

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: POSTCOLONIAL PLAY:
ENCOUNTERS WITH SPORT
AND PHYSICAL CULTURE IN
CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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Drawing upon the idea that India and the West are “tethered geographies” (Reddy, 2006), this dissertation project explores how the ongoing and dialogic relationship between contemporary India and the West is represented, experienced, and contested in and through the realms of sport and physical culture. With escalating rates of economic growth, a rapidly expanding middle class, and increasing international political clout, India is emerging as a global power while simultaneously defining itself as a postcolonial nation against, and in tandem with, the West. Utilizing a fluid theoretical vocabulary (Andrews, 2008) and employing mixed qualitative research methods that include participant observation and interviews, I examine how various sites of physical culture serve as points of meaningful exchange between India and the West. This project presents a necessarily partial and contingent understanding of the chosen sites, tempered by considerable reflexivity and self-awareness, as my own Self is intricately enmeshed in

this work. The four distinct, yet related, empirical studies that comprise this project thus focus on the following: 1) the embodiment of gendered nationalism and male power as manifested by the Cheer Queens, a cheerleading squad supporting the Pune Warriors cricket team in the Indian Premier League, and the Great Khali, a professional wrestler from India who performs internationally for World Wrestling Entertainment; 2) the city of Delhi's efforts to (re)create itself as a "world class" metropolis by hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games that resulted in spatial exclusion and the magnification of social inequalities; 3) changing body ideals amongst the young Indian middle class influenced by Western fitness practices and neoliberal discourses of healthism; 4) perceptions of authenticity held by Western tourists traveling to India to study Ashtanga yoga that reject the syncretic evolution of yoga and contribute to a construction of Otherness that continues to mark India and Indians as exotic, primitive, and poor. Also included is an "interlude" chapter centered on my personal experiences as a white, Western woman navigating the complexities of daily life in India and questioning the place of my own body within a context of fear, harassment, and assault.

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By

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Abbreviations

ACSA	American Community Support Association
AYRI	Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute
BCCI	Board for the Control of Cricket in India
BJP	<i>Bharatiya Janatha Pakshaya</i>
BMI	Body Mass Index
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CGA	Commonwealth Games Association
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
ECB	England and Wales Cricket Board
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICC	International Cricket Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPL	Indian Premier League
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
NDLL	New Delhi Little League
PCS	Physical Cultural Studies
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SSC	Subaltern Studies Collective
WWE	World Wrestling Entertainment
WWF	World Wrestling Federation

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Prologue

Welcome to India

My relationship with India began on March 10, 2010 as I passed through immigration control at Indira Gandhi International Airport. My flight arrived late in the evening, so the only things I could make out from my window seat on our descent into Delhi were small twinkles of light radiating out from underneath a thick layer of urban smog and springtime fog. Exhausted from the fourteen-hour flight, yet eager to see my husband, Charlie, who waited on the other side of baggage claim, I made my way to the immigration and customs checkpoint filled with curiosity and anticipation. What would this new adventure bring? What would our apartment be like? Is the poverty as shocking as everyone says it is? Would I learn how to cook *roti* and *chana masala*? I was bouncing with an impatient sort of nervous energy, but the immigration lines moved quickly. After fifteen minutes, I found myself in front of an immigration officer, a thin, middle-aged Indian man with thick hair and a Bollywood moustache. He nodded hello, then began a methodical process of comparing my passport photo to the face presented in front of him. His eyes moved from my passport to my face at least ten times before he was satisfied. After issuing the immigration stamp with a theatrical flourish of his wrist, he held on to my passport and said to me, “Ah, Miss Callie, you have nice lips. Ah yes, very beautiful lips. Your lips, yes, I find them very beautiful. I love your lips. Welcome to India” (field notes, March 11, 2010). With this proclamation, he handed back my passport, gave me a smile, and with a wobble of his head, dismissed me. And so it began, my relationship with this complex and mesmerizing country. Whether or not it was appropriate for the

immigration officer to speak so openly about his desire for my lips became irrelevant, as I soon realized that my body, and its (dis)connections to myriad other bodies in numerous contexts, would define my time in India.

Oh sure, I had flirted with India before. What serious yoga practitioner has not? After ten years of yoga practice and the completion of a teacher-training program, the next logical step for me would be to study in India, the ancestral home of yoga and a certain rite of passage for Western yogis to prove their yogic mettle and dedication to the practice. Alas, the energy and time required to balance the rigors of graduate school, teaching, and maintaining a social life prevented me from embarking on a yogic journey on my own terms. Yet throughout my graduate school career, a persistent internal voice nagged me to keep India in the back of my mind. Someday, it said, you will get there. Someday, it said, you will practice yoga in Rishikesh just like the Beatles did. Someday, it said, you will do sun salutations on the beach in Goa. Such were my superficial, pop culture oriented, and very Western desires to study yoga in India. Rather than coming from the ghost of some yoga guru from the past, this voice was comprised of the echoes of my American yoga colleagues who had traveled to India and returned with rapturous tales of exotic locales, “authentic” yoga, and spiritual enlightenment unattainable in the West. Now I realize that these stories were all laced with Orientalist fantasies of the Indian Other untouched by the vagaries of modernity and living in a pureness of simplicity constructed wholly in the Western imagination. Nevertheless, lured by their seemingly mythical stories, I yearned to experience it for myself.

This flirtation with India continued, in a more literal sense, when I met my future husband one clear and crisp January morning in Washington, DC. A lawyer by

profession, Charlie had heeded the advice of a trusted mentor and enrolled in the National Law School of India in Bangalore to pursue a Master of Laws degree. It was a strategic career move designed to capitalize on India's growing global economic and political clout, and he was one of the first Americans to attend the National Law School. He spent two years in Bangalore and returned to the United States in the summer of 2008. We met a few months later, introduced by a mutual friend of our mothers' who thought he could provide me with some insights into life in India as I contemplated a potential dissertation project based on sport and community development in the north Indian state of Bihar. So that first morning we talked about India. About how he negotiated being an American at a university that had hosted only one before, about how Bihar has struggled with underdevelopment and a government that does not care, and also about fun things like riding elephants and eating street food. His adventurous spirit, generosity, and thoughtful intelligence captivated me, and we married less than a year later.

When the call came from India offering Charlie a teaching job at a new university near Delhi, I realized that my ongoing, yet subtle, flirtation with India was finally going to be actualized. There was no question that he would take the job, as it represented a wonderful opportunity for him to advance his career. Indirectly, and perhaps circuitously, it also offered a fantastic, albeit unexpected, opportunity for me. I had finished my coursework and my comprehensive exams, so I was not tethered to my university. I had the freedom to go, even though it meant completely re-conceptualizing my dissertation and essentially starting from scratch with new research ideas. I was willing to accept this extra work because I knew the life experience provided by moving to India would be invaluable. I also recognized that the move would offer me the chance to carve out a

unique path as a young scholar. There is a growing body of academic literature on sport and physical culture in India, but there is virtually nothing on this topic written by women. Let alone white, American women. What was a surprising and sudden turn of life path for the two of us had opened up some exciting new possibilities.

Wrestling with Failure

Off we went. First Charlie, who left for India a week after our wedding. I stayed behind to teach a class at my university, but joined him for ten days over spring break during which time my flirtation with India morphed into a full-fledged relationship replete with a multitude of churning, swirling emotions. I committed fully to the relationship upon arriving in Delhi in June 2010 with the intent to build a life, a marriage, and a sense of home. Sure, I was a scholar with work to do, but this place was to become my center of being, more than just a temporary stop chosen for its research potential. I was not merely an “academic tourist” or a “research traveler” (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 2), for I completely uprooted myself to jump headfirst into this new life challenge. Charlie had a three-year job contract, so we were anticipating settling in and making a commitment to this place.

But I largely failed. I failed the relationship with India. And perhaps it failed me to a certain extent, but I hesitate to place blame so certainly and indiscriminately. After one year of living, working, and traveling in India, I was in need of an extended break away. My research went relatively well (a few insightful hiccups here and there) and I enjoyed it for the most part, but my body, health, and happiness had been compromised to an extent that I was no longer myself, and I began to loathe the person I had become.

There was no moment of divine transcendence ala Elizabeth Gilbert’s ashram stay chronicled in *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006); no outrageous escapades like those described by Gregory David Roberts in *Shantaram* (2003); little chance for the type of leisurely exploration undertaken by Sarah MacDonald in *Holy Cow* (2002); and no access to inner worlds as provided by Elisabeth Bumiller’s journalistic credentials in *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons* (1990) or depicted so vividly in Katherine Boo’s stunning *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012). I had read these accounts of India, written by Westerners, in an attempt to understand my own experiences as a foreigner in India, to see the India existing outside my doorstep through different eyes, and to jolt myself out of periodic feelings of exasperation and despair. Of course, I was not the only foreigner to move to India and be overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness, to fight the response to look away when confronted with very public scenes of immense poverty, cruelty, dehumanization, and even death. Of course, I was not the only woman to be physically assaulted and sexually harassed by men, as Indian women must face relentless harassment each day and getting groped is almost considered the mark of a “real” Indian travel experience for female foreigners (Falconer, 2011; Lozanski, 2007). Where I failed was in struggling to emotionally cope with the negative aspects of my life in India—the assaults, paralyzing fear, lack of control, sickness, constant harassment, and extreme guilt for being angry at it all. After a year, I felt compelled to break away and restore myself.

Compounding the emotional complexity of my time in India was my position as a researcher and the tasks that I needed to complete while there. Trying to adopt a radically embodied (Giardina & Newman, 2011) research method where my own body was placed at the forefront of empirical inquiry, I instead began to dissociate from my body in

response to the barrage of physical assaults upon it and its consumption by the voracious, patriarchal male gaze. So while my difficult experiences in India were not necessarily unique, the ways in which they impacted my research and my relationship to my research sites provided a distinct lens through which to examine the role of the researcher body and question the methodological process when anger, enmity, and fear come to dictate the researcher's interactions in the field. I was guilty of allowing these emotions, and the very tangible effects they had on my body, to influence my research, yet I also realized that negotiating and writing through these emotions was a valuable part of the overall experience, both in scholarly and personal terms.

Here I recognize the danger that including my personal reflections in this dissertation might be dismissed as mere pandering to emotion, an irrelevant exercise in self-indulgence. Yet I offer bits of autobiography to acknowledge that my work is unavoidably personal and to embrace Widdowfield's (2000) argument that "not only does the researcher *affect* the research process but they are themselves *affected* by this process" (p. 200, emphasis in original). I openly admit my feelings of failure and frustration in order to consciously place my own presence within the field (Silk, 2005) and present an honest account of my observations, interpretations, and encounters.

"Between Hilarity and Despair"

To be sure, my experiences in India were not the stuff of Orientalist (Said, 1978) romance, the colonial expectation of timeless exoticism, or blind faith in an Eastern spirituality promising to allay the negative energies caused by living in the harsh conditions of Western modernity. Contemporary India is raw, noisy, gritty, fractured,

greedy, and chaotic. It is also diverse, graceful, welcoming, enchanting, and vibrant. Above all, it is impossible to generalize. As Shashi Tharoor (2006) notes, “the singular thing about India is that you can only speak of it in the plural” (p. 8). Any attempt to capture the current Indian condition is bound to be incomplete and partial, as the country, its cultures, people, institutions, and practices defy easy analysis. The chapters I offer here are thus merely pieces of interrogation, fragments of Indian sport and physical culture that are part of a complicated and fast-changing whole. Of course, these pieces are also driven by my own positionality and identity as a white, Western woman living in north India. In learning how to navigate the messy realities of life in India, I was oftentimes helplessly caught in the “ugly vacuum between hilarity and despair” (Miller, 2009, p. 55) that so frequently characterizes the foreigner’s reaction to India. I could not, and nor did I want to, escape that positionality because I yearned to open my work to the personal and the biographical, to embrace complexity, and to utilize a “thoughtful, self-conscious awareness” (Finlay, 2002, p. 532) to guide reflexivity within my research.

My own moment of blurring despair and hilarity came one afternoon in central Delhi as we drove to a local market to do some shopping. Sitting in the backseat of our car, I was accustomed to fending off the vendors, beggars, and homeless children who regularly approached the windows to hawk various goods, hold out a hand for money, or perform back flips in the middle of traffic. Knowing that giving money would only support the brutal system of exploitation that props up the begging market in Delhi, I always ignored the requests for money even though it was emotionally excruciating to do so. As anthropologist Susan Dewey (2008) has noted, one needs a distinct “sense of emotional fortitude necessary to live with the ubiquity of inequality in India” (p. 149),

and my fortitude was tested each time I stepped out the door of our apartment. On this particular day, exhausted by the constant stream of people knocking on the car window and having to deny them, I finally lost it when a man with no arms used his forehead to bang against my window. Upon hearing the thump-thump-thump on the window, I turned expecting to see a guy selling magazines or perhaps a young woman with a baby on her hip. But the sight of this elderly man missing both arms at the shoulder socket, a head of wild white hair and a graying scraggly beard, with a small leather sack tied around his neck to collect handouts, and thwacking his head against the window to get my attention, made me laugh out loud. Rather inexplicably, I remember thinking, as the situation was certainly not funny. The line between the comically absurd and absolute desperation had been muddied, and all I could do was laugh. Who was I to be here, to witness this? What right did I have to be in this city, in this country, when the privileges that I embody must be so outrageous and angering to the millions living in poverty in Delhi?

Facing such a challenge, my white, middle class, Western identity imploded and suddenly I felt like an intruder. Should I even be here, extracting ideas and information for my own benefit, researching sport and physical activity of all things, when there are very real, very visible, and very urgent social inequities that need, but do not receive, dire attention? What right, if any, did I have as a white American with no connection to India other than my husband's job and my own intellectual curiosity, to come into this society and demand cooperation with, and interest in, my research? These were some of the internal questions that I dealt with, a nearly constant flow leading to feelings of self-doubt, discontent, and torpor. These questions, and the emotions they elicited, encompassed perhaps the most difficult part of conducting my research and writing this

dissertation. That is, reconciling personal feelings and professional obligations, maintaining intellectual self-reflexivity during moments of emotional paralysis, and accepting that my work was severely limited in its ability to confront injustice and catalyze social change.

Accepting Honesty

Above all, I aim here to present an open and honest account of my work and life experiences during my stay in India. Accepting all aspects of this honesty is, of course, not easy. It means I must confront the discomfort of acknowledging that I engaged in a process of defining my privileged, white, Western Self against the abject Indian Other. I must accept that I constructed a generalized Indian male Other as the object of my anger, fear, and distrust. A construction of which I am ashamed, as I interacted with many Indian men who treated me with kindness and respect. I must wrestle with continuous feelings of guilt and failure, as I recognize my complicity, however unwilling it may have been, in ongoing discourses of colonialism, Western privilege, patriarchy, and unequal power relations. In a more tangible sense, I must also be honest about how I directly guided my research in response to my experiences and the resulting emotions that played a significant role in deciding which sites I researched, whom I interviewed, and how I conducted myself in the field. Emotions are indeed an unavoidable part of any research process, but I hope that my acceptance of them can facilitate a better understanding of the work I undertook and, perhaps more crucially, form “an important part of the process of situating knowledge” (Widdowfield, 2000, p. 205) within the complex context of sport and physical culture in contemporary India.

Introduction

From 1893 to 2011

One of the most powerful scenes in the Bollywood film *Lagaan* (Gowariker, 2001) occurs when Bhuvan, the leader of a ragtag team of Indian village cricketers, proclaims to his compatriots, “Let me remind you all of one thing. This is not a game we are playing for fun and entertainment—this is a fight we must win.” Starring the ever-youthful Aamir Khan as the hero Bhuvan, *Lagaan* is set in 1893 during the British Raj and tells the story of a group of rural villagers who plead for a waiver of the yearly *lagaan* (tax) they must pay to the ruling British cantonment. Unable to pay the tax due to a lack of agricultural production caused by severe drought, the villagers instead agree to the challenge levied by a British officer—if the villagers can beat the British in a cricket match the taxes will be waived for the next three years, but if the villagers lose they must pay three times the amount of the regular tax. The villagers accept the challenge despite never having played cricket before, and the film ends with the village cricket team defeating the British in dramatic fashion, a thrilling foreshadowing of India’s eventual fight for independence and the crucial role that cricket would play in the construction and expression of postcolonial Indian national identity (Majumdar, 2009).

Recognized as the first Bollywood film about cricket to achieve significant commercial success, it became a crossover hit that received notable international attention and accolades, including an Academy Award nomination as Best Foreign Language Film (Gooptu, 2004). *Lagaan* was also the first Bollywood movie that I ever saw, perhaps foreshadowing my own eventual involvement with Indian sport and

physical culture and its connection to such issues as globalization, neoliberalism, and the dialogic exchange between India and the West. I remember being a bit befuddled by the song and dance numbers during my first viewing of *Lagaan*, but I was also struck by the film's attentive portrayal of cricket as a means of resistance against colonial rule, an adopted and adapted sporting form that has come to dominate contemporary Indian sporting culture. When Bhuvan urgently declares that the match is not just for fun, but is a fight the villagers *must* win, we become aware of the cultural importance and political efficacy of sporting forms, including, but certainly not limited to, cricket. Echoing CLR James's poetic examination of cricket, racism, anti-colonialism, and identity in the West Indies in his classic work *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), *Lagaan* suggests that sport is not merely an innocent diversion meant for entertainment, but a signifier of domination and resistance holding the potential for both social control and emancipation¹.

Fast forward from 1893 to 2011, from fictionalized film to gripping reality. This was India's postcolonial and globalized present, and cricket was at the forefront yet again. It was the night of April 2, 2011, sixty-four years after India gained independence in 1947 and twenty-eight years since its last cricket World Cup victory in 1983. On this night, at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, India faced Sri Lanka in the final of the 2011 World Cup, a six-week tournament featuring teams from fourteen countries and this year hosted jointly by India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. I was watching on television in the town of Sonipat, hundreds of kilometers north of Mumbai but no less affected by the palpable energy and excitement generated by the match. When India secured victory, I

¹ The film prompted numerous responses from the scholarly community, including Majumdar's (2002) call for a new historiography of cricket, Chakraborty's (2004) contention that the film is an extension of the subaltern studies project, Gooptu's (2004) interest in cricket as spectacle, and Farred's (2004) claim that *Lagaan* functions simultaneously as a "critique of the anti-colonial past and the postcolonial present" (p. 94).

heard shouts of glee from my neighbors and from the farmers across the street, the incessant honking of car horns, and blasts of loud celebratory music. It was not long before fireworks were exploding in the sky above us. As one of my friends in Sonipat remarked after the match, “This is an unforgettable night. When we look back at this stupendous achievement of the Indian team, one thing will stand out—a champion team has an endless reserve of mental strength and keeps producing the runs and wickets against all odds” (personal communication, April 2, 2011).

For many, India’s World Cup victory was not just a sporting achievement, but was also a reflection of the “India rising” (Chaulia, 2011) story in which India is rightfully taking its place as an important global power economically, politically, militarily, and culturally. Since liberalization policies were first initiated in 1991, India has seen its economic growth rates steadily increase, its engagement with global markets intensify, and its previously inward domestic orientation shift towards active integration with the world economy (Brosius, 2010; Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003; Wyatt, 2005). India’s economy has now become the fourth largest in the world with an average growth rate of 8.5% over the past five years (Times Insight Group, 2010, p. 22); the size of the Indian middle class has expanded to include an estimated 250 million people (Fernandes, 2006, p. xiv); and in 2008, four of the world’s top ten billionaires were Indian (Gupta, 2008, p. 61). The global profile of postcolonial India is rapidly evolving and becoming more visible, and the Indian World Cup victory confirmed and concretized the country’s shining status. This milestone achievement, in a sport once used to resist colonial rule, functioned to affirm India’s postcolonial vibrancy and success, and the Indian team’s

victory reinforced already existing national feelings of self-assurance, perseverance, and renaissance (Chaulia, 2011).

Conditions in contemporary India are very different from those of colonial oppression depicted in *Lagaan*, yet cricket continues to be viewed as more than mere fun and entertainment. For Bhuvan and his village team in 1893, victory on the cricket pitch was a means to independence and self-determination, a desperate fight undertaken by eleven men on behalf of the entire village. For Mahendra Singh Dhoni, captain of the World Cup squad in 2011, and his team of sporting stars that included Sachin Tendulkar and Yuvraj Singh, victory was a means to validate India's rise to the world stage and announce the arrival of a confident nation pursuing global success not just in business and industry, but in sport as well (Chaulia, 2011; Vasu, 2011). Like Bhuvan's team, Dhoni's eleven men fought, and won, for others—in this case, for a nation of over one billion people crafting and negotiating its postcolonial identity amidst the complexities of globalization, a cricketing version of Hobsbawm's (1990) contention that “the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (p. 143).

In a sense, the Indian cricket victories of 1893 and 2011, one fictional and one very real, serve as bookends for my own experiences with Indian sport and my maturation as a scholar interested in such things. I first watched *Lagaan* sitting on a couch in Los Angeles, years before I even considered pursuing academia, rather confused by the rules of cricket and knowing little about India, yet nevertheless intrigued by the storyline and enraptured by the dramatic sporting spectacle depicted in the film. I watched the World Cup final years later, with a better grasp of cricket, fully immersed in India, and living its daily realities while pursuing interactions with other aspects of its

physical culture. What I encountered in-between these bookends—my entry into academic scholarship, the rather unexpected move to India, attending the 2010 Commonwealth Games, doing yoga with two hundred other foreigners in Mysore, enduring relentless sexual harassment and physical assaults, debating the merits of gymming² with university students—makes up the bulk of this dissertation project. These encounters are pieces of inquiry that represent fragments of a rich, diverse, and complex Indian physical culture that continues to change and adapt in response to shifting contextual conditions. I use the cricket bookends here as frames of reference to think through these other encounters, to locate them temporally within my own journey and remind myself of the personal connections I found along the way.

Research Questions

Of course, physical cultural forms and practices in India encompass more than just cricket. Ray (2008) astutely notes that cricket “monopolizes every bit of public adulation and resultant financial spin-offs” in India, while other games and physical activities “languish in stepmotherly treatment” (p. 1637). It also dominates the scholarly material on Indian sport, with significant contributions from Nandy (1989), Bose (1990), Appadurai (1995), Guha (2002), Majumdar (2004)—amongst others—who have written eloquently on the history and social meanings of cricket. Though cricket continues to enjoy massive popularity in India and operate as a vehicle for nationalistic fervor, we must move past its dominance to gain a more nuanced and balanced understanding of sport and physical culture in contemporary India. This dissertation project was thus a

² Gymming is the colloquial term for working out at a gym and/or following a set routine of physical exercise.

modest attempt to engage in that border crossing and contribute to the socio-cultural examination of physical culture in contemporary India that ranges beyond cricket into lesser explored empirical areas such as gym and fitness culture, yoga tourism, and professional wrestling.

In addition to opening up the empirical to areas that have not received much scholarly attention, this dissertation also serves to open a unique perspective on sport and physical culture in India, namely that of a white, Western female. Male scholars—Indian and Western—have written only intermittently about the female sporting experience in India (Majumdar, 2005; Mills, 2006) and continue to dominate the existing literature on sport in India. Work from female Indian scholars has appeared sporadically and inconsistently, most notably Banerjee's (2004) examination of women's cricket; Bhattacharya's (2004) look at the constraints faced by Bengali women involved in sport and her later piece (2009) on the effect of physical education curriculum on young Bengali women; Basu's (2004) study of women's participation in *kabbadi*; and Mitra's (2009) analysis of Bengali Muslim female boxers negotiating religious, regional, and national identities. Contributions from female Western scholars is noticeably sparse, as I encountered only pieces from Mills (2001) on the impact of the Anglo-Indian community on sport development in India; O'Hanlon's (2007) history of military sports in India; and works from Strauss (2002; 2005) and De Michelis (2005; 2007; 2008) on the evolution of yoga within and beyond India. What is missing are critical pieces written by female Westerners who consciously situate themselves within their research and use sites of sport and physical culture to engage with a broader exploration of conditions in contemporary India. This dissertation is designed to make an attempt to fill that gap.

Connected to the deliberately varied empirical sites and my unique epistemological perspective is an attempt to engage in theoretical and methodological eclecticism, to promote a sense of unity-in-difference (Andrews, 2002) advocated by Physical Cultural Studies (PCS) that embraces a multitude of empirical, theoretical, and methodological approaches to create a multifaceted project. Remembering that “sport has meant, and continues to mean, different things in different cultural and temporal contexts” (Andrews, 2002, p. 116), I sought to craft a dissertation grounded in the current social, economic, and political contexts that shape the contemporary Indian condition. Crucial to this task was the adoption of a transnational perspective that recognizes the ongoing, and oftentimes contentious and contradictory, dialectic dialogue between India and the West. Physical cultural forms do not exist in isolation from social forces circulating in and through global relations. Rather, as Frow & Morris (2003) argue, physical culture is a “pressure point of complex modern societies” (p. 508), a site rich with the assemblage, expression, and contestation of various social forces, institutions, and discourses. Within the “events” (Frow & Morris, 2003) that compose physical culture, individuals craft and negotiate their embodied subjectivities and identities through multi-layered relations of power in contextually contingent ways. The chapters that I present here are therefore distinct, yet related, inquiries of different “events” driven by a specific empirical focus, guided by a fluid theoretical vocabulary (Andrews, 2008), and informed by mixed qualitative methods. Overall, per Richardson (2000), my goal was to generate a crystallized interpretation of the phenomena under scrutiny. Not a singular and inalienable truth, but rather a self-consciously partial understanding of my

encounters with sport and physical culture in contemporary India tempered by considerable self-reflection and self-awareness.

A key thought propelling this dissertation is that India and the West are “tethered geographies” (Reddy, 2006), connected by a colonial past and a globalized present in which ideas, institutions, and practices move between the two in a dialogue that is often productive, often combative, and nearly always meaningful. Due to this tethering, and by virtue of my own Self as white Westerner, it was impossible to conceptualize a dissertation that focused solely on the Indian experience of sport and physical culture. I cannot escape my positionality, and although I can negotiate how it is manifested within my research, it prevented me from accessing sites of marginalization and interacting with impoverished populations. My own Self was too intensely implicated in my encounters, negating any possibility of fully knowing the Indian Other (Gaines, 2005). It was presumptuous of me to even consider the potential of “truly” knowing and presenting the Indian Other, so I adopted an overall approach that centered on the exchange between India and the West and acknowledged my presence as a Westerner experiencing and interpreting physical culture in India. The overarching research questions guiding this project thus included the following:

- **How is the contemporary relationship between India and the West represented, experienced, and contested in and through sport and physical culture?**
- **How do physical practices, and knowledge of those practices, flow dialectically between India and the West?**

- **How does physical culture contribute to the construction of Western conceptions and expectations of India?**

These questions are grounded in the recognition that contemporary India and the West remain tethered, thereby encouraging the use of a general postcolonial perspective through which to explore them. While the prefix “post” suggests an ending point, what comes after the colonial time period, it also implies a lingering relationship in which past effects of colonialism continue to inform the present and future (Bale & Cronin, 2002; McEwan, 2009; Quayson, 2000). For the purpose of examining my research questions, I preferred to work with the simple, yet instructive, definition of postcolonialism as a way of “criticizing the material and discursive legacies of colonialism that are still apparent in the world today” (McEwan, 2009, p. 18). Such an understanding was useful, for example, in unpacking the expectations of cultural authenticity held by Western tourists traveling to India to study yoga (see Chapter IV). Many of these tourists expected to find the “real” India in their travels, which for them was defined in terms of Orientalist (Said, 1978) imaginings of a timeless and exotic society, of a “frozen past transposed to the present” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1312). The discursive constructions of an India untouched by global markets and financial prosperity, of an enduring poverty attractive to Westerners weary of modernity, have not gone away with decolonization but persist in the ways in which India continues to be represented in the West through various means, be it travel guidebooks, television shows, the characterization of professional wrestlers, or the Ashtanga yoga tradition.

Closely tied to the postcolonial is the role of the body in the creation, maintenance, and expression of power relations. Said (1978) recognizes the body as a trope that contributed to the manufacture of binary difference between the West and the non-West, as cultural constructions of the body played a significant role in formulating the ideology of Western superiority that helped to legitimize colonialism. According to Mills & Sen (2004), the body was “at the center of justification for colonialism, of the objectives of colonialism and of the processes associated with colonialism” (p. 2). Moreover, and specifically addressing colonialism in India, Mills & Dimeo (2002) argue that the Indian body was depicted as weak and inferior in comparison to the robust and superior body of the European in order to discipline Indian bodies, “improve” them, and uphold the unequal power relations that sustained the politics of colonialism.

Sport and physical activity were deeply implicated in these colonial power relations, and the active Indian body became intimately wrapped in the negotiation of politics and culture during colonialism. Of course, as our hero Bhuvan from *Lagaan* reminds us, sport and the active, strong Indian body were also means for resisting colonial rule and co-opting colonial impositions (Alter, 1992; Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Bose, 1990). During India’s struggle for independence, Mahatma Gandhi posited the body as a site on which to thwart colonial oppression and stage the nation. He called for the decolonization of the body through such means as vegetarianism, the reclamation of traditional Indian physical practices such as *kushti* and yoga, and wearing homespun *khadi*³ instead of English style suits and bowler hats (Alter, 2000; Chakraborty, 2007).

³ *Kushti* is a form of traditional wrestling popular in north India that takes place in an earthen *akhara* (gymnasium) and is oftentimes a devotional act to the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman. *Khadi* is a coarse cotton cloth and was used as a symbol during the independence movement to promote local Indian crafts and reject foreign goods (Bean, 1989).

In the contemporary postcolonial context, the body has taken on new meanings reflective of India's economic liberalization, increasing consumerism, interactions with global markets, and growth of the middle class (Brosius, 2010; Derne, 2008; Munshi, 2001). For example, the slender, fit, and toned body has replaced the fat body, once a symbol of affluence and abundance in India, as a sign of wealth, happiness, and personal and social responsibility (see Chapter III). The intensified circulation of Westernized images of beauty and the promotion of a consumerist lifestyle have opened up space in India for a new definition of the "right" body, one that pursues thinness as part of the performance of certain physical practices that embody upper and middle class consumption (Brosius, 2010; McGuire, 2011). Here we encounter a direct dialogue with the West, as Westernized fitness practices are becoming increasingly popular amongst the middle and upper classes, yet the idealized Indian body exists within a context of inequity and injustice in which millions of Indians grapple daily with hunger and malnutrition.

Working within a PCS framework, we assume that the body is the material core of sport and physical activity (Hargreaves, 1987; Loy, Andrews & Rinehart, 1993), so I also developed more specific research questions for each chapter focused on the role of the body at each empirical site. I must acknowledge here that the body cannot be essentialized, and nor do I attempt to present a reductionist reading of the body. There is no one experience, representation, or meaning of the body, just as there is no one singular, absolute, or complete understanding of India. These questions included the following:

- **Chapter I: What kind of gendered nationalism is expressed through the bodies of the Cheer Queens performing in the Indian Premier League (IPL)? How does the Great Khali embody discourses of Indian nationalism, and are these discourses merely Western constructions or representative of empowered postcolonial corporeality?**
- **Chapter II: Which bodies benefitted from the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi? How did the government’s neoliberal policies of urban cleansing and spatial exclusion affect marginalized and impoverished bodies?**
- **Interlude: How did my own body navigate the challenges of sexual harassment, physical assault, and fear? How does the researcher engage in radically embodied work when she is dissociated from her own body?**
- **Chapter III: What is the “right” and idealized body in contemporary India, and what is its relationship to the burgeoning young middle class? How are Westernized gym and fitness practices implicated in the privileging of this body and its moralities of self-care and personal responsibility?**
- **Chapter IV: How do American yoga practitioners define authenticity, both in terms of the Ashtanga yoga practice and a “real” Indian travel experience? How are interactions between Western tourist bodies and local bodies mediated in and through the expectations of authenticity?**

To explore these questions, I utilized a mixed methods approach that included articulation to locate each empirical site in the wider conjunctural moment, critical discourse analysis to uncover how texts create and/or reinforce certain dominant

messages and socio-political inequalities, and the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of people involved in a particular activity or practice. The following sections further explain my theoretical framework, expound on my methodology, and offer short summaries of each chapter. Since we must remain aware of the contextual conditions in which the empirical sites exist, I also provide a brief account of India's move into liberalization initiated in 1991 and the persistence of attendant social inequities, as well as a review of India's historical and contemporary sporting landscape. Finally, I address my failures in the field—two instances of responding to unanticipated challenges that proved to be instructive lessons about access, insider/outsider status, and hierarchical power relations.

Theoretical Frameworks

Rather than impose a rigid theoretical structure upon this dissertation project, I preferred to retain a fluid theoretical vocabulary (Andrews, 2008) that allowed me to remember that social theory “does not determine how we see the world but helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306). Heeding Grossberg (1997), I tried to use theory as a means of gaining a better understanding of my observations and experiences within the various sites of physical culture with which I engaged, and I embraced the idea that theory is contingent upon the specific contexts and conditions of the empirical. As such, I was not in search of the “right” theory that would magically make sense of the complexities of physical culture in contemporary India, but rather I looked to critically grapple with theories to discover

what was useful, what was not, and what needed to be reworked in relation to this particular context (Andrews & Giardina, 2008). In this sense, I followed Slack's (1996) contention that theory is a detour rather than a starting point in a cultural studies project, that we are never looking for an exact and seamless theoretical fit but instead we want to creatively and constantly work with theory to move towards greater understanding of what is actually going on in a given context.

Keeping in mind that PCS's relationship with theory is "necessary, yet ambivalent, and certainly unpredictable" (Andrews, 2008, p. 58), I began my theoretical wrestling by detouring through postcolonialism as a useful lens through which to examine physical culture, the active body, and transnational exchange in contemporary India. Thinking through a postcolonial perspective encouraged me to remain cognizant of sport's role as both an "idiom and technology for imagining and transforming the Indian body" (Mills & Dimeo, 2002, p. 109) and as a means to resist colonial corporeal politics. In India today, the body remains an important discursive site for the construction and expression of particular subjectivities, and forces such as globalization and neoliberalism increasingly affect how the body is conceptualized and given meaning. Though India has enjoyed sixty-five years of independence from colonial British rule and has arisen as a promising economic and political global leader, the lingering legacies of colonialism, whether discursive or material, continue to inform daily reality in India. Thus, it is important to note that my usage of the term postcolonial suggests a constant interplay between the conditions under colonialism and their continuing effects today, not an indication of a tidy and finalized end to colonialism (Bale & Cronin, 2002; McEwan, 2009; Quayson, 2000). Although skeptical of the universal use of the term postcolonial,

Hall (1996) concedes that the theoretical concept of postcolonialism might help us to “describe or characterize the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonization moment” (p. 245). So a localized analysis of the postcolonial condition must be contextualized within global developments, an idea that is certainly relevant for making sense of the complexities and contradictions of physical culture in India today.

Defined by Quayson (2000) as a “studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects” (p. 2), postcolonialism is also about destabilizing the dominant discourses of imperialism and challenging the production of knowledge controlled and regulated by the West (McEwan, 2001). An underlying assumption of various strands of postcolonial thought is that discourse and ideology are just as important as material conditions when identifying the effects and legacies of colonialism (Hall, 1996; McEwan, 2001; Quayson, 2000; Said, 1978). Said’s influential work, *Orientalism* (1978), catalyzed this recognition of discourse, as he argued that the idea of the Orient was a Western construction meant for consumption in the West, a discursive production that manufactured an ideology of Western superiority and non-Western inferiority that contributed to the legitimization of imperial domination.

Similarly, and drawing upon Foucault’s notion of discourse as a bounded means for representing particular kinds of knowledge, Hall (2002) identifies the difference between “the West” and “the Rest” as a result of a pervasive and persistent system of representation that frames the non-West as inferior to the West. Power imbalances between Western and non-Western countries are embedded within a system of knowledge dominated by Western constructions, and these knowledges (economic,

political, social) in turn construct representations of both the West itself and developing countries. For Hall, the crucial point is that these terms do not mean anything on their own. The meanings are created through discourses of difference that construct a binary placing “the Rest” in inferior opposition to “the West”. Acknowledging that, once produced, the discourse of “the West/the Rest” had very real material effects, Hall speaks to the power of this discourse by suggesting that it holds destructive potential because “it draws crude and simplistic distinctions and constructs an oversimplified conception of ‘difference’” (2002, p. 60). While a narrow concern with representation and text might expose postcolonialism to the critique of being too far removed from the material realities of millions of people living in situations of poverty and oppression (McEwan, 2001), it is nonetheless imperative to uncover how certain discourses contribute to ideas of difference and are used to sustain unequal power relations.

In addition to maintaining an overall postcolonial perspective, I also worked with various other theories to help frame my arguments in each empirical chapter and engage in a multifaceted theoretical approach. Briefly, these theories included the following⁴:

- **Chapter I: Guided by theories of gendered nationalism, this chapter explores how the Indian nation remains the “property of men” (Mayer, 2000, p. 1) expressed in and through the bodies of the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali. I relied on Chatterjee’s (1989) conception of postcolonial Indian nationalism as related to the objectification of the female body and the dichotomy of materialism and spiritualism, and Derne’s (2000) ideas about male power, the masculine Indian body, and expressions of nationalism.**

⁴ Please see Appendix A for a more thorough description and analysis of these particular theories.

- **Chapter II:** This chapter responds to Chopra’s (2003) claim that in contemporary India, it is neoliberalism that functions as doxa, meaning that the tenets of neoliberalism—privatization, rationality, individualism and self-interest, the retrenchment of the state—have become an “unquestionable orthodoxy” (p. 421). Using the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi as a focal point, I looked at how the incidents of spatial cleansing and exclusion that occurred during the Games were manifestations of neoliberal policies (Bhan, 2009; Ghertner, 2010; Uppal, 2009).
- **Chapter III:** The body of the young middle class Indian is the focus of this chapter, and I drew upon Foucault’s (1995) ideas about corporeal discipline and power to question how disciplinary regimes such as gymming and dieting are used to not only shape the body, but also to confirm and display social class status.
- **Chapter IV:** The notion of authenticity is central to this chapter, as it relates to both the Ashtanga yoga practice itself and the tourism expectations of Westerners who hold distinct definitions of how the “real” India should look and how it should function. Following Korpela’s (2010) contention that authenticity is ultimately a discourse of power, I utilized theories of objective (Lau, 2010) and existential (Kim & Jamal, 2007) authenticity to examine how American yogis interpret their experiences in Mysore.

Methodology and Mixed Qualitative Methods

Driven by the contention that research is “not an innocent or distant academic exercise” but a dynamic activity that occurs in a “set of political and social conditions” (Smith, 1999, p. 5), I aimed to maintain flexible, yet rigorous, research practices encompassing mixed qualitative methods across multiple empirical sites of investigation (Figure 1). Throughout my time in India, I consciously strived to situate my own physical, researcher body in and among the bodies of others, both Westerners and Indians, in order to better experience and understand the “politics of gender, exclusion/inclusion, and corporeality acting upon, and within” my chosen empirical sites of physical culture (Giardina & Newman, 2011, p. 49).



Figure 1. Location of research sites (map taken from Lonely Planet: India website, 2012).

While I was attempting to understand and interpret my empirical sites through the use of such research methods as critical discourse analysis and ethnography, I feel it imperative to emphasize that it was impossible for me to fully know the Indian Other. The concept of the Other is, of course, mutually constitutive, as I distinguished my researcher Self against the Indian Other with whom I interacted and whom I observed (Gaines, 2005), and I was concurrently viewed as a white, female, Western Other by the local host population. This relationship between the Self and the Other is complicated, and it reinforced my positioning as a privileged, outsider body. My ability to interact with those Indian bodies living a reality of poverty, and to place my Self within those spaces of immense inequality, was compromised by my class status, gender, ethnicity, and nationality.

So here I recognize a gross shortcoming in my research, as I could not access those spaces where social change and intervention are most needed. In accepting that “reflexivity *can* make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them” (England, 1994, p. 250, emphasis in original), I came to understand the limitations of my researcher Self as a privileged, white Westerner to not only engage with marginalized bodies, but also to help rectify unequal power relations and social inequities. At best, I could only pursue a partial and situated understanding of my research sites and the people involved therein. I cannot, and do not want to, claim to speak *for* my research participants. Nor is it sufficient for me to engage in my own navel gazing and offer an uncritical description of my world during the research process. Instead, my ethnographic research is an account of the “betweenness” (England, 1994) of lives, the points at which my life overlapped and connected with the lives of my

interview participants, points which were fleeting and contextual. This “betweenness” is shaped by my own biography and my own experiences in the field, filtering the collected “data” and molding my perceptions and interpretations of the research process. Hence, I must recognize that this dissertation is *my* project, not in a possessive or proprietary sense, but rather in acknowledging the inescapable influence of the Self in this particular research, work that was unavoidably (and rather unexpectedly) personal, emotional, and challenging.

I deliberately adopted a qualitative, mixed-methods strategy in order to honor the complexity of physical culture and create a project that can be considered an example of “bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). By embracing the stance of a bricoleur, I was better able to recognize the complexity of my research sites by using multiple methods to “uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and reexamine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). Instead of shying away from a multiplicity of perspectives, theories, and methods, I wanted to view my research as active rather than passive in order to continually construct and reconstruct my methods in response to ever-changing, and oftentimes personally challenging, contextual conditions (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). This “methodological eclecticism” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 274) allowed me to embrace a number of research techniques that complemented each other in an effort to craft nuanced understandings of the four chosen empirical sites. My fieldwork elements, informed by participant observation and semi-structured interviews, cultivated a direct relationship with those being researched (England, 1994), while the discursive analysis provided insights into the production of meaning and the operation of power across multiple sites

(Fairclough, 1992). The “ebb and flow” of mixed methods research facilitates the search for more thorough engagements with social phenomena, as artificial dichotomies are removed and the researcher is better able to move across methodological boundaries (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This versatility is particularly important when the topic of study involves contemporary groups of people, as Brosius (2010) notes that “the complexity of people’s movements in their everyday lives requires an equally flexible methodology” (p. 36). People’s lives are not static, so the research methods used to engage with them should not be static, but rather dynamic, responsive, and open to change.

My mixed qualitative methods included: 1) articulation; 2) critical discourse analysis; and 3) the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews⁵. These methods were meant to build upon each other to create integrative and multidimensional analyses of the topics at hand. They also speak to Saukko’s (2005) delineation of the methodological basis of cultural studies that combines contextualist investigations of social conditions and structures of power, critical readings of discourses that mediate our experiences, and understandings of lived realities. Here I want to clarify my usage of the term ethnography, as I choose to mitigate its anthropological connotations by claiming that I used ethnographic “techniques” rather than assuming that I engaged in a full-fledged ethnography of each empirical site. While there is debate within the academic community on the temporal definition of ethnography—is there an absolute minimum amount of time that a researcher must spend in the field to claim ethnographic validity, or is there a maximum time that should be

⁵ Please see Appendix B for a more thorough explanation of these methods and how I utilized them in this project.

allotted to work in the field (Wolcott, 2008)—I do not presume to have completed a full ethnographic study of my chosen sites. I spent over sixty hours directly observing Commonwealth Games events in Delhi, lived in Mysore for five weeks while studying yoga and immersing myself in the Ashtanga community, and regularly attended the university gym for three months while interacting with students and observing their gymming habits. I also conducted interviews with thirteen American yogis in Mysore and twenty-one university students to supplement my participant observation.

Summary and Chapter Outlines

In summary, this project explores how the ongoing and dialogic relationship between India and the West is represented, experienced, and contested in and through the realm of sport and physical culture. By drawing upon a postcolonial theoretical perspective and utilizing a qualitative mixed methods approach, I examine how various sites of physical culture serve as points of significant and meaningful exchange between India and the West, whether it is reactionary and gendered nationalism in the Indian Premier League (IPL), Dehli's bid to become a "world-class" city by hosting the Commonwealth Games, changing ideals of the young Indian body influenced by Western fitness practices, or the construction of "authenticity" by Western tourists traveling to India to study yoga. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own as a distinct piece of scholarship, yet they all share a common exploratory focus on the relationship between India and the West as interpreted and experienced through the lens of physical culture.

The chapters are organized along a methodological continuum with discourse analysis situated at one end and ethnography at the other. Chapter I is therefore most

heavily informed by articulation and discourse analysis, while Chapter IV represents the most fully realized ethnographic piece. The empirical chapters are thus divided roughly into two halves, with the first half functioning as more of a critical, textual analysis and the second half embracing the overt use of ethnographic techniques. The interlude serves as a bridge and a break between the two halves, as it offers an intensely personal viewpoint and is written in a distinctly casual style. It is an explicit exercise in researcher reflexivity and serves as an attempt to complicate the call to write against “the disappearance of authorial bodies” (Giardina & Newman, 2011, p. 44). This is not to say that the empirical chapters are impersonal and follow a rigid methodological focus. Rather, they all incorporate elements of articulation and critical discourse analysis, and the ethnographic strategies of participant observation and semi-structured interviews are employed to varying degrees in every chapter except the first.

Again, my overall goal is to present a self-consciously partial and contingent understanding of the particular phenomena under scrutiny tempered by considerable self-reflexivity, not a grand narrative of singular and absolute truth (Richardson, 2000). The following brief summaries describe each of the four empirical chapters, along with the fifth, largely unintended, chapter identified as an interlude.

Chapter I, Cheer Queens and the Great Khali: Gendered Nationalism and Male Power in the IPL and WWE: This chapter explores the construction and expression of a gendered nationalism in and through the bodies of the Cheer Queens, a cheerleading squad supporting the Pune Warriors cricket team in the Indian Premier League (IPL), and the Great Khali, a professional wrestler from India who performs internationally for World

Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Working from the idea that male power and masculinity are central elements of contemporary nationalism in India (Derne, 2000), I argue that the Cheer Queens embody a conservative and nostalgic sense of nationalism that seeks to regulate female sexuality, reinforce patriarchy, and uphold a moral code of modesty and spiritualism in reaction to the perceived threats of globalization presented by the IPL. This nationalistic male power is also embodied by the Great Khali, as his enormous and muscular body serves as a response to colonialist framings of the Indian body as weak, inadequate, and effeminate. His strong, powerful, and heterosexual body continues the tradition of Indian wrestling and promotes an overtly masculinist vision of the Indian nation within the globalized space of the WWE. Through a critical reading of the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali using popular media texts and WWE broadcasts, I suggest that postcolonial Indian (sporting) nationalism remains the domain of men and utilizes discourses of modesty, tradition, and sexuality to perpetuate male power and control the female body. In addition, both the characters of the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali can be read as narrow and limited constructs of the nation, caricatures that promote colonialist representations of India as exotic and primitive even in the midst of their celebration as icons of Indian culture.

Chapter II, Whose Games?: Aspirational Delhi and the 2010 Commonwealth Games: In October 2010, Delhi hosted the Commonwealth Games, a second-tier international sporting mega-event involving athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations. Through the organization and hosting of the Games, Delhi aspired to emerge as a “world class” and global city ready to attract tourists, political and business leaders, and increased foreign

investment. The local government sought to use the Games as a vehicle to enhance the image and stature of Delhi, catalyze urban development, and create spaces for capital investment. However, as this chapter argues, the Games benefitted only a narrow segment of elite society and contributed to politics of spatial exclusion, the forced displacement of the poor, and the magnification of social inequalities precipitated by the creeping neoliberalization of India in which the impoverished are simultaneously rendered invisible and demonized as hindrances to development. Through a critical reading of government policies, media texts, and official Games reports and the incorporation of my personal observations as a temporary resident of Delhi attending the Games, I examine here how the Games were hostile to the *aam aadmi*, the average Delhiite struggling to exist in a city that is becoming increasingly inhospitable for the working class and poor. The Games were deemed a success on the back of India's haul of 101 medals, but they also left a troubling legacy of spatial cleansing and class divisions.

Interlude: My Physical Body Challenged: This chapter is a product of frustration, anger, and fear. It is a response to the challenges I faced not only in the field doing research, but as a foreign woman attempting to navigate daily life in India. It is a personal story peppered with contextualized readings of the place of women in contemporary Indian society, the construction of gendered fear, and the role of the researcher's body in fieldwork. Drawing heavily on my field notes, I chronicle my experiences with physical assault and sexual harassment, detail the "geographies of fear" (Valentine, 1989) facing women in India, and describe my efforts to reclaim a sense of my body after gradually dissociating from it. Here I play with C.W. Mills' (1959/2000) contention that "you must

learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work” (p. 195), while simultaneously striving to place that experience within a wider context that has relevance and meaning beyond my own life.

Chapter III, “Letting Your Body Do the Talking”: The Young Indian Middle Class,

Gymming, and the Consumption of Health and Fitness: In India today, the body has taken on new meanings reflective of economic liberalization, increasing consumerism, interactions with global markets, and the growth of the middle class. The fat body, once a symbol of affluence and abundance, has been replaced by the fit, slender, and toned body as a sign of wealth, happiness, and personal and social responsibility. Drawing on ethnographic work completed at a university in north India, this chapter examines the construction of the new, young, global, and middle class Indian body via the consumption of Westernized fitness practices. These bodies exist within the context of a neoliberalizing India in which consumerism defines social and class identity, immense hunger exists alongside increasing rates of obesity, and the public health care system is rapidly collapsing. Incorporating interview excerpts from university students preparing for professional careers, I contend that the fit, young, middle class body is fast becoming the “right” body in contemporary India and functions to reinforce privileged social locations, moralities of self-care, and a performance of citizenship that confirms India’s rise in global affairs. Working out at a gym, colloquially known as gymming, is a class-based performative practice that plays a significant role in the achievement and maintenance of such a body.

Chapter IV, Studying at the Source: Yoga Tourism and the Search for Authenticity in Mysore, India: The Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (AYRI) in Mysore, India serves as the site of investigation for this chapter, a yoga *shala* (school) and educational center that caters to Western yogis traveling to India to practice yoga and “study at the source” (field notes, January 20, 2011) of the Ashtanga tradition. Based on a critical reading of the history of Ashtanga yoga, in-depth participant observation, and interviews with American yogis attending the AYRI, this chapter explores the notion of authenticity within Ashtanga yoga itself and amongst yoga practitioners journeying to India hoping to find an “authentic” travel experience. Many of these yogis assume that the yoga experienced in Mysore is more genuine than that practiced in the West due to its location and groundedness in a distinct lineage. These yogis also desire a travel experience that matches their definition of the “real” India, a narrow conception that spurns Western aesthetics, rejects technologies of modernity, and scoffs at local Indians who participate in global capitalism and seek commodified relationships with tourists. Acknowledging that authenticity is “ultimately a discourse of power” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1311), I suggest that the perceptions of authenticity that inform both the Ashtanga practice and the travel expectations of Western yogis are untenable and function to maintain Orientalist imaginings of a timeless and mystical India defined in opposition to the materialistic and rational West. Consequences of these persistent discourses include a rejection of the syncretic evolution of yoga and a denial of India’s vibrant postcolonial present, both of which serve to promote nostalgia for a static past, magnify difference, and contribute to the construction of Otherness that continues to define India and Indians as exotic, primitive, and poor.

The Context of Liberalization and Inequality

In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1947, India's economic policy focused on achieving self-reliance, securing higher standards of living, stimulating domestically manufactured goods, and restricting foreign trade in order to encourage rapid industrialization and the production of capital goods (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003). A series of Five-Year Plans, first enacted in 1951, promoted various economic policies aimed at controlling private economic activity and increasing government-led industrialization. These monetary and fiscal policies were largely protectionist, inward-oriented, and very conservative compared to other developing countries at the time (Krueger, 2002). The Indian economy was quite insulated from world markets in the late 1970s and early 1980s, illustrated by its share of world merchandise exports which declined from 2.2% in 1948 to 0.5% in the early 1980s (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003). From the late 1940s to 1980, India's rate of growth was also chronically low, averaging less than 2% annually (Krueger & Chinoy, 2002). Beginning in the mid-1980s, economic policy became more expansionary and led to an annual average rate of growth of 5.8%, but the balance of trade worsened and the external debt continued to rise. In 1985, the government attempted to liberalize the economy under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi, but these efforts ultimately failed due to opposition from the business sector, government bureaucrats, the rural sector, and the leftist-nationalist intelligentsia (Pedersen, 2000). By 1991, the ill effects of the expansionary policy were manifested in a balance-of-payments crisis and an inflation rate of 13%, prompting a former finance minister to declare this period "among the cruelest in India's post-independence economic history" (Pedersen,

2000, p. 271). In spite of a \$1.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991, the deficit was running at an annual rate of approximately \$10 billion (Krueger & Chinoy, 2002). A response from the Indian government was urgently necessary.

The reforms put into place starting in 1991 included immediate stabilization measures that tightened monetary policies, devalued the rupee, and reduced the fiscal deficit; structural changes that privatized public enterprises and liberalized labor laws to favor business; and an opening of the financial sector to foreign investment (Pedersen, 2000). The new policies represented a shift “from an inward-oriented, state-led development strategy to a policy of active reintegration with the world economy” (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003, p. 2) that stimulated private business to such an extent that by 1996, private capital surpassed public sector capital for the first time since 1972 (Pedersen, 2000). The success of these liberalization policies hinged upon a variety of factors, including, as Pedersen (2000) argues, pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, changes within the Indian state that allowed a small group of technocrats to emerge and take control of economic reform, and changes in the structure of Indian society at large, particularly amongst capitalist industry directly concerned with growth opportunities and profit maximization. As the reforms took hold, India saw its annual growth rate increase steadily and substantially, averaging a rate of 8.5% during the five-year period between 2005 and 2010 and becoming the fourth largest economy in the world by 2010 (Times Insight Group, 2010, p. 22). In 2008, *Forbes* reported that four of the world’s top ten billionaires were Indian (Gupta, 2008, p. 61), firmly placing the economic potential and power of India in the global financial imaginary.

The significance of these reforms was a “radical loosening” of controls and regulations (Oza, 2006, p. 11) that expanded the consumer lifestyle economy and led India into an age of neoliberalism in which the free market began to supersede the state. As Chopra (2003) suggests, in contemporary India it is neoliberalism that functions as doxa, meaning that the tenets of neoliberalism—privatization, rationalization, individualism and self-interest, the retrenchment of the state—have become an “unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth... across social space in its entirety” (p. 421). What is often made invisible in the discourse of India’s economic growth is the notion that neoliberal development is predicated on the underdevelopment and marginalization of a majority of people. The main socio-economic product of neoliberalism is inequality, and in turn, “the main outcome of inequality is poverty” (Ahmed, Kundu, & Peet, 2011, p. 3) due to the exploitative ways in which inequality strengthens the power and financial gain of a relative few at the expense of a mass of others. In India, this inequality results in a pronounced disparity between the rich who occupy privileged urban spaces and the utter deprivation and poverty of the masses who struggle to survive in villages, the slums, and out on the streets.

The inequality in India is manifested in numerous ways, from material poverty and malnutrition to illiteracy and female feticide. India is still a developing country, ranked 119 out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index in 2011 (United Nations Development Program, 2011). Despite its tremendous economic growth in recent years, India is home to over 450 million people living below the poverty line, surviving on less than \$1.25 per day. According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, there are more poor people in just eight Indian states than in the twenty-six poorest African

countries combined (Alkire & Santos, 2010, p. 4). In addition, India is ranked 67 out of 84 countries in the 2010 Global Hunger Index, eleven places below neighboring Nepal (ranked 56) and fifteen places below Pakistan (at 52). Within the Index, India is included as one of twenty-nine countries that have levels of hunger considered “extremely alarming” or “alarming” (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010). A national family health survey conducted in 2005 and 2006 revealed that 48% of children in India were underweight, a percentage that was more than twice as high as that for Malawi (22%), Kenya (20%), Cameroon (19%), and Zimbabwe (16%) during a similar time period (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 7).

Other indicators of socioeconomic inequality include a skewed sex ratio, illustrating a distinct privileging of the male child due to, amongst other things, the financial pressure of providing a dowry for female children upon marriage. Preliminary data from the 2011 census reveals that the national population average is 914 girls for every 1,000 boys, a slippage from the 2001 ratio that stood at 927:1,000 and the lowest figure recorded since India gained independence (Nolan, 2011). The practices of female feticide and infanticide continue in both rural and urban areas despite the passage of the 1994 Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, a law designed to prohibit the use of diagnostic techniques for prenatal sex determination and that makes it illegal for a doctor to reveal the sex of a baby to its parents (Kishor & Gupta, 2009). The cultural preference for boys and the monetary requirements of the dowry tradition compound the presence of intense poverty to perpetuate an unequal sex ratio and contribute to India’s phenomenon of “missing women” (Sen, 1990). Women also have a lower rate of literacy, suggesting

that inequality in education runs along gender lines. According to the 2011 census, the national female literacy rate is just 65%, while for males it is 82% (Joshi, 2011, p. 56).

We must remain cognizant of such examples of social and economic inequity, as it is all too easy to lose sight of these issues in the midst of India's current story of incredible growth and prosperity. We must also remember that the access to sport and play largely remains a privilege. According to figures released by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport in 2007, less than 6% of the Indian population under the age of 35 has access to sporting facilities and organized physical activity (Indian Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport, 2007, p. 7). "India rising" is a compelling story, but its neoliberal development is twinned with underdevelopment, marginalization, and a growing gap between rich and poor.

The Indian Sporting Context

In a short article published in 2000, Ian McDonald asserted that the "sociological study of sport in India remains essentially virgin territory" (p. 539). He further argued that, despite tremendous and rapid developments in the Indian economy and significant social changes, the sociology of sport remained on the margins of academic inquiry in India as intellectuals gave primacy to areas such as economics and international relations deemed "more relevant to the exigencies of building the new nation-state" (2000, p. 540). Notwithstanding the works he overlooked, in the years since the publication of McDonald's piece the volume of scholarship addressing sport in India has increased substantially, appearing not only from sociologists, but also historians, anthropologists, and critical theorists.

Of course, even though academic interest in Indian sport has arisen only relatively recently, India's sporting historical roots run deep and intertwine with such issues as cultural hybridity, colonialism, nationalism, and globalization. Indigenous games like *kabbadi*⁶ continue to be practiced today, successfully adapting to codification and internationalization while maintaining a strong sense of Indianness crucial to national identity (Alter, 2000). The martial art of *kalarippayattu*, a traditional bodily practice originating in the southern state of Kerala and dating from at least the sixteenth century, has been analyzed as a malleable cultural form imbued with multiple meanings that shift in response to engagement with media representation, consumption, and global capital (Zarrilli, 1995; 2005; McDonald, 2007). The game of *pulu*, a forerunner of polo, was played as early as the first century AD by tribesmen in the villages of Manipur in northeast India. British military officers and tea-planters picked up the sport in the late 1800s, gave it a standardized structure and rules, and exported it to Europe and other parts of the Empire (Singh & Kapoor, 2008). Traditional Indian wrestling, known variably as *kushti*, *pahalwani* or *malla yuddha*, is recognized as a mix of two earlier forms of wrestling, an indigenous form native to what is now India dating from the first millennium BCE, and a Persian form brought to India in the sixteenth century (Peabody, 2009). Joseph Alter's work (1992; 1993; 1994; 1995; 2000) has been particularly influential in understanding how traditional Indian wrestling became articulated into broader notions of somatic nationalism, the regimentation of health, and masculinity. Alter (2004; 2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2008; 2011) has also contributed significant work to

⁶ *Kabbadi* is a team sport in which two teams alternate on offense and defense, taking turns to send a designated player into the other half of the court to gain points by touching or tackling members of the opposing team. This player then attempts to run back to her/his own half of the court while holding her/his breath and chanting "kabbadi, kabbadi" continuously.

the history of yoga in India and its role in the development of a nationalistic, anti-colonial physical education movement in the early twentieth century and its construction as a science of holistic health dependent upon modern ideas about medicine and scientific inquiry. Other important contemporary works on yoga, an icon of Indian culture now accepted as a transnational physical practice, include McDonald's (1999) exploration of how right-wing Hindu nationalist groups in India use yoga to promote a narrow definition of the nation, Strauss's (2005) ethnographic account of the circulation of yogic philosophy and practices within and beyond India, De Michelis's (2008) history of modern postural yoga, and Singleton's (2010) excavation of the ties between ancient yoga traditions, calls for Indian independence, and modern physical cultural forms popular in the West such as bodybuilding and gymnastics.

The infiltration of British colonialism into India brought with it new sport forms, namely field hockey, football, and cricket that were used simultaneously as instruments of colonial rule and vehicles for resistance against that rule. Along with the sports came a Victorian "games ethic" used as a moral and disciplinary tool for the governance of colonized Indian bodies, particularly male bodies who were derided by the British for being weak and effeminate (Mangan, 1998; Dimeo, 2004; Majumdar, 2006). To counter the colonial negation, control, and regulation of the Indian body, Indians revived traditional pursuits such as yoga and wrestling and infused colonial sports with political resistance and nationalist urgency. Hockey, long considered to be India's national sport, provided a means for the subjugated nation to assert itself on an international stage as India won six consecutive Olympic gold medals from 1928 to 1960, including a solid thrashing of the United States by a score of 24 – 1 in the 1932 Los Angeles Games (Ray,

2008). Football was also a site for the promotion of national, regional, and community identities, as well as the display of successful and physically strong Indian sporting bodies. The “most glorious sporting success of an Indian team under colonial rule” (Bandyopadhyay, 2004, p. 364) occurred in 1911 when Mohun Bagan, a Bengali club based in Calcutta (now Kolkata) beat the British East Yorkshire Regiment to win the IFA Shield for the first time⁷. With this victory, Mohun Bagan became the first Indian football club to defeat a European team. The victory was celebrated as more than a sporting success, as it became linked to the validation of the struggle for independence and to the argument that the Bengalis had proved themselves to be a worthy “race” by countering colonial discourse with masculine bodies of strength and skill (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). While football’s presence within the Indian sporting landscape eventually spread to other parts of the country with mixed success, the Bengali clubs in Kolkata continue to hold a dominant place in the Indian football imagination, particularly the ongoing rivalry between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. As Majumdar (2008) notes, Indian football has largely failed to respond to the challenges of globalization and commercialization, but this club rivalry is a telling example of the social significance of football in certain regions of India.

On a national level, neither hockey or football can match the astounding popularity of cricket. The question of how cricket was adopted and adapted by Indians to become the most revered sport in the country—bordering on an obsessive religiosity—has been the focus of much scholarly attention. Ashis Nandy famously suggested that

⁷ The IFA Shield is an annual football tournament organized by the Indian Football Association (IFA). Started in 1893, it is the fourth oldest football club cup competition in the world, behind the English and Scottish Football Association cups and the Indian Durand Cup, first held in Simla and later moved to Delhi (Goldblatt, 2006).

“cricket is an Indian game accidentally invented by the English” (1989, p. 9), arguing that the rhythms and structures of cricket connect it to a uniquely Indian mythology, making it easily appropriated and popularized. Bose (1990), Appadurai (1995), Guha (2002), and Majumdar (2004)—amongst others—have written eloquently on the history and social meanings of cricket, with Majumdar (2004) arguing that “cricket is the only realm where Indians can flex their muscles on the world stage; it is her only instrument to have a crack at world domination” (p. 5). The Indian national team made its first appearance in England for a Test match in 1932, but did not win an official Test until 1952. During the period of 1932 – 1970, India played 116 official Test matches and secured only fifteen victories (Ray, 2008). It was not until the 1970s that India became a cricketing power, as enigmatic stars such as Kapil Dev and a string of Test victories heralded the arrival of Indian cricket on the world scene. Subsequent events that cemented cricket’s esteemed place in Indian society include the World Cup victory over the West Indies in 1983 (Marqusee, 1994), hosting the World Cup (with Pakistan) in 1987, coming in second place in the 2003 World Cup, defeating Pakistan in the inaugural edition of the Twenty20 World Cup in 2007, and electrifying the nation by hosting (with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) and winning the 2011 World Cup.

Other recent developments in Indian sport and physical culture include the phenomenal success of the IPL, a spectacularized and immensely lucrative Twenty20 cricket tournament; the 2010 Commonwealth Games hosted by Delhi during which Indian athletes captured a total of 101 medals; and the arrival of Formula One Grand Prix racing in India. Over 95,000 people attended the inaugural Indian Grand Prix held on October 30, 2011 at the Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida, a satellite city of

Delhi, and the race is set to become a regular feature on the Formula One calendar (Harris, 2011). In addition, the 2012 Olympics in London saw the Indian team collect a total of six medals—two silver and four bronze—doubling the haul from the 2008 Games and standing as India’s most successful performance in the Olympics to date (Krishnaswamy, 2012).

Other sports are attempting to replicate the IPL model, with World Series Hockey set to launch in 2012 with teams in eight cities featuring a mix of Indian and foreign players (Pinto, 2012). Similarly, the Wrestling Federation of India is teaming with Leisure Sports Management, a company based in Kolkata, to create a co-ed domestic wrestling league called the Indian Wrestling League with six city-based teams (Kumar, 2011). There are also plans to introduce a Maharashtra Badminton League with six teams, all owned by various Indian corporations and all, as a unique element, featuring a popular Marathi film actress as a brand ambassador (Nair, 2011). With these new developments and the continuation of more established physical cultural forms, the sporting culture in India remains rich and complex, with a depth that reaches well beyond just cricket.

The Failures

In my initial proposal, I outlined ideas for two chapters that do not appear in this dissertation. Rather than remain silent on the issue, I want to briefly explain what prompted the abandonment of these two strands of research, as their absence raises important questions about conducting research in postcolonial contexts and the ability of the researcher to access sensitive spaces as an outsider.

The first of these failures was a result of my inability to adequately access my research site, even though I had been actively involved in that site for several months. The difficulty, I believe, was in the unique character of that particular site and the multiple performances of identity and citizenship required to be accepted as an insider. This site was the American embassy in Delhi, and my research question centered on the negotiation and expression of national identity through the idiom of baseball, specifically the New Delhi Little League (NDLL), a youth baseball program operated out of the American embassy and open to all expatriate and local families. Since I have considerable experience coaching baseball and softball, I volunteered to coach a t-ball team composed of boys and girls aged four to six that played every Saturday from late August to the end of October. Coaching was part of my ethnographic approach to the site, as it allowed me to observe all practices and games, interact with parents and other coaches, and establish a working relationship with NDLL's administrators. I had also planned to conduct interviews with parents and coaches upon the completion of the season in order to learn about their experiences with the league. However, I had to abandon these plans due to my inability to access the space—the embassy—where I could successfully find these people, talk with them, and place myself fully within the operative context of the NDLL. I had trouble with access because I was not a member of the American Community Support Association (ACSA), an organization housed within the embassy that offers various support services for its members, including a commissary, library, restaurants, pool, and numerous recreational activities. Membership in ACSA is open to all United States citizens residing in India as well as foreign and local nationals employed by the embassy or companies located in Delhi. Due to the cost of membership,

ACSA is an exclusive space, limited to those who are either direct employees of the US government or can afford the yearly family membership fee of \$2425 or \$1675 for a single membership (personal communication, August 22, 2010). I could not afford to pay this fee, and therefore I was denied access to ACSA and the wider embassy space upon the completion of the NDLL season. I asked the president of the league for assistance, with whom I had been in contact about my research, but he simply replied that I needed to be a member in order to visit the site and solicit interviews with the parents and other coaches. With the exception of myself and one young man who worked for the embassy, all of the NDLL coaches had children participating in the league and all of these families were members of ACSA. I had also asked the league president for a list of e-mail and phone contact information for the parents and coaches, thinking I could arrange alternative meeting points for the interviews, but he gently refused to provide them to me, citing privacy and security issues. So, I was stuck. By virtue of being unable to pay the (unfairly restrictive) membership fee, I was denied access to a supposedly supportive space. I could not become an “insider” because I refused to confirm the performance of my American citizenship by paying for the privilege of doing so.

In a strange way, I was almost happy about the second failure because I think it stemmed from an entirely acceptable and perceptive response to my research requests. In order to explore the sport for development and peace (SDP) movement in the context of postcolonial India, I proposed to work as a volunteer at Magic Bus, a SDP organization that works with marginalized youth in urban communities. Based in Mumbai, Magic Bus has an office in Delhi that deals primarily with advocacy, training, and project evaluation. Having previously worked in the SDP movement with Right to Play in Uganda, I was

curious to learn more about Magic Bus and become one of its volunteers, making the rather arrogant assumption that they would welcome the help of a white Westerner who had experience in the SDP field. After corresponding with the volunteer coordinator for Magic Bus, who was based in Mumbai, I was connected with the Delhi office and invited to meet with its director and manager of human resources to discuss potential volunteer roles. During this meeting the director of the Delhi office admitted that he was having “issues” with the prominent (white) British scholar who had been working with Magic Bus to develop an effective monitoring and evaluation program for the organization’s myriad programs. No longer confident that this scholar’s work was “appropriate” or “relevant” (field notes, August 5, 2010), the director mentioned that they were hiring an Indian consultant to draft a new evaluation framework. Perhaps I would like to work with her, he suggested. I met her later that day, and she promised to e-mail me to set up a regular meeting time. When she failed to contact me after a week, I e-mailed her to inquire about the project. Still no response. I then contacted the manager of human resources, who told me that the consultant decided to pursue the project on her own and that they did not have any other opportunities for me at that time. After recovering from my initial annoyance, I realized that this response was exactly what Magic Bus should have done when I first showed up at the office. It was presumptuous of me to impose myself on Magic Bus, a brazen example of the racialized and imperialist hierarchical power relations that continue to impede SDP work in which white Westerners presume to possess superior knowledge and skills over the local host populations in the areas where SDP projects operate. In his analysis of the SDP movement, Darnell (2007) identifies a racialized binary evident in SDP work whereby the mostly white, Western volunteers

construct a sense of the privileged Self against the racialized, primitive Other in need of outside help. Kay (2009) calls for the dismantling of positivism within SDP by recognizing such binaries, decolonizing research, and including participatory individual voices in order to capture “authentic local knowledge” (p. 1177). She argues that by disrupting the dominance of evidence-based research within SDP and using qualitative methods, we can contribute to a democratization of the research relationship and help to subvert enduring colonial power relations that extend assumptions of Western dominance. However, in my pursuit of a volunteer position at Magic Bus, I was guilty of both perpetuating Darnell’s racialized binary and disregarding Kay’s appeal for decolonization. I might have lost a dissertation chapter due to the rejection from Magic Bus, but I do believe that the organization acted correctly and with purpose. It is time for the white, Western dominance of SDP to end, and I respect Magic Bus for taking a step towards empowering its local population to take leadership roles within this movement.

Chapter I

Cheer Queens and the Great Khali: Gendered Nationalism and Male Power in the IPL and WWE

Introduction

Cricket and wrestling are two of the most significant sporting forms in contemporary Indian society. Wrestling has a rich history and well-established traditions across the country, but especially in the north where it is associated with a holistic way of living that celebrates masculinity, connection to the land, and devotion to strict bodily practices (Alter, 1992; 1994; 1995; Peabody, 2009). Wrestling is not merely a competitive sport in India, but is a “complex way of life” (Alter, 1993, p. 51) that defines individual and national identity. Cricket, though not an indigenous sporting form, is a widely popular and passionate fixation laden with nationalistic fervor, a multitude of socio-cultural meanings, and beloved celebrity stars (Guha, 2002; Majumdar, 2004; Nandy, 1989). As the most popular cricketer in India, and arguably the world, Sachin Tendulkar is regularly embraced as a symbol of the nation and holds such immense cultural appeal that he has the ability to be “all things to all people” (Nalapat & Parker, 2005, p. 434).

Both wrestling and cricket have recently contributed to the assertion of a “rising” India (Chaulia, 2011) growing increasingly prominent in international affairs and the global eye. With its victory in the 2011 World Cup, the Indian cricket team confirmed the

country's shining status and reinforced already existing national feelings of self-confidence, renaissance, and ascendance. Likewise, the successful performance of Indian wrestlers at the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in Delhi—itsself a testament to India's rising stature—affirmed that the deep domestic tradition of wrestling could translate into international sporting achievement. Indian wrestlers won a total of nineteen medals at the Games, including ten gold. Speaking to the significance of these victories, wrestler Yogeshwar Dutt, a gold medal winner in the 60kg category, explained, “Being a *pehalwan* (wrestler) has become more than a statement of machoism. It is a matter of national pride and glory” (quoted in Sharma, 2010, p. 7). Indian wrestlers have moved from the earthen *akhara* (gymnasium) to the mats of international competition to represent the nation, just as young cricketers dream of taking their skills from the streets to the revered pitches of Lord's, Eden Gardens, or the Melbourne Cricket Ground as a member of the national team.

While it is important to recognize the ongoing relationships between these two sports and the development of postcolonial Indian national identity (Majumdar, 2009), I propose here a detour through lesser-explored elements of cricket and wrestling in order to examine constructions of a gendered nationalism that uphold the contention that the Indian nation remains “the property of men” (Mayer, 2000, p. 1). Thus, this chapter looks at the expression of gendered nationalism in and through the bodies of the Cheer Queens, a cheerleading squad supporting the Pune Warriors cricket team in the Indian Premier League (IPL), and the Great Khali, a professional wrestler from India who performs internationally for World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) and captured the heavyweight world championship belt in 2007 (Rose, 2008). These two empirical “sites” might seem

to be dissonant, an incongruous pairing with little connection or association. Yet I suggest that they are linked by two significant factors: 1) they each exist within a spectacularized, mass-mediated, and commodified sportainment (Andrews, 2006) entity negotiating the promises and perils of globalization, and 2) they are embodiments of an Indian nationalism rooted in male power and masculinity (Chatterjee, 1989; Derne, 2000; Oza, 2006).

Working from the idea that male power and masculinity are central elements of contemporary nationalism in India (Derne, 2000), I argue that the Cheer Queens embody a conservative and nostalgic sense of nationalism that seeks to regulate female sexuality, reinforce patriarchy, and uphold a moral code of modesty and spiritualism in reaction to the perceived threats of globalization presented by the IPL. This nationalistic male power is also embodied by the Great Khali, as his enormous and muscular body serves as a response to colonialist framings of the Indian body as weak, inadequate, and effeminate. His strong, powerful, and heterosexual body continues the tradition of Indian wrestling and promotes an overtly masculinist vision of the Indian nation within the globalized space of WWE. Through a critical reading of the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali, I suggest that postcolonial Indian (sporting) nationalism remains the domain of men and utilizes discourses of modesty, tradition, and sexuality to perpetuate male power and control the female body. In addition, the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali can be read as glocalized bodies incorporating elements of the local into global spaces. Yet they are also narrow and limited constructs of the nation, caricatures that promote colonialist representations of India, and the Indian body, as exotic and primitive even in the midst of their celebration as icons of Indian culture and tradition.

I begin by discussing theories of gendered nationalism within the context of contemporary postcolonial India. Central to this discussion are ideas about the control of the female body (Derne, 2000; van der Veer, 1994), anxieties about modernity (Oza, 2006), and the dichotomy between materialism and spiritualism that defines the place of women within the Indian nation (Chatterjee, 1989; Radhakrishnan, 2005). I then focus on the emergence of the IPL as a highly corporatized and spectacularized professional cricket league that has incorporated many elements of a largely Western/North American model of sports entertainment (Andrews, 2006; Mehta, Gemmell, & Malcolm, 2009). In response to the perceived threats to Indian culture presented by the globalizing IPL, the Pune Warriors introduced the Cheer Queens in 2011, cheerleaders dressed in ethnic costumes and performing traditional regional dances. I turn next to wrestling and WWE, which, much like the IPL, operates as a profit-driven global sporting spectacle and enjoys immense popularity in India. While the Cheer Queens embody a gendered nationalism predicated on conservative notions of femininity, the Great Khali represents a hyper-masculine vision of the nation in which the wrestling body is a symbol of strength, power, and discipline. I offer a brief consideration of how the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali exist as glocalized bodies before concluding with a snapshot of wrestling, male power, and the control of the female body in Haryana, a state in north India renowned for its wrestling prowess and unequal gender relations.

Gendered Indian Nationalism

Like all other nations, India is largely an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) tied together by the shared practices, values, and beliefs of its citizens. The topographic,

ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of India makes a singular definition of the Indian nation impossible (Dutt, 1998), yet there exists a distinct sense of Indianness and collective national identity that is often powerfully expressed and embodied in and through sport and physical culture. Hobsbawm's (1990) assertion that "the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people" (p. 143) certainly applies to the Indian condition, and is perhaps multiplied in its scope as the national cricket team carries the aspirations of over a billion people. Yet, because it is a socio-political construct, nationalism is rarely benign and carries with it constantly changing meanings in response to shifting contextual conditions. My focus here is thus the creation and deployment of a gendered Indian (sporting) nationalism rooted in masculinity and a male power that regulates the female body and promotes the assumption that the Indian nation remains the domain of men. Working with Derne's (2000) argument that "male power has become central to most forms of contemporary nationalism in India" (p. 238), I explore how the sporting body functions as a material and discursive site for the performance of the nation, a performance that is highly gendered and ultimately serves to control the female body.

In postcolonial India, cricket is about "bodily competition and virile nationalism" (Appadurai, 1995, p. 25) and has become a means by which Indian men create and experience identities of maleness and Indianness (Dimeo, 2004). This is not surprising, as the reimagining of the postcolonial Indian nation in the wake of independence and economic liberalization has depended on "powerful constructions of gender" (McClintock, 1995, p. 353) that identify men as the defenders of the nation and its traditions. The needs of the postcolonial nation have largely been associated with "male

conflicts, male aspirations and male interests” (McClintock, 1992, p. 92), while the anxieties presented by modernization and globalization are displaced onto women’s bodies through the twinned discourses of female protection and masculine aggression (Oza, 2006).

Chatterjee (1989) suggests that nationalism in India is a male discourse in which women lack the ability to speak. It is a discourse “which assigns women a place, a sign, an objectified value; women here are not subjects with a will and consciousness” (p. 632). The anti-colonial and independence movements emphasized the reinvigoration of the hetero-masculine body in response to colonialist depictions of the male Indian as weak and effeminate, but this movement offered a “very limited liberation for women” (Derne, 2000, p. 241). Even Gandhi, who criticized Hinduism for treating women as mere “playthings”, offered a vision of the nation in which women’s roles were restricted to wives and mothers (Alter, 2000; Derne, 2000). Within the nationalist imaginings of an independent India, the female body was a repository of morality, purity, and a dominant Hindu conception of culture and spiritualism that needed to be protected (Daiya, 2008; Oza, 2006). Expounding on the dichotomy between the material and spiritual that informs Indian nationalism, Radhakrishnan (2005) writes the following:

The Indian nationalist project, constituted to a large extent through India’s colonial experience with British nationalism, was based on a set of inevitably gendered dichotomies. The essential inner world, the domain of women, contained the essence of Eastern superiority and was the site on which the nation was imagined. This inner sphere, therefore, was to be protected. (p. 269)

The outer/inner distinction is a powerful ideological dichotomy that places the material domain—external, beyond control, ultimately unimportant—against the spiritual—

internal, essential to national identity, true reflection of Indian Self (Chatterjee, 1989). Indian culture resides in the internal spiritual domain, where it is considered to be superior, beyond Western influence, and the most important element of the collective nation (Das Gupta, 1997). The inner, spiritual world belongs to women, and it is the duty of men to protect, regulate, and control it in order to safeguard the genuine identity of the nation.

An important part of protecting the nation and maintaining its local identity in the midst of globalization is the imposition of a traditional moral code onto women and the female body. The moral code used to protect the Indian nation is based on narrow notions of masculinity and heterosexuality in which women's subjectivity is framed as pure and vulnerable and the female body is expected to display ideals of modesty (Mayer, 2000). The modest, pure, and spiritual woman is thus the legitimized, hegemonic norm representative of an Indian nation that calls upon its culture, and the protection thereof, to differentiate itself from the West and the forces, institutions, and practices of globalization. Indian women are expected to be modern, but "not so modern as to transgress into 'Westernized' modernity" (Oza, 2006, p. 31) and thereby engage in immoral and immodest behaviors and activities. It is here that the IPL cheerleaders are often the "soft target of the moral police in India" (Bag, 2012) as their bodies represent threats to the national moral code of modesty. In contemporary India, it is men who have the power to protect the nation, its culture, and its modesty by controlling the female body and female sexuality. This nationalist discourse "connects the control over the female body with the honor of the nation" (van der Veer, 1994, p. 113) while

simultaneously celebrating the ability of the hyper-masculine body to embody the strength and virility of the nation.

Emergence of the Indian Premier League

Inaugurated in 2008, the IPL has quickly become one of the world's most financially successful and spectacularized sporting leagues. In 2010, it was valued at \$4.13 billion and was the second highest paying league in the world, topped only by the National Basketball Association in the United States (Mitra, 2010). Its growth as an indigenous Indian creation with an undeniable international presence has catapulted India into the global sporting economy and has also signaled the shift of cricket control and power away from the West (Gupta, 2009).

While the IPL is arguably the most visible and marketable iteration of Twenty20 cricket, it was not the first league of its kind and did not propel the format into the global cricket consciousness. In 2003, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) created Twenty20 with the explicit goal of increasing attendance and reviving the revenues that had dipped in traditional Test cricket and one-day matches following the fifty overs per side format. In designing this new, shorter form of the game that restricts each team to a single innings with a maximum of twenty overs, the ECB spent two years gauging fan interest through focus groups and 4,000 individual interviews (Weaver, 2007). Based on this research, the ECB created a game meant to appeal to cricket "tolerators", people who neither loved nor hated traditional cricket (Weaver, 2007). In most cases, this meant women, children, and young males aged between 16 and 34 (Weaver, 2007). In addition, the ECB also recognized the perceived time constraints of fast-paced contemporary

British society. Most people could not devote a full day, let alone five, to watching a one-day or full Test cricket match. Stuart Robinson, the ECB marketing manager at the time and perhaps the most influential voice in the creation of Twenty20, noted that the game's popularity is directly related to the "cash-rich, time-poor" society in which people currently live (Jackson, 2007).

In the summer of 2003, the ECB launched Twenty20 at the county level under the catchphrase, "twice the action, half the time" (Menon, 2006). The press release distributed before the inaugural match noted that there would be a theme song, the first performance by a pop band in the history of county cricket, and spectators in fancy dress and face painting (Menon, 2006). From the outset, Twenty20 was a different cricket creature imbued with elements of pop culture, entertainment, and the carnivalesque. Despite claims from critics that Twenty20 was nothing more than a bastardization of a classic sport, the public responded with curiosity and support. During the first year of play, Twenty20 matches in England attracted an average crowd of just under 5,000 spectators. On July 15, 2004, a total of 26,500 people watched the match between Middlesex and Surrey at Lord's Cricket Ground in London, the largest crowd for a non-final county game since 1953. By the end of the 2006 season, the aggregate attendance at Twenty20 matches was over 1.5 million people (Jackson, 2007).

Other countries soon adopted the Twenty20 format and domestic leagues sprung up in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the West Indies. Taking notice of the rising popularity of Twenty20, and seeking to capitalize on it, the International Cricket Council (ICC) created the first Twenty20 World Cup in 2007. Held in South Africa, the Twenty20 World Cup attracted enthusiastic and appreciative crowds. The final between

India and Pakistan, laced with strong political overtones and shown live to a worldwide television audience of nearly 400 million, cemented Twenty20's place as a legitimate and popular sport form with global potential (Hopps, 2007). India emerged victorious, adding yet more zeal to the nation's obsession with cricket of any kind.

Energized by India's World Cup victory and intrigued by the financial promise of the Twenty20 format, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) created the IPL as a domestic league initially comprised of eight city-based teams privately owned through a franchise system. Before the inaugural six-week season began in April 2008, the IPL managed to raise \$1.8 billion from the sale of television rights, franchise auctions, and sponsorship deals. The eight teams were auctioned off to the highest bidders, including Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan who bought the Kolkata Knight Riders for \$75 million (Mitra, 2010). India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, paid nearly \$112 million for the Mumbai franchise, while a British consortium led by Lachlan Murdoch purchased the Rajasthan Royals for the relatively reasonable price of \$67 million (Kelso, 2008). This private ownership scheme was complemented by a player auction, in which domestic and international cricket stars were literally put up for sale, like "cattle in a meat market" (Vasu, 2011, p. 46). Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni drew the largest sum, hired by the Chennai Super Kings for a price of \$1.5 million, just ahead of Australian star Andrew Symonds who joined the Deccan Chargers for \$1.35 million (Starick, 2008). Considering that the 2008 IPL season lasted for only six weeks, these players earned a substantial amount of money for very little work.

The inaugural IPL matches featured elaborate entertainment spectacles, rock music, fireworks, and imported cheerleaders from the Washington Redskins American

football team, all contributing to the “razzamatazz and glitz of a cricketing revolution” (Starick, 2008, p. 58). The first season of the IPL attracted 20 million television viewers, a modest start for a country of nearly 1.2 billion people. During the second season in 2009, however, over 143 million tuned in, including nearly 64 million women who were apparently drawn “not only to the IPL’s breathless sort of cricket, but also to the glamour that attends it” (The Economist, 2011, p. 70). This glamour includes a regular bevy of Bollywood heartthrobs, international cricket stars, and American musicians attempting to crack the Indian market through the media exposure generated by the IPL. After American R&B singer and rapper Akon performed at the 2009 IPL closing ceremonies, his album “Freedom” sold more than 25,000 copies in India, a significant amount considering that international artists account for only 5% of overall music sales in the Indian market (Borthakur, 2010, p. 13). The transnational hype generated by the IPL marks the league as not only as an entertainment spectacle, but also solidifies its international brand recognition as an Indian product with global appeal.

The unrelenting glitz and excitement certainly captivate the Indian public, but the IPL also taps into a sense of the changing contemporary Indian condition. In post-liberalization India, the corporation has ascended to prominence, challenging and overtaking the government as the most dominant and influential presence in economic, social, and cultural life. As Subramanian (2010) argues, “below its surface of rat-a-tat cricket, the IPL is really one large flexion of the muscle of corporate India” (p. 2). The league is a successful business with a dynamic brand and a spectacularized product, operating in an international marketplace with global interest (Wagg & Ugra, 2009).

While the IPL certainly benefits from globalization in terms of wider exposure, participation of international cricketing stars, and financial gain, it is an event that does not necessarily depend on globalization for success. It is important to note here that the IPL is an outstanding example of an “Indian product acquiring international brand recognition” (Gupta, 2009, p. 204), and this sense of Indianness serves as a vehicle for the expression of nationalism in and through the IPL. As the case of the Pune Warriors Cheer Queens suggests, the display of nationalism functions as a response against the IPL’s intense engagement with globalization, corporatization, and elements of Westernization deemed threatening to traditional Indian culture. Cultural spaces in India, including sport, are increasingly being framed by competing “discourses of Indianness and globalization” (McDonald, 2003, p. 1563), and the IPL has become a site for the expression of tension between the two. Of course, this tension, and its expression, is not benign. It is a rich discursive construction that, in the embodiment of the Pune Warriors Cheer Queens, promotes a highly gendered nationalism that reproduces hierarchies of power relations by confirming male power and controlling the female body.

From Cheerleaders to Cheer Queens

In early 2010, bidding began for two new IPL franchises set to join league play for the 2011 season. Sahara India Pariwar, a multi-business conglomerate and a former corporate sponsor of the Indian national cricket team, settled on the city of Pune for their franchise bid and won it with a final price of \$370 million, 64% higher than the minimum base price of \$225 million set by the BCCI for each of the new franchises (Ninian, 2010).

Ostensibly owned and operated by Subrata Roy, the principal of Sahara India Pariwar and one of the richest men in India, the new team was dubbed the Sahara Pune Warriors India and joined the other new team, the Kochi Tuskers Kerala, for the IPL's fourth season of play.

Before play even began, the Pune Warriors made headlines by announcing the creation of the team's Cheer Queens, an Indianized version of the cheerleaders attached to each IPL team who have proved very popular with male fans. Two weeks before their first match, the team bought a full-page color advertisement in the *Times of India* to introduce this new concept and implore the other teams to adopt it as well (Figure 2). The ad features three illustrated Cheers Queens dressed in traditional Indian clothing and performing traditional dances from various regions of the country. In explaining the decision to pioneer the Cheer Queens rather than hire American-style, mostly white and Western cheerleaders like all of the other teams, Roy penned the following text included in the body of the advertisement:

IPL cricket matches are watched by millions in India and by billions worldwide. IPL as a platform is definitely a glamorous showcase to present the rich Indian culture, heritage, passion and entertainment. Here we are presenting Pune Warriors India's Cheer Queens. But why limit it to just one team? IPL is a magnificent opportunity to bring wider popularity and recognition to our nation and its rich culture. It is my humble appeal to every IPL team to come forward and showcase our own adorable culture. Let our culture shine. The *Bhartiya Nrityanganas*⁸ are here to cheer! (field notes, March 23, 2011)

⁸ This is the Hindi equivalent of the term "Indian cheer queens".



Figure 2. Advertisement for the Pune Warriors Cheer Queens that appeared in the *Times of India* on March 23, 2011 (photo by author).

While Roy used a curious choice of words in describing Indian culture as “adorable”, his entreaty is nonetheless suffused with protective nationalistic undertones. In appealing to the other IPL teams to embrace Indian culture and showcase it via traditional dance during league matches, Roy suggests that the IPL needs to emphasize its Indian origins as a means to promote the nation amidst the rapid globalization of cricket and the Western character of Twenty20 in general and the IPL in particular. The emergence of the Cheer Queens thereby suggests a rising tension between the IPL as both an Indian league and an international one. As Abhijit Sarkar, an administrator with the Pune Warriors, explained to the *Times of India*, the concept of the Cheer Queens “was to spread and promote India’s cultural diversity and richness amongst the vast audience of

IPL” (quoted in Dasgupta, 2011, p. 17). What neither Roy nor Sarkar admit is that their vision of Indian heritage is a very particular, narrow, and nostalgic response to the perceived cultural threat posed by the Westernized elements of the IPL, most notably the cheerleaders.

When twelve members of the Washington Redskins cheerleading squad traveled to Bangalore in 2008 to support the city’s IPL team and help train a group of local cheerleaders, they introduced Indian cricket fans to short skirts, pom-poms, and a display of female sexuality “rarely seen outside of Bollywood musical dance numbers” (Varadarajan, 2008). The overt presentation of the female body prompted local television pundits to declare that “the Redskins cheerleaders are showing more skin on the cricket pitch than most Indian men will see before marriage” (Wax, 2008, paragraph 16), a reference to the strict moral codes upheld by Hinduism and conservative beliefs about sex and marriage. The influence of the American cheerleaders quickly spread across the IPL, and all of the teams eventually featured scantily-clad cheer squads comprised primarily of foreign, white women from such countries as South Africa, Ukraine, and Australia⁹. The provocative dance routines and skimpy outfits—although nothing shocking for Western audiences—prompted outrage and vocal criticism from conservative political parties such as the *Bharatiya Janatha Pakshaya* (BJP), known for its championing of Hindu nationalism and right-wing social policies. Nitin Gadkari, senior Indian politician and current president of the BJP, condemned the cheerleading performances by remarking, “what the cheerleaders are doing during cricket matches is ten times more vulgar than what used to happen in the dance bars of Mumbai” (quoted in Elliott & Hussain, 2011, p.

⁹ South African cheerleader Gabriella Pasqualotto was fired from the Mumbai Indians cheer squad after admitting to writing a “saucy” blog entitled *The Secret Diary of an IPL Cheerleader* in which she divulged stories about post-match parties and flirtatious cricketers (Davies, 2011).

49). Yet, while traditionalist politicians and more conservative members of Indian society claimed to be disgusted by such blatant displays of Western wickedness and immorality, the cheerleaders were warmly welcomed by “hordes of sexually frustrated men” (Smith, 2011, p. 34) whose attention to the cricket match often wandered onto the women cheering for the teams instead. This ocular consumption of the female body sometimes ranged into verbal harassment and physical confrontation, forcing the cheerleaders to perform behind cage-like fences for their protection (Smith, 2011).

It was within such a context that Roy launched the Cheer Queens. During their inaugural season in 2011, the Cheer Queens performed seven classical dance forms and dressed in seven different ethnic Indian outfits in the course of each match. Costume designer Neeta Lulla pointed out that the Cheer Queens were utilizing a style that was “more traditional and Indianized” with clothing that was “all about elegance and grace” (quoted in Dasgupta, 2011, p. 17). The subtext of Lulla’s comments suggests a censure of the existing style and presentation of the IPL cheerleaders, insinuating that the cheerleaders employed by the other teams are not appropriate for India and that more traditional, conservatively-dressed dancers better represent the country’s culture and values. In “eschewing high kicks and splits for complex hand waves and traditional dance steps” (Magnier, 2011), the Cheer Queens became a literal embodiment of a gendered nationalism that seeks to regulate female sexuality, reinforce patriarchy, and uphold a moral code of modesty entrenched in masculinity and heterosexuality (Derne, 2000; Mayer, 2000).

Reactions to the Cheer Queens were mixed. Some male fans thought the Cheer Queens were “much hotter in saris than bottle blondes in knickers” (Magnier, 2011),

while other commentators noted that the performances risked cheapening and disrespecting thousands of years of Indian classical dance tradition (Shah, 2011). A member of the Progressive Organization of Women argued that the creation of the Cheer Queens was merely “replacing foreign dolls with Indian dolls” (quoted in Elliott & Hussain, 2011, p. 49), suggesting that any type of cheerleading was an exercise in objectifying and sexualizing women. Perhaps the most entertaining remarks came from a satirical job advertisement that appeared on an Indian sports blog, in which prospective Cheer Queens are informed that they must be able to do the following in order to get the job:

Carry off Indian ethnic costumes in sweltering weather. Be smiling and cheerful in the face of rude behavior, catcalls, and wolf-whistles. Be calm and composed when booed. Stare off competition from Western cheerleaders. Refuse to be intimidated by foreign cheerleaders in racier costumes. (Fernandes, 2011)

The members of the Cheer Queens did indeed persevere, and they came to embody a reassertion of “traditional” Indian values, identities, and performances that rely on a masculinist conception of the nation and its culture.

It also seems that they have set a new standard for other IPL teams, as the Kolkata Knight Riders featured a new cheerleading squad for the 2012 IPL season in order to forge a stronger link between the team and the strong Bengali identity of its host city. The cheerleaders, previously dressed in short skirts and tight tops with plenty of exposed skin, are now clad in purple and gold saris and perform traditional Bengali dances to the sounds of the *Rabindrasangeet*, a collection of songs written and composed by poet Rabindranath Tagore and regarded as a treasure of Bengali culture (Rodrigues, 2012). In addition, the squad is now composed entirely of local women, leading one journalist to

remark on the “desi-fication”¹⁰ of IPL cheerleaders (D’Cruz, 2012, p. 12) as pom-poms, miniskirts, and foreigners are being replaced by the local and traditional.

Kushti, WWE, and Masculinity

If the emergence of the IPL heralded the spectacularization, globalization, and commodification of cricket, then WWE has surely done the same for professional wrestling. Growing out of a loosely connected collection of regional associations in the United States, some of which showed matches on local television, WWE morphed into a national entity in 1983 when Vince McMahon Jr. took over what was then the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from his father. The systematic buying out of regional promoters and organizations resulted in the “nationalization of the WWF” (Andrews, 2006, p. 44) and the creation of an entertainment spectacle that quickly gained popularity across the nation. The name change to World Wrestling Entertainment in 2002, prompted by a lawsuit filed by a prominent environmental organization also using the acronym WWF, did not hamper the company’s operations or popularity and WWE soon became the largest professional wrestling promotional company in the world. WWE matches are now regularly broadcast in thirty languages to more than 145 countries and attract more than 500 million television viewers around the world. In the second quarter of 2011 alone, WWE held fifty-seven live shows in the United States and thirty events internationally, attracting over 570,000 fans (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011c). Seeking to capitalize on its globalizing presence and the status of professional wrestling as a “culturally powerful multi-media complex” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 47), WWE has

¹⁰ Desi is a slang term that refers to the people, cultures, products, and practices of India.

expanded its corporate reach and now oversees ten domestic and international offices, including ones in London, Shanghai, Tokyo, Singapore, and Mumbai (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011c).

Though not an Indian creation, WWE has a tremendous presence in the Indian media market with matches broadcast on several television channels on a weekly basis. This programming is available in more than 75 million households across the country (Newton, 2011). In turn, India is the third largest market for the consumption of WWE broadcasts and branded products, behind only the United States and Mexico (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011c). The Great Khali, currently the only wrestler from India performing with WWE, is beloved by his compatriots and enjoys a celebrity status that goes beyond his athletic skill to include movie appearances and a runner-up finish on *Bigg Boss*, India's version of the reality television show, *Big Brother*. He is often described as "the pride of the nation" (Blakely, 2008). As discussed further below, his imposing physical presence, muscularity, and intimidating persona not only make him an intriguing character for WWE but also embody a gendered Indian nationalism that celebrates hyper-masculinity and male power.

The celebritization of wrestlers in India is not a recent phenomenon, as the deep history of the sport and its strong cultural resonance imbue wrestlers with a sense of national significance and heroism. The connection between wrestling and Indian nationalism prompted the rise of Gama the Great, also known as The Lion of the Punjab, a wrestler who came to "embody a complex set of ideas regarding Indian national identity" (Alter, 2000, p. 47) in which the expression of Indian masculinity through the wrestling body functioned as anti-colonial discourse. In 1910, he won an international

championship in London by defeating a succession of fourteen challengers, including ten Englishmen and the previous year's champion, a Polish wrestler named Stanislaus Zbyszko (Alter, 2000). He returned home to India a hero, as he had claimed victory in the very heart of the Empire. As Alter (2000) notes, Gama's triumph in London proved, to a male Indian population anxious about the power of its corporeality, that "masculinity as such did not need to be defined in terms of...Victorian ideals" (p. 53), but could be crafted through a skillful physicality that embodied distinctly Indian values and national aspirations for independence from colonial rule.

These links between the body, masculinity, and nationalism have long defined the socio-cultural significance of Indian wrestling. Traditional wrestling in India is known variably as *kushti*, *pahalwani*, or *malla yuddha* (Alter, 1995; Peabody, 2009), terms that refer to a style of wrestling characterized by ritualized exercise, self-discipline, and regimented health practices performed in a sandpit gymnasium called an *akhara* and often dedicated to the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman. The earliest authoritative work dealing with wrestling in India is the *Mallapurana*, a text dating from the sixteenth century that links the physical art of wrestling with issues of individual and community identity, and also defines wrestling as a total way of life (Alter, 2000). *Kushti* is widely recognized as a hybrid of two earlier forms of wrestling—an indigenous form native to what is now India dating from the first millennium BCE, and a Persian form brought to India in the sixteenth century (Peabody, 2009). This hybridity allowed *kushti* to transcend conflicts of religion and caste and facilitated the development of a contemporary wrestling culture that exists "along a rather Gandhian line" in which the individual wrestler's "somatic nationalism is fundamentally nonsectarian" (Alter, 1994, p. 559). For

Indian wrestlers, representing the nation is a responsibility not taken lightly and supersedes any socio-economic or religious chasms that otherwise divide Indian society.

The most crucial aspect of this somatic nationalism is the performance of masculinity. Alter (2004a) highlights this argument by stating the following:

Wrestling in contemporary urban India is clearly nationalistic insofar as many wrestlers are principally concerned with the way in which their bodies engage with modernity in order to reform India and rebuild national character in terms of hyper-masculinity. (p. 21)

The task of building national character in and through the male body began well before India achieved independence from British rule in 1947. The body had been “at the center of justification for colonialism” (Mills & Sen, 2004, p. 2), as the Indian male body was discursively depicted as weak and inferior in comparison to the robust and superior body of the European in order to discipline Indian bodies, “improve” them (thus justifying colonialism itself), and uphold the unequal power relations that sustained the politics of colonialism (Majumdar, 2006; Mills & Dimeo, 2002; Sen, 2004). The rise of the physical fitness movement in the early years of the twentieth century signalled a challenge to this regulatory control of the body and operated as a form of cultural politics designed to decolonize the male body and “remasculinize its effete character” (Alter, 2000, p. 53). The strong, active, and muscular male Indian body thus became a means for resisting colonial rule and reclaiming colonial sporting impositions such as cricket, football, and hockey to serve nationalistic ends (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Bose, 1990; Dimeo, 2004; Ray, 2008). Indigenous physical cultural forms also played a significant role in the reassertion of Indian male corporeality, including yoga and *kushti*, both of which were championed by Gandhi in his calls for positing the body as a site on which to thwart

colonial oppression and stage the independent nation (Alter, 2000; Chakraborty, 2007; Singleton, 2010).

The male wrestling body continues to be an important site for the performance of nationalism and masculinity, even as traditional methods of *kushti* are being displaced by Olympic-standard freestyle and Greco-Roman forms of wrestling (Dupont, 1995; Gandhi, 2011). Driven by the desire to compete internationally and achieve victory on behalf of the nation, this shift can be read as a response to India's liberalization policies of the early 1990s that prompted increased engagement with global markets and framed India as a rising power not just in business and industry, but in sport as well. Peabody (2009) notes that *kushti* bears a strong similarity to Olympic freestyle in terms of skills and strategy, so perhaps the transition from traditional techniques to international standardization has not been prohibitively difficult for Indian wrestlers (as evidenced by their success in the 2010 Commonwealth Games). What has remained the same through this shift is the place of the male body in constructions of national identity and fantasy (Berlant, 1991), where the wrestling body represents discourses of individual masculine strength and power clearly linked to the health and virility of the postcolonial Indian nation as a whole.

This link finds a welcoming home in the next evolutionary step of wrestling in India, namely the leap from international competition to the entertainment spectacle of professional wrestling and WWE. Although commonly rejected as a genuine sport and belittled for its scripted action, professional wrestling is nonetheless a significant physical cultural form that draws its appeal from being able to create excitement, drama, and theatrical performance through the mediums of athleticism, sex, and violence (Atkinson,

2002; Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2004). It is within this space that professional wrestling also operates as a means for the creation and dissemination of messages about masculinity. In the practice ring and during televised matches, wrestlers “play out assumptions of what *real* men are and do” (Mazer, 1990, p. 116, emphasis in original). Since pro wrestling is such an integral part of mainstream popular culture, these messages and performances thus serve as “important cultural indicators of what being a man is all about” (Soulliere, 2006, p. 2). As several scholars note, the definition of masculinity presented in and through WWE includes themes of aggression, emotional restraint, and achievement, all characteristics associated with dominant hegemonic masculinity (Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2004; Mazer, 1990; Soulliere, 2006). Yet, we must also recognize that this is a conception of “hegemonic *Western* masculinity” (Lozanski, 2007, p. 296, emphasis added), a force that subjugates both women and the non-Western man. So it is here, in the context of performances of masculinity and male power in WWE, that the body of the Great Khali gains added significance to the Indian nation. His immense physical stature and displays of impressive strength do reinforce a limited Western definition of masculinity, but they also work to promote an Indian nationalism that relies on the wrestling body to confront the continuing subjugation of the non-Western man.

The Great Khali’s Frying Pan Hands

If the Cheer Queens embody a reactionary and gendered Indian nationalism predicated on conservative and traditional notions of femininity, then the Great Khali represents a hyper-masculine vision of the nation in which the wrestling body is a symbol of strength, power, and discipline. Yet this representation remains curious because it is a

fabrication, a creation of WWE producers and writers who operate from a Western, mass-mediated, and corporatized position and seek to maximize viewership and profits through the deliberate construction of drama, crude characterizations, and facile narratives. At its worst then, a professional wrestling performance is an “over-simplistic display of male bravado and vulgar social clichés” (Mazer, 1990, p. 97) as well as derogatory cultural and ethnic stereotypes. Yet it can also serve as astute political and cultural commentary, a theatrical representation of moral codes, and a temporary transgression of normalized behaviors and social expectations as often expressed in the *lucha libre* wrestling tradition of Mexico or *Las Cholitas*’ matches in Bolivia (Barberena, 2009; Levi, 2008; Mazer, 1990). Even though his image is an invention of WWE and functions largely as a perjorative Indian stereotype, the Great Khali enjoys tremendous popularity within India and is viewed, much like Gama the Great before him, as a virile hero who brings honor and strength to the nation. The stereotypes used to craft his character are certainly problematic and contribute to lingering colonialist and Orientalist imaginings of India, yet his body simultaneously symbolizes an ongoing resistance to the colonial portrayal of the Indian male as feeble and effete. It is through his muscularity and hyper-masculinity that the Great Khali affirms a robust Indian nationalism within the globalized and spectacularized space of WWE.

The Great Khali was born Dalip Singh Rana in 1972 in Dhirana, a small village in the state of Himachal Pradesh not far from the Himalayas. He worked as a day laborer and a security guard before getting recruited to join the local police force. After winning the Mr. India bodybuilding title in 1996 and 1997, he decided to embark on a career in professional wrestling (Lakshmi, 2008). He briefly wrestled in Japan before landing in

the United States in 1999 and performing under the ring name, Giant Singh (Rose, 2008). Upon signing with WWE in 2000, he adopted the name Great Khali in honor of the Hindu goddess of power and destruction, Kali (Lakshmi, 2008). He weighs 420 pounds, stands 7 feet 3 inches tall, and measures 63 inches around his chest. His signature moves include the Punjabi Plunge and the Khali Vise Grip (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011b). It was once rumored that he eats five chickens, two dozen eggs, and a kilogram of dried fruit before each match (Walshaw, 2010). Delicate and timid he is decidedly not.

WWE's portrayal of the Great Khali plays upon his physicality and merges it with (mis)representations of Indian culture to create a character to be feared. The official WWE website describes Khali as an "enormous monster" who has "walked the jungles of India unafraid of pythons and wrestled white Bengal tigers" (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011c). This framing of Khali as a monster from an exotic and scary land is a common feature of WWE broadcasts. Comments made by WWE announcers during the Great Khali's matches (Campbell, 2007; Campbell, 2008; Dunn, 2007) include a regular rotation of the following:

- His hands are bigger than an NFL football.
- Khali is an absolute giant.
- Getting slapped by Khali is like getting hit in the chest with a frying pan.
- He has a skillet-like right hand.
- That is one scary looking individual.
- You're almost at a loss for words to describe this monster.

This emphasis on the size and strength of the Great Khali's body is paired with demonstrations of his heterosexuality to present a hyper-masculinity that is appealing to Indian audiences. The presumption of his heterosexuality is regularly confirmed through the Khali Kiss Cam, a gimmick in which supposedly random women are chosen from the crowd to enter the ring and kiss him (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011a). The Kiss Cam provides a dose of comic relief, but it also adds to the characterization of the Great Khali as a masculine Indian body that is simultaneously feared and desired by the rest of the world. For a postcolonial India still anxious about its place in the global order, the physically powerful and overtly masculine corporeality of the Great Khali has become a symbol of national potency grounded in the supposition that the very representation of national power "rests on prior constructions of gender power" (McClintock, 1992, p. 92). Whether he is beating up white wrestlers or kissing Western women, the Great Khali embodies an Indian nationalism reliant upon expressions of masculinity and male power to negotiate a postcolonial identity within a rapidly globalizing world.

Glocalized Bodies

There is an argument to be made that both the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali exist as glocalized bodies that bring elements of local Indian identity into the globalized spaces of the IPL and WWE, respectively. Robertson (1995) advanced the notion of glocalization as a solution for the antagonistic framing of global homogenization against global heterogenization in efforts to understand the effects of globalized modernities. Glocalization thus refers to the processes and practices, whether intended or not, whereby certain features of the local culture interpenetrate the contingencies of global networks

and flows. The local and global become linked, and it becomes possible to identify a glocal condition that helps to explain the similarities and differences evident within, and between, contemporary societies. In general, there are many examples of where global corporations, brands, and products have been adjusted to the preferences and sensibilities of the local context, thereby becoming glocalized (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004; Matusitz & Reyers, 2010; Robertson, 1995). Much of Indian contemporary culture, including film, television, literature, food, leisure, and sport, has been glocalized. So much so that the growing middle class is characterized by its “glocal competence” (Brosius, 2010, p. 13) in blending global and local influences in their everyday lives.

The IPL constitutes a form of sporting glocalization because the league is global in much of its organizational, structural, and production elements, while being simultaneously local in terms of its packaging and presentation for an Indian audience. It is a space where “globalized Indianness” (Brosius, 2010, p. 329), a sense of transnational cosmopolitanism, can be realized and displayed. Cricket in contemporary India, and particularly the IPL, is a metaphor for the processes and products of globalization while also operating as an important site for the instantiation of the postcolonial nation (Mehta, Gemmell, & Malcolm, 2009). The IPL has ended up as a “strange hybrid of the English village green, Bollywood, and the Super Bowl” (Rowe & Gilmour, 2009, p. 172), and the cheerleading squads have become an important part of this melding. Perhaps the Cheer Queens are simply an expression of glocalization, of a strategic utilization of the local within the global.

Similarly, the Great Khali is a crucial part of WWE’s efforts to glocalize and adapt to the specificities and demands of the Indian market. While the Great Khali is an

almost comical exaggeration of Indian hyper-masculinity and WWE deliberately misrepresents Indian culture and history for the sake of drama and narrative tension, his presence in WWE is significant to an Indian nation with a rich and vibrant wrestling history.

However, we must be careful to not gloss over or minimize the deeper meanings and effects of this glocalization, for it is not a benign process, especially in relation to the Cheer Queens. The “desi-fication” of IPL cheerleaders is not just another example of glocalization where international products and brands take on local Indian characteristics, but is rather an extension of an intensely gendered nationalism that seeks to control and regulate the female body. The Cheer Queens are not equivalent to pizza slices topped with tandoori *paneer* at Pizza Hut, Chicken Maharaja Macs, or L’Oreal shampoo infused with *neem* and coconut oils. They are not merely glocalized products, but are an embodied reaction to the globalization of the IPL indicative of corporeal politics and the wielding of male power that subjugates female bodies. These politics, in turn, have very real material affects on the female body in contemporary India.

Conclusion: A Snapshot from Haryana

The Great Khali continues to enjoy a successful career in WWE and adulation in India, even though his physical skills are in decline and his chances of capturing another championship are slim. There is even speculation that he will open a professional wrestling training center in his home state of Himachal Pradesh to encourage young Indians to pursue careers in pro wrestling (Mishra, 2010). The Cheer Queens will enter their third year of existence in 2013, ready to maintain tradition in the midst of the

spectacle that is IPL cricket. We will wait to see if more cheerleading squads will make the move towards saris and classical dance, thus continuing the process of “desi-fication” started by Subrata Roy and the Cheer Queens. While it will be interesting to follow developments in how the Great Khali and the Cheer Queens are represented and consumed, I want to conclude by offering a snapshot of the current situation in Haryana, a state in north India where the issues of male power, control of the female body, and sport are intricately stitched together and have very real, material consequences for young female athletes. Far removed from the glitz, glamour, and entertainment spectacle of the IPL and WWE are female wrestlers (and other athletes) who embody the contradictory discourses of empowerment and oppression facing Indian women today. Like the Great Khali they are embodiments of a physical cultural tradition important to the nation, and are thus celebrated. Like the Cheer Queens their bodies are also sites of male control and the expression of narrow conceptions of gender expectations governed by a pernicious and stubborn patriarchy.

Haryana is home to India’s most successful male competitive wrestlers, including Yogeshwar Dutt, Sanjay Kumar, and Ravinder Singh, all of whom won gold at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. It has also produced prominent female athletes competing in track and field, badminton, and, of course, wrestling. During the 2010 Commonwealth Games, female athletes from Haryana earned nine medals—five of them gold—and wrestling sisters Geeta and Babita Phogat emerged as local stars after winning gold and silver, respectively (Deswal, 2010). Overall, India’s success in the Games was a watershed for the country’s female athletes. Out of India’s thirty-eight gold medals, women won thirteen of them, contributing a total of fifty-six medals to the country’s net

haul of 101 medals. It was the first time that female athletes had accounted for the majority of medals won by India in a Commonwealth Games (Roy, 2010).

While this sporting success might signal a measure of progress for Indian women, it must be read against the current context of oppressive patriarchy and male power that restricts opportunities for women and thwarts deep social change. The state of Haryana might be celebrating the victories of its female athletes, especially its wrestlers, but it is a region wracked by honor killings, female feticide, and a heavily skewed sex ratio that favors the male child. In 2010, the sex ratio in Haryana dropped to 834 girls for every 1,000 boys against the national average of 932:1,000 (Siwach, 2010). In 2011, both ratios decreased even further; in Haryana it stood at 826, while the national average dropped to 914:1,000 (Siwach, 2011). According to a recent report issued by the National Commission for Women in conjunction with the United Nations, the district of Jhajjar in Haryana has the worst sex ratio in the nation, currently standing at just 774 girls for every 1,000 boys (National Commission for Women, 2012). It is illegal for a doctor to reveal the sex of a baby to its parents during prenatal examinations, but abortions and murders of female children are still common.

Haryana, in addition to having the most heavily lopsided sex ratio, also has the highest female infanticide rate in the country (Sarin, 2011). Of the nearly 1,000 honor killings¹¹ that occurred in India in 2008, nearly 90% of them took place in Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, states in northern India where family pride is restored through the kidnapping, torture, and murder of family members who fail to abide by the rules of

¹¹ Honor killings are homicides perpetrated by a member, or members, of a family or social group against one of their own. Directed primarily at girls and women, these killings are undertaken with the belief that the victim has brought dishonor or shame upon the family and/or community.

honor (Sarin, 2011, p. 35). Moreover, in October 2010, in the midst of such astounding female athletic success in the Commonwealth Games, leaders of some of the *khap panchayats* (local caste councils) in Haryana demanded that the marriage age for girls be lowered from eighteen to fifteen years old in a move designed to further curtail basic rights and opportunities for women (Deswal, 2010).

Female athletes from Haryana are indeed a source of pride for the nation, but at home they are still bound by rigid patriarchal notions of family responsibility and honor. The *khap panchayats* “form the bedrock of life” in the small villages and towns of Haryana (Sarin, 2011, p. 34), using their power to control female bodies by ruling through fear. As Haryana resident, discus thrower, and Commonwealth Games bronze medalist Seema Antil explained, “if I do something that goes against our social customs or marry someone I know will be unacceptable to my family, these same people feting me will not think twice before killing me” (quoted in Sarin, 2011, p. 34). The father of Anita Sheoran, another Haryana athlete and a gold medalist in wrestling at the Commonwealth Games, was perhaps even more blunt in stating, “Anita is not the kind of person who will go against the values of our family. But if she does, I could kill her for honor. For us, family pride is above everything else” (quoted in Sarin, 2011, p. 35). So for female athletes from Haryana, empowerment in sport does not necessarily translate into socio-cultural liberation. The nation remains the property of men, and the female body continues to be controlled and regulated by male power, whether in the context of mass sportainment spectacles, local sport, or everyday life.

Chapter II

Whose Games?: Aspirational Delhi and the 2010 Commonwealth Games

Introduction

In bidding to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the city of Delhi aspired to not only organize a successful and highly visible sporting event, but also to emerge from the afterglow of the Games as a truly global city ready to welcome tourists, political leaders, and foreign investment. Those responsible for securing and delivering Delhi 2010—namely the ruling government, the chief minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, and the Games organizing committee led by Suresh Kalmadi—looked to the Games as a means of advancing the city as a global, world-class metropolis illustrative of India’s escalating economic growth, increasing influence within international politics, and unequivocal cultural import. The opportunity to project the capital city as a beacon of India’s rising power was at the center of Delhi’s bid for the Commonwealth Games, as suggested by official bid documents stating that “these Games will showcase New Delhi, the capital of India, to the world and promote it as a global city of an emerging economic power” (quoted in Majumdar & Mehta, 2010, p. 5). Delhi’s ruling elites ostensibly sought to use the Games as a vehicle to enhance the image and stature of Delhi, catalyze urban development, and create spaces for capital investment. In doing so, the Games would signal Delhi’s “arrival” or “graduation” to the ranks of the world’s leading cities and India would be launched into global superpower status, a common aspiration for cities and countries looking to host international sporting mega-events (Black, 2007). In

addition, a successful Games would establish Delhi as the “next great international sporting hub” (field notes, July 10, 2010), a center of sporting activity and excellence attracting people from all over the world and setting Delhi up for a bid to host a future summer Olympic Games.

On the surface then, the Commonwealth Games appeared to be a positive development for a city that has long been riven by structural and social challenges rooted in the inequities of colonial power relations, including poor infrastructure, extreme poverty, disparities in access to education, and divisions based on caste, religion, and gender that continue to cause violence and oppression. However, as with the recent staging of many global sporting events—including the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing—beyond the infrastructure improvements catalyzed by the Games, there exists in Delhi a widening gap between rich and poor, the educated and the uneducated, and bodies that matter and those that plainly do not. Those that do not, such as the 27,000 families displaced to make way for the Athlete’s Village on the banks of the Yamuna River (Puri & Bhata, 2009), remain invisible and expendable to the power elite who sought to use the Games to simultaneously globalize and capitalize Delhi in and through sport.

For those in power, the Games were about attracting, engaging, and serving those bodies that they perceive *do* matter—the privileged, the rich, the private developers, the political elite, the investors and industrialists, and the foreign tourists who can legitimize Delhi as a world-class travel destination. The rest of Delhi’s residents, who make up the majority of the city’s roughly 16 million inhabitants, are left to bear the financial debts and social costs of displacement, corruption, and environmental degradation for years to

come (Hazards Centre, 2010, p. 3). This pandering to the elite echoes India's neoliberal development strategies spurred by a series of political and economic reforms instituted in the early 1990s designed to intensify India's encounter with global capital, liberalize its economic policies towards free market capitalism, and shed its image as a cumbersome and isolationist bureaucracy hesitant to welcome foreign investment (Chopra, 2003; Oza, 2006). The significance of these reforms was a "radical loosening" of controls and regulations (Oza, 2006, p. 11) that expanded the consumer lifestyle economy and led India into an age of neoliberalism in which the free market began to supersede the post-independence welfare state initially championed by India's leadership.

As Chopra (2003) suggests, in contemporary India it is neoliberalism that functions as doxa, meaning that the tenets of neoliberalism—privatization, rationality, individualism and self-interest, the retrenchment of the state—have become an "unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth... across social space in its entirety" (p. 421). As India steadily moves into the doxa of neoliberalism, a dominant assumption has arisen that globalization and liberalization are frameworks for enabling positive change and growth across the country. The realm of sport is certainly not immune to such forces, as illustrated by the establishment of the Commonwealth Business Club of India, an organization sponsored by the Commonwealth Games Federation aiming to market the Commonwealth Games in Delhi and "promote and facilitate business networking as well as showcase the country as a preferred business destination for the global business community" (Hazards Centre, 2010, p. 3). This commercial underpinning of the Commonwealth Games suggested that the Games were more about corporate profit and the expansion of capital than the celebration of sport.

Even the Comprehensive National Sports Policy adopted by the government in 2008 declared that “special emphasis will be laid on mobilizing corporate support in the field of sports” (Indian Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport, 2007, p. 20). While India continues to engage with global capital and sanction processes of privatization, competition, and corporatization, social life has increasingly been marked by the growing gap between those who have access to India’s new wealth and those who do not. As journalist Palagummi Sainath has asserted, “India is not really about *Slumdog Millionaire*. It’s about slumdogs versus millionaires and that’s what you’re seeing in Delhi now” (quoted in Associated Press, 2010).

If the millionaires are benefitting from Delhi hosting the Commonwealth Games, what of the *aam aadmi*, the average Delhiite struggling to exist in a city that is becoming increasingly hostile to the working class and the poor? The construction of “new” India, including that of a world-class Delhi, continues onward but ignores the provision of basic industry and services for the masses in favor of exclusive real estate developments, shopping malls, and business parks (Wyatt, 2005). In its desire to host the Commonwealth Games as a means to arrive as a world-class city, Delhi has been swayed by the “seductive discourse of development” (Swart & Bob, 2004, p. 1311) that makes hosting sporting mega-events such an attractive prospect for cities. For Delhi, this promise of development translated into a gleaming future of “skyscrapers, fast-flowing traffic, and neon-lit branded shops and restaurants with unlimited power and water” (Baviskar, 2007, paragraph 2). This vision of Delhi as a world-class and global city, however seductive it may be, is predicated on the spatialization of exclusion and risks the creation of an “apartheid city” (Roy, 2005) divided along class lines where access to the

urban domain is restricted to a small selection of elite groups deemed to be “proper” and productive citizens (Brosius, 2010). Those who do not fall within these groups—the poor, the homeless, the *aam aadmi*—are further marginalized and are increasingly losing their right to participate in urban life.

With a final price tag of over 70,000 crore rupees (approximately \$1.6 billion)—a 114% increase from the original budget of 617.5 crore rupees (\$136 million)—the Commonwealth Games were supposed to launch Delhi’s world-class aspirations and showcase “brand India” as an economic, cultural, and sporting powerhouse (Majumdar & Mehta, 2010). Yet the Games also magnified, and played a part in, the deepening social inequalities precipitated by the neoliberalization of India in which the impoverished are simultaneously rendered invisible and demonized as hindrances to development. Beyond the “Harry Potter-esque incantations” of making Delhi a world-class city (Baviskar, 2007), seemingly imbued with magical powers of transformation, what were the Games meant to contribute? The Games managed to proceed smoothly and proved to be a great success for the Indian athletes who took home a total of 101 medals, but they also functioned as a manifestation of neoliberal socio-spatial politics of exclusion. In Delhi’s frantic rush to prepare for the Games and present itself as a global city modeled after Singapore and Shanghai (Baviskar, 2006), the *aam aadmi* have been denied their very right to the city amidst a forceful politics of socio-spatial exclusion fueled by neoliberal policies and the alluring discourse of international tourism.

In reflecting upon the Games, Majumdar (2011) argued that “the key question to ask in the post-Games scenario is: did these Games belong to the organizing committee or the government of India, or did the Games in fact belong to the athletes?” (pp. 235-

236). Responding to Majumdar's prompt, I offer here a different question: to whom did the Games *not* belong? In answering, I argue that the Games did not belong to, and were never meant to belong to, the *aam aadmi* of Delhi, the most significant segment of the city's population in terms of sheer numbers but also the most marginalized as Delhi races towards its self-proclaimed world-class future. Perhaps the Games ultimately did belong to the government or to the athletes, but the Games failed to stimulate meaningful development accessible to all. My exploration is rooted in a critical reading of the city's divisive policies and analysis of various printed media texts produced before, during, and after the Games. In addition, I had the opportunity to attend the Games while I was living in Delhi for six months, and I use some of my observations and experiences here to augment my analysis. The personal element is also meant to convey a sense of humanity that often gets lost in the broader discourses of urban development and staging sporting mega-events for civic gain. Of course, I am not a Delhiite and I do not claim to speak for the *aam aadmi*, but rather I offer my personal observations to suggest that Delhi's world-class aspirations are about more than new buildings, beautiful streetscapes, six-lane highways, or even court decisions and government policies. It is the human experience of these happenings that often gets overlooked—whether is the experience of the *chaiwallah*, the migrant worker, the office manager, or the foreigner living temporarily in the city.

Economic Reform and Inequality

Upon gaining independence in 1947, India adopted economic development policies underpinned by a commitment to state planning and ownership, industrial

regulation, and market protection driven by the Nehru government's (1947-1964) democratic socialism (Reed, 2002). Realized through a series of Five Year Plans first initiated in 1951, these inward-oriented monetary and fiscal policies (Krueger, 2002) controlled private economic activities while also stimulating government-led industrialization. The aim was to increase the standard of living for the Indian populace through the establishment of economic self-reliance (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003). By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Indian economy was thus relatively insulated from world markets. For example, India's share of world merchandise exports declined from 2.2% in 1948 to 0.5% in the early 1980s (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003, p. 8), an indication of the country's hesitance to engage with foreign capital in favor of focusing on its own domestic growth. However, during this same time frame, a combination of economic inefficiency, budget deficits, and restricted sources of capital investment (Das, 2011) meant that India experienced a low rate of economic growth, averaging less than 2% annually (Krueger & Chinoy, 2002).

In an effort to stimulate what had become a stagnant Indian economy, and to some degree compelled by the global shift toward economic liberalization (Desai, 2007; Harvey, 2005), the Indian government implemented a series of liberalizing economic reforms beginning in the mid-1980s. Due to a combination of opposition from the "business sector, the bureaucrats, the rural sector and the traditionally highly vocal and influential leftist-nationalist intelligentsia" (Pedersen, 2000, p. 266), this initial phase of reform ultimately failed. Furthermore, it created the conditions of economic crisis that justified the eventual enactment of more radically revisionist measures. By 1991, the Indian economy wrestled with an inflation rate of 13% and a balance-of-payments deficit

running at an annual rate of approximately \$10 billion, with state reserves reduced to a low point of two weeks of imports (Krueger & Chinoy, 2002). The ensuing economic reforms were focused on discrete measures designed to stabilize the Indian economy (tightening monetary policy, devaluing the rupee, and reducing the fiscal deficit through spending cuts), and more expansive changes designed to liberalize the Indian economic structure as a whole (privatizing public enterprises, creating business-friendly labor laws, and opening India's financial sector to foreign investment) (Pedersen, 2000; Topolova, 2007). As such, they heralded a shift "from an inward-oriented, state-led development strategy to a policy of active reintegration with the world economy" (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003, p. 2).

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the success of these policies was demonstrable. The Indian economy experienced an average growth rate of 8.5% between 2005 and 2010; in 2008, four of the eight richest people alive were from India; and in 2010, India claimed the tenth position on the International Monetary Fund's ranking of nations by gross domestic product (French, 2011). Under the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002 – 2007), the Indian economy experienced tremendous growth. During this time, average annual GDP growth was 7.8%, the highest for any five-year period since independence. The most successful years were 2005 and 2006, with growth rates of 9.5% and 9.7% respectively, vaulting India into the status of one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Though rates of growth and increases in per capita income faltered during the global financial crisis of 2007 – 2009, the Indian economy recovered quickly and responded with a GDP growth rate of 7.4% in 2009, high business confidence, and increasing rates of foreign direct investment (Das, 2011). As a result, India's economic

transformation captured the “imagination of policymakers, financial markets, analysts, as well as the general public” (Hall & Poloz, 2007, p. 771).

However, the celebratory discourse which routinely framed India’s liberalizing economic policies belied the socio-economic inequalities which not only endured but were, if anything, accentuated following the implementation of the reforms (Deaton & Dreze, 2002; Nagaraj, 2000; Pedersen, 2000; Rizvi, 2007). In 2008, a research report from the World Bank (Chen & Ravallion, 2008) acknowledged that although the percentage of the Indian population living below \$1.25 per day fell from 59.8% to 41.6% between 1981 and 2005, the growth of the Indian population in general meant that the number of people living below this international poverty line actually increased from 421 million to 456 million over the same time period (Chen & Ravallion, 2008).

The financial gains derived from the liberalization of the Indian economy have largely been experienced by the capitalist elite and those members of the middle class able to take advantage of new forms of employment, particularly those within the “information technology and business processing industries that make up the so-called new economy” (Mishra, 2006, paragraph 15). Conversely, India’s widely touted economic “miracle” (Lal, 2008) has failed to relieve India’s elevated levels of extreme poverty. Not only have India’s residual poor been circumvented by the new modes of technology, education, and employment that accompanied the globalization of the Indian economy, they have suffered from attendant price increases across various consumer sectors. The rate of inflation started to rise significantly in 2008, driven by high food prices, agricultural output unable to meet domestic demand, and higher disposable

incomes in rural areas boosting the demand for food products (Das, 2011). By early 2011, the food inflation rate had reached 18.3% (Enough to make your eyes water, 2011).

The early months of 2011 were marked by this raging inflation, spurred by an agrarian crisis, increasing corporate control over farm production and trade, and speculative trading that pushed food prices up. The poor and underprivileged bore the brunt of this inflation, as prices of basic food items such as onions, milk, and pulses increased substantially (Chandrasekhar, 2011). The government largely failed to act to curb this inflation, even as millions of families were forced to stop buying basic foodstuffs due to high prices. Feeding the hungry population was, and is, not a priority for the government, and with “corporate and financial interests dominating the state, the axe has to fall on the increasingly hungry and inflation-battered working people” (Patnaik, 2011, p. 29). Among these battered people are India’s farmers, who are committing suicide at an alarming rate. It is estimated that nearly 250,000 farmers have committed suicide since 1995 in the “largest wave of recorded suicides in human history” (Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, 2011, p. 1). In 2009, a total of 17,638 farmers ended their lives, equating to one suicide every thirty minutes (Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, 2011).

In addition to the rural population, India’s urban residents are subject to growing levels of economic inequality. Urban inequality has been statistically measured in terms of consumption levels and income tax burden (Deaton & Dreze, 2002), and is also evident in the stark and uncomfortable juxtaposition between the embodiments of new consumer affluence and those of entrenched poverty, oftentimes simultaneously occupying the same contemporary urban Indian streetscape (Rizvi, 2007). India’s

liberalizing economic policy has thus contributed to the accentuation of inequality within the nation, by strengthening the financial power and political influence of the capitalist and middle classes at the expense of the massed ranks of the impoverished (Ahmed, Kundu, & Peet, 2011).

Slum Free?: Spatial Cleansing in Delhi

Once derided as a “sleepy, boring, parochial capital” (Miller, 2009, p. 1), Delhi¹² has emerged as a rapidly expanding megalopolis brimming with opportunity but also struggling with such issues as pollution, congestion, sprawl, and poverty. When Delhi became the capital of India in 1911, its population was just under 240,000 people. One hundred years later the population had swelled to roughly 16 million, not including surrounding areas such as Gurgaon and Noida that are informally considered part of Delhi. By 2015, according to figures calculated by the United Nations Population Division, the city will be home to 20.9 million people, making it one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the world (Miller, 2009). People are flocking to Delhi from all over India—and the globe—in search of jobs, business deals, and brighter futures for their children as promised by the economic reforms of the 1990s. With the opening up of India, Delhi has fast become a leading political, commercial, and cultural hub. Alongside the economic changes and population growth, Delhi has witnessed significant socio-spatial transformations that speak to the tangible manifestations of “transnational neoliberalism” (Peck, 2004) and the “spatialization of class divisions” (Rao, 2010).

¹² Technically, the National Capital Territory, the center of political administration established by the British and designed by architect Edward Lutyens, is called New Delhi. Colloquially the entirety of the city is referred to as Delhi, and I use Delhi here to refer to the city as a whole.

India's market reform and liberalization has created a sharp rise in urban inequality (Jha, 2000; Bhan, 2009; Rao, 2010), evident in the contradictions of Delhi's spaces where the very poor often exist alongside the very rich. The spaces of poverty, namely the slums, have increasingly become the target of government campaigns designed to cleanse city space so that it will be "enticing to consumerism and economic growth" (Truelove & Mawdsley, 2011, p. 415). With a diminishing concern for the poor as it eagerly chases transnational capital, Delhi is partaking in the production of a "culture of segregation" (Rao, 2010, p. 403) that bolsters the interests of the elite while simultaneously demonizing the poor and denying them the right to participate as equal citizens in urban life.

A slum is defined as an area with substandard housing whose residents do not formally own or lease the land on which they live (Ghertner, 2010). Also known as *jhuggi bastis* (shanty settlements), the slums in Delhi are scattered across the city and most often occupy land owned by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), a government agency responsible for the development and maintenance of housing, infrastructure, commercial properties, sports facilities, and other aspects of the built environment (Baviskar, 2006; Ghertner, 2010). According to survey data collected by the city government, in 1951 there were a total of 12,794 slum households in Delhi. By 1981, the number had risen to approximately 91,000, and in 1998 the count stood at nearly 600,000 households (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2003). Estimates of how many people live in these households vary, as the slum population is continually shifting in response to labor migration patterns and perceived opportunities for work in the city, but in 2000 it was determined that more than three million people, a quarter of Delhi's population at the

time, lived in the 1,160 *jhuggi bastis* spread throughout the city (Baviskar, 2006, p. 91). Despite the vital services that the slum residents provide to Delhi, primarily as construction workers on municipal projects, the city is engaged in a long-range campaign to demolish the slums, displace their residents, clear the land for redevelopment, and construct new spaces deemed necessary for Delhi to rise to the status of a global, world class city. In its efforts to “reclaim public spaces for the use of proper citizens” (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 131)—proper meaning the middle and upper classes—the city government is propagating a vicious process of social exclusion in which a “large number of marginalized people are further marginalized as they do not fit into the larger scheme of things” (Uppal, 2009, p. 26).

The social and spatial exclusion evident in Delhi today is rooted in the economic reforms of the 1990s that ushered in neoliberal policies favoring private commercial development over the provision of public welfare. The economic liberalization initiated in 1991 began to be implemented in full in Delhi by the late 1990s, leading to an explicit government goal of “turning Delhi into a ‘slum free city’, giving it a ‘world class’ look...and converting public land occupied by slum dwellers into commercially exploitable private property” (Ghertner, 2010, p. 194). The Draft 2021 Master Plan for Delhi was released in 2005, outlining a future vision of the city as a global leader in tourism, commerce, and business predicated on attracting conventions, hosting major sporting events, and building new shopping centers, hotels, and restaurants (Butcher, 2010; Roy, 2005). The Plan presents the “twin brothers of commercialization and privatization” (Roy, 2005, p. 9) as the solution to all of the city’s ills. By focusing on providing for only the elite, argues Roy (2005), this future Delhi will become an

“apartheid city” divided along class lines where the poor are demonized for being unproductive anti-citizens and positioned as sources of national incapacitation threatening India’s social and economic advances. As part of the realization of the Plan, public finances began to be shifted away from education, public housing, healthcare, and food subsidies towards “large, highly visible and ‘modern’ infrastructure projects” (Ghertner, 2010, p. 200) such as the Delhi metro, highway flyovers, toll roads, and the Commonwealth Games Athlete’s Village. These “world class” projects, although built by the labor provided by migrant workers living in poverty, are meant to provide an aesthetic veneer for the city that renders the working class and poor invisible and denies their very existence. The advancing neoliberal doxa, concretized in official state policies such as the 2021 Master Plan, celebrates consumptive lifestyles and encourages the proliferation of commercial spaces available only to the middle and upper classes. As Indian political culture becomes dominated by such neoliberal policies and ideologies that privilege the elite, there also exists a growing political and cultural indifference towards poverty, making urban life in Delhi inhospitable for the poor (Rao, 2010; Rizvi, 2007). Hence, the drive for a “slum free” Delhi guided by government policies that envision Delhi as a future London or Singapore, built for the “legitimate urban citizens” of the middle and upper classes and functioning as a space where the impoverished are refused their very “right to the city” (Bhan, 2009, p. 141).

The entrepreneurial approach to urban governance and development adopted by the city of Delhi in the past decade underpins a material expression of an “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) further cemented by judicial decisions and discourses surrounding what constitutes “clean” and legal space. Derided

as “economically unviable, environmentally harmful and criminal” (Bhan, 2009, p. 141), the poor have become targets of a judiciary that has, in large part, redefined the “public” interest to include only the upper and middle classes that embody India’s global rise (Truelove & Mawdsley, 2011). In 2000, the Delhi government attempted to provide alternative living spaces to evicted slum dwellers, but the Indian Supreme Court disallowed the plan, arguing that it would ultimately justify the crime of land grabbing and encourage squatters to occupy public land (Rao, 2010). The Delhi High Court later ordered the demolition of Nangla Machi, a slum located on the banks of the Yamuna River, to make room for the Commonwealth Games Athlete’s Village and the Akshardham Temple¹³ complex, a decision that highlighted the city’s commitment to the construction of new, “legitimate” spaces at the expense of thousands of impoverished families who were resettled forty kilometers from the city, far removed from the vibrant economic centers where they managed to eke out a living (Srivastava, 2009). Supported by such a legal atmosphere, members of the middle class, including residents’ welfare associations across Delhi, are filing public interest litigation (PIL) cases to hasten the demolition of slums and clear squatter settlements (Truelove & Mawdsley, 2011). By ignoring, even standing against, the need for low-income housing, the judiciary has criminalized the presence of the urban poor in Delhi, and slum evictions are justified as being in the public interest. However, this definition of public excludes the poor and fails to recognize issues of homelessness and poverty as public concerns (Baviskar, 2006).

¹³ The Akshardham Temple was completed in 2005 by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, a key sub-sect of the broader Swaminarayan movement located within the Bhakti tradition of Hinduism. It sits on the eastern bank of the Yamuna River, not far from the Commonwealth Games Athlete’s Village. Amongst other features, the complex includes an IMAX cinema, a boat ride through “10,000 years of Indian history”, a musical fountain, the Garden of Values, and the temple itself, which is surrounded by a large moat (Srivastava, 2009).

Instead, the poor are viewed as the prime source of crime, pollution, and a generally unpleasant and dirty urban aesthetic perceived to be unfitting for a city with world class aspirations (Figure 3). The making of “clean” spaces—malls, offices, hotels—proceeds alongside the removal of “unclean” spaces—slums, *dhabas* (roadside restaurants), makeshift shelters, and anywhere else the poor are visible (Srivastava, 2009, p. 341). Many of the recent court orders, responsible for the displacement of nearly one million slum dwellers in Delhi, equate slum clearance with “environmental and visual clean-up” (Ghertner, 2010, p. 202) and define spaces as legal or illegal, as acceptable or deviant, based on their outer characteristics. So, as Ghertner (2010) notes, a “shopping mall, even if violation of planning law, is legal because it looks legal”, while a slum, even an authorized one, is “illegal because it looks like a nuisance” (p. 202). Such arbitrary aesthetic judgments not only contribute to the justification of slum removal, but also help to create an “urban topography of moral middle-classness” (Srivastava, 2009, p. 342) in which the very behaviors and appearance of city residents are expected to align with hegemonic discourses of consumption, modernity, and cosmopolitanism.

The Delhi metro, held up by civic authorities as an iconic marker of the city’s emerging world-class status, is an integral part of this topography as it offers an efficient mode of transportation that is governed by particular rules of conduct. The metro is quickly changing commuting practices in Delhi, as those who can afford it prefer to ride in the comfort of an air-conditioned train car rather than struggle against the chaos, heat, and grittiness of the streets. These practices also require a change in accepted behaviors, including an “emphasis on cleanliness, order and quiet” (Butcher, 2011, p. 237) that reveals proper middle class comportment in line with Delhi’s ongoing transformation. As

spatial manifestations of neoliberalism, the initiatives designed to make Delhi a world-class city valorize the upper and middle classes as deserving and moral citizens while simultaneously excoriating the undeserving poor from the newly reconfigured urban environments.



Figure 3. Flyer posted at Khan Market in central Delhi during the 2010 Commonwealth Games advocating the resettlement of the poor and displaced in order to improve the city's image (photo by author).

Not for the Aam Aadmi

The 2010 Commonwealth Games represented the culmination, and arguably the most visible expression, of more than a decade of city-led initiatives designed to symbolically reinvent, and materially restructure, Delhi as a world-class city (Bhan, 2009; Rao, 2010). Since slum clearance and spatial cleansing were established features of Delhi's urban development strategy, the Games simply offered the most high profile example of the concerted removal of Delhi's poor and their resettlement away from the core spaces of the globalizing metropolis (Dupont, 2008). The Games even acted as a compelling deadline for the goal of a "slum free" Delhi, however unrealistic and inhumane that goal proved to be (Rao, 2010). Caught up in these efforts were the *aam aadmi*, the average Delhiites and the working poor struggling to survive in the city, for whom the Games were never accessible. They were excluded by high ticket prices at best, and forced displacement from their homes at worst.

In a direct nod to the goal of creating Delhi as a global city with world-class aspirations, the bid document prepared by the Commonwealth Games Organizing Committee budgeted 7.5 crore rupees (\$1.66 million) for expenses related to the beautification of Delhi. By the time the Games were due to begin, the city government had overblown this budget, spending 344 crore rupees (about \$76 million) on the improvement of roads and footpaths in and around the Games venues alone (Mishra, Chaudhry, & Kothari, 2010). Additional plans for beautification included improving streetscapes, new road signage, potted plants around venues, resurfacing roads, improving sidewalks and footpaths, and the construction of bicycle paths.

In speaking to the human cost of these beautification efforts—which resulted in slum demolition, the destruction of a night shelter for the homeless, and the arbitrary arrests of beggars and homeless people (Hazards Centre, 2010; Mishra, Chaudhry, & Kothari, 2010)—a division bench of the Delhi High Court comprised of Justice A.P. Shah and Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw proclaimed, “We do not expect a modern civilized society to allow its people to die, whether it is the Commonwealth Games or any other reason. This trend cannot be allowed” (quoted in Mishra, Chaudhry, & Kothari, 2010, p. 14). Further condemning the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for destroying a night shelter on Pusa Road in 2009, the justices declared, “You are doing it in the name of the Commonwealth Games. Is it beautification? You have made them sleep under the open sky in winter. You can’t run away from your responsibility towards the public at large” (quoted in Mishra, Chaudhry, & Kothari, 2010, p. 14). Unfortunately, the government was all too eager to simply run away from its responsibility, primarily because providing for the poor was no longer considered to be in the public interest.

This “clean up drive” (Pandit, 2010a) initiated by the Delhi government and local police rounded up beggars and homeless people in and around areas of central and south Delhi that were expected to see heavy Games-related traffic. By late September 2010, two weeks before the Games began, the city’s social welfare department estimated that over 1,300 beggars had been removed from the streets and confined in shelters since the drive began, giving the homeless a clear message of “don’t step out, lest the Games visitors spot you” (Pandit, 2010a, p. 4). Desperate to present to the world an image of Delhi free of poor people, the city government even asked states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to take back their beggars, to recall those people who had come to Delhi in

search of a more prosperous life (Team Sunday Times, 2010). Realizing that they couldn't possibly "remove" all of the beggars or the slums, city officials decided to hide the slums behind bamboo screens during the Games to prevent tourists, athletes, and visiting dignitaries from seeing the conditions of poverty. The chief secretary of Delhi, Rakesh Mehta, explained that the bamboo screens would serve as a buffer between the roadside routes traveled by Games-goers and the shanties lining many of the streets in order to "conceal the sights" and "present a good face of Delhi during the Commonwealth Games" (quoted in Mishra, Chaudhry, & Kothari, 2010, p. 13). Anxious about the image of Delhi being projected during the Games, the authorities sought to hide the city's most vulnerable and marginalized people in response to a self-reckoning reminder that, as a local journalist put it, "as hard as we try to build a new India ... old India still has the power to humiliate and embarrass us" (quoted in Mishra, 2010, p. WK9).

For the Games' organizers, "old" India presented another obstacle in the form of families occupying land deemed necessary for Games-related projects. According to the Hazards Centre, an international NGO concerned with issues of forced displacement, over 200,000 families have been evicted from their homes since 2005 under clearance schemes connected to the Games, including the 27,000 families removed from the site of the Athlete's Village along the Yamuna River (Hazards Centre, 2010, p. 8). Most of these families had arrived in Delhi in the early 1980s to help construct stadiums, roads, and other infrastructure needed for the 1982 Asian Games, the last major international sporting event held in Delhi (Puri & Bhata, 2009), and many of them sought employment as construction workers for the Commonwealth Games. The irony of this situation was

not lost on critics of the 2010 Games, who argued that the 1982 Asian Games did not bring the increased levels of employment, tourism, and regional prestige promised by the city, so it was doubtful that the Commonwealth Games could realize those same promises made twenty-eight years later (Hazards Centre, 2010; Majumdar & Metha, 2010; Mishra, Chaudhry & Kothari, 2010). Such is the magnitude of forced displacement that the homeless population in Delhi topped three million during the Games, half of which were migrant laborers who worked at various Games venues (Team Sunday Times, 2010, p. 12).

Compounding the problem of displacement for workers were the dangerous working conditions, lack of adequate healthcare, and insufficient wages. The number of construction-related deaths at Commonwealth Games project sites was officially forty-two, but other sources from NGOs and watchdog groups placed the actual figure at “1,000 and counting” as many workers died as a result of unreported accidents, illness, and disease, particularly the dengue fever epidemic that gripped Delhi during the late summer months of 2010 (Majumdar R., 2010). The city government was concerned about the dengue outbreak, mostly because it had the potential to dissuade tourists and athletes from attending the Games, but the most vulnerable people were the ones working on the construction sites. I noted the following after a MCD employee came to fumigate our neighborhood in northwest Delhi a week before the start of the Games:

Delhi is currently in the midst of a dengue fever outbreak, with the number of reported cases estimated to be nearly 1,600. The city is under pressure to get a handle on the dengue fever outbreak due to the upcoming Commonwealth Games. Hence the neighborhood fumigations and the careful tracking of cases that appears in the newspaper every morning. Unfortunately, many of the cases of dengue fever are being reported in and around the major sporting venues currently being prepared for the Games. Laborers, the majority of whom have relocated

from the state of Bihar for the prospect of earning steady wages, have contracted the disease while working to renovate stadiums, install new sidewalks, and finish up numerous beautification projects. The lack of preparedness for the Games and the subsequent last minute scrambling has turned central and south Delhi into one enormous construction zone. Add in an extremely wet and persistent monsoon season, and you have a recipe for fertile mosquito breeding grounds. (field notes, September 28, 2010)

In addition to being regularly exposed to a potentially deadly disease, many of the construction workers involved in Games projects were not paid minimum wage. Over 70,500 laborers were employed in the run-up to the Games, according to the Regional Labor Commissioner, but only 15% of these workers were registered with the Construction Workers Welfare Board. The stipulated daily minimum wage for these workers was 203 rupees (about \$5), but this rule was routinely flouted by the contractors and government agencies responsible for hiring and paying the workers. Most workers were paid between 110 and 130 rupees (\$2.75 - \$3.25) per day, and some were paid a weekly wage of 300 – 400 rupees (\$7.50 - \$10) while the contractors pocketed the remaining amount. Workers were also denied overtime pay and rest days (Pandit, 2010b, p. 2).

In his analysis of evictions of the urban poor in Delhi, Bhan (2009) notes that the Games “have made visible the aestheticization of city space and the vital importance of how the city is seen and consumed by a global audience” (p. 140). The removal and shielding of slums, the banishment of beggars from Delhi’s central areas, and the displacement of thousands of poor families were all part of broader urban development policies designed to transform the city’s aesthetic in order to “bring it into line with the image of a world class city” (Bhan, 2009, p. 140). This aestheticization of Delhi also prompted efforts by city officials to ban food vendors, flower stalls, and small shops in

central and south Delhi during the Games, as well as to shut down supposedly illegal *dhabas* lining key Games' transport routes due to their perceived security threat and unhygienic conditions (Bhasin & Ghosh, 2010, p. 4). The rush to superficially aestheticize Delhi placed priority on removing and/or hiding those elements of the city deemed by the authorities to be “dirty” or “unpleasant” and that could potentially remind the watching world that “new” India has not yet adequately provided for its most vulnerable and marginalized residents. Anil, the owner of a *paan* shop in central Delhi who was forced by police to close his shop during the Games, spoke for many when he stated, “I’ve been told by the police and MCD to shut shop till October 15. If I do that, how will my family survive?” (quoted in Bhasin & Ghosh, 2010, p. 4). In its clamor to present a world-class façade via the Games, Delhi has become unlivable for the *aam aadmi* who are routinely excluded from the spaces of “new” India and denied the basic right to exist in the city.

The Seductive Discourse of Tourism

On July 9, 2010, the *Times of India*, the most widely circulated national newspaper, sponsored a forum on the Commonwealth Games. In attendance, amongst others, were Sheila Dikshit, Suresh Kalmadi, journalist Ayaz Memon, and former professional cricketer Akash Chopra to discuss the promises, possibilities, and problems of the Games. The panelists also tackled the question of how Delhi could use the Games to showcase itself as a “truly world-class city with a makeover of world class infrastructure and amenities establishing itself as an international business and leisure hub” (Times of India, 2010a, p. 1). One prominent theme that crept up repeatedly

throughout the day was the issue of tourism, of how the Games could stimulate increased international tourism to Delhi through the effective development of new infrastructure and marketing the city's cultural heritage. While Dikshit expressed a desire to "avoid a clash between modernity and heritage" in the promotion of Delhi as a tourist destination, Rina Ray from Delhi Tourism focused on the "empowerment of the tourist", concerned that visitors have access to sufficient information and resources to enhance their stay. Both Dikshit and Ray reiterated that Delhi had the potential to become a cultural and tourism "superpower" after the Commonwealth Games (field notes, July 10, 2010). What the panelists never discussed during the forum, however, was how the tourism discourse contributed to the displacement of the poor, the social and spatial exclusion of the *aam aadmi*, and the continued privileging of the rich.

Initial expectations were high for tourist influx during the Commonwealth Games. In 2007, the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India projected that one million foreign tourists would visit India during the two-week span encompassing the Games, with an assumption that a majority of those tourists would be in Delhi at some point during their travels (The Hindu, 2007). Predictions from the state were more modest, however, as the Ministry of Tourism and Culture remarked that "no estimate has been made regarding the number of tourists expected to arrive" in Delhi specifically for the Games and that the only benchmark they had to measure against was the approximately 90,000 tourists who, according to the Indian government, visited Melbourne for the 2006 Commonwealth Games (Majumdar & Mehta, 2010, pp. 66-67).

Based on these amorphous figures, the DDA calculated a shortage of existing hotel rooms and initially planned to auction land on thirty-five sites for the construction

of an additional 20,000 rooms to house foreign and domestic tourists during the Games (Baviskar, 2007). The DDA later amended its plans and instead offered thirty-three hotel sites to create 6,000 rooms (Pandey, 2011). These sites were located in various parts of Delhi, including Noida, Paschim Vihar, Rohini, and Dwarka, supposedly to bring new infrastructure and tourist activity into these areas and stimulate attendant development such as restaurants and shopping centers. However, as reported by the Ministry of Urban Development, only seven new hotels were fully constructed before the Games and another six were partially ready for use, bringing a total of thirteen hotels with 2,500 rooms prepared to host guests (Pandey, 2011). Incredibly, the hotel managers reported that only ninety-one tourists stayed at these new hotels during the Games (Pandey, 2011). Of course, many visitors invariably found accommodation at the previously existing and well-established hotels in the city, but the expected rush of tourists into Delhi never materialized. The anticipated “tourism tsunami” (Baviskar, 2007), based on shaky data to begin with, was used to not only justify the auctioning of public land to private developers, but also to further promote the message that the Games were not meant to benefit the *aam aadmi* of Delhi. Rather, the infrastructure built for arriving tourists created yet more exclusionary and privatized spaces—spaces that were, for the most part, unused during the Games.

Hosting a sporting mega-event such as the Commonwealth Games is often credited with boosting a city’s image through media coverage and tourism experiences (Black, 2007; Curi, Knijnik, & Mascarenhas, 2011), but the tourists simply failed to show up in Delhi. While it is difficult to determine how many visitors traveled to India *specifically* to attend the Games, general figures indicate only a slight rise in tourism

overall. The Ministry of Tourism reported a 5% increase in the number of foreign tourists arriving at the Delhi airport in October 2010 as compared to a year earlier (Times of India, 2010b). For the time frame encompassing the Games, October 3 – 14, airport officials estimated that 8,000 foreigners came through Delhi (Pandey, 2011). In a poll conducted in September 2010 by TripAdvisor, a popular online travel portal, a total of 635 travelers from the United Kingdom and Canada were asked about their opinions of the 2010 Games. India receives a large number of British and Canadian tourists, hence the selection of these two particular Commonwealth countries, but when asked if they were planning to travel to India to attend the Games, 93% of the respondents said “no”. Reasons given for not traveling to Delhi to watch the Games included “not interested in the Commonwealth Games” (30%), “traveling elsewhere” (25%), “security concerns” (17%) and “Delhi does not offer a great experience” (11%). A total of 69% were aware that the Games were being held in Delhi, but 57% felt that Delhi was “not the right place to host” them (Banerjee, 2010a, p. 4). While the relevancy of the Commonwealth Games in general must be questioned in relation to sports tourism, traveling to Delhi to attend the 2010 Games was not a high priority for many people.

This lack of tourism also affected the sale and distribution of event tickets. Only 16,000 of the 78,000 tickets allocated to the Commonwealth Games Associations (CGA) were sold in the lead up to the Games. The seventy CGAs, representing the Commonwealth nations participating in the Games, were responsible for selling tickets in their respective countries, yet all reported slow sales and low interest in the Games (Banerjee, 2010b). Moreover, domestic sales in India amounted to only 561,000 tickets out of a total of 1.4 million available for purchase, resulting in a net ticketing revenue of

just 16 crore rupees (\$3.3 million). Only 40% of the total Games tickets were sold outright, nearly 35% of tickets were distributed free of charge to VIPs, and 25% went unsold (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2011, p. 137). Paradoxically, there were regular reports of venues claiming to be sold out of tickets when attendance inside was sparse. Ashmita Thakur, a housewife from Delhi, complained about this discrepancy, remarking, “We know that the seats are going empty. Even then, they are not giving tickets. They seem to have given away free passes to politicians and bureaucrats” (quoted in Jha, 2010, p. 2). Through the mismanagement of the ticketing system, people in positions of privilege were provided the opportunity to attend the Games, while the *aam aadmi* were denied that chance. Yet, of those who had purchased tickets in advance or received free tickets, on average only 65% of them actually attended an event (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2011, p. 137). To make matters worse, the official audit report of the Games found “no evidence of a policy for free/discounted tickets for school children, college students and other target groups, which would have had potential for promoting sports awareness” (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2011, p. 138). Rather than donate the unsold tickets to schools, social welfare agencies, and community organizations, the organizing committee instead attempted to save face by pandering to the elite through the distribution of complimentary tickets that largely went unused.

The empty stands were a recurring observation during my time at the Games, a glaring indication that neither tourists nor locals were attending the events in large numbers. Excerpts from my field notes below describe several of my experiences:

Yesterday I attended the men's team gymnastics competition at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex. Seating within the arena was open, so I was free to sit wherever I wanted. I chose a seat in the second tier to have a good view of the proceedings—there was no one else within a hundred feet of me. The crowd was very small, mostly comprised of other athletes, a few Indian families with young children, and a handful of Western journalists. (field notes, October 5, 2010)

Tonight we attended squash at the Siri Fort Sports Complex for the men's and women's singles gold medal matches. We convinced two of our friends to come with us, certain that tickets would be available at the venue, as none of the events so far have been close to a sell-out. However, upon our arrival at the complex, we noticed a sign on the ticket kiosk saying that both squash and badminton tickets were sold out for tonight. So our friends turned around to head back home, and we entered the arena to find a half-empty stadium with plenty of seats available. The stadium never did fill up through the course of the competition. (field notes, October 8, 2010)

Today I was at the north campus of Delhi University to watch rugby sevens. A sign outside of the stadium near the ticket kiosk indicated that tickets were sold out for today's round robin competition, but there were plenty of empty seats as I walked in and decided where to sit. I settled on a seat a few rows down from a group of university students enthusiastically cheering for India, and I had the entire row to myself. The stadium remained half-full even for the gold medal match. (field notes, October 12, 2010)

When the expected influx of international and domestic tourism did not happen, tickets to Games events went unsold and hotel rooms were left unoccupied. The sale of public land to private developers for hotel construction, a decision made by the government based on tenuous needs-based data, encouraged the creation of yet more exclusionary spaces that are coming to define Delhi as a divided city. Instead of dedicating the public land to low-income housing for the thousands of poor residents displaced by the Games, the government furthered its neoliberal development strategies focused on courting private business in an effort to attract increased global capital and investment through, in this instance, foreign tourism. Instead of opening up the Games

experience to a wider population and promoting a sporting culture for all by reducing the price of event tickets or donating them to the community, the organizing committee gave away free tickets to those who could afford to buy them at any price level. The empty arenas served as a visible reminder that the Games were not accessible for the *aam aadmi*, and perhaps were never meant to be.

Conclusion: The Olympics Come to Delhi?

The 2010 Commonwealth Games ended up being a rousing success for Indian athletes, as India amassed a total of 101 medals and finished second in the medal tally, bested only by Australia. In a poll conducted by the *Times of India* immediately after the conclusion of the Games, public attitudes had shifted in favor of the Games and their intended legacy for the city of Delhi. The survey, conducted by global market research agency Synovate, polled a total of 375 Indian adults between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, with 150 of them residing in Delhi (Times News Network, 2010, p. 1). Results of the poll indicated that 85% of the respondents thought the Games were a success and had enhanced India's global image, while 88% agreed that India had "arrived as a sporting nation" due to its athletic triumphs during the Games. Furthermore, 82% of those polled supported a potential Indian bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympics (Times News Network, 2010, p. 1). The bid was never submitted, but the idea of hosting a future Olympics remains an intriguing one for the local Delhi government, the Indian Olympic Association, and those who believe in the benefits of such global sporting events (Chitravanshi, 2010).

This type of positive afterglow and patriotic fervor predicated largely on a haul of gold medals is only temporary, however, and we must remember that the 2010 Commonwealth Games functioned as an example of how sporting mega-events, as part of overarching civic development plans steeped in neoliberal policies, serve to marginalize and dehumanize large segments of the population in their quest to bring global attention and increased financial capital to the host city. As must be recognized, neoliberal development is based on “the underdevelopment of the vast majority of people” (Ahmed, Kundu, & Peet, 2011, p. 3), and in Delhi this means the continued marginalization of the *aam aadmi* and the destitute. The socio-spatial politics of exclusion spurred by Delhi’s aspirations to become a world-class city have created, as within other neoliberalizing contexts, a bifurcation between “the generative affluent and the degenerative poor; the private consumer and the public recipient; the civic stimulant and the civic detriment; the socially valorized and the socially pathologized” (Silk & Andrews, 2008, pp. 396-397). The *aam aadmi* are increasingly excluded from privatized and sanitized spaces in Delhi as part of development schemes designed to render the impoverished invisible (Fernandes, 2004). Through these processes of social exclusion, Delhi risks becoming a segregated city divided along class lines where the inequities of capitalism are steadily magnified instead of challenged and counteracted (Smith, 2011).

To be sure, expressions of resistance to the mishandling of the Games did arise. The charges of corruption, mismanagement, and the misuse of public funds levied against the city of Delhi and the Games organizing committee became a “key tipping point” (de BERNARDI, 2011) in sparking wide ranging and passionate anti-government protests in Delhi, led by social activist Anna Hazare and marking the emergence of a politically

active middle class (Denyer & Lakshmi, 2011; Nolen, 2011). Suresh Kalmadi, chairman of the organizing committee, and two other members of the committee were ultimately arrested on charges of awarding illegal contracts for various Games projects (Yardley, 2011). While the protesters raised their voices against political corruption, very little was heard in support of the provision of basic, and urgent, needs for the entire population of Delhi. The Games exposed corrupt practices, but the spectacularization of the event itself and the success of the Indian athletes wooed many in Delhi and prompted the notion of bidding for the Olympics. Former sports minister and MP for the Congress Party, Mani Shankar Aiyar, offered a minority viewpoint by suggesting the following:

The only good that will come out of the Commonwealth Games would be a decision to never again bid for such games until every Indian child gets a minimum to eat, an assured basic education, and a playground with trained coaches to discover the sportsperson in himself or herself. (Aiyar, 2010)

Until it can provide basic needs for all of its residents and ensure that everyone has a right to the urban spaces of the city, perhaps Delhi should think twice before bidding to host the Olympics.

Interlude

My Physical Body Challenged

Colonial Aggression?

Well, this is unsettling. According to sociologist Kristin Lozanski (2007), I am guilty of “colonial aggression” (p. 311) in my interactions with Indian men. As is my husband, Charlie. I am guilty because I chased a teenager down a street in Mysore and threw the sandal that came flying off his foot into a drainage ditch, hoping that his mother would berate him for losing one of his shoes. Charlie is guilty because he pushed a cycle rickshaw driver to the ground outside of the New Delhi railway station, yelled in his face, and threatened to punch him. To compound the guilt, again following Lozanski (2007), Charlie also perpetuated the long-standing discourse that women are dependent upon men for their mobility, safety, and protection. Western women, she argues, are “haunted by their inconspicuous possession by Western men” (2007, p. 307), particularly when traveling through spaces deemed unfamiliar or dangerous. So are we indeed guilty of colonial aggression, a deliciously provocative term fraught with tension, and what does it have to do with my body, my research, and this dissertation?

I threw that kid’s sandal in the ditch because he assaulted me. Charlie shoved the rickshaw driver because he assaulted me when Charlie’s attention was drawn elsewhere. During twelve months in India, I was physically assaulted five times, including an encounter with a man holding a gun in a small shop and a man who grabbed my breast while riding past on his motorcycle. Thus, our “aggression” came out of a response to

physical threat and the violation of my body. Yes, we retaliated with our own violence against the Indian perpetrators, a response that Lozanski asserts is grounded in hierarchal colonial power relations that marginalize and emasculate the male Indian subject. She argues that “Western women who take up aggression and violence as a means to confront their harassers with the implicit backing of Western male power slip into colonial aggression that was historically wielded by Western men” (Lozanski, 2007, p. 311). So yes, I resorted to violence, if only symbolic in tossing away the kid’s shoe, to confront my harasser, and I had the explicit support of my husband to do so. I appreciate Lozanski’s critical points here and her efforts to unpack the inequities of patriarchy and colonialism that continue to disenfranchise Indian and Western women as well as Indian men. After all, we are still living under the continuing authority of “hegemonic Western masculinity” (Lozanski, 2007, p. 296), a discourse of inequality that subjugates both women and the non-Western man.

However, I feel that Lozanski’s contentions and casting of guilt strip the individual of her/his own agency to respond to threats, especially for women who must constantly negotiate multiple “geographies of fear” (Valentine, 1989) and struggle to assert their subjectivity under the gaze of patriarchy. As Dewey (2008) points out, the dominant values in India are shaped by a “cultural system that clearly views women as objects of display rather than valuable contributors to society” (p. 145). There is no escaping the patriarchy, and women rarely, if ever, enjoy the same level of agency and independence that men have. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, Lozanski’s viewpoint is disembodied. It does not account for the corporeal response to assault, for the very real effects that the traumatized body must cope with and reconcile. I am

thinking here of Fanon's (1963) call for corporeal agency via physicality within the context of decolonization and liberation. He insists that the "muscles of the colonized are always tense" (Fanon, 1963, p. 16), as the trauma of colonization has caused the body to tighten, to coil, and to seethe with an anticipatory tension awaiting action against the colonizer. While Fanon's espousal of violence can be troubling, he nonetheless offers an interpretation of embodiment in which the body has the capacity to challenge the power inequities of colonialism and subjugation. Replace colonialism with patriarchy, and my body reacted similarly while enduring relentless sexual harassment and numerous physical assaults in India. My muscles were always tense, my body was rigid with caution when out in public, and I developed an overwhelming desire to physically confront Indian men who were leering at me or touching me. Did this make me a colonial aggressor? Perhaps, but the female body in India—both Indian and Western—has long suffered the injustices of patriarchy and deserves to utilize a powerful sense of agency in combating these wrongs, particularly when it comes to protecting and honoring the dignity of the body.

It is worth quoting my field notes at length here to illustrate how and why my body was so intricately stitched into my research experiences and my interpretation of the connections between colonialism, patriarchy, and corporeality. This excerpt documents one of my five physical assaults, my resulting aggression, and the thoughts about violence with which I wrestled in the aftermath.

Today it was quiet as I quickly strolled from Anokhi Garden to Anu's, chattering away with Charlie on the phone the entire time. The only other people on the road were three young men, teenagers who looked to be no more than sixteen years old. They were walking towards me, and I thought nothing of it. But then one of the young men—the pack leader, shall I say—approached me to say "hello." I

replied with a quick “hi”, seeing as I was on the phone and didn’t really have time for a conversation with these strangers. The young man was smiling broadly and seemed to be genuinely friendly as he stuck out his hand towards me, gesturing for a handshake. I decided to humor him—he seemed harmless enough—and reached out my right hand towards him. With a sudden move, he retracted his hand, lunged towards me, and grabbed my left breast. It was so fast that I could not react in time to prevent his assault upon my body. Once he got his feel, he backed off, his two buddies howled with malicious laughter, and he strutted back to his pack with a satisfied grin on his face. Of course, I screamed at him. Then I feigned as if to chase the boys, which succeeded in getting them to run off. I sprinted a few steps after them, but gave up my pursuit because I had my phone in one hand (with a stunned Charlie still on the line), my yoga bag over my shoulder, and a cooking class to get to. Surging with anger, I desperately wanted to track the boy down and beat him up. Why is it that I continually feel the desire to punch someone here? And it’s always men. Nothing would satisfy me more than laying a right hook into some guy’s face. This desire, this championing of violence, concerns me, but perhaps I am merely responding in-kind to what was happened to me and what my body has had to endure. Anyway, the kids bolted and the pack leader lost one of his sandals in the process. With smug gratification, I picked his sandal up, walked over to a drainage ditch by the park, and threw the sandal far into the ditch where I hoped the kid couldn’t find it. The image of this boy arriving home to his mother and having to explain why and how he lost one sandal soothed and amused me. Perhaps his mother would give him the beating that I did not. What a silly way to appease my anger, but I really considered this an act of justice. You assault me, I throw your sandal in a ditch, and you, still a child, must face the wrath of your mother at home for losing your sandal. Should I be ashamed that I felt such pleasure and satisfaction in this? (field notes, February 10, 2011)

I still cannot answer the question I posed to myself there at the end. I never did punch anyone, and neither did Charlie. Yet, I do feel guilty about asserting a so-called colonial aggression, of perhaps abusing my privileged position as a white Westerner. Or was I just defending myself and the sanctity of my body? Reading Lozanski’s article two months removed from my fieldwork spurred me to re-visit my experiences of harassment and assault and use them as a lens through which to look at the role of the body in ethnographic research, a question that is central to the PCS project. While it is imperative that this question addresses both the body of the researcher and the bodies with which

she/he interacts during the research process, my concern is with the former. Following Giardina and Newman (2011), I strive to write against “the disappearance of authorial bodies” (p. 44) by acknowledging the shifts that occurred in my own sense of embodiment during my research. It is all too easy to overlook the embodied practices of the researcher, and my personal experiences illustrate that the researcher’s relationship with her/his body can change significantly during the course of fieldwork. These changes, in turn, inform the interpretative analysis of the research and the subsequent ways in which the researcher situates her/his body into interactions with other bodies. In my case, in response to my experiences with harassment and assault—barrages on my body—I began to dissociate from my body and avoid engagement with male bodies that I perceived to be potentially threatening. As PCS practitioners, we must not erase our own bodies from fieldwork and empirical discussion, but what happens when our bodies react with aggression, fear, anger, enmity, or other responses detrimental to the research process?

Contextualizing Harassment, Assault, and Fear

Delhi is widely considered to be the most dangerous city in India for women. The rate of reported rape is three times that of Mumbai, and ten times higher than Kolkata. Over 80% of women have faced verbal harassment in Delhi, and nearly a third have been physically assaulted by men (Polgreen, 2011, p. A8). Indeed, it is the relentless presence of harassment that shapes women’s social experiences in Delhi and constrains their mobility. As Kanekar (2007) observes, “sexual harassment short of rape is endemic in India and is much more prevalent as well as much less documented than rape” (p. 114).

While rape is certainly a concern for women in Delhi, the most constant threat comes from verbal harassment and physical assault such as groping. Taken together, these forms of harassment are colloquially referred to as “eve-teasing”, a misleadingly innocuous term for a serious issue. It is not light-hearted, or innocent, and the women on the receiving end do not find it funny. A particularly vivid account of the harassment faced by women in Delhi comes from journalist Sam Miller (2009), who writes:

Men stare carnivorously at women on public transport. Harsh or angry words are rarely enough to break those stares. And then there is the touching. In crowded places, men will rub their bodies against women, pinching and groping at leisure... The local Delhi pages of the newspapers are full of eve-teasings, molestations, rapes, forced marriages and dowry-deaths. Women in this society are of distinctly lower value. (p. 163)

All over India, and especially in the booming metropolis of Delhi, tensions are on the rise between traditional conservative values that prevent women from pursuing educational and career opportunities outside of the home, and rapid social changes wrought by economic liberalization, urbanization, and globalization. Most of the literature addressing sexual harassment in India emphasizes the need to locate this gender violence within a context of social transformation. For Rogers (2008), sexual harassment is a manifestation of instrumental violence used by lower caste young men to “contest their subordination within higher education” (p. 79) and the white-collar job market. Other studies connect gender violence with inter-caste conflict, the increasing participation of women in the labor market, and the socio-economic marginalization faced by millions of Indians in the wake of liberalization (Anandhi & Jeyaranjan, 2001; Go, Johnson, Bentley, Sivaram, & Srikrishnam, 2003). Still others blame eve-teasing on the influence of Western media in creating overly sexualized depictions of women (Hapke & Ayyankaril, 2001), a

simplistic and generalized argument in my opinion, but nonetheless a contributing factor in the collective imaginings of gender relations.

Injected into this context of messy, disorderly social transformation is a longstanding “preference for sons so strong that it is manifested as limiting the birth and survival of girls” (Kishor & Gupta, 2009, p. 8). The sex ratio of girls to boys is an important indicator of gender equality in India, as it illustrates a distinct privileging of the male child and speaks to the ways in which official law can be subverted to maintain cultural preferences (Chakraborty & Kim, 2010). In 1994, the government passed the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act to prohibit the use of diagnostic techniques for prenatal sex determination, recognizing that medical technologies such as ultrasounds were contributing to the elimination of unwanted female fetuses (Kishor & Gupta, 2009). While this Act made it illegal for a doctor to reveal the sex of a baby to its parents, the practice has continued amongst the wealthier segments of Indian society and the rate of female feticide continues to be troubling. Perhaps surprisingly, wealth is not a guarantee of survival for girls, as sex ratios at birth decline with wealth, suggesting that sex selection is more common among wealthier than poor households due to access to advanced medical technology to facilitate prenatal determination and, if desired, abortion (Kishor & Gupta, 2009). Preliminary data from the 2011 census reveals that the national average is 914 girls for every 1,000 boys, a slippage from the 2001 ratio that stood at 927:1,000 and the lowest figure recorded since India gained independence in 1947 (Nolan, 2011). These skewed ratios are not due to feticide alone, as female infanticide remains a “hidden social ill in India” (Sev'er, 2008, p. 67) and, along with malnutrition and the medical neglect of girls, accounts for a higher rate of deaths for girl children than

boys. Sev'er (2008) notes that between the ages of one and four, the number of deaths for girls is one-and-a-half times higher than that for boys. The manner of committing infanticide varies, ranging from feeding babies poisonous berries, pesticides, or uncooked rice to lacing poison on the mother's breasts, suffocation, and starvation (Hegde, 1999).

Upon reaching adulthood, a woman has not escaped the potential for violence against her body, as indicated by high rates of harassment and the institutionalization of eve-teasing as "harmless, youthful flirtation that does not hurt anyone and is simply natural male behavior" (Pauwels, 2010, p. 2). Women are also subjected to violence from family members, particularly from fathers, uncles, and brothers whose self-perceived role is to protect the honor of the family from female behavior deemed inappropriate (Dewey, 2008). These tortures and killings are a family collaboration, often involving not only male members of the family, but also mothers and grandmothers who believe that their daughter or granddaughter has brought dishonor upon the household. Reasons for such a murder range from the victim being "too Western", wanting to choose her own husband, engaging in a relationship with a man from a lower caste, or attempting to pursue an advanced education and career (Chesler, 2010). Of the approximately 1,000 honor killings that occurred in India in 2008, nearly 90% of them took place in Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, deeply conservative and patriarchal states in northern India where family pride is restored through the kidnapping, torture, and murder of women who fail to abide by the rules of honor (Sarin, 2011). Moreover, in October 2010, in the midst of the Commonwealth Games taking place in Delhi, leaders of some of the *khap panchayats* (local caste councils) in Haryana demanded that the marriage age for girls be lowered from eighteen to fifteen years old in a move designed to further curtail basic

rights and opportunities for women (Deswal, 2010). I was especially interested in these stories because we lived near Sonipat, a town in Haryana locally renowned for its successful wrestlers and its regular spate of honor killings.

So it is within this context of “missing women” (Sen, 1990) and the overt privileging of males that eve-teasing, sexual harassment, and physical assault against women occur. I know my experience with harassment is not unique, and I do not want to essentialize the experiences of all women visiting India (Wilson, Holdsworth, & Witsel, 2009), but I raise this context to suggest that the dissociation from my body that I felt in response to harassment was perhaps an exercise in privilege because, compared to millions of Indian women, I had a body which had never before been subject to assault or violation or systemic marginalization. Prior to arriving in India, my body was not “missing”, in a metaphorical sense, from my own definition of Self. Yet, through the course of my fieldwork, travel, and daily tasks of living, it became alien to me and it went missing from my own sense of embodiment and agency.

Geographies of Fear

Of course, I cannot, and must not, speak for Indian women who experience invisibility, harassment, and fear on a daily basis. As a white Westerner, I can feel unease and disgust at reading about rates of female infanticide and accounts of honor killings, but they are not part of my daily reality. I am viewing and consuming them from an outsider’s position. The Indian female Self is constrained by a cultural system steeped in patriarchy that limits opportunities for women, but my Western female Self brought in assumptions about women’s empowerment and mobility that are at odds with the Indian

cultural context. In response, I developed a conflicted subject position, a fractured subjectivity pitting my perception of empowered independence against my feelings of vulnerability, concern for personal safety, and guilt.

In attempting to make sense of this “socialized fear as a gendered subject” (Falconer, 2011, p. 84) and my conflicted feelings as the white Other, I turned to literature about travel, tourism, and independent Western female backpackers. As many times as I presented myself as an academic researcher and PhD student, I also recognized that I was a visitor, a traveler in and through the unfamiliar spaces of India. I might have called Delhi, and then Sonipat, “home” for a year, but each venture into the city presented something new, each walk in my neighborhood resulted in a new observation, and the sheer size and diversity of the city kept it “foreign” to me. As such, I was not a tourist, but rather an independent traveler, an important distinction to make in that tourists consume packaged travel deals as part of insulated groups while independent travelers choose to move through their travels without any external support system, relying instead on guidebooks, conversations with fellow travelers, and interactions with locals to shape their experiences (Falconer, 2011; Lozanski, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2008). Since women’s access to leisure and tourism activities is often constrained by fears of harassment and potential male violence (Wilson & Little, 2008), I felt it was imperative to engage with ideas about the female travel experience, expectations of Western liberal feminism that women bring with them into travel, and the resulting mixed feelings of insecurity, risk, and liberation.

Many women are confronted with conflicting discourses of fear and empowerment when traveling, as their use of tourist spaces is “governed by a patriarchal

system of fear, social control and judgment about what is ‘appropriate’ female travel behavior” (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 170). Yet, simultaneously, the successful negotiation of those spaces and fears also serves a means for asserting independence and breaking away from patriarchal control. Norms of acceptable travel behavior and definitions of gender roles are dependent upon the specific cultural context under question, so the constraints and fears that women face are fluid rather than fixed. Within the context of contemporary India then, female travelers from the West must temper their expectations for freedom against prevailing social conditions that render women undervalued and objects of both symbolic and real violence.

Falconer (2011) links the contradictions apparent in Western women’s backpacking narratives in India to shifts in feminist identities, pointing in particular to the assumption amongst young women that gender equality has been achieved in the West but that the concrete experiences in their daily lives present a different story and oftentimes “feelings of inequality are internalized and obscured under the identities of ‘empowered’ and ‘lucky’ contemporary women” (p. 81). When placed against the feelings of fear and objectification that many Western female travelers in India report, the sense of Western feminist empowerment becomes conflicted and fractured, causing personal confusion and guilt as making sense of experiences of inequality, violence, and the freedom of travel gets more and more difficult. The Western feminist demand to “move through colonial settings without being harassed” (Lozanski, 2007, p. 296) collides with patriarchal constraints, but at the same time Western women travelers are construed as different from Indian women because of their perceived freedom and independence. By virtue of witnessing, and perhaps living through, instances of gender-

based discrimination and violence in India, the Western female traveler who self-identifies as “empowered” in her home country comes to question her own reality of equality, restricts her own travel movement in response to fear rooted in her gendered subjectivity, and develops tremendous guilt for feeling afraid in the first place (I am a strong woman, why am I scared?) and for recognizing her selfish, Western expectations of entitlement when Indian women face so much more (I cannot take a walk outside by myself and that irks me, but the women in the village never even had the opportunity to go to school).

While these fears, confusion, and guilt are largely internalized, there are tangible consequences for the female traveling body and its ability to move through public space. Many women, whether traveling abroad or simply crossing to the other side of their hometown, must negotiate a “geography of fear” (Valentine, 1989) that constrains their movements and creates restricted access to, use of, and enjoyment of public spaces. Women’s fear of male violence affects their perceptions and use of space, making the inhibited occupation of space a “spatial expression of patriarchy” (Valentine, 1989, p. 389). For women traveling in and through spaces deemed foreign or unfamiliar, the geography of fear is compounded by gendered discourses asserting that women’s unaccompanied (by men) travel is risky and violates codes of acceptable behavior for women (Lozanski, 2007; Wilson & Little, 2008). These discourses perpetuate the notion that “the travel practices that take place in foreign spaces are constructed as the domain of men: whereas men are active explorers of new environments, women are expected to be more passive in their consumption” (Lozanski, 2007, p. 303). This expectation then permeates a dominant understanding of harassment and assault, often emphasized by

travel guidebooks, that men are “largely not to blame in the context of sexual harassment and the control of space” (Wilson, Holdsworth, & Witsel, 2009, p. 10). Rather, it is the woman who is singularly responsible for ensuring her own safety by limiting her use of public space, carefully mapping out her movements (in daylight, always traveling with a friend, staying on main roads, etc.), and developing effective coping strategies to deflect attention away from her body such as modifying her dress, remaining in a constant state of defensive alert, or removing herself from fearful places (Wilson & Little, 2008). The ever-present specter of danger is a “time-honored way of limiting women’s spatial freedom” (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 11), but it also caused me to confront my own geographies of fear, acknowledge my feminist confusion and guilt, and question how these feelings governed my research work in the field. Would I have necessarily confronted such thoughts without the prompting of living with socialized and gendered fear? Probably not.

Embracing Vulnerability

Throughout much of my fieldwork, and especially during the periods of psychological recovery after the assaults, I felt extremely vulnerable. My sense of vulnerability was a response to not only the constant harassment, but also to my realization that multiple power relations were in operation every time I stepped out the door. The powers of gender, race, nationality, education, and class were in play in every personal interaction and every social transaction, from hailing a rickshaw to taking our dog to the veterinarian. I strived to be cognizant of these power relations and my research was designed to make them more equal (if at all possible), but the emotional punch

provided by the daily onslaught of self-questioning and uncertainty surprised me. Is that man on the corner going to try to grab me? Did we get the best table in the restaurant just because we are white? If I refuse to give a beggar money, am I perpetuating a colonial hierarchy? Or worse, am I really a colonial aggressor?

Rather than ignore this vulnerability, I confronted it and attempted to write through it via my field notes and online blog. Encouraging an embrace of vulnerability and arguing that it can ultimately be empowering, Giardina and Newman (2011) assert that “vulnerability provides a lens through which to understand the tenuous body and conditions that make it unsettled” (p. 53). My body was definitely unsettled, and I knew that exploring why it felt that way, and what ramifications it would have for my research, was important. To unearth the autobiographical and embodied discourses that constituted my researching self during my time in India is a crucial step in recognizing how those discourses become intertwined with my research, my ongoing interpretative analysis, and my writing. Like Behar (1996) notes in her musings on vulnerability in fieldwork, I want to wrestle with critical writing that is “rigorous yet not disinterested” and “not immune to catharsis” (p. 175). I do not seek self-indulgence through catharsis, as vulnerability “doesn’t mean that anything personal goes” (Behar, 1996, p. 14), but it is necessary to reflect upon the experiences that caused discomfort, anxiety, and doubt because they open spaces to better understand how my own body and my own corporeal performances shaped my research interactions with others.

Central to this task is accepting that I dissociated from my body due to an internalized fear of violence and the relentless consumption of my body by the male gaze. This dissociation affected my research plan, negating certain observation sites and

interview participants because of my intense feelings of vulnerability and discomfort when working at those sites. It also affected my personal relationship with my body. What once was a source of strength, confidence, and joy for me became an inhibiting burden. I was used to my body *doing* things, pleasurable things like running, dancing, throwing a softball, teaching a yoga class, or hiking up a mountain unencumbered by fear or anxiety at who might be watching. Unsettled and made vulnerable by my experiences with assault in India, my body became passive as I was more concerned with covering it up, limiting its movements, and protecting it. My active Self—so crucial, I thought, to my research—became detached, lost. Upon realizing this, I attempted to reclaim my active body in order to restore balance to my own Self and reinvigorate my research. Much to my frustration, I learned that the severing of the active body from the Self is a much more rapid process than its recovery.

Dissociating From My Body

In her exploration of the history, meanings, and practices of staring, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009) suggests that, in response to prolonged staring at their breasts, many women dissociate themselves from their breasts or become completely alienated from them. Not only were my breasts the object of prolonged and intense staring, they were also touched, grabbed, and squeezed without my permission on multiple occasions. This continuous assault—whether directly physical or merely felt through the male gaze—caused me to distance myself from my entire body, not just my breasts, because I find it difficult to partition my body. For me, it is a whole, each part reliant on the others and all existing as one. Which, of course, is a rather psychologically dangerous way of

conceptualizing a body, as I was unable to isolate the physical violation of my breasts from the rest of my body that remained relatively unscathed. Thus I became alienated from my entire body as well as my breasts, a state that had both psychological and very real, material corporeal ramifications. Here the “fragmentation of my body and my thinking” (Schaare, 2000, p. 47), spurred by the staring and the assaults, contributed to a gradual breakdown of my radical embodiment and affected my ability to place my own body at the forefront of my research.

Schaare (2000) argues that it is through the sexism of the male gaze that the “woman’s body is designated as deviant and deficient” (p. 46), a designation that is not only presented outside of her body to others, but also internalized within. These messages of deviance and deficiency, prompted by sexual harassment and the devaluing of the female body, reveal patriarchal systems in which “male power serves to control women’s lives and perpetuate a masculinized environment” (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 181), regardless of the particular cultural context in question. The more I was harassed and stared at, the more deeply I dissociated from my body, relinquished control of it, and felt it to be deviant and deficient. I engaged in typical coping strategies to counter these feelings, such as wearing loose clothing that covered my body, riding in the women’s-only car on the Delhi metro, and never traveling alone at night. While in Mysore after being viciously harassed by a teenaged boy, I also briefly considered changing the color of my hair from blonde to a darker shade in order to feel less “deviant” in my appearance:

Yesterday Alice suggested that I dye my hair dark brown. I’ve heard this before as a way to deflect harassment and unwanted attention from Indian men, but I have always dismissed it as needlessly reactionary and a burden of the purported and expected “victim.” But on that street, slowly processing the teenager’s words,

I found myself thinking that perhaps dyeing my hair would help. (field notes, February 12, 2011)

That I would even flirt with the idea of changing my hair color, something I have never done before for any reason, illustrates the increasing depth of my dissociation. It deepened further, and became more explicit in terms of my active body, as I no longer felt comfortable going to the gym due to the “obsessive ocularity” (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 13) of the male gaze within the confined space of the fitness center. My active body was being suffocated, and I struggled to retain the ability and desire to rescue it.

In speaking to the male gaze and its control over female bodies, anthropologist Susan Dewey (2008) noted the following while living in Mumbai and conducting research on Indian beauty pageants:

The reality that space in India is aggressively male prevents women from cultivating their beauty in public; female beauty is something that needs to be carefully hidden, almost as if it were currency or property of a future or current male partner that exists only for his consumption. I grew so incredibly sick of burying myself under yards of heavy cloth in order to avoid the suburban male gaze that I started spending unhealthy amounts of time looking longingly at pictures of young women in Indian fashion magazines who wore the same high heels and miniskirts that I had worn in New York. (p. 55)

Dewey’s frustrations and longings echoed my own, but instead of dreaming about wearing miniskirts and high heels, I yearned for my pair of running shorts, my sleeveless softball jersey, and my comfortable, albeit tight-fitting, yoga pants. None of which I could wear in Delhi without attracting tremendous amounts of unwanted attention. Like Dewey, I dreaded getting dressed in the morning, knowing that my clothing choices were deliberately made for only one purpose—to avoid the male gaze by covering my body in long, loose, and flowing clothes. Unlike Dewey, however, I was not concerned with the

loss of my sense of self-beauty or with the inability to cultivate that beauty in a superficial, outward manner. Instead, I mourned the loss of my ability to define and utilize my *active* body on my own terms.

While exercising at Gold's Gym in Rohini, a neighborhood in northwest Delhi, for my ethnography on urban fitness culture, I never wore shorts and rarely wore a short sleeve t-shirt in an effort to manage the male gaze working upon the female bodies in the gym (both Indian and foreign) to exert power and control. I was the only foreign woman attending the gym, as Rohini is far removed from the expatriate enclaves of south Delhi such as Vasant Vihar and Defence Colony and is largely a middle-class neighborhood attracting Delhiites working in professional fields such as software engineering, information technology, and retail (field notes, September 14, 2010). So while I possessed the knowledge and skills required to feel confident as an insider within gym culture, my gender, nationality, and ethnicity marked me as an outsider in Rohini generally and in the gym specifically. Yet, as I want to emphasize, my body was not the only one subject to the gaze of men at the gym. Perhaps not surprisingly, there were far more men attending the gym than women, and the women tended to take the group aerobics class and walk on the treadmills rather than utilize the free weights and machines (field notes, September 10, 2010). I will not attempt to speak for the Indian women attending the gym, for all of our experiences with the male gaze are different, but I do think that there was an overall sense of the gaze within the gym operating as an "ocular gesture of dominance" that was "laden with sexual desire, predation, voyeurism, intimidation, and entitlement" (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 41). Of course, the character of this gaze is similar to that found in many fitness centers in the West, as the gym is

widely understood as a space in which bodies are objectified, compared, and visually consumed (Dworkin, 2003; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Frew & McGillivray, 2005).

What compounded the situation for me, and ultimately led to the abandonment of my research plans at Gold's Gym, was the dissociation from my body heightened by my inescapable, internalized fear of male violence. I was not comfortable with my body within the male-dominated space of the gym, and this discomfort became a focal point of obsessive worry and anxiety. Instead of observing gym-goers and arranging interviews with them, I spent my time worrying that too much of my skin was showing and agonizing over how I would respond if some man offered to give me a ride home on his motorcycle (which happened several times). Everything associated with the gym became a part of my personal geography of fear—the walk there and back from our apartment, most times made alone; riding in the elevator up to the eighth floor of the shopping center where the gym was located, wedged in-between groups of men; and listlessly going about my own workout with no other goals than to just get it done, avoid interactions with men, and note the time in my fieldwork log. What good was that attitude for my research? After struggling with these feelings and seeing my research stagnate, I realized that my anticipated research plan was simply unfeasible for me at that moment.

In acknowledging the dissociation from my body, my fear, and the resulting desertion from my research, my emotions ranged from anger at a generalized Indian male Other, to tremendous guilt for feeling such anger, and embarrassment at my self-perceived emotional weakness. Again, here I questioned my Western, liberated, feminist Self living in the cultural complexity of Delhi, and I crumpled under the weight of admitting that yes, I am a strong and independent woman capable of looking after myself,

but yes, I am also scared and I recognize that this fear is socially produced (Falconer, 2011; Lozanski, 2007). It took me a few months to reconcile with myself, to understand that these emotions were okay and that my dissertation would not completely fall apart because of them. Writing about the value of confronting emotions in academic research, Widdowfield (2000) offers the following thought:

Upsetting and/or unsettling experiences are as potentially paralyzing as ethical dilemmas, with some researchers feeling unable to continue research which brings them into contact with aspects of the world and people's lives which they feel (emotionally) ill-equipped to cope with. (p. 201)

At that time, in that gym, surrounded by bodies that were potentially threatening to mine, I was unable to emotionally cope. Continuing with my research would have compromised its quality, so I decided to remove myself from the unsettling situation and revise my plans to include a fitness-related research site that was not so paralyzing for me.

Reclamation?

While rescuing my dissertation chapter was mostly a matter of giving myself permission to change it, reclaiming my active body and reinserting it into my work was much more difficult. Yet, why was this project of reclamation so important to me? After all, it would be much easier to simply allow my active Self to lie dormant in India, to not fight against the feelings of fear and anxiety so intricately tied to my body and its restricted ability to be active and move freely in the ways it so desperately wanted to. So why bother? Poet Audre Lorde (1980) perhaps expresses it best by speaking to the practice of reclaiming the body: "In order to keep me available to myself, and be able to

concentrate my energies upon the challenges of those worlds through which I move, I must consider what my body means to me” (p. 65). I needed to regain an association with my active body because I needed self-availability as I moved through the challenges of India. My active body meant empowerment and control, and I needed to discover how to re-craft that Self in the aftermath of the implosion of my old Self.

The first step in my personal reclamation project was to find a safe space in which to be active, to run, to play, to start to open my body rather than keep it closed. In the autumn of 2010, while coaching a youth baseball team in Delhi, I learned about a slowpitch softball league based at the American embassy. After my frustrations at Gold’s Gym in Rohini, I latched onto the idea of this softball league with extreme enthusiasm. I had played varsity fastpitch softball in college, coached baseball in England, and played slowpitch on a recreational team in London for three years. A superstar I am decidedly not, but my skills are solid and I have deep knowledge of the game. Never before in my life had I encountered any resistance against my softball playing. Even when playing with men three times my size, I always managed to gain respect, or at least tolerance, by displaying my softball acuity. So the prospect of playing in the American embassy league became a promise of corporeal reclamation for me. By participating in a familiar physical activity in a supposedly sympathetic space, I could come back to my body, retrieve its buoyancy, and maybe even wear a tank top without fixating so much on the oppressive male gaze. How wrong I was, though, as I was never even extended the chance to play.

“Yeah, we have an informal rule that women aren’t allowed to play in the league”, remarked John, a US government employee stationed in Delhi who played softball on one of the embassy teams (field notes, January 2, 2011). I had asked him

about the league and how I should go about getting onto a team. His candor surprised me a bit, as I did not expect him to outright declare that women were not welcome in the league. My naïveté was brightly exposed upon hearing John's comment because I had carried with me an idealized hope (and expectation) that the American embassy could provide a supportive space as respite from the difficulties of Delhi. On the contrary, the expatriate and male-dominated space of the embassy, despite (or because of) the privileged social locations of the people allowed to access it, perpetuated "established hierarchies of gender that are rather restrictive" (Fechter, 2007, p. 38). From the groups of "trailing wives"¹⁴ (Fechter, 2007) spending their days sitting by the pool to the informal rule banning women from the softball league, the American embassy in Delhi is not a space where traditional gender relations are easily, or comfortably, defied or traversed.

My friend Ashleigh, an American woman living and working in Delhi, was also interested in playing softball. We coordinated our efforts to get placed on a team, thinking that it would be harder for the league organizers to ignore us if we were both sending e-mails and making phone calls. In response to her inquiry about the league, Ashleigh received the following e-mail from one of the organizers, prefaced by her comments to me when she forwarded the message:

Please read the bullshit e-mail below. Honestly, I was hoping to get AWAY from sexist jackasses, not find more in the American softball league.

¹⁴ The term "trailing wives" refers to women who have moved abroad to accompany their husbands whose job prompted the move. Due to the difficulty of getting a work visa and the usually high salaries earned by their husbands, trailing wives rarely work and spend much of their time socializing with each other at embassy clubs and national women's organizations.

Hello Ashleigh,

There is indeed a softball league playing ball on Sundays—ACSA¹⁵ men's softball league. There had been a separate women's league that played on Friday evenings but did not develop this year due to lack of management. The men's league is competitive and skill levels range from the very high to the (very) low! We only have a couple more weeks before the five-week or so break and pick back up for the second half on January 9. *There are a couple of women currently playing in the league and to be honest their skills are not at a level that are required to play in this league and I had to wonder why they even put in the effort!* (field notes, November 20, 2010, emphasis added)

Why they even put in the effort? Not only was this man's message condescending and sexist, but it also reinforced my self-questioning at making the effort to be active if it meant confronting discriminatory and frightening spaces. I cannot engage in embodied PCS research if I am detached from my body, but when faced with such hurdles and negative messaging, why should I even try to reclaim it?

I never did fully re-associate with my active body while in India. Not even a month of studying Ashtanga yoga in Mysore, where the body in movement is the primary focus, helped. Mostly because I was assaulted three times in Mysore, thereby nullifying any positive association with my body that I was able to build up through a daily yoga practice. The cycle of assault, fear, guilt, and frustration was difficult to break, and it came to be as much a part of my research as field notes and interview transcripts.

Concluding Thoughts: Complicating Radical Embodiment

While the reclamation of my active Self, of making that Self available once again, was a project that remained incomplete during my time in India, it compelled me to

¹⁵ ACSA stands for American Community Support Association.

ponder the numerous ways in which the cultural politics of the body can be interpreted in and through the wider PCS project. Drawing on Giardina & Newman's (2011) notion of "radically embodied cultural studies research" (p. 46) and their desire to craft a vision of PCS that "seeks to *move beyond writing and researching about bodies to writing and researching through bodies as a principle force of the research act*" (p. 44, emphasis in original), I offer an attempt to complicate these ideas based on my experiences of corporeal detachment while in the field. We are encouraged to place our own bodies at the forefront of our researching acts, but what happens when we dissociate from our own body in response to unexpected, violent encounters with other bodies? I embrace Giardina & Newman's (2011) call to cultivate embodied research and gamely thrust one's body into positions of vulnerability and unpredictability in order to gain rich interpretive insights, but as a female researcher working in a deeply patriarchal society rooted in systemic gender inequity, how do I *protect* my body from unwanted sexual advances and physical assault while still researching and writing *through* my body? After facing feelings of detachment and dissociation, how do I reclaim my body so I can again make sense of my relationships to my research sites with a sense of embodiment that has changed? It is important to "remain aware of how our bodies are intruding upon the bodies of others" (Giardina & Newman, 2011, p. 52), but perhaps we must also recognize that the process is mutual, that other bodies can have a profound impact on the researcher's body, particularly when the researcher's body is *not* that of the privileged, white, Western male. For, as I learned, a "woman's body can be the site for struggle and challenge" (Schaare, 2000, p. 47) in numerous settings, including while conducting research that strives to place the body—of Self and of the Other—at the center of its

inquiry. And while I hope that future PCS scholars never experience assault or paralyzing fear in the field, the power imbalances and social inequities still rife in our world make that hope elusive. Though not a pleasant or easy task, it would serve PCS well to think about how to “negotiate the messiness of re-telling stories of violence” (Bhattacharya, 2009, p. 360) within the context of radically embodied research because these stories are important, not only to the individuals who experience the violence, but also to the ways in which we work to craft understandings of the politics of corporeality and expressions of power operating in various spaces of physical culture.

Chapter III

“Letting Your Body Do the Talking”: The Young Indian Middle Class, Gymming, and the Consumption of Health and Fitness

Introduction

My name is Sheila
Sheila *ki jawani*
I'm too sexy for you

I know you want it but you never gonna get it
You never gonna get my body
I know you want it but you never gonna get it

Ain't nobody got a body like Sheila
Everybody wants the body I have, Sheila
Drive you crazy cause my name is Sheila

(Sheila Ki Jawani, 2010)

Released in 2010, the Bollywood film *Tees Maar Khan* (Khan, 2010) was panned by critics but lauded by the general public in large part due to the movie's energetic and infectious hit song, *Sheila Ki Jawani*. Performed by actress Katrina Kaif in the film, the song is a boisterous item number¹⁶ featuring a scantily clad Kaif as Sheila, a B-grade movie character taunting a group of men surrounding her and bragging about her sexy body. Rejecting the theme of romantic and tender love so common in Bollywood, the

¹⁶ The term “item number” is commonly used to describe a musical performance in a Bollywood film that has little, if any, relevance to the plot, but is instead meant to showcase an upbeat, and often sexually provocative, dance sequence connected to a song in the film. While item numbers most often feature actresses, and are therefore criticized for contributing to the sexual objectification of women, several prominent actors have recently performed item numbers of their own, most notably Shah Rukh Khan in *Om Shanti Om* (2007) and Aamir Khan in *Delhi Belly* (2011).

song presents a confident Sheila tossing aside inept suitors as she proclaims “ain’t nobody got a body like Sheila” while provocatively grinding, shaking, jiggling, and belly dancing across the screen. Kaif, a veteran Bollywood actress, admitted that the number was “one of the raunchiest songs I have ever shot” (Spicezee Bureau, 2010). The sensuality of the number even prompted a woman in Lucknow to file a public interest litigation (PIL) order with the Allahabad High Court seeking an immediate ban on the song due to its “indecent and immorality” (Deccan Herald, 2010). The PIL was ultimately unsuccessful, and the song went on to top the Indian charts.

When I arrived on the campus of Nilgai University¹⁷ to begin my ethnographic research for this chapter, everyone was talking about *Sheila Ki Jawani* and Kaif’s sultry performance. The male students were entranced by Kaif’s sexy persona in the film, and the female students seemed captivated by her thin and toned body. As one female student exclaimed to me, “I think she has such a perfect body!” Although the ocular consumption of Kaif’s body can be problematized as yet another way in which women are externally judged, evaluated, and objectified (Dewey, 2008), it also serves as an interesting departure point for an exploration of how notions of the “right”, “fit”, and “ideal” body are being constructed and consumed in post-liberalization, neoliberal India. As the middle class continues to expand and evolve in contemporary India, so too do ideas about how the body is connected to consumption within consumer capitalism (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Maguire, 2008; Monaghan, 2007). Consumer culture incorporates the body as a central subject and object of consumption, and the body becomes a corporeal commodity molded by a wide range of cosmetic, dietary, and exercise practices and products meant to transform physical capital into social capital (Featherstone, 1982). In

¹⁷ A pseudonym.

the quest to gain and exhibit social status, the body serves as a means for conspicuous consumption, not only through the display of clothing and accessory choices, but also through the very shape, size, and form of the body itself. The individual body is a commodified projection of the Self that has the potential to reinforce privileged social locations, particular discourses of morality, and dominant performances of citizenship (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Having the “right” kind of body thus becomes a marker of social status, virtue, beauty, health, and contribution to the public good.

As part of this pursuit, exercise and fitness have recently entered into the broader Indian consciousness as technologies for not only bodily transformation, but for the accrual of social status as well. Working out at the gym, or gymming as it is called colloquially, is a relatively new bodily practice in India that is intricately linked to the rise of middle class values and the expression of those values through conspicuous consumption. These values, including individuality, confidence, assertiveness, and cosmopolitanism, are encoded in particular bodily practices that have become central to middle class existence in India (McGuire, 2011). Whether it is meeting friends at a coffee shop, going shopping at the mall, or gymming to stay slim, these practices demand specific knowledge of the proper ways of engaging in them, knowledge largely available only to those affluent enough to invest the time and money to procure it (Brosius, 2010; McGuire, 2011). Fitness is now an important part of this middle class investment because, as McGuire (2011) notes, “the production of the new middle class entails the production of a new middle class body” (p. 118). Twenty years ago, the idea of fitness in India was associated largely with traditional wrestling practiced by working class males who dedicated their rigorous exercise routines to the Hindu monkey god Hanuman, but

now upper and middle class men and women frequent a growing number of fitness centers and gyms in order to cultivate a beautiful and fit body indicative of their social standing (Brosius, 2010). Instead of being a devotional act to the gods, the pursuit of fitness amongst the new middle class is a means to display class identity, moral virtue, and an individualistic care of the self so crucial to the “feel-good ideology promoted in neoliberal urban India” (Brosius, 2010, p. 307).

This chapter examines the intersections of neoliberal ideologies, the young middle class, and the desire for a fit body in contemporary India. Much has been written about Western health and fitness clubs as emerging sites of cultural contestation (Crossley, 2006), fitness as bodywork and the accrual of physical capital (Brace-Govan, 2002; Frew & McGillivray, 2005), feminist collectivization through exercise and fitness (Brabazon, 2006; Roth & Basow, 2004), and the gym as a place for cultural intermediary work (Maguire, 2008). Yet little attention has been paid to the production and meanings of the “fit” body outside of a Western context. Drawing on ethnographic work completed at a university in north India, I explore here the construction of the “new” young, global, and middle class Indian body via the consumption of Westernized fitness practices. These bodies exist within the context of a neoliberalizing India in which consumerism defines social and class identity, immense hunger exists alongside increasing rates of obesity, and the public health care system is rapidly collapsing. Following Dworkin & Wachs (2009), I suggest that the fit, young, middle class body is fast becoming the “right” body in contemporary India and functions to reinforce a privileged social location, moralities of self-care, and a performance of citizenship that heralds India’s rise in global affairs. Gymming, as a class-based performative practice, plays a significant role in the

achievement and maintenance of such a body. Amongst the university students I interviewed, three prominent themes surfaced in relation to these thoughts: 1) looking good and fearing fat; 2) being fit to work, particularly in a globalized context; and 3) the emergence of the fit Indian woman prepared to tackle multiple roles and responsibilities.

The Young Middle Class in Contemporary India

India is a young country, both in terms of its existence as an independent nation—it will celebrate its 65th year of independence in 2012—and the demographic characteristics of its population. According to *Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh*, the National Population Stabilization Fund, India is experiencing a “youth bulge” as over 30% of the current population is under the age of fifteen. Data released in 2010 indicate that an estimated 315 million people are between the ages of 10 and 24. By 2020, approximately 325 million Indians will reach working age, the highest figure in the world (*Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh*, 2010). The professional world that these young Indians are entering is now a global one, and many of them will find jobs with multinational companies that offer opportunities both domestically and abroad. The youth sector is also a major consumer market, as young Indians have grown up exposed to, and interacting with, global markets, brands, and commodities and they aspire to own the luxury goods that will mark them as members of an upwardly mobile class of young professionals (Mathur, 2010).

It is important to note here that the new middle class in India is an expansive, heterogeneous socio-economic grouping that reaches across regional, caste, ethnic, and religious affiliations (Nijman, 2006). Its size is estimated to be somewhere between 50 million and 250 million out of India’s total population of 1.2 billion, and it is comprised

predominantly of professionally (white collar) employed people living in urban areas with relatively high salaries and ample disposable income, concerned with upward social mobility, and aspiring for privileged lifestyles (Brosius, 2010; Mathur, 2010; Sridharan, 2011). This new middle class is a product of economic liberalization and privatization, unlike the “old” middle class that was comprised largely of government bureaucrats and employees of state-owned companies. Yet the material size of the new middle class is secondary to its symbolic influence, its performativity, and its embrace of a consumerist lifestyle propelled by economic liberalization and the intensified incursion of transnational brands and products into the Indian marketplace (Brosius, 2010; Fernandes, 2006; Mathur, 2010). The new middle class consumer performs her/his status—shopping at malls, eating international cuisine at fancy restaurants, wearing the latest designer fashions—and has become normalized as the idealized representation of an India actively engaged in commodity consumption (Bijapurkar, 2009). Indeed, as Brosius (2010) contends, for the new middle class it is “not so much a question of *what* is consumed but a question of *knowing how* to consume it” (p. 16, emphasis in original). For many young Indians of the new middle class, knowing how to engage in the practices of health and fitness—how to work out at the gym—is an important marker of their class status, as the gym serves as a prominent space of the new middle class along with pizza parlors, coffee shops, malls, and cineplexes (McGuire, 2011).

The vibrancy of the youth sector in India and its relevance to the rising new middle class led me to focus this chapter on the ways in which university students incorporate physical fitness into their daily lives and use the act of gymming to confirm, display, and heighten their socio-economic standing. University students, as Mathur

(2010) notes, are a significant category of consumers in India because they represent a fairly large segment of urban society, influence their parents' spending decisions by expressing desire for certain goods and services, and will eventually become employed with the promise of future disposable income. To tap into this sector, I engaged in ethnographic work at Nilgai University, a private, non-profit university located in north India. Nilgai University has an enrollment of approximately 700 students, spread across schools of law, business, international affairs, and public policy. The schools employ both Indian and foreign faculty, and a stated mission of the university is to promote a global curriculum, global research, and global collaborations in order to prepare students for a future professional life anticipated to range beyond the borders of India.

While a handful of students at Nilgai University receive needs-based scholarships, most of them pay the full tuition of six *lakh* rupees per year (about \$13,000) and come from solid middle or upper class backgrounds (personal communication, March 6, 2012). Curious about how these future lawyers, financiers, civil servants, and managers—the future leaders of globalized, neoliberal India—engage in health and fitness, I attended the university gym nearly every day for three months, alternating between morning and evening workouts to better observe the use of the gym and get to know the students frequenting it. Once I had established my presence and a sense of familiarity, I asked for student volunteers willing to participate in an interview. In total, I interviewed twenty-one students—twelve women and nine men, nineteen undergraduates and two graduate students, ranging in age from 18 to 30, and hailing from various parts of India including Mumbai, Hyderabad, Punjab, Kerala, Chennai, and Haryana. Some of their thoughts and observations are included here to illustrate how having/getting/maintaining the “right”

body through gymming is a significant part of their daily performance of social status and worldly ambition.

The “Right” Body

Far from being a biologically determined fact of nature, the body is a socially constructed entity that is influenced, adapted, and reproduced according to distinct social relations and structures. The significance of the body touches nearly every facet of individual and collective existence, from the basics of birth and death to complex identities and subjectivities. As Bourdieu (1990) reminds us, corporeal experience is “part and parcel of one’s whole relation to the world” (p. 157). These relations are contingent and contextual, as meanings of the body, and the ways in which it is understood, change in response to changing times (Dimeo, 2004). For Foucault (1995), the body is also at the center of the conceptualization, operation, and reproduction of power. Individual bodies that comprise the social body are made by, and continuously carry, modern power through such disciplinary techniques as surveillance and panopticism. Foucault asserts that “it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission” (1995, p. 25). In the shift from sovereign to modern power, personal and social control became centered on the disciplining of both the individual and collective body. Weaved throughout Foucault’s framework is the supposition that power and knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent. New ways of thinking emerge alongside struggles for power, and the body serves as the central locus for the modern technologies of power that regulate and control society.

The regulation and control of the body in India has long been an important issue. In their examination of the politics of physicality in India, Mills & Sen (2004) assert that Indian culture has a “long history of attaching a range of meanings to the body” (p. 5), arguing that the body has been used in the systematic organization of Indian society based on gender, caste, and physical ability. Holdrege (1998) identifies a specific “Hindu discourse of the body” in which the body is the “instrument of biological and socio-cultural reproduction that is to be regulated through ritual and social duties” and controlled through dietary restrictions and sexual limitations (p. 342). The body was also at the center of the colonial encounter in India, as discursive constructions of the physically “weak” Indian body existed in opposition to the “strong” British body as a means to justify and uphold unequal relations of power under colonialism (McGuire, 2011; Mills & Sen, 2004). The education of the male student body in colonial India was guided by Victorian values of masculinity that utilized sport and physical activity to instill a specific moral and disciplinary code focused on loyalty, obedience, and conformity (Sen, 2004). Moral meanings were also attached to colonial Indian bodies, constructed through their dress, cleanliness, musculature or lack thereof, and movements, a project of difference-making perpetrated by British colonialists to support the notion of Indians and India as essentially different from, and inferior to, the peoples and cultures of Europe (McGuire, 2011). Of course, physical culture became a significant means of resistance against colonial rule, and the active, male Indian body reclaimed the gymnasium, the wrestling *akhara*, and the cricket and football pitch as spaces for crafting a sense of muscular Indian nationalism (Alter, 1992; Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Bose, 1990).

In postcolonial contemporary India, the body has taken on new meanings reflective of India's economic liberalization, increasing consumerism, interactions with global markets, and growth of the middle class (Brosius, 2010; Derne, 2008; Munshi, 2001). For centuries in India, having a large and plump body was a sign of comfort and prosperity, an indication that you were rich enough to afford ample food and avoid the rigorous physical labor associated with the poor. The fat body was admired and fatness was linked to happiness, while the thin body was considered economically, socially, cosmetically, and emotionally impoverished (Mohanty, 2011; Munshi, 2001). However, as Mohanty (2011) argues, India today is in the midst of a "historical change in connotation" in which being fat no longer necessarily means that you are wealthy, but rather that you lack the time, money, or sense of personal responsibility to keep your body in shape. She further explains this shift by noting the following:

This change may be a result of globalization—a change in our perception of beauty to conform to a more Westernized image...In most of the Indian movie industry, the deliciously plump actors and actresses of the 70s and 80s have been replaced by buff men and slender women...Over the past few years a number of slimming spas have cropped up, replete with 'before and after' advertisements and special offers. And for those who don't want to undergo the agonies of diet and exercise, liposuction clinics are also on the rise. (paragraphs 4 – 9)

The Indian body has undergone a significant change in meaning in the past twenty years, as the fat body has been replaced by the fit, slender, and toned body as a sign of wealth, happiness, and personal and social responsibility. A body altered by a regime of dieting and gymming is a marker of beauty and class status in urban India today, and the beautiful body (as defined by shifting social standards) is acknowledged as a happy and healthy body (Brosius, 2010; Dewey, 2008). Moreover, the idealized body is imbued with

moral discourses that link socially favorable characteristics such as commitment, dedication, and hard work to the external appearance of the body. Influenced by “transnational standards of beauty” (Derne, 2008, p. 102) that emphasize thinness and eager to conform to those assumed global standards, contemporary India now values the thin and toned body as the ideal and “right” body indicative of a nation quickly gaining significant economic and political clout on the world stage. The intensified circulation of Westernized images of beauty and the promotion of a consumerist lifestyle opened up space in India for a new definition of the “right” body, one that pursues thinness as part of the performance of certain physical practices that embody upper and middle class consumption (Brosius, 2010; McGuire, 2011).

The Foucauldian disciplinary regimes regulating the body in post-liberalization, neoliberal India thus include gymming, dieting, and medical technologies such as liposuction and cosmetic surgery. Per Foucault (1995), the young, middle class Indian body is subjected to normative values and judgments in and through gymming and the consumption of health and fitness. If you do not have the “right” body—currently defined as slender and toned—you are judged as being physically and morally inferior to those who do possess the “right” body. Ultimately, the body internalizes the disciplinary techniques and the moral discourses attached to them, becoming a self-controlling entity governed by the individual self as well as the regulatory gaze of other bodies and social institutions.

Looking Good and Fearing Fat

When asked why he works out at the gym, 19 year-old undergraduate student Sanjay¹⁸ gave the following answer:

I exercise because I don't like a paunch. When I shower, I want to see my abs and my fit body. My fitness goals would be to reduce weight and have a thin, yet muscular body with those football player abs. I think in Bollywood, John Abraham has got the best body. He has a great ass, and I think every man desires to have a butt like that.

Sanjay's admiration for movie star John Abraham's butt speaks not only to the celebritization of fitness in India and Bollywood's influence in promoting changing body ideals, but also to the moral discourses surrounding self-care and the cultivation of a good-looking body arising in neoliberal India. Brosius (2010) argues that the need to appear physically attractive has recently assumed greater importance for both women and men, as "a beautiful body is now a happy body" (p. 308) and conspicuous consumption is valued as a sign of caring for oneself, for investing the time, energy, and money in creating a beautiful body through gymming and diet. Moral discourses of beauty, happiness, and health are attached to the body, and the fit, slim, and aesthetically pleasing body becomes a marker of personal responsibility, self-control, and hard work (Brosius, 2010; Reddy, 2006).

According to promotional material distributed by Fitness First, a transnational gym chain, in the Delhi market approximately 52% of members joined the gym in order to "improve their shape" and look better. A young woman named Devika, a member profiled in a Fitness First pamphlet who lost nine kilograms by gymming, testified that "it

¹⁸ Pseudonyms are used for all interview participants.

took some time for me to get used to a regular exercise regimen and the rigorous personal training sessions, but when I look at myself in the mirror now, I believe it has been well worth it” (field notes, May 1, 2011). Akash, an 18 year-old first-year student at the university also wants to feel and look good:

Gymming adds that little rigidness to your body that you need. It doesn't leave a whole bag of flab on you. Your body is revived, you don't feel lackluster. Mostly it is about feeling good and letting your body do the talking.

Sanjay, Devika, and Akash enjoy looking at their bodies because they have achieved the “right” body, all partly inspired by the desire to avoid fat. Sanjay exercises because he “doesn't like a paunch”, Devika lost a significant amount of weight and only now likes her body, and Akash prefers a rigid body to a flabby one. The muscled, taut body has become a “cultural icon” in India that “flaunts to the world that one now cares for oneself and how one appears to others” (Munshi, 2001, p. 86). They let their bodies do the talking, as their bodies tell a story of their hard work, dedication, and privileged social standing.

On the flip side, the fat body, which was once aspired to in India, is now placed in moral opposition to the thin, taut body and tells a story of assumed laziness, lack of willpower, and indolence (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Murray, 2008; Sykes & McPhail, 2008). Like in the West, the fat body in contemporary India is an entity that is stigmatized as undisciplined, unhealthy, and inactive while the fit body is a “metaphor for success, morality, and good citizenship” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 38). The fear of fat and of the painful social stigma placed upon the fat body are sources of worry for the young middle class in India today, as the pressure to look good and have the right body is

couched in social, health, and aesthetic terms. A number of the students at Nilgai University spoke of these fears, highlighted by the following comments:

My reason [for gymming] is to maintain my body, to be fit. Because here if you are big in size, it is not good for you. You are destroying your health and yes, society will also not accept you. (18 year-old female)

Flexibility has always been a major reason [for why I go to the gym], as I used to be a classical dancer. Eventually staying fit and not growing fat also joined the list. (20 year-old female)

In college I see, like, if you are fat then you are seen as a figure of laughing and joking. (19 year-old male)

I want to remain fit even when I grow old. I also fear fat as my family has a strong history of diabetes and obesity plays a major role in building it. (18 year-old female)

The fear of fat thus works on several levels, from being socially rejected to developing diabetes, and becomes an internalized disciplinary force to regulate and control the body. Even the interior design of the Nilgai University gymnasium contributes to this regulation, as images plastered on the walls of the gym depict idealized male and female bodies made lean and muscular through rigorous exercise and weight training (Figure 4). These images help to reinforce the students' aspirations to craft the "right" body, and also to remind them that they are gymming, in part, to avoid becoming fat and undesirable. Driven largely by this fear of fat, young middle class Indians are striving to obtain a body that looks good and thus exudes the moralities of responsibility and hard work so crucial to the successful navigation of the world around them.



Figure 4. Images of idealized bodies posted on the walls of the gymnasium at Nilgai University (photo by author).

Fit for the Working World

Increasingly for the young middle class, maintaining a thin and fit body is no longer viewed simply as a personal choice, but rather as “an obligation to the public good and a requirement for good citizenry” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 35). Not only is a fit, healthy body an outward marker of responsible citizenry by supposedly not placing pressure on the health care system, but it is also a visible sign of a commitment to hard work, dedication, and the willingness to make personal sacrifices for the greater goal of achieving socially-defined success. After all, the corporeal can be “read as a ‘sign’ of success” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 64), as long as it conforms to a culturally idealized

shape and size. For young Indians who engage in gymming, getting the “right” body is considered a successful venture, an achievement largely driven by corporeal aesthetic desires and social discourses of health and well-being. The sacrifices that come with maintaining a fit body—free time, junk food, socializing—are simply part of the process.

Within the Western, neoliberal context, Dworkin & Wachs (2009) argue that multinational companies seek to transform “women and men into the right kind of objects” (p. 11), fit and healthy objects who will contribute to profit expansion through their productivity, reduce company health care costs by living a healthy lifestyle, and serve as literal embodiments of success. These concerns are becoming increasingly evident in the Indian context, as multinational corporations expand their operations into India and employ educated young Indians. Pia, an 18 year-old aspiring corporate lawyer, described her motivations for gymming in terms of preparation for professional work.

When asked why she goes to the gym, she replied:

To be fit, because I believe that when your body is fit then your mind will work more fast. Coming to the law, I feel that my body has to be fit so my mind works properly and I can function properly and work hard. Chatting with friends is just wasting time, but going to the gym with that time is more important.

Twenty year-old Raju, also a law student, made similar comments about the connections between physical exercise, mental acuity, and work productivity:

I exercise to stay fit, more so mentally than physically, because strangely my thoughts are more clear and precise after a great workout. It’s like it makes me more organized and lucid in my thinking process.

Both Pia and Raju point to the need to be fit in order to tackle the working world, to perform professionally in a way that is effective, organized, and productive. Already in

their academic career, years before they are ready to enter the globalized corporate workplace, they recognize the importance of working hard and utilizing their time properly and efficiently. In chasing the “great Indian dream” (Friedman, 2004), an ambitious vision of lucrative and global career opportunities offered to the educated and industrious, young middle class Indians are coming to realize that “to meet the global standard you must be in good shape” (Brosius, 2010, p. 320). No longer are educational degrees and internships enough, as having a fit and healthy body is increasingly important for gaining professional employment opportunities, particularly within a globalized context in which multinational companies are coming to dominate the corporate landscape.

The Fit Female

In an article for *Pulse* magazine published in 2010, G. Ramachandran, former investment banker and current director of Gold’s Gym India, noted the changing status of women in India and hinted at how maintaining a fit and attractive body is important for women aiming for a successful career in the corporate world. He wrote:

It’s a hard world. But it’s definitely not a man’s world anymore. Gone is the perception of a feeble, docile and delicate woman attempting to make a mark in her own small way. Today’s reality showcase is filled with the woman who has discovered the *shakti*¹⁹ within her; the woman who has used her innate feminine qualities to create her own distinct leadership style; the powerful and influential woman who drives change, innovation and satisfaction at the work place. In the corporate landscape, the woman of today has truly arrived. (p. 1)

¹⁹ The term *shakti* refers to the Hindu personification of divine, creative feminine power.

Of course, we must recognize that the “woman of today” that Ramachandran has in mind comes from a privileged social location and has access to education, professional opportunities, and spaces of middle class consumption (including the gym). Yet the dominant values in India are still shaped by a cultural system that views women as “objects of display rather than valuable contributors to society” (Dewey, 2008, p. 145), so the movement of women into positions of corporate leadership has certainly been fraught with tension and struggle.

The construction of Indian womanhood has undergone significant changes in response to liberalization and increased interactions with global markets, consumer capitalism, and Western conceptions of beauty and femininity. Physically, the ideal Indian female body has shifted from the Rubenesque and shapely form of the actress Sridevi and her “thunder thighs” admired in the 1970s (Mohanty, 2011), to the thinness and near fragility of 1994 Miss Universe Sushmita Sen (Dewey, 2008), to the slim, toned, and confident figure of Katrina Kaif in the film *Tees Maar Khan*. Sitting alongside this corporeal evolution are changing perceptions of women’s roles and responsibilities, no longer confined to just the home and family. The middle class Indian woman is now a global subject who is highly mobile with the ability to slip in and out of “boundaries of ‘home’ and ‘the world’” (Reddy, 2006, p. 77) and enjoy a level of economic and social independence unknown to previous generations. This sense of independence and the desire to attain the “right” body contribute to women’s increased participation in fitness and gymming. Shalini, a 20 year-old undergraduate student, spoke to the connections between physical fitness and the changing roles of contemporary Indian women when she remarked:

Exercising is something that is very important for every girl today, because her role has modified and evolved over time, and she has much more to deal with. Therefore it is imperative that she be physically fit, to be at an even footing, to tackle all that is thrown her way.

The young, middle class woman with professional aspirations thus must prepare herself for a fast-paced, globalized existence in which her body plays a central role. In receiving the message that “women can handle everything as long as their body is in good shape” (Brosius, 2010, p. 319), Shalini and her peers identify the gym as a place of significance to their immediate and future lives.

Being physically prepared to “tackle all that is thrown her way” means not only deftly balancing professional, family, and personal obligations, but also knowing how to assert the confidence and independence that young, middle class women take pride in. Sexual harassment, known as eve-teasing, is endemic in India (Kanekar, 2007) and exists in tandem with a cultural privileging of males, often creating an environment of hostility towards women. Many of the female students at Nilgai University voiced their concerns about sexual harassment and admitted that they experience it on a regular basis. Some of them talked about how gymming has helped them to develop a sense of confidence in their physical strength, including 20 year-old Gauri who stated:

Exercising is also important for ensuring my safety. It is crucial that girls acquire at least the nominal fitness to be able to fend for themselves, instead of depending on the idea of being rescued out of every mishap and sticky situation.

Similarly, when asked why she works out at the gym on a regular basis, 19 year-old Kalpana replied:

My goal in exercising is to increase my physical endurance, clear my head and be equipped to deal with any situation. I don't like the stereotype of girls being weak, so I try and make myself faster and more agile than any guy.

So the young, middle class Indian female must be fit to negotiate both the external corporate world and her own personal space often invaded by unwanted male advances. As indicated by some of the interview excerpts in the previous section, she must also be wary of becoming fat, lest she be stigmatized by society and be viewed as physically and morally inferior. The celebrated independence of the “new woman” (Brosius, 2010) is thus perhaps threatened by an emerging panoptic social control over her body, increasingly internalized and reproduced through the expectation that the young, female body be fit, thin, and disciplined enough to stay that way. It is in this sense that gymming can function two ways for the young Indian woman—either as a feminist, emancipatory practice to challenge the hegemony of men and masculinity (Brabazon, 2006), or as a means of reinforcing narrow and repressive conceptions of the female body (Collins, 2002).

The Contradictions of the Bekari Body

We must acknowledge that the yearning for a slender, fit, and toned body expressed by these Indian youth exists within a very specific and limited socio-economic context. While the thin and sinewy Indian body is acceptable, even desired, amongst the upwardly mobile segments of society engaging with global capital, it is also a marker of poverty and hunger amongst those who struggle to survive in the absence of state support and aid. Thus, as Dewey (2008) notes, “the only thing that separates the beauty queen

from the *bekari* (emaciated) body is context” (p. 134). In contemporary urban India, a *bekari* body living in a slum and surrounded by poverty is a problem, an embodiment of the deep social inequalities and divisions that are embarrassing and shameful for the country as it tries to prove itself on the world stage. On the other hand, a *bekari* body living in a bungalow in Mumbai and surrounded by wealth is an object of beauty, an embodiment of success and prosperity worthy of representing a nation on the rise (Dewey, 2008). The *bekari* body has very different meanings depending on the context within which it exists. As such, it can represent poverty or wealth, struggle or ease, lack or abundance. In this sense, the *bekari* body is at the center of the tension between hunger and obesity so prevalent in India today.

In 2010, India was ranked 67 out of 84 countries in the Global Hunger Index, eleven places below neighboring Nepal (ranked 56) and fifteen places below Pakistan (at 52). Within the Index, India is included as one of 29 countries that have levels of hunger considered “extremely alarming” or “alarming” (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010). Child malnutrition is especially problematic in India, with rates worse than many sub-Saharan African countries. A national family health survey conducted in 2006 revealed that 48% of children in India were underweight, a percentage that was more than twice as high as that for Malawi (22%), Kenya (20%), Cameroon (19%), and Zimbabwe (16%) during a similar time period (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 7). In 2009, 42.5% of Indian children under the age of five were underweight and malnourished. In comparison, the rate for Chinese children was 7% (Sengupta, 2009). India is also home to 42% of the global population of malnourished children, meaning that nearly half of all the hungry children in the world live in India

(International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010). Unfortunately, hunger is not a political priority in India, and the private sector has not yet responded to the needs of millions of Indians who suffer from malnutrition and lack of food. Subsequently, 54% of all deaths before the age of five are related to malnutrition (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 14).

The problem of malnutrition is not limited to children, as adolescents and adults in India continue to grapple with hunger. Nationwide, 54% of adolescent boys and 47% of adolescent girls are considered too thin. Youth in rural areas are more likely to be abnormally thin and underweight than youth residing in urban areas (Parasuraman, Kishor, Singh, & Vaidehi, 2009, p. 81). Based on data collected in 2006, it is estimated that amongst all youth aged 15 – 24, 44% of females and 47% of males are underweight (Parasuraman, Kishor, Singh, & Vaidehi, 2009, p. 81). Indian adults also contend with hunger, as nationwide approximately 36% of women and 34% of men are malnourished and too thin (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 44).

Amidst the horrific hunger and widespread poverty, India is simultaneously confronting a burgeoning obesity crisis and other health issues associated with increasing wealth and sedentary lifestyles. Averaging out the adult population, 13% of women and 9% of men are considered overweight or obese, although these percentages differ widely across regions of the country. Rates of obesity, defined by the National Family Health Survey of India as a body mass index (BMI)²⁰ greater than 30, fluctuate by state and city, perhaps an indication of varying poverty levels and distinctions between rural and urban

²⁰ I recognize that using BMI as a measure of obesity is extremely problematic (Monaghan, 2007; O'Hara & Gregg, 2012), but here I am simply using data collected by the National Family Health Survey as a way to demonstrate the increasing prevalence of, and concern with, obesity in contemporary India.

areas. For example, Chennai has the highest percentage of obese women at 39%, while only 19% of women in Nagpur are considered overweight. In Delhi and its immediate surrounding areas, 27% of women and 18% of men are overweight or obese, compared to 14% of women and 15% of men identified as too thin (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 47).

While quantifying and categorizing bodies in such rigid terms does not necessarily recognize the social and structural causes of health disparities, the main point is that India is suffering from a “dual burden of malnutrition” (Arnold, Parasuraman, Arokiasamy, & Kothari, 2009, p. 44) in which under-nutrition and over-nutrition exist concurrently and contribute to the contextual complexity of the *bekari* body. The under-nourished body is a *bekari* body by default and is derided as a symbol of poverty. Yet the over-nourished body, once a sign of health and affluence, now yearns to become a *bekari* body, but one placed within a context of financial prosperity and cosmopolitanism. This contradiction is rooted in class divisions, as India’s encounter with obesity is a phenomenon currently limited to the upper and middle classes where “bulging pay packets have resulted in bulging waistlines” (Avadhani, 2010, p. 4). Rising opportunities in the professional class have led to a reduction in physical labor and increases in discretionary income allow for regular meals out and the consumption of food associated with social status, such as the frequent delivery of pizza so aptly used by Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger* (2008) to illustrate the chasm between rich and poor in urban India. In addition to the rising purchasing power of the upper and middle classes, the intensifying exposure to international markets and an expanding consumer consciousness wrought by liberalization have resulted in a new “spending on fitness goods and services as never

before” (Chakraborty, 2007, p. 1173), as those who can afford it are investing in the body in order to look good, feel good, and meet the new global standard of neoliberal India.

This increased spending on fitness has given rise to a booming “slimming market” in India, which includes gyms, nutrition clinics, weight-loss centers, and cosmetic surgery services. This market is worth approximately \$250 million per year, and is growing at an estimated rate of 11% every year (Avadhani, 2010, p. 4). As of 2008, the fitness market alone was calculated at \$96 million based on gym membership figures from the seven largest cities in India (IHRSA, 2008, p. 12). The local Indian fitness center chain Talwalkars was even floated on the Indian stock market in 2010 (Das, 2010). Obesity is not the only health issue prompting the growth of this market, as rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes are escalating. Cardiovascular disease is now the leading cause of death in India, and the number of people diagnosed with diabetes is expected to rise from 32 million in 2000 to 79 million in 2030 (Joshi, Jan, Wu, & MacMahon, 2008, p. 1818).

The slimming and fitness industries growing up around the issues of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes point to the emerging notion that health is a commodity that can be purchased. The medicalization of diet and exercise suggests that those who follow the dictates of a healthy lifestyle by watching what they eat and exercising on a regular basis will accrue physical capital in the form of the “right” body and attendant cultural capital as the slender body serves as a visible indicator of health and moral virtue (Murray, 2008). Lack of health thus begins to be associated with “moral laxity” and the burden of pursuing and achieving health is placed entirely on the individual, emphasizing personal responsibility and promoting neoliberal ideologies that

“obscure the impact of government and structural contributions to health disparities” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 11). The individual thus becomes the sole arbiter of her/his health, well-being, physical appearance, and resulting emotional state and moral standing. As Yasmin, an 18 year-old university student, remarked during our interview, “It’s my body, rather than society owning my body. It’s up to me how I take care of it”.

That Yasmin feels a distinct sense of personal responsibility to take care of her body—it is up to her, and no one else—is indicative of how the onus of health, loaded with moralistic overtones, is being placed upon the individual body. This discourse of healthism “assumes that individuals can achieve health through individual effort and discipline, mainly by regulating the size and shape of the body” (Sykes & McPhail, 2008, p. 69). Those who cannot afford to participate in the consumption of health and fitness, who cannot “buy” their health by joining a private gym or eating only organic food, are stigmatized as undisciplined and vilified as drains on the health care system. Lifestyle then, largely dictated by the imperatives of the capitalist consumer marketplace, has become an “ideological construction” (Ingham, 1985, p. 43) that frames health issues in terms of personal, moral responsibilities in which the individual is held accountable for her/his health or lack thereof.

When placed within the context of India’s rapidly collapsing public health care system, the emergence of the healthism discourse is particularly striking. The economic liberalization reforms initiated in the early 1990s were designed to intensify India’s engagement with global markets and prompt a shift away from an inward-oriented, domestically focused development strategy to a policy of active integration with the world economy focused on attracting foreign investment, privatizing public enterprises,

and creating a business-friendly labor laws (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003; Topolova, 2007). One of the results of the neoliberal reforms was a severe and sustained cut in budgetary support for various social welfare measures, including public health care. As a percentage of overall gross domestic product (GDP), expenditure on *public* health care programs declined from 1.3% in 1990 to 0.9% in 1999, and it continues to hover at about 1% currently (Sengupta, 2011, p. 315). Conversely, the rate of *private* expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP stands between 4.5% and 5%, making India one of the top twenty countries in the world in terms of how much is spent on privatized medical and health care (Sengupta, 2011, p. 313). Public health facilities are crumbling, and many have been dismantled in favor of private clinics and hospitals that attract the Indian elite willing to pay for access to world-class facilities and foreigners engaging in medical tourism (Joshi, Jan, Wu, & MacMahon, 2008; Sengupta, 2011). Neoliberal policies have thus opened up space for the penetration of the corporate sector into health care, further underlining the idea that health is a commodity to be purchased and consumed. The increasing dominance of the private sector in areas of health and medical care—including the burgeoning slimming market and fitness industry—denies basic care to the poor as the new, corporate spaces of health in contemporary India cater to the upper and middle classes (Figure 5). Profitability overrides equality, and the impoverished *bekari* body continues to struggle with hunger and malnutrition while the wealthy *bekari* body becomes the idealized marker of health, prosperity, and moral righteousness.



Figure 5. Billboard in Sonapat, Haryana promoting a weight-loss program at a private slimming center (photo by author).

Conclusion: Ramdev's Alternative

Despite being in a “primitive stage” of development with reportedly only 765 fitness clubs serving a population of 1.2 billion people (IHRSA, 2008, p. 27), the Indian fitness industry is rapidly expanding in order to service the increased spending power of India’s new middle class and their desires to sculpt their own culturally idealized body projects. Western-owned, transnational fitness chains such as Gold’s Gym and Fitness First are entering the Indian market to capitalize on the interest in gymming and India’s growing consumptive power, joining domestic enterprises such as Talwalkars, a family-

owned chain of health clubs with over 100 locations in fifty cities across the country (Talwalkars, 2012). Of the transnational chains, Gold's Gym appears to be particularly aggressive with plans to add twenty-five additional gyms to the fifty currently in operation (Anonymous, 2011). The director of Gold's Gym India looks at this expansion as a "revolution" and aims to fuel the revolution by "getting fitness to every town, every city, and every state of India" (Ramachandran, 2010, p. 1).

Attempting to counter this fitness revolution is contemporary guru Swami Ramdev, a scholar of yoga, Ayurveda, and agricultural science who is becoming increasingly active in Indian politics. He spearheads a movement to restore the strength and health of the Indian nation through the use of traditional yogic and Ayurvedic concepts and practices, largely marketed through a health and fitness oriented framework (Chakraborty, 2007). Ramdev appears regularly on television, leading yoga classes and giving speeches about the ills of globalization, and he oversees an expanding commercial empire that includes an Ayurvedic medical hospital, a yoga health center, and a processing plant that produces herbal supplements, juices, skin care products, and a wide range of other health-minded goods (Polgreen, 2010). He argues that multinational corporations, including fitness chains like Gold's Gym and Fitness First, have no place in India, and all things foreign—from Coca-Cola and hamburgers to aerobics and cricket—weaken and pollute traditional Indian culture and the Indian spirit. With his passionate platform, commercial endeavors, legions of followers, and celebration of yoga as a means to strengthen both the individual body and the national body politic, Ramdev was described by the *New York Times* as "a product and symbol of the new India, a yogic fusion of Richard Simmons, Dr. Oz, and Oprah Winfrey, irrepressible and bursting with

Vedic wisdom” (Polgreen, 2010, p. A1). His energetic crusade seeks to “decolonize Indian bodies and minds” through regular yoga practice, the adoption of a simple lifestyle, and rejection of anything not produced in India or connected to traditional Indian culture (Chakraborty, 2007, p. 1179). As such, he claims to offer an alternative not only to Westernized health and fitness practices so readily embraced by the young middle class, but also to the notion of health as a commodity to be bought and sold.

So does Ramdev offer a viable, alternative postcolonial model of health and fitness that will reinvigorate the nation, or is he simply repackaging discourses of healthism and corporeal discipline? Invoking Foucauldian notions of corporeal power, Chakraborty (2007) argues that Ramdev’s campaign relies on the production of docile bodies through regimented participation in his disciplinary activities of yoga and Ayurveda. Rather than engage with social and structural determinants of health and illness, Ramdev promotes an essentially healthist and neoliberal program that equates exercise and diet with control over health. He assigns individuals the responsibility for securing and maintaining their health, encouraging them to engage in his ilk of consumerism by purchasing his branded products (vitamins, yoga DVDs, shampoos, etc.) that promise to aid in the achievement of health and well-being. For the majority of Indians who live below the poverty line and whose basic health care needs are not being met by the state, Ramdev’s calls for self-treatment through healthy diet and yogic exercise “ring hollow” as hunger and malnutrition continue to torment the masses (Chakraborty, 2007, p. 1182). For those who do not get enough to eat, Ramdev’s prescription to “regularly drink milk and eat fresh fruit and vegetables or fast once a week is both ludicrous and undeniably cruel” (Chakraborty, 2007, p. 1182). It is a recipe

for health that denies care to the poor, as it ultimately relies on consumptive power and ignores the social roots of the health problems facing the country.

Moreover, Ramdev's advocacy of yoga might not appeal to young middle class Indians who look at gymming as a means to shape their body, display their class status, and engage in transnational bodily practices indicative of the global world they inhabit. Perhaps 18 year-old Sonali put it best:

I don't like yoga because it becomes too lazy, too sleepy. Nowadays after Ramdev's yoga thing, now in India the culture is again coming up with yoga. Here yoga has had a great influence on people's lives, but according to my personal perspective, I would not prefer yoga so much. In Indian culture, yoga stands in a more important position than aerobics. Aerobics is totally a Westernized form of exercise. Yoga is truly Indian culture. In India, it is totally recognized that yoga is good, but for me, I go for aerobics.

While Sonali certainly does not speak for all of her young, middle class compatriots, her choice of aerobics over yoga reveals an affinity for Westernized fitness practices, including gymming, that offer a means to achieving the "right" body. Although yoga, and Ramdev's campaign, might be "truly Indian culture", the Westernized gym is more important for young, middle class Indians as it represents a globalized space where performances of class status and values can be enacted, validated, and exhibited for others to see. Though Ramdev might object, the fitness revolution has most definitely come to India and has found willing soldiers amongst the young middle class.

Chapter IV

Studying at the Source: Ashtanga Yoga Tourism and the Search for Authenticity in Mysore, India

Introduction

In 2004, approximately 3.4 million foreign tourists visited India, contributing nearly \$4.7 billion to the domestic economy. By 2020, estimates the World Tourist Organization, international tourist inflow will increase to 10 million visitors per year (Aggarwal, Guglani, & Goel, 2008, p. 459). Many of these tourists are drawn by India's history and visit such famous sites as the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Red Fort in Delhi, and the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra. Others come for the beaches of Goa, the tea plantations of Darjeeling, the stark natural beauty of Ladakh, the cosmopolitanism of Mumbai, or the houseboats of Kerala. For others, India is the "yoga and spiritual capital of the world" and "the gateway to the heavens" (Aggarwal, Guglani, & Goel, 2008, p. 458), a place renowned for its ancient healing practices and therapies that offer the promise of health, spiritual connection, and perhaps even enlightenment. Since the Beatles and Mia Farrow visited Rishikesh in 1968 to study yoga and transcendental meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Saltzman, 2000), India has become an increasingly popular destination for Westerners interested in yoga and Eastern spirituality. Yoga practitioners from around the world now visit India to study at specific *shalas* (schools) such as the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune, deepen their practices through ashram stays and daily *seva* (selfless service) in the community, celebrate the annual International Yoga Festival

in Rishikesh, or attend retreats that combine a wide array of leisure activities with yoga instruction.

At the center of inquiry for this chapter is the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute (AYRI)²¹, a *shala* located in the city of Mysore in the southern state of Karnataka and made famous by its founder, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, and his cadre of Western students who propagate the Ashtanga system around the world. Attracting thousands of international yoga tourists each year, the AYRI offers long-term (from one to six months) study of Ashtanga yoga, an especially vigorous style of physical yoga characterized by a series of set postures linked by a flowing *vinyasa* sequence. Students pay a fee for each month of study and are also encouraged to engage in complementary studies such as Sanskrit, chanting, spiritual texts, or Indian classical music. As a preeminent site of yoga tourism and the consumption of a specific type of yogic knowledge, the AYRI capitalizes on an increasing Western interest in Indian bodily practices associated with alternative health modalities. This “soft power” (Gupta, 2008) of spirituality and yoga provides contemporary India with not only a branding mechanism—the “land of Yoga Bhoomi” (Aggarwal, Guglani, & Goel, 2008)—but also an economic strategy to lure global capital. By “selling” yoga and spirituality to the world, India will earn monetary gains but can also “serve humanity by its wisdom” (Gupta, 2008, p. 64), both of which would seemingly enhance India’s image to the rest of the world.

While the economic promises of tourism drive much of the development of India’s international yoga industry, it is also propelled by the promotion of “authenticity”,

²¹ I am choosing not to use a pseudonym for the AYRI because of its unique status as an internationally known and recognized yoga *shala* in Mysore. This status contributes directly to its popularity as a yoga tourism destination, as it is *the* place that Western practitioners serious about the Ashtanga practice yearn to visit.

a complex, multi-layered, and contested idea that operates here on two levels: 1) that of the yoga practice itself, regarded by many practitioners as more authentic and pure in India than in the West, and 2) that of the cultural experience in India, as Western tourists tend to have particular expectations of what authentic India should look like and how it should function. For many tourists, travel to India is meaningful because it is exotic and timeless, a land shaped by colonial legacies, enduring poverty, and spiritual wealth that set it in direct opposition to the West (Lozanski, 2007). Travel to India is thus a challenge to the sensibilities of Western modernity, offering foreign tourists a glimpse into a nostalgic world, a “last refuge of spirituality in the modern, technologically dominated world” (Shafi, 1997, p. 42). By seeking refuge from the vices of modernity in the practice of a pure yoga unsullied by commerce or corporate interests, Western yogis arrive in India with distinct ideas about the meanings of both yogic and cultural authenticity, where to find it, and how it will make a positive impact on their lives.

Never mind that the cultural authenticity in India that Westerners crave and value is a constructed Western project, a “frozen past transposed to the present” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1312) that denies the Indian people their own subjectivity and agency. Never mind that a “pure” yoga never existed and that the “notion of an original yoga is a just-so story” (Lieberman, 2008, p. 100) that ignores, even deliberately stifles, the syncretic and derivative nature of yoga practices that evolved in India in direct response to encounters with the West and modernity (Singleton & Byrne, 2008; Singleton, 2010). For yoga tourists in India, the discourse of authenticity is convincing and influential, but, as concerns my argument here, we must also recognize that authenticity is “ultimately a discourse of power” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1311) that has the ability to perpetuate colonial

imaginings of the Indian Other and to shape lasting stereotypes of the contemporary Indian condition caught in-between tradition and modernity (Bandyopadhyay, 2009; Lozanski, 2010).

Based on in-depth participant observation and interviews with American yogis studying at the AYRI in the early months of 2011, this chapter explores the notion of authenticity within Ashtanga yoga and amongst the expectations of yoga practitioners traveling to India to “study at the source” (field notes, January 20, 2011). The desire to study at the source of Ashtanga yoga, to experience its birthplace and receive instruction directly from the family of its creator, was a recurring theme echoed again and again in the interviews. Attached to this sentiment was an implication of authenticity, that the yoga experienced in Mysore is more genuine than that practiced in the West due to its location and its groundedness in an authentic Indian culture marked by a simplicity of life infused with spiritual serenity all but lost in the West. In searching for an authentic expression of their yoga practice, these yogis also desire a travel experience that matches their definition of the “real” India, a narrow conception that spurns Western aesthetics, rejects technologies of modernity, and scoffs at members of the Indian middle-class who participate in global capitalism and seek commodified relationships with tourists (Bandyopadhyay, 2009). By engaging in a critical reading of the history of Ashtanga yoga and incorporating observations from interview participants, I argue that the discourses of authenticity that inform both the Ashtanga practice and the travel expectations of foreign yogis are untenable and ultimately function to maintain Orientalist imaginings of a timeless and mystical India defined in opposition to the materialistic and rational West. Consequences of these persistent discourses include a

rejection of the syncretic evolution of yoga and a denial of India's vibrant postcolonial present, both of which serve to promote nostalgia for a static past, magnify difference, and contribute to the construction of Otherness that continues to define India and Indians as exotic, primitive, and poor.

Site and Methods

Established in 1948 by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois and located in a neighborhood called Gokulam in the southern city of Mysore, the AYRI functions as a yoga school and general hub for all things related to Ashtanga yoga in India. Smith (2007) notes that Mysore is the yoga tourism capital of India due to its abundance of Ashtanga yoga teachers who cater to Westerners, and the AYRI is widely recognized as the nucleus of this community. Not only can students practice *asana* at the AYRI, they can also take chanting classes, attend Sanskrit lessons, or buy books, t-shirts, and mat bags in the small shop. Upon Jois's death in 2009, his daughter, Saraswathi, and grandson, Sharath, took control of the AYRI and are now responsible for its daily operations. These operations include teaching hundreds of students each day, starting as early as 4:30am; holding a weekly conference to discuss issues such as proper diet and internal cleansing with the students; and planning for international workshops that take them to New York, Tokyo, Sydney, and London amongst other places. Sharath is clearly the heir to his grandfather's legacy, as he works with the more advanced students while Saraswathi largely instructs the beginners and those who struggle with the primary postures and need physical assists. Foreign students are required to study at the *shala* for at least one month, but not more than six months at any given time. For the first month of study, a student must pay 27,575

rupees, or approximately \$650. Subsequent months cost 17,650 rupees each, about \$410 (personal communication, July 23, 2010). These figures do not include accommodation, travel, or food, so studying at the AYRI proves to be a very costly endeavor indeed, and one certainly defined by social class and financial means.

I attended the AYRI for five weeks in January and February 2011, the high tourist season due to the pleasant weather in Mysore and the desire of many Europeans and North Americans to escape the cold winter at home and make the trip to India. During my time at the AYRI, I estimated that there were approximately 200 other foreigners studying at the *shala*. By my count, they came from at least twenty different countries, including Finland, Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Australia, Singapore, Greece, and the United States. People came and went every week, lending a constant stream of new energy to the *shala* but making it difficult to figure just how many people were at the AYRI at any one time. While I came to recognize familiar faces and make friends with people who shared my practice time of 9am, there were entire groups of people that I never even saw because they practiced very early in the morning and curtailed their social lives outside of the *shala* due to their extremely early wake-up calls (some yogis regularly woke up at 2am for a practice time of 4:30am in order to perform meditation, have a cup of coffee, and arrive at the *shala* early enough to get a good place in the practice room). So, of course, my observations and interactions were necessarily limited by people's personal choices and movements throughout the day. Mysore locals also attended the *shala*, but usually only in the afternoon with instruction from Saraswathi. During my three days of additional practice in the afternoon to become more familiar with the sequencing of postures, I noted a group of seventeen Indians engaged in the

practice, fourteen men and three women, ranging in age from mid-60s to a teenaged boy (field notes, January 18, 2011). This segregation—foreigners practicing in the morning, Indians in the afternoon—was an interesting phenomenon in itself and deserves attention, but my focus here is instead on how the Western yogis interpreted their practices and travel experiences as representative of an expected authenticity.

In addition to immersing myself in the AYRI community and culture²², I also conducted semi-structured interviews with thirteen American yogis to explore their reasons for coming to Mysore and how their experiences of India matched their expectations. These interviews lasted from forty-five to sixty minutes and took place at various venues in Mysore, from a participant's apartment to a local *chai* stall. With consent from the participants, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcriptions were later e-mailed to the participants for their review, allowing them to make edits or additions where desired. I made the conscious decision to interview only American yogis primarily due to my own positionality as an American active in yoga for ten years. I was confident that I could relate to the Americans in terms of a shared yoga practice and therefore create a more equalized power balance because I was familiar with the American Ashtanga culture but did not occupy an insider or expert position. Though I had been practicing yoga for years, I was a relative newcomer to Ashtanga, as I had dabbled with a few classes, but it was never my preferred style of practice. This self-defined beginner status allowed me to adopt the role of supplicant in my interactions with others in order to invert power relations and place knowledge firmly with my interview

²² A typical day included Ashtanga practice in the morning, brunch at one of the several Western-run cafes near the *shala*, chanting class, an excursion into town to buy fruit or go shopping, socializing at the coconut stand, Sanskrit lessons, an early dinner, and perhaps an evening *kirtan* or musical performance organized by students.

participants (Chacko, 2004; England, 1994). I was reliant upon my participants to provide me with knowledge about the intricacies of the Ashtanga system, but focusing solely on Americans also enabled me to make personal connections that led to further insights and relationships based on shared experiences and thoughts. For example, my interview with a yogi from Los Angeles reached a level of honest intimacy only when I shared descriptions of my own experiences with yoga in that city that echoed hers. I could have easily interviewed yogis from Finland or Japan—language was not an issue because the AYRI conducts its teachings in English—but I would not have achieved the same depth of relationship because I am completely unfamiliar with Finnish or Japanese yoga culture. This is not to say that I limited my socializing to only Americans. Rather, I actively sought out informal conversations and excursions with many other foreigners, and these interactions proved not only intellectually valuable but also a lot of fun.

The interview participants included ten women and three men, ranging in age from 28 to 54. Some had been doing Ashtanga yoga for just a few years upon their arrival in Mysore (one was a complete beginner), while others had developed a consistent, long-term practice (one had practiced for thirteen years). Eight of them were visiting the AYRI for the first time, three of them were on their second trip, and two were making their fifth and sixth trips to Mysore respectively. These men and women were just thirteen of the estimated 15.8 million Americans who practice yoga, a figure that represents nearly 7% of the US adult population. As of 2008, these yogis spent \$5.7 billion on classes and yoga-related equipment, clothing, media, and vacations (including trips to Mysore), an 87% increase in spending since 2004 (Macy, 2008). As an active consumer and

burgeoning cultural icon, the American yogi is fast becoming a significant subjectivity replete with a multitude of social meanings.

Authenticity

The notion of authenticity has long been of interest to scholars of tourism and has recently been taken up by those studying yoga. First introduced into the sociology of leisure and tourism through the work of Dean MacCannell (1973; 1976), it has received steady attention from a variety of theoretical and empirical standpoints (Cohen, 2007; Lozanski, 2010; Mkono, 2012; Olsen, 2002). Criticized as being a “slippery” concept with a heterogeneous usage that contributes to confusion over its meaning and application (Belhassen & Caton, 2006, p. 854), authenticity operates within numerous frameworks, the most prominent of which are objective, constructivist, and existential definitions of the term. Objective authenticity refers to the genuineness or realness of tangible things such as buildings, artifacts, or events (Chhabra, 2012; Lau, 2010), while constructivists view authenticity as something projected onto objects by tourists and/or the tourism media, thereby creating various versions of authenticity for the same objects that are dependent upon particular, constructed interpretations (Wang, 1999). The emergence of the existential viewpoint draws upon the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger and suggests that authenticity is a temporary human attribute signifying being true to one’s self, transcending everyday social norms, and reveling in the freedom of self-expression that travel experiences can often generate (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 2000). Most recently, Mkono (2012) argues that the concept of authenticity functions as a “Eurocentric grand narrative” (p. 482) and is therefore helpful in

identifying ongoing processes of Othering, something certainly of concern when questioning how Western perceptions of yogic authenticity can operate as discourses of power that reinforce difference and reify a nostalgic past.

Crucial to understandings of authenticity that deal with the potentially exploitative and imperialistic nature of tourism, particularly in former colonized countries, is Said's (1978) critique of Orientalism that illustrates how colonial powers of the West reduced Eastern societies, its peoples, and practices to essentialized images of the Other that were discursively constructed in opposition to the West and thereby deemed to be inferior, exotic, and backwards. These constructions continue to inform Western ideas of what "authentic" India is and should be, namely a chaotic but mystical place where a pre-colonial past overshadows the postcolonial present and cultural Otherness is defined against the Western Self (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Lozanski, 2010). In speaking to the rise of yoga in the West, Brown & Leledaki (2010) argue that "Orientalist perceptions not only persist, but loom large in the Western psyche" (p. 129) when questions about yoga's origins, lineage, and authenticity emerge. Yet while Western yogis might perpetuate Orientalist imaginings of India as a poor, timeless, and exotic place, many hold up the yoga as practiced in India as superior to, and more pure than, that practiced in the West. For those who follow the Ashtanga style, traveling to India offers the chance to practice their preferred type of yoga at its source, where it supposedly began and where it is believed to be a transformative experience. In this sense, Ashtanga yoga in Mysore is also a form of the "cultural Other" being consumed by Western yogis and serving as a reference point from which to define their own sense of Self. By practicing "at the source" and interacting with the Indian Other, however superficial

those interactions might be, Western yogis engage in the project of “identifying and elaborating the Self” (Lozanski, 2010, p. 743). As Singleton & Byrne (2008) note, many practitioners are concerned with “not only the authenticity of the practices they engage in but their own authenticity with regard to themselves and their place and purpose in the world” (p. 6). So not only are Westerners in search of an objectively authentic yoga in Mysore, they also pursue an existential authenticity that is largely defined within the binary of Indian asceticism versus Western consumption.

These twinned expectations of authenticity continue to be rooted in a rejection of modernity and the reification of ancient texts, disregarding both the hybridity of yoga and India’s postcolonial economic and social vibrancy. In his exploration of contemporary yoga, Alter (2004b) contends that yogic texts, such as Swatmarama’s *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, are “used to authenticate the tradition as a whole by virtue of being ‘ancient’ and authored by semi-divine sages” (p. 23) and to create a sense of a homogenized and historical continuity. This reliance on ancient texts, and a concomitant denial of any modern influences, prompts many yoga practitioners and scholars to dismiss contemporary yoga as inauthentic in regards to the Indian traditions from which it emerged. In this view, certain manifestations of yoga are “simply *phony*” in that they “speciously claim affiliation with a more or less ill-defined ‘tradition’ of yoga” while also being informed by modern physical cultural forms and practices (Singleton & Byrne, 2008, p. 4, emphasis in original). What is often missing from discussions about the historical authenticity of yoga is a recognition that yoga, as it is known and practiced transnationally, is now its “own cumulative tradition” (Jain, 2011, p. 23) that is best understood as a derivative and malleable practice bestowed with multiple meanings by its

practitioners. In an effort to capture a sense of authenticity grounded in “genuine” tradition, some Western yogis feed off of “the strangeness of the few Sanskrit terms they have learned” (Lieberman, 2008, p. 107) during practice, such as the names for certain postures like *trikonasana* (triangle pose) or *adho mukha svanasana* (downward facing dog). As Lieberman (2008) contends, Westerners are also seduced by the idea of yogic authenticity through the presence of incense, *kirtan* or Indian classical music, and recitations of “Namaste” and “Om”, superficial markers that provide a “veneer of sufficient authenticity to quell further investigation into what the authentic might actually be” (p. 107). This veneer of authenticity is also reflective of Orientalist imaginings of an exotic, spiritual, and pre-modern India. The perceived exoticism and mysticism of the yoga practice, fueled by visions of enlightened Indian yogis following ancient texts, contribute to Western representations of India that are mired in an unchanging past and fail to acknowledge the dynamic present.

Yoga From East to West

Existing literature about yoga is vast, and predominantly divided into three categories: 1) works devoted to yogic philosophies and foundational texts, such as the origins of Tantric thought (Odier, 2005), Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* (Bachman, 2011; Devi, 2007), and the Hindu epic *The Bhagavad Gita* (Easwaran, 2007); 2) research within the medical community concerned with yoga’s purported mental and physical health benefits, including its use in treating depression (Pilkington, Kirkwood, Rampes, & Richardson, 2005), cardiovascular disease (Pullen, Thompson, Benardot, & Brandon, 2010; Sharma, Sharma, & Sood, 2009), eating disorders (Douglass, 2009), and

Parkinson's disease (Hall, Verheyden, & Ashburn, 2011); and 3) popular, practical instructional guides written by acclaimed gurus (Iyengar, 1966; Jois, 2002), designed to facilitate a daily practice (Lee, 2002; Swenson, 1999), or aimed at a particular segment of the population, be it pregnant women (Freedman, 2004), golfers (Roberts, 2005), or people with bigger bodies (Kerr, 2010). It is only relatively recently that yoga has been examined as a physical cultural form with a complex history and contested interactions with forces, practices, and institutions outside of India (Alter, 2004b; De Michelis, 2005; Singleton, 2010; Strauss, 2005; Syman, 2010). Though its roots lie in corporeal and spiritual practices originating in India as early as 3300 BCE (Atkinson, 2010), yoga is now a "globally recognized bodily idiom" (Strauss, 2002, p. 217) reaching well beyond India but maintaining ties to its homeland through Western expectations that it is a more pure, traditional, and authentic practice when performed in India.

Of course, it is imperative to recognize yoga as "fundamentally an ingenious human construct" that is inherently "social and cultural, not transcendental" (Alter, 2004b, p. 15). Too often yoga is perceived as a static and detached practice cemented by tradition, when it is instead an active and flexible cultural form that has been shaped, adapted, and represented in different ways according to the temporal, cultural, and socio-political contextual conditions in which it exists (Samuel, 2007; Singleton, 2010). Given the premium placed on tradition, implying a privileging of yogic knowledge produced in India, many forms of yoga currently popular in the West are criticized for being mendacious and fraudulent. Offerings such as Power Yoga, Moksha Yoga, Anusara Yoga, and even the hugely popular Bikram style of yoga are creations of Western (post)modernity and the transnational dialogue between India and the West, yet they are

often dismissed as unworthy of serious study because they do not conform to the dictates of traditional yoga. However, as Singleton & Byrne (2008) argue, these phenomena “should not be dismissed or condemned simply on account of their dislocation from the perceived tradition” (p. 6). Acknowledging the cultural flexibility of yoga is thus crucial in understanding how it operates as a significant site of transnational exchange and contestation.

As De Michelis (2005) and Syman (2010) chronicle, *raja* yoga was first popularized in Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century as a sedate, non-physical spiritual practice focused on stilling and controlling the mind through meditation. Other branches of non-physical yoga include *bhakti* yoga (religious devotion), *jnana* yoga (the path of knowledge), and *karma* yoga (discipline of action). Taken together, these forms of yoga were viewed with suspicion by mainstream America because they were associated with an exoticized and dangerous East seen as a threat to Protestant-flavored religious and social orthodoxy (Schmidt, 2010). Nevertheless, the Western adoption of these practices, and a growing curiosity about Eastern spirituality in general, continued into the twentieth century spurred largely by the work of the American Transcendentalists, the advent and success of esoteric movements such as the Theosophical Society, and the rapid dissemination of printed materials designed to facilitate self-knowledge on the back of a developing self-help culture (De Michelis, 2007). Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), Indian yogis and scholars, are widely credited with introducing yogic thought to the West and for bringing together Eastern spirituality and Western esotericism to form a foundation for the emergence of transnational modern yoga (De Michelis, 2007; Syman, 2010).

American Pierre Bernard, an influential social radical and tantric yogi, built upon these early teachings and infused them with a spirit of hedonism by constructing a country club in upstate New York in 1918 that functioned as both a yoga retreat and a utopia of communalism replete with grand parties, circuses, and baseball games (Love, 2010). Rather than promote an ascetic yoga of self-restraint and inner contemplation, Bernard was a “guru of pleasure and encouraged a life lived to its fullest” (Jain, 2011, p. 21), perhaps setting the stage for the development of a unique, (post)modern American yoga culture.

Yet it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that movement-based *hatha* yoga caught on in the West, a category of yoga described by De Michelis (2005) as “modern postural yoga”, the practice of *asanas*, or physical postures, designed to strengthen the body, increase flexibility, and link the breath with movement. An article from the January 25, 1960 issue of *Sports Illustrated* quotes a yoga teacher from New York City commenting upon the recent rise of *hatha* yoga in the United States:

Ten years ago, I never dreamed that so many Americans could get interested in yoga. When I first came here most people laughed when they heard the name. I guess the trouble was they didn't understand it. Now it looks as if America will have as much effect on yoga as yoga does on America. (quoted in Brown, 1960, p. 62)

The teacher's observation speaks to the malleability of yoga, as he predicts a dialogic relationship between America and yoga that recognizes yoga's syncreticity and hybridity. As such, Singleton (2010) contends that modern postural forms of yoga—including such styles as Iyengar, Ashtanga, and Integral yoga—are the result of a “reframing of practices and belief frameworks within India itself over the last 150 years, in response to

encounters with modernity and the West” (p. 16). Influenced by “encounters” with Western physical cultural forms introduced via British colonialism, modern postural yoga came to incorporate elements of gymnastics, calisthenics, body building, and acrobatics (Singleton, 2010).

So the “transnational commercial yoga” (Fish, 2006) popular today in the West has its historical roots in India as an ancient system of unifying the mind, body, and spirit, but it is equally (if not more so) indebted to modern, Western forms of physical culture and exercise for its current appeal and commercial success (Fish, 2006; Singleton, 2010; Singleton & Byrne, 2008). Even Joseph Alter, a foremost scholar on yoga in contemporary India, admits that “Eugene Sandow, the father of modern body building, has had a greater influence on the form and practice of...modern *hatha* yoga...than either Aurobindo or Vivekananda” (2004, p. 28), the two Indian yogis most recognized as introducing yoga to the West. Of any form of physical culture then, yoga is perhaps the best example of the dialectic interactions between India and the West, the exchange and privileging of knowledge, and the creative adaptation of physical practices in response to changing contextual conditions (Samuel, 2007).

Ashtanga, Ants, and Authenticity

As a specific style of modern postural yoga, Ashtanga refers to the system developed and taught by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois and now promulgated by his daughter and grandson. Practitioners of Ashtanga yoga perform a series of physical postures (*asanas*) tied together by a set pattern of flowing movements (*vinyasa*), all the while linking movement with breath through a form of controlled breathing (*ujjayi*), contracting

specific muscle groups (*bandhas*) in order to increase the internal flow of energy, and maintaining a fixed gaze (*drishti*) to steady and still the mind (Jois, 2002; Smith, 2004). Most students of Ashtanga practice the primary series, a grouping of postures considered key for good health and longevity, while more advanced yogis will proceed to the second and third series. The entire Ashtanga system includes six series, although very few people are known to practice all the way up to the sixth series. According to Jois (2002), it is necessary to master one posture before progressing to the next one in the set sequence, so many practitioners will never advance past a certain point in their personal practice.

The philosophical base of Ashtanga stems from the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, recognized as a seminal text that prescribes the eight limbs of yoga as a holistic system to bring quiet to one's mind and achieve a state of union between body, mind, and spirit (Atkinson, 2010; Jois, 2002; Singleton, 2010). The history of the physical base of Ashtanga, however, is much murkier and open to a multitude of interpretations. In addition to Jois, the most influential figure in the development of the Ashtanga system was Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888 – 1989), a yoga scholar and Ayurvedic healer who taught physical education and yoga to young men at the Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore under the patronage of the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodiyar from the early 1930s to the 1950s. Under his leadership in the years before independence, Mysore became a “pan-Indian hub of physical culture revivalism” (Singleton, 2010, p. 177) in which yoga played a significant role in the growth of a masculinized and muscularized Indian nationalism to counter colonial discourses of male weakness and effeminacy. It was also during this time that Krishnamacharya and his students—including future yogic luminaries Jois, BKS Iyengar, and Indra Devi—elaborated a “radically physicalized”

(Singleton, 2010, p. 176) form of yoga characterized by a rigorous series of postures connected by a common linking sequence, what would later become the foundation for both Ashtanga and Iyengar yoga, two styles now very popular in the West. The yoga *shala* at the Palace closed shortly after Indian independence in 1947, but several of Krishnamacharya's students, most notably Jois, continued to teach yoga in Mysore and expand its reach to include foreigners. Important to note here is that Krishnamacharya's style of yoga was a "powerful synthesis of Western and Indian modes of physical culture" (Singleton, 2010, p. 23) framed within traditional philosophical understandings of yoga, not a uniquely and wholly indigenous Indian practice.

This is where the history of Ashtanga, of its authenticity as a "pure" Indian practice, gets muddy. According to Jois (2002), Krishnamacharya learned his system of yoga from a Himalayan guru named Rammohan Brahmachari who based it on a five thousand year-old text entitled *Yoga Kurunta*. The creation myth contends that Krishnamacharya discovered this ancient text in a Calcutta (now Kolkata) library and then taught it verbatim to Jois, who later insisted that the text fully detailed all of the postures and linking sequences that came to comprise the Ashtanga style (Singleton, 2010). Curiously, the *Yoga Kurunta* did not survive, as it was allegedly eaten by ants (Jois, 2002), and no extant copy now exists. Neither Krishnamacharya nor Jois ever transcribed the text, or passed it down to a student in the tradition of oral transmission common in the guru-disciple relationship. So while this insistence on a deep lineage, of reliance upon an ancient text guiding a modern practice, holds a sanctioned place in Ashtanga legend, it also functions as a means to infuse an artificial sense of authenticity into a practice that is not five thousand years old as claimed, but rather a creation of

modernity forged out of interactions with the West. As Singleton (2010) argues, invoking the *Yoga Kurunta* is used to “legitimize the sequences that became Ashtanga yoga” (p. 185), a way to circumvent the complicated and syncretic history of modern yoga and maintain a sense of rootedness in ancient Indian traditions and localized authenticity.

Yet the development of modern postural yoga as a whole, and its constituent styles like Iyengar and Ashtanga, was a project of hybridity, a product of the dialogical exchange between yogis such as Krishnamacharya motivated largely by nationalism, and the “physical culture of Western gymnasts, body builders, martial experts, and contortionists” (Jain, 2011, p. 21). Calling upon the *Yoga Kurunta* as the singular fount of Ashtanga knowledge is merely a convenient way to ignore the significant influence that Western forms of physical culture had on the emergence of modern yoga in India. The long-standing claim that ravenous ants destroyed the only copy of the text serves to reify the *Yoga Kurunta* and imbue it, and therefore also Ashtanga yoga, with a timeless and mysterious exoticism so attractive to Westerners seeking a “pure” yoga untouched by the vagaries of modern consumerism and commercialism. Perhaps indicative of this appeal to the Western imagination is a claim from Singleton (2010) that Jois put a name to his system only when foreigners became interested:

It is telling that according to one Mysore resident who studied these practices with Pattabhi Jois in the 1960s (and who preferred to remain anonymous), the name ‘Ashtanga Vinyasa’ was applied to the system only after the arrival of the first American students in the 1970s. Prior to this, Jois had simply referred to his teaching as ‘*asana*’. (p. 186)

According to accepted Ashtanga lore, a Belgian man named Andre Van Lysbeth was the first Westerner to study with Jois in Mysore (Smith, 2007; 2008). He spent two

months with Jois in 1964, later publishing a book on the breathing techniques of *pranayama* (Van Lysbeth, 1979) that led other Western practitioners to seek out Jois's *shala*. American David Williams arrived in Mysore to study with Jois in 1973, later organizing Jois's first trip to the United States in 1975 (Donahaye & Stern, 2010). Tim Miller, who met Jois in California in 1978, traveled to Mysore for the first time in 1982 and became the first Westerner to earn an Ashtanga teaching certificate from Jois (Donahaye & Stern, 2010). Other Westerners then began to seek official certification in order to teach the system in their home countries, open their own Ashtanga studios, and capitalize on the growing popularity of yoga. As listed on the official AYRI website, there are now currently 259 certified Ashtanga teachers across the world, including eighty-eight in the United States, twenty-seven in the United Kingdom, fifteen in Finland, seven in Japan, and six in Brazil (Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute, 2011).

In the West today, Ashtanga has gained a reputation for being both an intensely physical practice (a good way to get the idealized fit and trim “yoga body”) and an “*exotic, mystical, physically rigorous and decisively alternative to mainstream Western sports*” (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1256, emphasis added). Atkinson (2010) remarks that the fusing of Ashtanga with other fitness trends such as Pilates, aerobics, and tai chi has reduced it to yet another neoliberal fitness technology marketed and sold as effective for weight loss and body toning. Yet he also identifies Ashtanga yoga as a form of “post-sport physical culture” that values “human spiritual, physical and emotional expression” (p. 1251) and retains a sense of mysticism and exoticism that makes it attractive to many Westerners disillusioned with the competitive and achievement-oriented culture of Western sport and fitness. It is this propagation, and perpetuation, of Ashtanga's timeless

exoticism that lures Westerners to the AYRI and props up Mysore's yoga tourism industry. Yet it also contributes to the stubborn discourse of authenticity that ultimately reproduces colonialist imaginings of a romanticized India that valorizes a static past, ignores the modern present, and denies a dynamic future.

"The Beverly Hills of India": Mysore as Authentic India?

In his scathing critique of the commercialization of yoga, John Philp (2009) presents a biting portrait of Western yogis who travel to India in search of personal transformation and authentic practice. Writing with a marked sense of sarcasm, he offers the following:

Understandably eager for Western dollars, owners of the local yoga school, restaurant, and hotel will try to ease their guests' transition to Indian life by mimicking as best they can how things might be back home. Thus Westerners are assured an entirely inauthentic experience inside a hermetic bubble. It's a kind of Disneyland for yoga dilettantes, far removed from the daily grind. Without having any contact with actual Indians except their gurus and waiters, the pilgrims come away satisfied, even transformed. They've just gotten a taste of the 'real yoga', after all. (p. 26)

Yoga tourists making the journey to Mysore to practice at the AYRI are indeed searching for a taste of the "real" yoga and for a "real" Indian travel experience, but defined wholly on their own terms. Yoga tourism in Mysore can be considered imperialist in nature, as the Ashtanga practice, framed as pure and authentic in the minds of Westerners, becomes a commodity to be consumed and the AYRI becomes an entity to be conquered. The romanticism of authenticity is so fully ingrained within the Western mindset that for many tourists, "appreciating India does not require appreciating contemporary Indian

people” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1303). Like Philp’s Disneyland metaphor, daily life for the Western yogi studying at the AYRI is oftentimes completely removed from the realities of contemporary India constantly swirling and churning around them. With the exception of the instructors at the AYRI, waiters at the cafes, shopkeepers, the man selling coconuts outside of the *shala*, and the rickshaw drivers fighting for their business, Western yogis in Mysore rarely have any sustained, sincere contact with local Indians. Yet this does not prevent the tourists from feeling like they have engaged in transformative and insightful relationships, nor does it stifle their appreciation of the experience. This sense of “instant authenticity” (Maoz, 2006, p. 235) that is presented in an attractive, easy to consume package satisfies the tourist desire for meaningful interaction with the local population, but also serves to maintain distance between tourists and their hosts and amplify difference between the two.

An observation common to many of my interviews was the assertion that Mysore is not representative of the “real” India. Jill²³, a 37 year-old yoga teacher from San Francisco, summed up this attitude by remarking:

I feel like Mysore is nothing like India. I feel like Mysore is the Beverly Hills of India. I lived in Los Angeles for eight years, and I look around and I feel like I’m in Los Angeles many times. A dirtier Los Angeles. Bihar and Delhi are totally different stories. It took me four trips to travel around in India, and I think that was maybe a good thing to be a little bit more prepared and to hear people say, ‘oh, Mysore is not like India at all.’

While Jill appreciated the reassurance that Mysore offered an easier travel experience than other parts of India, the claim that it is “nothing like India” not only perpetuates narrow Western conceptions of what the “real” India is and should be, but also denies

²³ Pseudonyms are used for all interview participants.

cultural authenticity to Mysore's postcolonial present. She identified Bihar (the poorest state in India) and Delhi (the capital city with 16 million residents) as places indicative—for her—of authentic India, a designation perhaps based on assumptions of poverty and the chaotic confusion caused by extreme population density, two prominent representations of India common in Western tourism media (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005).

In her description of Mysore, Sharon, a 30 year-old marketer from Chicago, echoed Jill's thoughts and revealed being surprised by the city's modernity:

Some people have that attitude of 'why would you go to India? Unless there's a five-star hotel, I'm not going.' I mean, I feel like I'm in Beverly Hills in Gokulam. It's not the India that I thought of. It's totally Beverly Hills. There are BMWs, I hear car alarms. And then you'll see a shack and some burning trash. Well, it's a mix. But it's really affluent here.

Both Jill and Sharon likened Gokulam, and Mysore in general, to the wealthy southern California enclave of Beverly Hills, a comparison that fuels their argument that Mysore is not the India that they anticipated, and thus does not offer a real glimpse into Indian cultural authenticity. In rejecting Mysore as a "real" Indian city, they privilege pre-colonial and colonial conceptions of Indian authenticity that ignore current conditions of modernity, prosperity, and successful engagement with global capital. For Sharon, seeing imported BMW cars on the streets of Mysore completely shattered her expectations of what India is supposed to be. The affluence on display in Gokulam was at odds with her imaginings of India as a poverty-stricken, developing country struggling to catch up to Western standards of modernity. For Jill and Sharon, the BMWs and car alarms are not part of their definition of the "real" India. After all, as perceived by many Westerners, "in

‘real’ India, people sleep on the streets, senses are overloaded” and “real Indians are imagined as people who live simple lives and are happy with the few things they have” (Lozanski, 2010, p. 746).

Christopher, a 48 year-old community college professor, had a different take on his impressions of Mysore. Making his first visit to India and rather skeptical about what he would find, he remarked:

I was afraid it wasn't going to be exotic enough. That was my fear. Oh, it's going to be overrun by Westerners and I won't get any sort of authentic Indian experience. And I'm pleased to say that's not the case at all. There's plenty of Westerners here, and it's actually nice to have conversations like this. But, you know, it's deeply mysterious, it's hilarious, it's funny, it's great.

Christopher feared finding an India overrun by Western influence, afraid that his hopes for authenticity would be dashed by the presence of other Westerners and the trappings of Western commerce and materialism. Yet, although he seems satisfied in finding a “real” Indian experience in Mysore, his comments betray an underlying assumption of encountering an India that is still “mysterious” and different.

In addition to expectations of poverty, simplicity of life, and an exoticism missing in the West, what, then, is authentic India in the contemporary Western imagination, and where do these images come from? For many tourists, the recognition and admiration of authentic Indian culture refers to India's “ancient past instead of its modern present” (Korpela, 2010, p. 1306), suggesting that the Taj Mahal is more objectively authentic than the new glitzy shopping malls popping up all over the country. Yoga tourists thus might appreciate the history of the Ashtanga practice tied directly to Mysore, but the presence of such wealth and commercial activity in the city might disrupt their

expectations of finding a place largely unchanged since the colonial days of the Maharaja Wodiyar and Krishnamacharya. As noted by Lozanski (2010), there is also a tendency for travelers to India to ignore anything that interrupts the “dichotomy between Indian asceticism and Western consumption” (p. 746). Certainly for yoga tourists seeking the romanticized ideal of dedicated study and quiet contemplation, the visibility of conspicuous consumption amongst the Pizza Huts, car dealerships, and Reebok outlets counters their image of India as an ascetic land of simplicity and spiritual purity. It thus becomes difficult for many Western travelers to accept that authentic India is rooted in *both* the past and the present, that the “real” India can be found at not only the Taj Mahal, but the new shopping malls as well.

This discourse of authenticity centered on a static past and the rejection of the practices and technologies of modernity comes largely out of travel writings and discursive representations of India in both the Western and Indian tourism media. In his comparison of Western travel writings about India from the nineteenth century and those from the past decade, Bandyopadhyay (2009) identifies four common themes appearing in both contemporary and historic representations of India: 1) timeless India, 2) poverty, 3) exotic women, and 4) effeminate men (p. 28). Despite India’s rapid, post-independence rise to global economic prominence and its incredible cultural and ethnic diversity, it is still represented as an unchanging whole replete with stereotypical notions of the exoticized Other. In an earlier piece examining the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to India popular amongst Western budget travelers, Bhattacharyya (1997) concludes that the book “reinforces a very Orientalist view of India, where India is represented through images of its past glory and present exoticism” (p. 383). These representations continue

to be embedded within a colonial discourse that portrays India as timeless and primitive and relies on a definition of cultural Otherness framed against the Western Self (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Lozanski, 2010).

While the persistence of these tropes is indeed troubling, India has also experienced remarkable success at capitalizing on its perceived status as the home of ancient spiritual wisdom and alternative medicine, using these claims in both Western and Indian tourism media to fuel interest in India and draw tourists (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005). As India develops and markets itself as a global brand, the interactions between a “West craving cultural and spiritual authenticity” and an India “hungry for foreign capital” will continue (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005). Ironically, as Chakraborty (2007) notes, yoga and Ayurveda rose to prominence as symbols of a surging Indian nationalist identity and resistance to Westernization in the years prior to independence, but in contemporary times they “seemingly offer cures for the ex-colonists and for the late capitalist illness of modernity” (p. 1173). The proprietors of the AYRI certainly play upon this reformulation of yoga in order to offer foreigners the opportunity to “study at the source”, but they also use it to enhance their own financial wealth and social status.

Several of the American yogis spoke to this supposed dissonance between representations of spiritual India and the rush for Western-style capital accumulation so visible in Mysore, criticizing the local Indians for eschewing their traditions in favor of rampant materialism. Steven, a 54 year-old entrepreneur from Washington, DC making his second trip to the AYRI, was the most emphatic about this issue:

What's also fascinating being here is seeing the culture trying to move more to be like the West and have cars and tight jeans, and all of these Western things that apparently people think will bring them happiness. I see this frenzy to have more material goods here in Mysore, from the rickshaw drivers who seem to do anything to charge higher fares to Westerners and not taking local residents, to the crowds I saw in local department stores downtown with people just buying things like DVDs and appliances, to a young man in college who was envious of my Blackberry phone and asked if I would sponsor him in the US without even knowing who I am. Thus, I see a country where many are ignoring their spiritual roots to become more like the West.

By privileging spiritual wealth over material wealth and placing a moral judgment on India's increasing engagement with global capital, Steven reinforces the conception that India "is, was, and must always be poor" (Bhagavan & Bari, 2002, p. 99). He was disappointed in the local material "frenzy", assuming instead that Mysore should be a place of unspoiled spirituality where days are spent in yoga practice rather than in the commercial bustle of contemporary reality. While Steven can make this judgment based on his own attainment of material comfort (owning a Blackberry and having the financial means to travel to India), he denies local Indians the agency to pursue their own means of livelihood within a social framework that is often highly competitive, corrupt, and lacking in state support.

Conclusion: Reframing Authenticity

The search for authenticity, whether in objective or existential terms, is one of many reasons why Westerners travel to India to practice yoga. Those concerned with the objective authenticity of Ashtanga yoga come to Mysore to find the source of the practice, to receive teachings directly from the family lineage, and consume a product

they believe to be of superior quality than that offered in the West. This expectation of a historically fixed authenticity is, of course, further perpetuated by the AYRI itself and the sanctioned stories surrounding the origin and creation of Ashtanga yoga. Others seeking existential authenticity arrive in the liminal touristic space of the AYRI where the social norms and regulations of their everyday lives are temporarily suspended, they are free from the constraints of those norms, and they can “take advantage of the relative anonymity and freedom from community scrutiny” (Kim & Jamal, 2007, p. 184) that the *shala* provides. While these discourses of authenticity help to promote the Indian tourism industry, they also contribute to widening perceptions of difference that pit the abject Indian Other against the Western Self. It is within these perceptions that Western tourists shape an understanding of India as a country steeped in pre-colonial exoticism but beleaguered by its current march to modernity. Equating Indian cultural authenticity with poverty, spiritualism, and a rejection of Western materialism serves to valorize the past, dismiss India’s rapidly changing present, and maintain Orientalist imaginings of a still inferior India set in opposition to a superior West.

While the notion of authenticity, however defined, will continue to be important to tourists and tourism studies (Mkono, 2012), perhaps its application to yoga and yoga-related travel can be reframed to recognize its multiplicity of meanings and formations. Within the Ashtanga system, this means acknowledging the syncretic, hybrid, and fluid nature of the practice itself. Instead of holding fast to a sense of an objective and historically fixed authenticity propped up by reified texts, perhaps it is more productive to view the authenticity of Ashtanga yoga as a “cultural value constantly created and reinvented in social processes” (Olsen, 2002, p. 163). To counter the fixation on

authenticity that haunts yoga in the West in general, Alter (2008) suggests that we turn our attention away from questions of tradition and lineage and look instead at the performativity of yoga, at the numerous ways in which yoga can be experienced, expressed, and taught. As such, the embodiment and performativity of yoga “indexes the possibility, rather than the realization, of a ‘pure and authentic’ form of practice” (Alter, 2008, p. 47), maintaining the contextual fluidity of the practice and allowing it to change, shift, and grow ever more interesting in response to the unique conditions surrounding it.

Conclusion

Ponderables and Imponderables

One of my first acts of fieldwork for this dissertation was attending a public forum on the Commonwealth Games held at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi in July 2010, three months before the Games were due to begin. A host of local and national luminaries were present for the forum, including Suresh Kalmadi, the former (and now disgraced) president of the Indian Olympic Association and chairman of the Commonwealth Games organizing committee; Ayaz Memon, a renowned sports journalist; and Sheila Dikshit, the fiery chief minister of Delhi. Given the task of beginning the proceedings, Dikshit opened her remarks by declaring that there were “many ponderables and imponderables” to consider when thinking about Delhi’s state of preparedness for the Games (field notes, July 9, 2010). She refused to identify one, singular, overriding concern about the Games, saying only that it was imperative to deliver a successful Games not just for the benefit of Delhi, but for the entire country of India. Other issues of concern were simply beyond comprehension, worry, or control.

Reflecting on the process of researching and writing this dissertation—as well as negotiating daily life in India—I have come to realize that Dikshit’s memorable phrase is applicable to my own experiences over the past two years. Indeed, there are many ponderables to consider when looking back at the momentous task of completing a dissertation and learning from mistakes made, challenges overcome, and accomplishments celebrated. I gained confidence in my abilities as a qualitative researcher by conquering an innate shyness that made interviewing strangers an

unnerving prospect; I maintained a sense of self-awareness and tried to recognize operations of power throughout my fieldwork; I aimed to keep a theoretical and methodological flexibility in order to respond to shifting contextual conditions; and I produced four distinct studies of empirical sites that I believe to be interesting and significant. These were things, amongst others, that I regularly contemplated and could wrap my head around—my ponderables.

Yet there is also a multitude of imponderables to consider, and they are perhaps even more important in terms of my maturation as a scholar and the future directions of my work because their meanings remain elusive for me. They are the issues, emotions, and questions that are unresolved, enduring in my intellect and my psyche with little hope of easy and quick reconciliation. Moreover, some of my imponderables continue to reside in my body, informing my personal sense of embodiment and how I interact with other bodies. My personal imponderables—those things that continue to lie largely beyond my comprehension and control—have the potential to haunt me, yet they also provide an impetus of curiosity that will drive and shape my academic future. I am still curious about them because they are uncertain and have, in turn, left my sense of Self and embodiment so very unsettled as well. Three of my imponderables (and there are many more) present particularly strong demands for further exploration due to their relevance to the larger PCS project and the role of the body therein. They include: 1) struggling with the paralyzing fear that affected my presence and behavior in the field; 2) dissociating from my body while simultaneously trying to keep it at the center of my intellectual inquiry; and 3) acknowledging that my work did little to alleviate injustice and catalyze social change, and attempting to assuage the guilt attached to such a realization. I have no

answers for these issues, no solutions, no concrete explanations. At best, I wrestle with them and use that energy to ask new questions. At worst, they agonize me and perpetuate the cycle of emotional paralysis and self-reproach that has been difficult to break.

I will leave the imponderables for future deliberation, but will use this concluding chapter to briefly consider the question of internationalizing PCS—certainly a relevant issue capable of adequate contemplation—and to discuss some of the limitations of this dissertation project. I also identify several ideas for additional research in the hope that my work presented here is just the beginning.

Internationalizing Physical Cultural Studies

In addition to the specific empirical examinations of contemporary Indian sport and physical culture that aimed to deepen understandings of the ongoing dialogue between India and the West, this dissertation offered an attempt to take the philosophies and practices of PCS to India, a geographical and cultural context largely unexplored by scholars who align themselves with the PCS project. As such, I think my work holds the potential to serve as a means to start a broader discussion about where, how, why, and by whom PCS can/should be internationalized. Alexander (2008) identifies an increasing interest amongst cultural studies scholars in various aspects of South Asian (including Indian) cultures, people, and practices since the late 1990s, and this interest certainly includes elements of physical culture and sport. Bhattacharyya (2003) notes that the study of South Asian cultures has recently emerged as a distinct sub-discipline of cultural studies, echoing such themes prominent in the West as cultural production, consumption,

and the everyday lived realities of South Asian peoples. Numerous scholars have also spoken to the overall importance of recognizing and embracing cultural studies work in diverse, global, and non-Western contexts (Abbas & Erni, 2005; Ang, 1992; Chen, 1996; Fornas, 2010; Shohat & Stam, 2005; Shome, 2009; Wright, 1998). Yet these discussions are not immune to critical questioning and charges of a persistent Anglo-centrism that continues to gnaw at cultural studies and prevent its true internationalization (Fornas, 2010; Shome, 2009). Thus, I wonder the following: how can PCS, as a movement borne out of the influence of British cultural studies, internationalize itself but not become complicit in perpetuating Eurocentric views and the privileging of Western conceptions and expressions of cultural studies?

My concern about the international viability of PCS, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as India, stems largely from the work of Raka Shome (2009), who argues that the point of departure into the international continues to be the West. She suggests that current discussions about internationalizing cultural studies are often marked by a tension in which the framing of an international focus, “while attempting to break out of the North Atlantic axis, unwittingly, in its rhetorical framing, seems to slip back into it” (p. 699). The hegemony of English as the preferred language of knowledge production, pressure to publish work marketed primarily to British and American audiences, and the persistence of the Western origin story of cultural studies all function to uphold the “shadow of Anglo-centrism” (p. 707) that impedes the internationalization of cultural studies. Shome also recognizes that the current global economic and political interest in South Asia is informing a growing desire for cultural scholarship about, of, and in South Asia. This dissertation can be considered a product of that interest and desire, as my

move to India and my resulting work were prompted by professional opportunities provided by a globalizing India.

However, my presence in India and my resulting work are not enough to claim that I am/we are sufficiently and responsibly internationalizing PCS. I might have wandered across geo-political borders to open up the PCS project to new cultural contexts and empirical sites, but my inescapable positionality as a white American limited my ability to truly “de-westernize” or “de-eurocentrize” (Shohat & Stam, 2005) PCS. In recognizing this dilemma, I tried to make clear my intentions in this dissertation by adopting an approach that deliberately highlighted the idea that India and the West are “tethered geographies” (Reddy, 2006) and always will be. I tried to keep my own positionality and sense of self-reflexivity at the center of examination because of this tethering, and also because I cannot lay any claim to India beyond my own intellectual interest and a timely opportunity. I could not adequately contribute to the “de-westernization” of PCS because, simply, I am a Westerner of white European origin with only a superficial connection to India. I speak and write in English, I am undoubtedly aiming my work towards a Western audience, the framing of my entire dissertation project hinges upon a “North Atlantic axis”, and my success in this endeavor will largely be determined by a committee composed solely of Westerners. I certainly do not mean to devalue my own work or the guidance of my committee members, but I want to make the point that internationalizing PCS is about more than traveling to places deemed “different” or “foreign” or “unexplored” in the Western academic imagination. Merely imposing our Western Selves on such places will do little to craft a polycentric, multi-vocal, collaborative, multi-lingual—and thereby international—expression of PCS.

Rather, we need to seek out partnerships and collaborations between Western and local scholars when looking to internationalize PCS (Lincoln & Gonzalez y Gonzalez, 2008; Fornas, 2010). While I strived to enter into my work with a critical self-awareness of my positionality and its affect on power relations and interactions in the field, I could not decolonize the process of knowledge production because I was working by myself and was solely responsible for the collection, interpretation, and writing up of data. Had I been working collaboratively with an Indian scholar or in partnership with an Indian educational institution or organization, my work might have had more capacity to be polyvocal and able to engage with a wider swath of the population, perhaps then leading to a greater sense of community involvement and the opportunity to spark change. If we are serious about genuinely internationalizing PCS, as well as acting on its political imperative to identify and confront social injustice, we must initiate and cultivate “inter-continental contacts” (Fornas, 2010, p. 218) amongst fellow scholars, universities, NGOs, and other institutions working in complementary fields.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this dissertation extends the study of sport and physical culture in contemporary India into new empirical areas and offers a fresh angle on the ongoing dialogue between India and the West, it was limited in its reach in several notable ways. As mentioned above, I failed to adequately contribute to a process of decolonizing my research and could not interact with certain populations because of my positionality and lack of local collaborations. Thus this project was limited by its focus on upper and

middle class experiences of physical culture, from both the Indian and Western viewpoints. Future ethnographic work, conducted in partnership with local scholars, needs to explore the experiences and views of people otherwise excluded here, most notably the poor and marginalized. As such, there is room for the expansion of the empirical chapters I presented here, and important questions to ask might include the following: 1) what were the experiences of those displaced by the Commonwealth Games? 2) who has access to the Games' venues now, and how are they being used? 3) what do fitness and gymming mean for the working class and poor? 4) how is the yoga tourism industry affecting those who provide services to foreigners and whose economic livelihood largely depends on the promotion of yoga as a uniquely Indian practice? By opening up these topics to include those people with whom I did not interact and did not interview, this work can become multi-lingual and multi-vocal with a plurality of perspectives, making it richer, more in-depth, and a fuller representation of the particular issue at hand.

A related limitation was this project's constrained political efficacy and inability to intervene into operations of power relations on a scale that went beyond the individual. While I attempted to remain cognizant of the circulations of power between myself and the many people with whom I interacted during my ethnographic fieldwork, it was difficult to take this awareness to a macro level and directly intercede into institutional or societal inequalities, even though oftentimes they were highly visible. Trying to be self-reflexive helped me to remain sensitive to sites and practices of inequality and exploitation—and to recognize my own complicity therein—yet I also came to realize that I could do little to change or remove them (England, 1994). This ultimately left me

feeling unsatisfied and disappointed that my dissertation work was not more active and forthright in its political expediency. As such, I am left feeling that my work did not do enough to honor and engage with the political impetus of PCS. Catalyzed by the observation that kinesiology lacks a political voice (Andrews, 2008), PCS attempts to disrupt the asymmetries of existing power relations within physical culture. It advocates a “commitment to progressive social change” (Andrews, 2008, p. 57) through interventionist practices and the production of knowledge that is politically driven. While I certainly hold fast to a belief in progressive social change, I am not convinced that I adequately and passionately put it into practice through my research and work in India.

That said, there is a distinct need for physical cultural activism in India, particularly in the realms of developing grassroots community programs, providing opportunities for girls and women, and intervening to challenge the discourses of healthism and the fear of fat prevalent in the country today. Less than 6% of the Indian population under the age of 35 has regular access to sporting facilities and organized physical activity (Indian Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sport, 2007), family responsibilities and traditional gender expectations often prevent girls and women from participating in sport (Roy, 2010), and the collapse of the public health system has contributed to creeping neoliberal policies that underline the idea that health is a commodity to be purchased and consumed (Sengupta, 2011). These are just a few sites that demand political intervention and activism in the future, and they hold tremendous potential for sparking community action and social change.

Finally, this dissertation was limited by my own crisis of embodiment. I used the interlude chapter to address this crisis and offer thoughts as to how it might open up

discussion about radically embodied research and the role of the researcher body in PCS scholarship. In addition to causing personal pain, this crisis hampered my ability to access certain research sites, talk to certain people, and fully immerse myself in particular situations. Yet, for all that it limited, my struggle with embodiment also allowed me to see its potential as an instructive point for future work in terms of how we approach embodied research and define its parameters. Instead of shying away from placing my body at the center of inquiry, I want to welcome it. Perhaps with a bit of trepidation, but also with a willing curiosity. I hope to apply these ideas to continuing research on the dialogue between India and the West, whether empirically based in India or the United States. Much work remains to be done in India itself but there are also plenty of promising research sites in the West, whether it is exploring *kabaddi* tournaments in California (Meenan, 2010), joining a cricket team in Colorado (www.coloradocricket.org), or finding my inner Bollywood at Dhoonya Dance fitness classes in New York City (Vora, 2010).

Epilogue?

When I first started writing this dissertation, I envisioned concluding with a grand epilogue that would neatly sum up my experiences, offer heartfelt points of reflection, and describe the peaceful reconciliation of my relationship with India. Three trips to India later and a decision to remain committed to the relationship, I cannot offer such a tidy ending. I have learned to better manage my feelings of fear and anger, but the ubiquity of inequality and dehumanization remains emotionally paralyzing. I did indeed discover

how to make *roti* and a delicious *dal makhani*, as I endeavor to embrace my cultural surroundings and savor the vibrancy and diversity of India. Yet I still catch myself deliberately avoiding men and shielding my body from sexual harassment and physical advances. So there is change and acceptance, sitting (sometimes uncomfortably) alongside the lingering self-doubt and uncertainty. The relationship thus continues. And evolves. It may never end in a definitive and orderly way, and I have come to recognize the beauty and opportunity in that. After all, *yeh zindagi ek safar hai suhana*.

Appendix A

Theoretical Frameworks

Overview

This section discusses the theoretical frameworks that I utilized to think through, question, and wrestle with my chosen empirical sites. Rather than impose a rigid theoretical structure upon this project and rely on it to provide a pathway to interpretation, I preferred to retain a fluid theoretical vocabulary (Andrews, 2008) that allowed me to remember that social theory “does not determine how we see the world but helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306). Following Grossberg (1997), I used theory as a means to gain a more nuanced understanding of my observations and experiences within the various contexts in which they occurred, and I embraced the idea that theory is contingent upon the specific contexts and conditions of the empirical. As such, I was not in search of the “right” theory to magically make sense of the complexities of physical culture in contemporary India, but rather I looked to critically grapple with theories to discover what was useful, what was not, and what needed to be reworked in relation to particular contexts (Andrews & Giardina, 2008). In this sense, I relied on Slack’s (1996) contention that theory is a detour rather than a starting point in a cultural studies project, that we are never looking for an exact and seamless theoretical fit but instead we want to creatively and constantly work with theory to move towards greater understanding of what is actually going on in a given context. Once we achieve this understanding, then we can seek to intervene into the context and act strategically to change it for the better.

Addressed here are the various theoretical frameworks with which I engaged for this dissertation project. I maintained a general postcolonial lens throughout the course of my research and writing, as it was crucial for me to acknowledge the continuing relationship between India and the West in terms of operations of power and the dialectic exchange of practices, knowledge, and cultural products. To further examine the unique conditions of each empirical site and their surrounding contexts, I used the following theories to guide my work: 1) the notion of nationalism as a gendered act, informed largely by Chatterjee (1989), Derne (2000), and Mayer (2000); 2) neoliberalism functioning as doxa in contemporary India (Chopra, 2003) and the tangible, physical manifestations of neoliberal policies evident in urban Delhi as highlighted by Bhan (2009), Ghertner (2010), and Uppal (2009); 3) Foucault's (1995) ideas about corporeal discipline and power in relation to the performance and confirmation of social class status through regimes such as gymming and dieting; and 4) theories of objective (Lau, 2010) and existential (Kim & Jamal, 2007) authenticity applied to Ashtanga yoga practice and expectations of American yoga tourists traveling to Mysore, India.

Postcolonialism

Keeping in mind that PCS's relationship with theory is "necessary, yet ambivalent, and certainly unpredictable" (Andrews, 2008, p. 58), I began my theoretical wandering by detouring through postcolonialism as a useful lens through which to examine physical culture, the active body, and the ongoing dialogue between India and the West. Thinking through a postcolonial perspective encouraged me to remain

cognizant of sport's role as both an "idiom and technology for imagining and transforming the Indian body" (Mills & Dimeo, 2002, p. 109) and as a means to resist colonial corporeal politics. In postcolonial India the body remains an important discursive site for the construction and expression of particular subjectivities, so I wanted to look critically at how physical culture in contemporary India serves to perpetuate colonial depictions of the body, resist them, or create new representations indicative of neoliberal ideologies becoming so dominant in Indian society today.

An important consideration to note here is that my usage of the term postcolonial suggests a constant interplay between the conditions under colonialism and their continual legacies after independence, at both a local and global level. While the prefix "post" suggests an ending point, what comes after the colonial time period, it also implies a lingering relationship in which past effects of colonialism continue to inform the present and future (Bale & Cronin, 2002; McEwan, 2009; Quayson, 2000). For the purpose of examining my research questions, I preferred to employ the simple, yet instructive, definition of postcolonialism as a way of "criticizing the material and discursive legacies of colonialism that are still apparent in the world today" (McEwan, 2009, p. 18). Also heeding Bale & Cronin (2002), I worked with the understanding that "there is clearly no unambiguous division between colonialism and postcolonialism" and that "it is the challenge to the present and the future that are most important in postcolonial studies" (p. 3). Thus, there is not distinctly a "post" in my usage of postcolonialism in the sense of advocating a belief in the *end* of colonialism in India. The effects of colonialism are not locked in the past. The British have left and India has achieved the status of an independent nation, but the material and discursive legacies of

colonialism have not completely evaporated and continue to inform India's relationships with itself and the rest of the world. Therefore, much of the significance of postcolonial theory lies in the "continuing heuristic power" of certain colonial tropes that remain pertinent when transposed onto conditions of postcoloniality (Boehmer & Chaudhuri, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, I certainly agree with Hiddleston's (2009) claim that postcolonialism is a "broad and constantly changing movement" (p. 1) that requires diligent contextualization and an eye on the future as much as the past. Of course, we also must remember that there exist "multiple postcolonialities" (McClintock, 1992) and multiple experiences of the postcolonial condition, so it is impossible to capture a singular truth of postcolonialism.

Defined by Quayson (2000) as a "studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects" (p. 2), postcolonialism is also about destabilizing the dominant discourses of imperialism and challenging the production of knowledge controlled and regulated by the Global North (McEwan, 2001). It is a way to contest the conflation of modernity with Europe and resist the "continued privileging of the West as the 'maker' of universal history" (Bhabra, 2007, p. 2). As Young (2001) reminds us, Western and non-Western thought were never distinct entities, but were always already in dialogue with one another and were dialectically related and mutually constitutive. Yet Chakrabarty (2001) also suggests that there exists "asymmetric ignorance" within the field of postcolonial studies in which scholars from the Global South feel compelled to read a wide variety of Western texts on the subject, but Western scholars feel no such obligation to "know" texts from the Global South (Chakrabarty, 2001). So inequalities of knowledge production and assumptions of Western superiority

continue to exist, even though postcolonialism—as an intellectual movement—seeks to call attention to, and ultimately remove, such inequalities.

An underlying assumption of various strands of postcolonial thought is that discourse and ideology are just as important as material conditions when identifying the effects and legacies of colonialism (Boehmer & Chaudhuri, 2011; Hall, 1996; Krishna, 2009; McEwan, 2001; Quayson, 2000; Said, 1978; Young, 2001). Said's influential work, *Orientalism* (1978), catalyzed this recognition of discourse, as he argued that the idea of the Orient was a Western construction meant for consumption in the West, a discursive production that manufactured an ideology of Western superiority and non-Western inferiority that contributed to the legitimization of imperial domination. Similarly, and drawing upon Foucault's notion of discourse as a bounded means for representing particular kinds of knowledge, Hall (2002) identifies the difference between "the West" and "the Rest" as a result of a pervasive and persistent system of representation that frames the non-West as inferior to the West. Power imbalances between Western and non-Western countries are embedded within a system of knowledge dominated by Western constructions, and these knowledges (economic, political, social) in turn construct representations of both the West itself and developing countries. For Hall, the crucial point is that these terms don't mean anything on their own. Their meanings are created through the constructed discursive difference between them and their connection as related elements in the same discourse. Acknowledging that, once produced, the discourse of "the West/the Rest" had very real material effects, Hall speaks to the power of discourse by suggesting "that is what makes the discourse of 'the West and the Rest' so destructive—it draws crude and simplistic distinctions and

constructs an oversimplified conception of ‘difference’” (2002, p. 60). While a narrow concern with representation and text might expose postcolonialism to the critique of being too far removed from the material realities of millions of people living in situations of poverty and repression (McEwan, 2001), it is nonetheless imperative to uncover how certain discourses contribute to ideas of difference and are used to sustain unequal power relations.

Amongst contemporary scholars, there is a general agreement that Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak comprise the “holy trinity” of postcolonial studies, as they are the most influential theorists working in the field today (Krishna, 2009; Young, 2001). Said largely built the foundation for postcolonial theory with *Orientalism* (1978), and later expanded his ideas about the connections between cultural domination and Western imperialism with *Culture and Imperialism* (1994). Bhabha credits Said for shaping his own work, including *The Location of Culture* (1994) in which Bhabha introduces such key ideas as hybridity and mimicry. He also offers the concept of ambivalence to postcolonial studies in suggesting that both the colonizer and the colonized possess impossible desires—the colonizer wants to fully know the native and the colonized wants to replace the colonizer, but both desires remain thwarted and unrealized. As Krishna (2009) notes, Bhabha is often criticized for implying a world in which colonialism is over and done with, thereby ignoring the ongoing inequalities between the Global North and South. Spivak, as the only female member of the trinity, makes an important contribution to the evolution of postcolonial studies by focusing on gender and examining the double subjugation of women by imperialism and by patriarchy. She “conceives her postcolonial critique as necessarily always feminist”

(Hiddleston, 2009, p. 152) and self-identifies as working from feminist, Marxist, and deconstructionist viewpoints. For Spivak (1995; 1999), the postcolonial is a product of a culture of imperialism, while the subaltern exists outside of this culture and whose position is unheard by the postcolonial. Her work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1995), is perhaps her most famous piece and argues that the subaltern cannot speak in a manner that matters because the subaltern is not adequately represented by academic knowledge and dominant history. Admittedly, her writing can be difficult to penetrate, but she continues to provide significant contributions to cultural studies, literary criticism, and critical feminism.

Both Said and Spivak were also active in the Subaltern Studies Collective (SSC), an affiliation of scholars interested in the histories and cultures of postcolonial South Asia. The SSC was formed in 1982 by a group of historians led by Ranajit Guha, who argued that a history of India documenting the experiences of ordinary people in their everyday lives had never been attempted due to the dominance of knowledge produced from the perspective of the Western and Indian elite (Bates, 2007; Guha, 1989; Hiddleston, 2009; Krishna, 2009; Prakash, 1992). The SSC utilized the term “subaltern” to refer to “the people” and to differentiate the masses of South Asia from the elite. They took the phrase from the writing of Antonio Gramsci and approached their work from a Marxist viewpoint that sought to represent the subaltern as “resistant to appropriation by colonial and nationalist elites” (Prakash, 1992, p. 9). Guha (1982; 1989), in particular, made moments of peasant defiance and rebellion central to understanding the subaltern’s role as subjects of their own history and not just merely objects of colonial domination. The subaltern is thus constructed as a political subject and historical actor with a

powerful sense of agency. In this sense, subaltern studies is largely about power and the processes by which certain groups gained it and utilized it over others (Beverley, 1999; Dube, 2004). In addition to Guha, Said, and Spivak, other prominent members of the SSC include David Arnold, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee.

Subaltern studies is often criticized for contributing to Orientalist essentializations of the “native” Other, for ignoring issues of gender, and for romanticizing resistance by imbuing the subaltern with an unrealistic amount of agency (Beverley, 1999). Likewise, the broader theoretical framings of postcolonialism are faulted for placing too much emphasis on representation and discourse at the expense of tackling problems of material inequality so visible in many postcolonial societies (Hiddleston, 2009; McEwan, 2001). Postcolonial scholars also tend to write exclusively in English, facilitating the continued hegemony of Eurocentrism in knowledge production and consumption and casting postcolonial work farther away from its subjects of inquiry (Shome, 2009). Perhaps the most pressing critique comes from Krishna (2009), who argues that “the dominant mood produced by postcolonial theory is one of ironic resignation and apathy” (p. 118). For postcolonialism to survive as a viable and useful theoretical framework, this sense of apathy must be replaced with an energetic focus on the future, with calls for activism and social change that use the past to better the future for all those living in postcolonial contexts.

Gendered Nationalism

Like all other nations, India is largely an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) tied together by the shared practices, values, and beliefs of its citizens. The topographic, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of India makes a singular definition of the Indian nation impossible (Dutt, 1998), yet there exists a distinct sense of Indianness and collective national identity that is often powerfully expressed and embodied in and through sport and physical culture. Hobsbawm's (1990) contention that "the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people" (p. 143) certainly applies to the Indian condition, and is perhaps multiplied in its scope as the national cricket team carries the aspirations of over a billion people. Yet, because it is a socio-political construct, nationalism is rarely benign and carries with it constantly changing meanings in response to shifting contextual conditions. It is thus important to examine the creation and deployment of a gendered Indian (sporting) nationalism rooted in masculinity and a male power that regulates the female body and promotes the assumption that the Indian nation remains the domain of men. Derne (2000) argues that "male power has become central to most forms of contemporary nationalism in India" (p. 238), so the body has the capacity to function as a material and discursive site for the performance of the nation, a performance that is highly gendered and ultimately serves to control the female body.

In postcolonial India, cricket is about "bodily competition and virile nationalism" (Appadurai, 1995, p. 25) and has become a means by which Indian men create and experience identities of maleness and Indianness (Dimeo, 2004). This is not surprising, as

the reimagining of the postcolonial Indian nation in the wake of independence and economic liberalization has depended on “powerful constructions of gender” (McClintock, 1995, p. 353) that identify men as the defenders of the nation and its traditions. The needs of the postcolonial nation have largely been associated with “male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests” (McClintock, 1992, p. 92), while the anxieties presented by modernization and globalization are displaced onto women’s bodies and practices through the twinned discourses of female protection and masculine aggression (Oza, 2006).

Chatterjee (1989) suggests that nationalism in India is a male discourse about women in which women lack the ability to speak. It is a discourse “which assigns women a place, a sign, an objectified value; women here are not subjects with a will and consciousness” (p. 632). The anti-colonial and independence movements emphasized the reinvigoration of the hetero-masculine body in response to colonialist depictions of the male Indian as weak and effeminate, but this movement offered a “very limited liberation for women” (Derne, 2000, p. 241). Even Gandhi, who criticized Hinduism for treating women as mere “playthings”, offered a vision of the nation in which women’s roles were restricted to wives and mothers (Alter, 2000; Derne, 2000). Within the nationalist imaginings of an independent India, the female body was a repository of morality, purity, and a dominant Hindu conception of culture and spiritualism that needed to be protected (Daiya, 2008; Oza, 2006). Expounding on the dichotomy between the material and spiritual that informs Indian nationalism, Radhakrishnan (2005) writes the following:

The Indian nationalist project, constituted to a large extent through India’s colonial experience with British nationalism, was based on a set of inevitably gendered dichotomies. The essential inner world, the domain of women,

contained the essence of Eastern superiority and was the site on which the nation was imagined. This inner sphere, therefore, was to be protected. (p. 269)

The outer/inner distinction is a powerful ideological dichotomy that places the material domain—external, beyond control, ultimately unimportant—against the spiritual—internal, essential to national identity, true reflection of Indian Self (Chatterjee, 1989). Indian culture resides in the internal spiritual domain, where it is considered to be superior, beyond Western influence and the most important element of the collective nation (Das Gupta, 1997). The inner, spiritual world belongs to women, and it is the duty of men to protect, regulate, and control it in order to safeguard the genuine identity of the nation.

An important part of protecting the nation and maintaining its local identity in the midst of globalization is the imposition of a traditional moral code onto women and the female body. The moral code used to protect the Indian nation is based on narrow notions of masculinity and heterosexuality in which women's subjectivity is framed as pure and vulnerable and the female body is expected to display ideals of modesty (Mayer, 2000). The modest, pure, spiritual woman is thus the legitimized, hegemonic norm representative of an Indian nation that calls upon its culture, and the protection thereof, to differentiate itself from the West and the forces, institutions, and practices of globalization. Indian women are expected to be modern, but “not so modern as to transgress into ‘Westernized’ modernity” (Oza, 2006, p. 31) and thereby engage in immoral and immodest behaviors and activities. In contemporary India then, it is men who have the power to protect the nation, its culture, and its modesty by controlling the female body and female sexuality. This nationalist discourse “connects the control over

the female body with the honor of the nation” (van der Veer, 1994, p. 113) while simultaneously celebrating the ability of the hyper-masculine body to embody the strength and virility of the nation.

Neoliberalism

My use of theories of neoliberalism in this dissertation stems from Chopra’s (2003) suggestion that, in contemporary India, it is neoliberalism that functions as doxa, meaning that the tenets of neoliberalism—privatization, rationality, individualism and self-interest, the retrenchment of the state—have become an “unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were the objective truth...across social space in its entirety” (p. 421). As India steadily moves into the doxa of neoliberalism, a dominant assumption has arisen that globalization and liberalization are frameworks for enabling positive change and growth across the country. India’s recent neoliberal development strategies were spurred by a series of political and economic reforms instituted in the early 1990s designed to intensify India’s encounter with global capital, liberalize its economic policies towards free market capitalism, and shed its image as a cumbersome and isolationist bureaucracy hesitant to welcome foreign investment (Chopra, 2003; Oza, 2006). The significance of these reforms was a “radical loosening” of controls and regulations (Oza, 2006, p. 11) that expanded the consumer lifestyle economy and led India into an age of neoliberalism in which the free market began to supersede the post-independence welfare state initially championed by India’s leadership (Pedersen, 2000; Topolova, 2007).

The expansive policy changes focused on liberalizing the Indian economic structure as a whole by privatizing public enterprises, creating business-friendly labor laws, and opening India's financial sector to foreign investment. As such, they heralded a shift "from an inward-oriented, state-led development strategy to a policy of active reintegration with the world economy" (Srinivasan & Tendulkar, 2003, p. 2). This specific shift within the Indian context echoed the general widespread pattern of neoliberalism, a term used to describe the global economic move away from state-led interventions and government regulation of the marketplace towards free market principles emphasizing privatization, corporatization, and individualism (Grossberg, 2005; Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is thus, in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices whose supporters are bound by a fundamental opposition to Keynesian demand-side fiscal policy and push for the deregulation of business and the market (Grossberg, 2005). As Harvey (2005) explains, the core of neoliberal theory rests on the presupposition that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Thus the focus becomes a radical individualism (Grossberg, 2005) that is positioned in direct opposition to social collectivity and community welfare provided by the state.

It is this emphasis on the individual and the resulting shifts towards privatization and self-interest that has made neoliberalism such a significant political and social ideology as well as an economic policy. Those who promote neoliberalism argue that the free market is the most rational and democratic system available in the contemporary world, so therefore "every domain of human life should be open to the forces of the

marketplace” (Grossberg, 2005, p. 112). What gets lost in this simplistic reasoning is the recognition that free market capitalism and liberalizing economic reforms hold tremendous potential to accentuate, not mitigate, socio-economic inequalities and conditions of poverty. Nowhere is this more evident than in India today (Deaton & Dreze, 2002; Nagaraj, 2000; Pedersen, 2000; Rizvi, 2007). As is apparent within numerous other neoliberal contexts (Silk & Andrews, 2006; Wacquant, 2007), so too in India the urban and rural poor become pathologized and demonized for their very poverty, for not taking advantage of the opportunities seemingly afforded to them by what Friedman (2004) refers to as “the great Indian dream”. It is their perceived indolence, rather than any widespread acknowledgment of existing socio-structural impediments, that justifies the neoliberal governmental policies which intensify, rather than ameliorate, the exclusion and marginalization of India’s impoverished masses (Baviskar, 2006; Bhan, 2009; Rao, 2010). Another possible effect of neoliberalism’s focus on individualism, to be felt particularly acutely in India, is a rising tension between the individualistic pursuit of capital gain and the traditional obligations of family and communalism still so important in daily Indian life (Netting, 2010; Radhakrishnan, 2009).

The financial gains derived by India’s move into neoliberalism have largely been experienced by the capitalist elite, and the country’s widely touted economic growth has failed to relieve levels of extreme poverty that affect hundreds of millions of Indians. Not only have India’s poor and working class been circumvented by the new modes of education and employment that accompanied the globalization of the Indian economy, but they have also suffered from attendant price increases across various consumer sectors (Spencer, 2010). In 2008, a research report from the World Bank revealed that

although the percentage of the Indian population living on less than \$1.25 per day (the international marker for the poverty line) fell from 59.8% to 41.6% between 1981 and 2005, the growth of the population in general meant that the numbers of people living below the poverty line actually increased from 421 million to 456 million over the same time period (Chen & Ravallion, 2008). So it is important to recognize that neoliberal policies contribute to rising inequality by strengthening the financial power and political influence of the capitalist and middle classes, excluding the poor from educational and job opportunities, and promoting a rampant individualism that denies basic welfare to the masses. Moreover, we must remember that neoliberal development is based on “the underdevelopment of the vast majority of people” (Ahmed, Kundu, & Peet, 2011, p. 3), so addressing the complexities and nuances of neoliberalism becomes a crucial part of theorizing and enacting social change.

Corporeal Control and Discipline

Far from being a biologically determined fact of nature, the body is a socially constructed entity that is influenced, adapted, and reproduced according to distinct social relations and structures. The significance of the body touches nearly every facet of individual and collective existence, from the basics of birth and death to complex identities and subjectivities. As Bourdieu (1990) reminds us, corporeal experience is “part and parcel of one’s whole relation to the world” (p. 157). These relations are contingent and contextual, as meanings of the body, and the ways in which it is understood, change in response to changing times (Dimeo, 2004). For Foucault (1995),

the body is also at the center of the conceptualization, operation, and reproduction of power. Individual bodies that comprise the social body are made by, and continuously carry, modern power through such disciplinary techniques as surveillance and panopticism. Foucault asserts that “it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission” (1995, p. 25). In the shift from sovereign to modern power, personal and social control became centered on the disciplining of both the individual and collective body. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1995) illustrates how docile bodies—those that are subjected, used, transformed, and improved through various technologies—are created through the use of space, the selection of certain activities, panopticism, and the careful organization of time. Weaved throughout Foucault’s framework is the supposition that power and knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent. New ways of thinking emerge alongside struggles for power, and the body serves as the central locus for the modern technologies of power that regulate and control society.

The application of Foucauldian theorizing to the study of sport and physical activity has become increasingly popular in the past twenty years. Andrews (1993), Cole (1994), and Rail & Harvey (1995) offered three of the earliest calls for an examination of Foucault’s work in relation to the active body and disciplinary processes evident in physical culture. In summing up why Foucault is such a significant theorist for the study of physical cultures, Maguire (2002) states that it is his “ongoing concern with the connections between the body, power, knowledge, subjectivity, and social management” (p. 293) that makes his ideas so relevant to the critical sociology of sport. Toby Miller (2009) seeks to synthesize Marxist and Foucauldian understandings of sport by arguing

that “the notion of sport as a technique of the self that is equally a technique of domination makes sense” and that cultural theorists of sport must search for the “political technology *and* the political economy of popular subjectivity” (p. 190, emphasis in original). Shilling (2003) further expounds on the centrality of the body and power in Foucault’s work, suggesting that “the body for Foucault is not simply a discourse, but constitutes *the* link between daily practices on the one hand and the large scale organization of power on the other” (p. 66, emphasis in original). This link is important for scholars of sport and the active body, as power relations and the unequal operations of power (and their effects on the body) are crucial issues in the organization and experiences of physical culture.

Foucauldian frameworks have been employed to explore a wide variety of empirical sites, sometimes mixed with other theoretical approaches such as critical feminism. Amongst a long list of others, some of these works include Shogan’s (1999) study of discipline and docility in high performance training, Johns & Johns (2000) analysis of surveillance and subjectivity in elite sport, Chapman’s (1997) look at the controlling effects of weight for female rowers, Chase’s (2006) examination of how female rugby players negotiate multiple disciplinary processes, and Barker-Ruchti & Tinning’s (2010) article on women’s artistic gymnastics and technologies of dominance that shape the experiences of participants. Other empirical sites of Foucauldian analysis have included coaching (Denison, 2007), the fit pregnant body (Jette, 2006), Wii video games (Francombe, 2010), and the gym and fitness club (Dworkin, 2003; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Building upon this existing literature, we can thus suggest that the Foucauldian disciplinary regimes regulating the body in post-liberalization, neoliberal India include gymming, dieting, and medical technologies such as liposuction and cosmetic surgery. Per Foucault (1995), the young, middle class Indian body is subjected to normative values and judgments in and through gymming and the consumption of health and fitness. If you do not have the “right” body—currently defined in India as slender and toned—you are judged as being physically and morally inferior to those who do possess the “right” body. Ultimately, the body internalizes the disciplinary techniques and the moral discourses attached to them, becoming a self-controlling entity governed by the individual self as well as the regulatory gaze of other bodies and social institutions.

Authenticity

For the purposes of this dissertation project, I chose to use theoretical understandings of authenticity that are rooted in critical tourism studies. Authenticity has long been an issue of interest for scholars of tourism due to its central place in the expectations of travelers. First introduced into the sociology of leisure and tourism through the work of Dean MacCannell (1973; 1976), it has received steady attention from a variety of theoretical and empirical standpoints (Cohen, 2007; Lozanski, 2010; Mkono, 2012; Olsen, 2002). The central debate surrounding the very idea of authenticity is its existence. As MacCannell (1976) suggests, modern society is often deemed inauthentic and alienating, driving people to travel away from their daily existence in order to seek out and experience the authentic since “reality and authenticity are thought to be

elsewhere” (p. 3). Yet, as he also argues, this touristic quest is always ultimately a failure because the commodity-driven tourism industry stitched into market capitalism is itself an expression of modernity and produces a false touristic consciousness (Kim & Jamal, 2007; MacCannell, 1976). In response to this rather bleak proclamation, other scholars have posited that authenticity in travel does indeed exist and continues to be an important expectation for tourists (Cohen, 2007; Mkono, 2012; Olsen, 2002; Wang, 1999). Even though it is criticized as being a “slippery” concept with a heterogeneous usage that contributes to confusion over its meaning and application (Belhassen & Caton, 2006, p. 854), authenticity operates within numerous frameworks, the most prominent of which are objective, constructivist, and existential definitions of the term.

Objective authenticity refers to the genuineness or realness of tangible things such as buildings, artifacts, or events (Chhabra, 2012; Lau, 2010), while constructivists view authenticity as something projected onto objects by tourists and/or the tourism media, thereby creating various versions of authenticity for the same objects that are dependent upon particular, constructed interpretations (Wang, 1999). Chhabra (2012) summarizes this relationship by explaining that objective authenticity “advocates pure, frozen, original, made by locals and genuine versions of heritage while the constructivist notion advocates the influence of capitalism and commercialization of genuine authenticity” (p. 480). While it is imperative to acknowledge the inescapable influence of consumer culture and capitalism on tourism, many scholars also now recognize that the expectation of objective authenticity continues to be of primary importance to travelers (Chhabra, 2012; Kolar & Zabkar, 2009; Ramkisson & Uysal, 2010). Antique hunters and souvenir shoppers want the “real” thing when purchasing goods while abroad, and many tourists

trust that the traditional dance performances, camel festivals, and crafts fairs (all common in India) are genuine and grounded in a rich cultural and artistic history. Rather than dismiss such attachment to a hopeful, yet probably misguided, objective authenticity, theorists are now embracing its complexity and fluidity (Chhabra, 2012) and exploring the ways in which the expectations for, and definitions of, objective authenticity impacts the travel experience for various groups of people.

The emergence of the existential viewpoint draws upon the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger and suggests that authenticity is a temporary human attribute signifying being true to one's self, transcending everyday social norms, and reveling in the freedom of self-expression that travel experiences can often engender (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 2000). The idea did not generate from tourism scholarship, but rather from a long philosophical tradition—rooted in work by Hegel, Kant, Heidegger, Sartre, and Rousseau amongst others—questioning what it means to be human, to be happy, and to be one's true self (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). It is only within the past fifteen years that the notion of existential authenticity has become prominent in tourism literature, with significant contributions from Wang (1999), Taylor (2001), Steiner & Reisinger (2006), and Kim & Jamal (2007). Drawing heavily on various philosophical definitions of the Self, much of the existing literature on existential authenticity focuses on the freedom of travel, the spatio-temporal liminality of the tourist experience, and liberation of the Self when allowed to develop new social relationships, explore new social worlds, and engage in new experiences that are not constrained by public roles and responsibilities. It is therefore an interesting concept to utilize when examining non-commodified or participatory relationships between the tourist and the

objective environment in which she/he is temporarily existing and expressing the Self. As such, it can help further understandings of the social meanings of tourism and how authenticity can operate as a mediating force between Self and Other.

Mkono (2012) argues that the concept of authenticity functions as a “Eurocentric grand narrative” (p. 482) and is therefore helpful in identifying ongoing processes of Othering, something certainly of concern when questioning how Western perceptions of cultural authenticity in India can operate as discourses of power that reinforce difference and reify a nostalgic past. Crucial to understandings of authenticity that deal with the potentially exploitative and imperialistic nature of tourism, particularly in former colonized countries, is Said’s (1978) critique of Orientalism that illustrates how colonial powers of the West reduced Eastern societies, its people, and practices to essentialized images of the Other that were discursively constructed in opposition to the West and thereby deemed to be inferior, exotic, and backwards. These constructions continue to inform Western ideas of what “authentic” India is and should be, namely a chaotic but mystical place where a pre-colonial past overshadows the postcolonial present and cultural Otherness is defined against the Western Self (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Lozanski, 2010). Yet while Western yogis might perpetuate Orientalist imaginings of India as a poor, timeless, and exotic place, many hold up the yoga as practiced in India as superior to, and more authentic than, that practiced in the West. So there is certainly an ongoing tension between the search for authenticity and the process of Othering within the tourist experience in contemporary India, making theories of authenticity relevant and important to explorations of the meanings and effects of tourism in India today.

Appendix B

Research Methods and Methodology

Overview

The worst dengue fever outbreak in decades. Multiple physical assaults. Threats of a terrorist attack. Relentless sexual harassment. Fear. Anger. Resentment. These were just some of the situations and emotions that I confronted during the course of my dissertation fieldwork in India. I mention them here not to be dramatic or overstate the challenges of my research, but rather to highlight the unpredictability of socio-political conditions and the need for methodological flexibility in the field. Throughout my time in India, I consciously strived to situate my own physical, researcher body in and among the bodies of others, both Westerners and Indians, in order to better experience and understand the “politics of gender, exclusion/inclusion, and corporeality acting upon, and within,” my chosen empirical sites of physical culture (Giardina & Newman, 2011, p. 49). However, I did not adequately anticipate the complexity of those interactions, the difficulty of gaining access to certain sites, the emotions involved, the effects on my own body, and the need for a hyper-awareness of the contextual conditions constantly swirling and changing around me. While I was attempting to understand and interpret my empirical sites through the use of such research methods as critical discourse analysis and ethnography, I feel it imperative to emphasize that it was impossible for me to fully know the Indian Other. The concept of the Other is, of course, mutually constitutive, as I distinguished my researcher Self against the Indian Other with whom I interacted and whom I observed (Gaines, 2005), and I was concurrently viewed as a white, female,

Western Other by the local host population. This relationship between the Self and the Other is complicated, and it reinforced my positioning as a privileged, outsider body. My ability to interact with those Indian bodies living a reality of poverty and to place my Self within those spaces of immense inequality was compromised by my class status, gender, ethnicity, and nationality. So here I recognize a gross shortcoming in my research, as I could not access those spaces where social change and intervention are most needed. In accepting that “reflexivity *can* make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them” (England, 1994, p. 250, emphasis in original), I came to understand the limitations of my researcher Self as a privileged, white Westerner to not only engage with marginalized bodies, but also to help rectify unequal power relations and social inequities.

That said, this appendix outlines the methods and methodologies I employed in my dissertation project. Driven by the contention that research is “not an innocent or distant academic exercise” but a dynamic activity that occurs in a “set of political and social conditions” (Smith, 1999, p. 5), I aimed to maintain flexible, yet rigorous, research practices encompassing multiple qualitative methods across four different empirical sites of investigation. Here I offer an explanation and justification of those methods, an account of my positionality in the field, my thoughts about research validity and objectivity, and descriptions of the methodological specifics for each chapter. Overall, per Richardson (2000), my goal was to generate a crystallized interpretation of the phenomena under scrutiny. Not a singular and inalienable truth, but rather a self-consciously partial and contingent understanding of sport and physical culture in contemporary India tempered by considerable self-reflection and self-awareness.

Mixed Qualitative Methods and Multiple Sites

The emerging field of PCS embraces a comprehensive and integrative approach that engages in post-positivist research focused on the historical, social, and cultural analysis of the active body (Andrews, 2008). The epistemological and ontological complexity of physical culture reflects the very multiplicities of corporeal experience and representation prevalent in contemporary society, thereby providing PCS with a vast array of empirical sites in which to contribute to a holistic understanding of physical activity and the body. To counter the privileging of rational, closed scientific inquiry, PCS advocates qualitative and interpretive methods of research that critically examine the body “through rigorous ethnographic, autoethnographic, textual and discursive, socio-historic treatment” (Andrews, 2008, p. 49). PCS thus strives to disrupt the fixed boundaries of rigid epistemology, theory, and methodology, instead creating an interdisciplinary (perhaps even antisciplinary) field of fluid and pliable boundaries that employs a multiplicity of research methods to interrogate the empirical (Silk, Bush, & Andrews, 2010). This mix of multiple theoretical concepts, research methodologies, and empirical sites allows PCS to cross disciplinary boundaries and inform knowledge production in a variety of fields.

My research approach, or overarching methodology, is grounded in a commitment to these philosophical and political tenets of PCS, while my chosen methods were “tools” used to help me make sense of the empirical sites selected for investigation (Saukko, 2003). I deliberately adopted a qualitative, mixed-methods strategy in order to honor the complexity of physical culture and create a project that can be considered an example of

“bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). By embracing the stance of a bricoleur, I was better able to recognize the complexity of my research sties by using multiple methods to “uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and reexamine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687). Instead of shying away from a multiplicity of perspectives, theories, and methods, I wanted to view my research as active rather than passive in order to continually construct and reconstruct my methods in response to ever-changing, and oftentimes personally challenging, contextual conditions (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Rather than remaining tied to a prescribed, scientific, and “correct” method, I understood the need to be flexible and creative in my research because the interactions with my empirical sites were bound to be “complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and, of course, complex” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317). Such conditions negate prescriptive and rigid research planning.

This “methodological eclecticism” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 274) allowed me to embrace a number of research techniques that complemented each other in an effort to craft nuanced understandings of the four chosen empirical sites. My fieldwork elements, informed by participant observation and semi-structured interviews, cultivated a direct relationship with those being researched (England, 1994), while the discursive analysis provided insights into the production of meaning and the operation of power across multiple sites (Fairclough, 1992). The “ebb and flow” of mixed methods research facilitates the search for more thorough engagements with social phenomena, as artificial dichotomies are removed and the researcher is better able to move across methodological boundaries (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This versatility is particularly important when the topic of study involves contemporary groups of people, as Brosius (2010) notes that

“the complexity of people’s movements in their everyday lives requires an equally flexible methodology” (p. 36). People’s lives are not static, so the research methods used to engage with them should not be static, but rather dynamic, responsive, and open to change.

My mixed qualitative methods included: 1) articulation; 2) critical discourse analysis (CDA); and 3) the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. These methods were meant to build upon each other to create integrative and multidimensional analyses of the topics at hand. They also speak to Saukko’s (2005) delineation of the methodological basis of cultural studies that combines contextualist investigations of social conditions and structures of power, critical readings of discourses that mediate our experiences, and understandings of lived realities.

Articulation

Influenced by the practices of British cultural studies formulated at the Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and grounded in the work of such scholars as Hoggart, Williams, Hall, and Grossberg (Andrews, 2002), PCS adopts a radically contextual approach to understand how forms of physical culture relate to the ever-changing social contexts from which they develop. The concept of articulation, functioning as both a theory and method, is vital to this understanding. Specific physical cultural forms and events can only be fully comprehended “by the way in which they are *articulated* into a particular set of complex social, economic, political, and technological relationships that comprise the social context” (Andrews, 2008, p. 56, emphasis in

original). There are no predetermined, guaranteed relations between physical culture and the broader context within which it exists (Slack, 1996; Andrews, 2008). Rather, it is up to the PCS researcher to examine under what particular contextual circumstances a connection can be made (Andrews, 2002).

Within a cultural studies framework, the term articulation has a double meaning. On one hand, it refers to a way of expressing something, of conveying and communicating information in a coherent manner. On the other, it also means to bring things together, a coupling, or a suture. For cultural studies, this double meaning is important as it imbues the term articulation with a rich connotation that captures the need for clear expression when explaining how social elements are coupled together. Articulation thus refers to a temporary connection between two elements that do not necessarily go together. It is an arbitrary closure, as the connection can be broken (disarticulated) or re-made under different circumstances (rearticulated). In this sense, articulation is not only a connection, but also the process of creating connections (Slack, 1996). The meaning or identity of an articulation is not guaranteed, nor is it determined before placing it in relation to the broader forces that make up the social context at any given time. Meanings are contingent upon the conjunctural moment, suggesting a dialectical relationship between context and forces in which “identities, practices, and effects generally constitute the very context within which they are practices, identities, or effects” (Slack, 1996, p. 125).

Articulation is thereby a theory in that it helps us understand the condition of the social world via contextualism and allows us to identify points for intervention through dis/rearticulation. It is also the “methodological face” of a radically contextualist theory

(Grossberg, 1997), in that it offers a means of “doing” and “practicing” cultural studies. As Slack (1996) suggests, articulation also has political and strategic levels that foreground power relations of dominance and subordination, identify sites for intervention, and provide mechanisms for shaping interventionist action within specific contexts. In reiterating the contingency of meaning and contextualism, articulation further develops cultural studies as a project dedicated to understanding, and responding to, the specific socio-political expediencies of the contemporary moment. It also provides a strategy for understanding social formations and meanings without falling into reductionism or essentialism. In describing articulation, Hall (1981) suggests that it plays a role in both explaining and catalyzing cultural transformation. It is not merely an explanatory tool, but rather a means to ignite social change. By realizing that discourses are not naturally unified and that their constitutive elements do not automatically belong together, we can then entertain the possibility of rearranging those elements into new connections. What we take to be common sense and unbreakable meanings of cultural forms and practices are actually the outcomes of a politics of articulation that, under other contextual circumstances, could be rearticulated in different ways. This temporary juxtaposition creates a contingent unity of discursive elements that do not necessarily have to go together.

Driven by a commitment to radical contextualism, PCS has effectively incorporated articulation as a guiding theoretical and methodological concept. Also, as suggested by King (2005), Andrews (2008), and Andrews & Giardina (2008), articulation can function as a political strategy in the exploration of, and intervention into, sites of

injustice within physical culture. King (2005) reiterates the importance of physical culture when considered as a space for social change. She argues:

While the study of sport *in itself* is a rather limited intellectual and political enterprise, it is nonetheless necessary to carefully excavate the nature, meaning and organization of the phenomenon under analysis, for it is at this level that the articulation of social forces is experienced and at which they might also be transformed or rearticulated. (p. 34, emphasis in original)

While the study of only four empirical sites of Indian physical culture in itself might be a rather narrow means for confronting colonialist assumptions, neoliberal ideologies, social inequities that displace the poor, and narrow conceptions of national and gender identities, it does offer meaningful insights when articulated into these and other social, political, economic, and historical contexts.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Building on the methodological foundation of articulation is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Articulation's focus on contextualism can meld with CDA's concentration on discursive practices to open space for exploring the interrelationships between power, ideology, and discourse in a specific conjunctural moment, leading not only to increased understanding but also to means of spurring intervention and emancipatory change. The overriding aim of CDA is to examine "how political and social inequalities are manifest in and reproduced through discourse" (Wooffitt, 2005, p. 137). As a critical method for the analysis of complex webs of texts, social practices, and representations, CDA folds neatly into the political impetus of cultural studies with its

explicit agenda to advocate on behalf of oppressed groups and use academic research to further social change (Burdsey, 2007; Fairclough, 1992; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; Wooffitt, 2005). Discourse is always implicated in power and it is one of the systems through which power circulates in society, so it is crucial to examine the knowledge that discourse produces because it can become taken for granted and legitimized as a natural “truth” (Hall, 2002).

CDA is an interdisciplinary form of critique that draws upon three traditions of analysis: text-based, social practice (macro-sociological), and interpretations of everyday life (micro-sociological). Text analysis alone is not sufficient, as it fails to uncover the links between texts and the socio-cultural processes and structures that produce them (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). As Gee (1999) explains, all situations are composed of a combination of language, activity, materiality, politics, and socio-cultural practices. Each of these components gains meaning from the others and each one simultaneously gives meaning to all the rest, suggesting a dialectical relationship between discourse and the social world. CDA thus purports that “language-as-discourse is *both* a form of action through which people can change the world *and* a form of action which is socially and historically situated” (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 62, emphasis in original). It is here that articulation and radical contextualism can intersect with CDA to craft an analysis that considers discourse as a socially embedded construction with meanings that are not predetermined or guaranteed, but rather dependent on the specific socio-historic conjuncture within which it is located.

While there is a general lack of agreement on a definition of discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 1999; Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002), most scholarship describes it

as a particular manner of talking about, representing, and understanding the world. Central to this characterization is the use of language to enact social practices and to produce knowledge. Hall (2002) recognizes that discourse is about producing knowledge through language, but he also argues that discourse itself is created through what he terms “discursive practice”, or the “practice of producing meaning” (p. 60). He goes on to conclude that “since all social practices entail *meaning*, all practices have a discursive aspect” (p. 60, emphasis in original). By engaging in a critical analysis of discourse (language), the social practice within which it is created (context), and its discursive practice (making meaning), we can identify where and how particular power relations are endorsed and reproduced through discourse. Identifying and contextualizing the interconnecting social forces, practices, and institutions that help produce discourse at a particular moment become key tasks in the analysis. Discourses are always changing in response to broader forces, subject to a process of reconstruction, and never set within rigid boundaries (Gee, 1999). Meaning is thus situated in specific social and cultural practices, and it can change within and through those practices.

An important point to make here is that there is no one way to conduct CDA. It is not a method that follows a step-by-step formula laid out in a manual. Rather, it is a flexible approach to studying texts that is grounded in critical theory and a recognition of the social and political construction of knowledge and meaning (Wilson, Holdsworth, & Witsel, 2009). For the various chapters of this dissertation project, I used CDA to study the following types of texts:

- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Cheer Queens newspaper advertisement
- Video broadcasts of WWE matches
- Official WWE website
- Online forums for discussion and blogs
- Reports from NGOs and government agencies
- Commonwealth Games pamphlets and brochures
- Commonwealth Games DVD featuring short promotional films
- Television broadcasts of Commonwealth Games opening and closing ceremonies

I took notes on the video and television broadcasts and created transcripts that I later analyzed for recurring themes and concepts. Websites were tracked over a period of time (three to six months) to note changes in their discourses; for example, the tone of the Great Khali's profile on the official WWE website changed from focusing on his intimidating physical stature and immense strength to highlighting his relationship with Jinder Mahal once Mahal was introduced as a WWE superstar in April 2011. Overall, my use of CDA centered on critical readings of the above texts, identifying key themes, grouping texts together under those themes, additional readings to isolate significant examples of dominant and counter discourses, and final selection of examples to incorporate into the broader analysis. I did not use any computer software or program to assist me in these tasks, as I found it easier to fully engage with the material manually, and in a more tangible sense, with color markers in hand and piles of newspaper articles

on the floor. While this technique might have hampered my productivity, it allowed me to have a visual and tactile relationship with the data.

Ethnography

While CDA is an important and effective means of social research, it alone cannot account for the complexity of subjective experiences. Noting this limitation, Fairclough (2003) admits that CDA is “one analytical strategy amongst many” and it is often necessary to use it “in conjunction with other forms of analysis, for instance ethnography or forms of institutional analysis” (p. 2). We cannot reduce social life merely to language, to suggest that everything is discourse. To do so would be to ignore the materiality of existence and the very real lived consequences that discourses help to produce.

In order to gain a grounded sense of how elements of physical culture in contemporary India are produced, represented, and experienced in the dynamic realities of the lived world, I used ethnographic methods to complement my work with articulation and CDA. As Saukko (2003) argues, the practice of ethnography is a beneficial research method because it offers a means to consider how the contexts in which an empirical phenomenon is located are mediated by certain social processes, forces, and power relations. I aimed to utilize a critical ethnographic approach (Silk, 2005) that honored the potential of ethnography to be a collaborative and participatory project leading to the co-production of knowledge by both the researcher and those being researched. This “ongoing moral dialogue” (Denzin, 2002, p. 486) between the researcher and the researched can help facilitate honest work that is truthful to different lived

realities, acknowledges multiple voices, and encourages reflection on the Self as researcher. Following Sklar (1991), Bolin & Granskog (2003), and Howe (2008), I also wanted to maintain an acute awareness of the role of the body in ethnographic research, whether it be to inspire the production of embodied knowledge, blur the division between emic and etic through an appeal to common corporeal experience (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003), or place a reflexive physicality at the center of the research process.

In order to explore the lived experiences of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, gymming, and yoga tourism, I used the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The overarching goal was to capture these research sites through thick description (Geertz, 1973) that involves “both being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experience for oneself these events and the circumstances that give rise to them” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 2). The act of writing field notes is crucial to participant observation, and I tried to remain diligent in keeping detailed notes after each session of fieldwork. These notes, whether written during the course of my observations (attending Commonwealth Games events) or shortly afterwards (after each yoga practice), served as a comprehensive record of my observations, interpretations, and ongoing analysis during my time in the field. Some of my notes were written by hand in a small notebook and others directly on my computer, but eventually all of my notes were transcribed and stored on my personal laptop computer and organized by day, time, and activity. Of course, I absolutely acknowledge that my writing, whether descriptive field notes or theoretical analysis, presents a “*version* of the world” and functions “more as a filter than a mirror reflecting the ‘reality’ of events” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 66, emphasis in original).

Therefore I tried to maintain reflexivity throughout my fieldwork by recognizing that I played a central role in the production and interpretation of data gathered through observation and interviewing (Silk, 2005). I could not remove myself from these processes, and I tried to remain cognizant of this by writing up my personal thoughts, concerns, and questions on a regular basis.

In addition to participant observation, I also conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with adults directly involved in the consumption of gym and fitness culture and the Ashtanga yoga tourism industry in Mysore. It was important that I understand the participants' perspectives of these phenomena and not just my own, so interviewing was an appropriate and productive means to do so. The interview can help to corroborate observations documented in field notes, make interpretations more credible, and contribute to a more personal and dynamic picture of what is happening on a daily basis, what it means, and why it is significant. Amis (2005) suggests that interviews "offer a depth of information that permits the detailed exploration of particular issues in a way not possible with other forms of data collection" (p. 105), and Patton (1990) argues that interviewing "begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 278). I felt interviewing could offer these meaningful perspectives and provide me with a way to deepen my personal interactions and relationships in the field. I opted for the semi-structured or "general interview guide" (Amis, 2005) format, in which I worked off a list of set questions but approached the interview as more of a conversation, allowing the participant to speak freely and ask questions of me as well. This strategy was particularly interesting with the university

students, who were very curious about me, my educational background, and my opinions of India, so I was conscious to answer their questions honestly and openly.

Protection of the research participants is paramount (Amis, 2005; Silk, 2005), so I used pseudonyms for all interviewees to protect their privacy and maintain anonymity. Copies of the IRB consent form were provided to all participants before the interview, and in the case of the university students interviewed for the chapter on gym and fitness culture, consent forms were offered in both English and Hindi. All participants had a chance to review the set questions before the interview so they had a general idea of what to expect. Reciprocity was also an issue, and I framed this as making myself available and honest in sharing my research, my information, and my ideas on the relevant subject matter. I did not pay the participants, but in a few cases I offered to pay for a cup of *chai* or a simple lunch when the participant wanted to meet at a restaurant rather than a private space. As a matter of reciprocity, I also ensured all of the participants that I would send them a copy of my dissertation if they were interested. Equalizing power relations (Chacko, 2004) and making the participants feel comfortable were important considerations as well, and the methodological specifics for each chapter detail how I aimed to accomplish this.

Positionality

I am a female, white, middle class, married American. This is the Self I brought into my research, a Self that I cannot extricate from my everyday interactions and relationships. My researcher Self is also female, white, and Western—a positionality that

affected how I was perceived and received in the field, how I was able to gain access to research sites, and how my understandings of the Indian Other were constructed and challenged (Mazzei & O'Brien, 2009). Remaining aware of my own positionality, both in and out of the immediate field of research, was a crucial part of being reflexive, of constantly reflecting on my personal biases and assumptions that affected my analysis, interpretation, and writing. The process of recognizing my positionality and maintaining self-reflexivity was particularly important given my placement as a white, Western woman in an Indian context where patriarchy is difficult to escape. While my gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class status are features of my researcher Self that affected my (in)ability to access certain sites and peoples, the ways in which I deployed them during my research were constantly in flux in response to the specific contextual conditions of the immediate situation. In this way, the mediation of my researcher positionality was an ongoing task that demanded the re-crafting of my presented Self and an appreciation of the differences between my positionalities and those of my research participants (Srivastava, 2006).

Realizing that I was “just as much the Other to my informants as they were to me” (Chacko, 2004, p. 60), I tried to massage the outward presentation of my researcher positionality in order to mitigate unequal power relations that placed me in a position of power over my interview participants. My field identities were “multiple and continually mediated constructs” (Srivastava, 2006, p. 214) that changed in response to how I anticipated I would be received by the interviewees. For example, for the yoga research in Mysore, I feared that I would be rejected if I came off as an overly intellectual, overbearing, and uptight researcher. I underplayed my role as burgeoning academic

scholar and instead introduced myself as a *student*, a deliberate nod to the popular yogic mantra that everyone is a student and we never stop learning. I did not highlight my position as a relatively experienced yogi (practicing for ten years), but rather chose to adopt the position of a supplicant in order to invert the power relations between researcher and interviewee by placing the knowledge with my participants (Chacko, 2004). I relied on the participants to share their knowledge with me and emphasized that their knowledge was greater than mine. Which was an entirely truthful position, as I had little experience with Asthanga yoga and had never been to Mysore before. By making myself vulnerable and admitting my beginner status, I was able to open up space with my participants and narrow the gulf of our different positionalities and power relations.

An issue of positionality especially relevant to my fieldwork in India was the gaze. The notion of the gaze is particularly important when exploring the interconnected questions of power, gender, and knowledge production (Garland-Thomson, 2009). Like anywhere, in India the relationships between foreigners and locals, men and women, and observers and the observed are complex and multi-faceted. The gaze can operate as an act of power and carries significant meaning regardless of who initiates it and to whom it is directed (Mulvey, 1975). Throughout my fieldwork, I had to negotiate a double-edged subjectivity as both the gendered oppressed and the racialized colonizer. I was the object of an oppressive male gaze seeking to dominate me as a woman, but I also engaged in colonial gazing as I traveled in India and confronted scenes of poverty, abuse, and discrimination that left me startled. I was both the target and perpetrator of gazes laden with assumptions of gendered, disciplinary, and normalizing power.

Victimized by the “obsessive ocularity” (Garland-Thomson, 2009) of the male gaze, I was also guilty of engaging in a colonial/ethnographic gaze that serves to perpetuate Western privilege and knowledge creation. The white colonial gaze is a “broadly construed epistemic perspective” in which the subject engages in a process of seeing without being seen (Yancy, 2008, p. 6). No matter how hard I tried to resist this gaze, it was suffused through my daily activities as I tried to hide myself and prevent uncomfortable interactions while simultaneously consuming the events and occurrences around me, all the while taking notes about it. This collection, interpretation, and representation of “data” also made me guilty of performing an ethnographic gaze (Smith, 1999) predicated on a hierarchy of power that denied an active subjectivity to those upon whom I was gazing. Taken together, the colonial and ethnographic gazes “accord their bearers a position of mastery and designate their objects as the site/sight of difference” (Columpar, 2002, p. 40). Thus, they perpetuate unequal power relations and heighten perceptions of difference, problems of which I was aware and strived to ameliorate, but which were difficult to completely overcome in the field.

While I felt the constant gaze of the Indian male upon my body, my white, Western gaze was equally working upon the bodies of the locals, implicating myself in a process of defining my own Self against the Indian Other in and through the exercise and management of power via the gaze (Maoz, 2006). Curiosity of the Other functions as a two-way relationship of power in which the gaze can work to establish positions of hierarchy. Whether distinctly ocular or expressed via mental perceptions, imaginary constructions, or visual images, the gaze is far from benign. To balance the power of my gaze, I attempted to simultaneously engage in a “self-reflexive gaze”, or “seeing oneself

seeing oneself” (Song, 2006). I saw myself gazing upon and consuming the Other, using my positionality to witness local daily life without becoming embroiled in its troubles. I also saw the gaze of the Indian male working upon my body in an assertion of dominance, but I rarely directly challenged this gaze. Perhaps reflexivity is not enough here, as it fails to confront the materiality of such operations of power, but it can at least contribute to a dialogue of acknowledging and problematizing the gaze.

On Objectivity and Validity

The act of conducting research, no matter the academic field, is not innocent or benign, and the validity of that research cannot be measured by its adherence to objectivity. As Guba & Lincoln (2005) convincingly argue, objectivity is merely a chimera, a “mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower” (p. 208). Traditional notions of objectivity, validity, and reliability are irrelevant due to the different ontological, epistemological, and political perspectives that individual researchers bring to the field. Language itself is a socially constructed entity that makes objectivity impossible, as the language used to report research findings is never transparent and is always grounded in particular frameworks of culture and power (Saukko, 2003).

Following Guba & Lincoln (2005), and in an effort to counter the growing presence of evidence-based research in the sociology of sport (Silk, Bush, & Andrews, 2010), I sought to engage with conceptions of quality and validity that recognize the positionality of the researcher in the field, acknowledge that understandings of social

reality are always partial and political, and honor efforts to join “the researcher with the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue” (Silk, Bush, & Andrews, 2010, p. 119).

Working with Saukko’s (2003; 2005) notion of multiple validities, I aimed to craft a dissertation project that approached the chosen empirical sites as complex and contradictory realities rather than as simple reflections of a singular, universal reality/truth that can be accurately and objectively captured.

Since empirical research in (physical) cultural studies is “structured by an interest in the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context” (Saukko, 2003, p. 11), it is clear that a singular validity is not sufficient. Instead, as Saukko (2003; 2005) asserts, we must work with multiple validities that are associated with particular epistemological perspectives. These validities include dialogic validity, deconstructive validity, and contextual validity (Saukko, 2003). Dialogic validity relates to the humanist drive to capture the lived worlds of people, maintain a polyvocality of numerous lived realities, and demonstrate a conscious sense of self-reflexivity. Within a dialogic approach then, validity is measured by “how well the researcher fulfills the ethical imperative to be true to, and to respect, other people’s lived worlds and realities” (Saukko, 2003, p. 20). Connected to a structuralist understanding of texts and discourses is deconstructive validity, which evaluates research in terms of how thoroughly it uncovers the ways in which social tropes have come to “pass for a ‘truth’ about the world” (Saukko, 2003, p. 20), and how deeply it expresses an awareness of how discourses mediate understandings of reality. Finally, in striving for contextual validity, researchers need to be sensitive to historicity and mindful that accounts of social phenomena are always historical and political. Contextual validity thus speaks to how

meticulously the research locates its object of study, as well as the research itself, in “the wider social, political, and global context” (Saukko, 2003, p. 34). These three validities interlace with one another to create a multidimensional and diverse understanding of research quality that better encapsulates the complexity of social realities.

Saukko is not alone in calling for new standards of criteria in judging quality and validity in social research. In offering seven points for evaluating quality research, Guba & Lincoln (2005) reinforce the point that a researcher’s way of knowing is “most assuredly tied up with” her relationships with the research participants (p. 209).

Therefore, research quality needs to be linked to the experience of the participants. From this, the following criteria become important: an awareness of positionality, a respect for polyvocality, establishing reciprocal rather than hierarchical relationships, contributing to human flourishing, sharing the perks of privilege afforded by a researcher’s position, and intense self-reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 209). Similarly, Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) suggest that research achieves quality and validity when it makes a substantive contribution to our understanding of social life, offers interesting and creative reading, expresses reflexivity and self-awareness through the voice of the researcher, and generates new questions by impacting the reader intellectually and/or emotionally.

Methodological Specifics

The following sections describe the methods I employed for each empirical chapter. The interlude—or my fifth, “unintended” chapter—is not included here because it is largely a personal story peppered with contextualized readings of the place of women

in contemporary Indian society, the construction of gendered fear, and the role of the researcher's body in PCS work. An unstated, yet crucially important, factor in all of the chapters was the simple act of *being* in India, living in its complexity, and recognizing that I was not there just for my academic work. I was not simply a "research traveler" (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 2) with a strict timetable and fixed research questions in need of quantifiable answers. Yes, I arrived in India with distinct ideas about my research and how I would spend my time, but my dissertation work was never the whole of my existence. In this sense, some of my most notable experiences and sharp observations were completely unplanned. So, I offer here descriptions of both my premeditated methods and those that spontaneously emerged in response to particular happenings.

The empirical chapters move along a methodological continuum with discourse analysis and articulation located at one end and ethnography at the other. Hence, the first chapter is more firmly rooted in discursive analysis while the final chapter incorporates more ethnographic techniques. The interlude chapter serves as bridge between the two "halves" of the dissertation, offering thoughts about embodied research as a means to transition from discourse to ethnography.

Chapter I

Cricket and wrestling are two of the most significant sporting forms in Indian society. Wrestling has a rich history and well-established tradition across the country, but especially in the north where it is associated with a holistic way of living that celebrates masculinity, connection to the land, and devotion to strict bodily practices (Alter, 1992;

1994; 1995). Cricket, of course, is the national passion laden with a multitude of socio-cultural meanings (Guha, 2002; Majumdar, 2004; Nandy, 1989). Ignoring these two sports in my dissertation would largely be unforgivable because of their importance within India, but I did not want to tackle each of them in separate chapters due to the prolific amount of previous work published on both cricket and wrestling. Ray (2008) rightly notes that cricket “monopolizes every bit of public adulation and resultant financial spin-offs” while other games and physical activities “languish in stepmotherly treatment” (p. 1637). It also dominates the scholarly literature on sport in India, creating a narrow view of Indian physical culture and limiting its very definition. While less has been written about wrestling in India, notwithstanding the abundance of Joseph Alter’s ethnographic work, I faced the daunting issue of access when contemplating researching and writing about wrestling. The wrestling culture in northern India is almost exclusively male, although a few female wrestlers from Haryana won medals at the 2010 Commonwealth Games (Deswal, 2010), and it is certainly a culture unaccustomed to the presence of foreigners. It would be incredibly difficult for me to forge relationships with key people and gain access to the sites necessary for an ethnographic exploration of contemporary wrestling as practiced in a place like Sonipat. Therefore, I knew that any research on wrestling would be done via critical reading and discourse analysis, a more detached approach and not personally embodied, but appropriate for my own particular positionality and the context within which I was working.

I first learned about the Pune Warriors Cheer Queens on the morning of March 23, 2011 as I was sitting at our dining room table drinking a cup of coffee and reading the *Times of India*. This was my regular morning routine, as I depended on the newspaper to

keep informed of national and local events (and the latest gossip from Bollywood). Flipping through the paper, I noticed a full-page color advertisement announcing the creation of the Cheer Queens with an illustrated depiction of their traditional costumes. I was immediately intrigued, not only by the novelty of the idea but also because it was clearly a reaction against the American-style cheerleaders utilized by every other team in the league. This advertisement thus served as the launching point for this chapter, as I began to think about representations of Indian national identity in and through Westernized and spectacularized sport forms such as the IPL.

Exactly when the Great Khali first entered into this thought process, I cannot remember. However, I had been reading a lot of Alter's work both on wrestling (1992; 1994; 1995) and yoga (2004; 2007; 2008), and I was struck by the ongoing evolution of Indian wrestling from a traditional physical cultural practice, to a standardized Olympic-style sport, to a performative spectacle housed within WWE via the body and character of the Great Khali. Considering that India is WWE's third largest market and matches are regularly shown on Indian television (World Wrestling Entertainment, 2011c), I came to realize that this most spectacularized, commercialized, and Americanized form of wrestling occupied a place of growing significance in the Indian consumer sporting landscape. Plus, professional wrestling can be a space rich with questions about identity, representation, masculinity, and resistance (Andrews, 2006; Atkinson, 2002; Deeter-Schmelz & Sojka, 2004; Mazer, 1990). So I began to wonder if the emergence of the Cheer Queens and the popularity of the Great Khali shared some overlapping themes focused on the construction and embodiment of Indian national identity within a dominant sporting framework of Westernization. If the Cheer Queens represented an

effort to infuse the IPL with a superficial, highly gendered, and nostalgic sense of Indian culture, what did the Great Khali represent as the lone WWE wrestler from India (Lakshmi, 2008)?

My research on both the Cheer Queens and the Great Khali relied primarily on discursive analysis of various contemporary media texts, including newspaper and magazine articles, television broadcasts, websites, blogs, and online videos.

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to witness the Cheer Queens in person, as the Pune Warriors were scheduled to play the Delhi Daredevils (my home team) in the last week of the IPL season in late May, a time which I had already planned to be back in the United States. I have also never seen the Great Khali in live action, as WWE did not make a stop in India during my time there. To compensate for the lack of direct engagement with my study “subjects”, I collected as much textual and visual information on them as I could.

For the Cheer Queens, this resulted in a critical reading of fifteen newspaper articles (there was not much coverage in either the domestic or international press), viewing videos posted on YouTube of the Cheer Queens performing (I was able to find ten such videos), and trolling for relevant websites/discussion forums/blogs that offered information and opinions about the Cheer Queens. The most consistent theme across all of these sources was the tension between Indian tradition as embodied by the Cheer Queens and a certain type of Westernized culture represented by the other cheerleaders, with strong subtexts related to the definition of “proper” femininity and the role of women in contemporary Indian society. Thus, I organized my information to focus on the

theme of Indian femininity and its relationship to national identity within the specific context of the IPL.

If the major theme surfacing from the Cheer Queens research was the embodiment of femininity, then the flip side emerged from exploring the Great Khali and the ways in which he represents a postcolonial Indian hyper-masculinity that sits in direct opposition to colonial images of effete, weak, and compliant Indian males used by the British to legitimize their rule. In addition to gleaning ideas from thirty-five articles from a diverse range of newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Times* (London), and *The Hindustan Times*, I also pored over the official WWE website to understand how the Great Khali's character was constructed and portrayed. I tracked this website for six months to note any changes in his characterization and attendant features such as his entry music and costuming. To gain a sense of how the Great Khali's masculinity, national identity, and role within WWE were expressed and promoted to a worldwide television audience, I watched the five official WWE videos available for rent that prominently feature the Great Khali:

- WWE Armageddon (2007)
- WWE No Mercy (2007)
- WWE Unforgiven (2007)
- ECW One Night Stand (2007)
- WWE Backlash (2008)

For footage that was not available in official video format, such as the Great Khali's world championship match and subsequent *masala*-flavored celebration, I turned to YouTube. For all video content that I watched, I made transcription notes of what the announcers were saying, reactions from the crowd, notable signs held by the audience (Crush the 8-foot cry baby!), interviews with the Great Khali, comments from his translator, entertainment devices (The Khali Kiss Cam), and significant match formats (the Punjabi Prison match). Needless to say, I learned quite a bit about professional wrestling by watching these videos and was often teased by my family for so enthusiastically embracing this task. Never before had I been very interested in professional wrestling, but I am now convinced that it is a fascinating, insightful, and incredibly flexible cultural form that can be approached from numerous scholarly standpoints.

Chapter II

I started collecting material related to the Commonwealth Games immediately upon my arrival in Delhi in June 2010, four months before the Games were due to begin. These materials consisted of newspaper and magazine articles, photographs of construction for the Games from around the city, and notes recounting informal conversations I had about the Games with various people such as our driver, our landlord, my husband's work colleagues, and even the occasional random rickshaw driver. I maintained these activities through the duration of the Games and in their immediate aftermath, eventually amassing a total of 310 print media sources drawn predominantly

from the newspapers *Times of India*, *The Hindu*, *Mint*, and *The Business Standard*, and also from the magazines *All Sports* and *Sports Illustrated: India*. These periodicals were chosen for their wide range of circulation within India, the diversity of their target audiences, and my ability to procure them on a regular basis, a seemingly simple factor but certainly not to be overlooked. Of course, I had to limit my readings to English-language media, which necessarily cut off a wide swath of possible sources. In addition, I was limited in my photographic endeavors by the tight security surrounding Games-related construction sites, such as stadiums, and also by the sheer impossibility of gaining access to sensitive spaces like squatter's camps set up near many of the sites. As such, I was disappointed in the relative lack of photographs that I was able to take in order to document spatial changes in the city.

My first venture into fieldwork for this chapter, beyond the periodic casual conversations, was attending a public forum in early July on the Commonwealth Games sponsored by the *Times of India* and featuring public figures such as Sheila Dikshit, the chief minister of Delhi, and Suresh Kalmadi, the head of the Games' organizing committee. The event was largely celebratory in tone, although a few voices raised concerns about the cost of the Games, "redeveloping" a part of the city (south Delhi) that was already the most developed, and vague plans for the future use of the stadiums and venues (field notes, July 10, 2010). It was this forum that made me question who the Games were ultimately for, as some of the panelists identified increased tourism as the most important legacy, some pointed to the beautification projects and revamped sporting facilities that would serve the burgeoning middle class, and others argued that the Games were meant to showcase India's athletes and solidify the country's sporting culture.

As the Games drew nearer, I made a schedule of events that I wanted to see and ordered my tickets online. I deliberately tried to include a wide range of events in order to experience as many of the venues as possible. Ticket prices for the opening and closing ceremonies were too high for my budget, however, so I had to settle for watching those on television (later the official audit report of the Games indicated that a large amount of tickets for the ceremonies were given away to VIPs, denying regular residents of Delhi and tourists like myself the opportunity to buy tickets at a reasonable price). On September 27, 2010, I traveled into Delhi to pick up my tickets at the main branch of the Central Bank of India, a long process that proved to be simultaneously frustrating and entertaining for numerous reasons. Suffice to say, my simple errand ended up involving sitting in the branch manager's office drinking *chai* for an hour, waiting for him to find a new ink cartridge for the printer, watching him physically print out each of my tickets from a stack of blank templates stored behind his desk wrapped in a rubber band, and then smiling innocently as he asked to see my notebook and read aloud the notes I had been taking during my wait.

My research strategy during the Games centered on attending events, traveling via public transportation (included free with the event ticket), observing all elements of the experience, and making field notes either in the moment or immediately upon returning home. I also kept a log of my fieldwork, noting the day, time spent, location, and specific activity. In total, I attended ten different events—gymnastics, netball, track cycling, squash, weightlifting, athletics, diving, boxing, rugby 7s, and men's hockey. I also had tickets to tennis, but was not able to attend because the public transport links were not efficient enough for me that day. Traveling across the city to see two events in one day

was a definite challenge. Factoring in travel time, attending events, chatting with Games volunteers, informal conversations in the stands, and tracking down souvenir merchandise (not easy, as it was virtually non-existent!), I spent approximately sixty-five hours directly engaged in this research. In addition, I spent at least one hour each night formally writing up my field notes and dealing with logistical issues for the next day.

Overall, my experience at the Games was impossible to generalize. Most days I was struck by the lack of people attending events—where was everyone? Lingering construction work and organization was occurring at most venues, and I even had to leave the gymnastics event early because I was very thirsty and the refreshment stands had not yet been set up (drinking from the water fountain was simply not an option). Security was suffocating, and I quickly learned to leave my coins, pens, water bottles, and lip balm at home. I admit to buying unauthorized, knock-off souvenir merchandise because it was a wonderful example of plucky, local commerce—quite obviously homemade wooden buttons painted in a shaky hand featuring the face of Shera the tiger mascot and sold for 50 rupees (about \$1). The men’s hockey final, pitting India against Australia, was an irresistible riot of Indian pride and excitement that I felt privileged to witness. I never could find the cultural programming supposedly taking place at Connaught Place. I was mistaken for a Canadian three times. And I will never forget the dismayed comment made by an Indian man sitting behind me at the diving venue; as the Indian diver received low scores for his final dive, the man sighed and said, “why must we always come in last?” The Indian athletes ended up performing extremely well during the Games, winning a total of 101 medals, including thirty-eight gold. As India gradually made its way to the second spot on the overall medal tally (behind only Australia), it was

interesting to notice the shift in the general public opinion of the Games. Before the Games—in the midst of all the charges of corruption, the delayed construction, the collapsed footbridge, the debates on cleanliness and hygiene, the rather insipid theme song, the presence of cobras and stray dogs in the Athlete’s Village, and the criticism coming from abroad—it seemed as if most Delhiites were highly critical of the Games. I had several rickshaw drivers tell me that they would rather see the money being spent on the Games go to schools and health care. Our driver, Somvir, had strong opinions about the Games and insisted that the officials involved were nothing more than corrupt politicians doing a disservice to the country. But these opinions changed tremendously once the Indian athletes started winning medals and the Games managed to proceed without any major mishaps or security threats. Somvir, once so dismissive of the Games, exclaimed to me after the closing ceremony, “India is number one!” Apparently a large haul of gold medals can go a long way in changing minds, at least temporarily.

My ethnographic engagement with the Games ended up feeling very scattered, with a noticeable lack of distinct and solid themes emerging from my research. I did not use a qualitative software program to code the collected data for this chapter, as the majority of my source material was in the form of original, tangible newspaper and magazine articles, reports from NGOs and government agencies, and printed information connected to the Games such as pamphlets and programs. Plus, my field notes were, admittedly, quite unfocused and did not produce any overriding central themes of note. I coded the source material manually and ended up with six piles of information, each connected to a particular key concept: 1) the displacement of the poor/slum demolition; 2) charges of corruption; 3) delays in construction and infrastructure problems; 4) athletes

withdrawing from the Games; 5) questions about hygiene and cleanliness at the venues and the Athlete's Village; and 6) criticism from the West. When placed in the broader context of Delhi's efforts to become a "world-class", global city in time for the Games, the stories of displacement and slum demolition claimed a prominent spot in my thinking as they are issues too often overshadowed by the "seductive discourse of development" (Swart & Bob, 2004, p. 1311) driving the hosting of sporting mega-events. So, I certainly wanted to concentrate on this side of the Games story.

To flesh out this focus, I returned to a basic question that remained relevant long after the Games finished—just who were the Games for? I had wondered about this during my fieldwork, as the working poor were excluded by virtue of high ticket prices at best and forced displacement from their homes at worst, the Indian middle class largely did not show up and became enraged by the continuing corruption associated with the Games, and very few tourists made the trip to Delhi to attend the Games. The Indian athletes performed very well, but no investment was made in grassroots sport programs and the facilities have been left underutilized and mired in ownership disputes, suggesting that the Games were never meant to inspire and expand Indian sporting culture. On a personal level, and gleaned from my experiences attending various events, the Games were not for someone like me—a foreign tourist but also a temporary expat resident of Delhi, and an American one at that. I had numerous interactions with people who expressed utter shock that an American would be interested in the Commonwealth Games and make the effort to attend, which was amusing yet puzzling. If not the average Delhiite, the rising middle class, the tourists, or the next generation of Indian athletes, then who really benefited from the Games?

Chapter III

In terms of negotiating emotions while in the field and acknowledging the consequences of those emotions, this chapter was the most insightful, yet also the most difficult. My original idea for this chapter was to explore urban gym and fitness culture in Delhi, specifically through the use of ethnography at a branch of Gold's Gym in Rohini, the middle class neighborhood on the northwestern edge of the city where I lived for the first six months of my time in India. I chose Gold's Gym because it represented a transnational fitness culture becoming increasingly prominent in India, replacing traditional physical practices and propagating particular visions of the ideal male and female body. I was curious about how a transnational fitness chain like Gold's Gym was being received in urban India amongst members of the upper and middle classes who could afford the luxury of a gym membership. How was the active Indian body being implicated in processes of globalization, neoliberalism, and commercialization? What does having the "right body" mean in India, and how are Western-style gym and fitness centers promoting and capitalizing upon these ideals?

To explore these questions, I signed up for a three-month membership at the Rohini Gold's Gym, located on the eighth floor of a new shopping center not far from our apartment. The total cost for three months was 8,000 rupees (about \$200), plus a 500 rupee (\$12) enrollment fee. This allowed me to work out at any Gold's Gym location around the world, but members were required to pay additional fees to participate in the group fitness classes such as yoga, spinning, and aerobics (field notes, July 26, 2010). Upon securing my membership, I began to visit the gym every day, rotating the times at

which I went in order to observe different patterns of gym usage and the various activities taking place there. Of course, it took me a few days to learn the unspoken rules of the gym—always sign your name in the book at the front desk, bring your own towel, the men wearing red shirts are employees but the ones in black are private trainers, only drink the water from the cooler in the foyer, and do not be alarmed when the locker room attendant hides your shoes. Rather than follow a set workout routine, I varied my time in the gym to better observe everything going on. One day I would spend significant time on the cardio machines, the next day I would take an aerobics class, and the next I might linger in the free weights area. I had confidence in my ability to “fit in” in the gym setting, even though my nationality and gender marked me as an obvious outsider. Perhaps not surprisingly, there were very few women attending the gym, and I was the only foreign woman to do so.

As explained in the interlude chapter, my time at the gym eventually became a source of fear and worry, due primarily to the relentless operation of the male gaze upon my body. I began to dissociate from my body, limit my interactions with other people in the gym, and dread the mere thought of trying to set up interviews. My research site had become so uncomfortable that my personal well-being felt threatened, so I ultimately abandoned my planned research. I was incredibly disappointed in myself and had to wrestle with intense feelings of failure, weakness, and anger.

It took a couple of months to make peace with these feelings and give myself permission to change the focus of my research. After moving to Sonipat, I realized that I could keep the basic premise of the chapter—the role of gym and fitness culture in globalized, neoliberal India—but simply change the context. Instead of examining middle

class adults utilizing a transnational fitness chain, I would look at university students and how gymming factors into their everyday lives and future plans. The rising, “new” India will be guided by the young adults now preparing to enter such global careers as lawyers, financiers, and consultants. These future corporate leaders are entering the global market as India emerges as an economic and political power, and as neoliberalism and privatization are coming to characterize contemporary Indian society. For these students then, what does having the “right body” mean and how is it connected to the forces currently shaping India?

I used the same research strategies as I had initially adopted, just transferring my point of interest to the university gym and the students who used it. I engaged in participant observation by exercising at the gym nearly every day, alternating between morning and evening workouts. I also helped teach a yoga class held in the gym twice a week. My presence in the gym allowed me to interact with the students in a casual setting and get to know them before asking for interview participants. Overall, I spent three months establishing my presence in the gym and observing before beginning the process of finding volunteers to be interviewed.

Two methods were used to recruit interviewees: 1) visiting numerous classrooms in the law and business schools (with permission from the professors) to describe my research, explain how the students could help, and gather contact information for those willing to be interviewed; and 2) seeking out and making contact with the university’s sport club, whose president offered to help me get volunteers from the club’s membership. Initially I had planned to do the interviews in-person with each volunteer, but a conversation I had with the club president convinced me to offer an alternative to

the standard interview format. Following her advice, I decided to give the students a choice between a traditional one-on-one interview or an e-mail interview in which they could respond to my questions in writing and in their own time. As explained by the club president, some of the students were quite shy and would feel very nervous sitting with me—certainly an indication of hierarchical power relations that I wanted to avoid. In addition, for the majority of students English was not their first language, or even second language in some cases. For those less confident in their English skills, having the opportunity to respond in writing would give them a sense of having more control over the process, again a consideration of unequal power relations particularly relevant in this situation. Even though offering the option of an e-mail interview would take away the spontaneity, instant follow-up, and personal interaction of a traditional interview (Amis, 2005), I felt it was important to offer the students a choice in order to ensure their comfort level and provide them with multiple ways to contribute their thoughts and experiences.

My preliminary communication with interested students outlined the two options, and I received responses from twenty-one students willing to participate. Of these, six opted for the traditional interview format while the remaining fifteen preferred to complete the e-mail interview. With the participants confirmed, I then scheduled the traditional interviews and fully detailed the nature of my research before having each participant sign the IRB consent form. These interviews were semi-structured in form, as all participants were asked the same questions but each conversation differed in the additional questions asked and the general direction of inquiry. The interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, took place in the neutral space of a university

office, and were audio-taped with permission from the participant. For those who opted for the e-mail interview, I e-mailed the IRB consent form to them and asked for a return reply indicating that they understood the information and were voluntarily participating in my research. Once I received these replies, I then e-mailed the interview questions as an attached MS Word document. These questions were the same ones asked of the traditional interviewees. In both cases I provided my contact details to the participants and encouraged them to e-mail or call me at any time with questions or concerns. In total, I ended up with twenty-one interviews—twelve women and nine men, ranging in age from 18 to 30, and hailing from various parts of India including Lucknow, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Punjab, Kerala, Kolkata, Chennai, and Haryana.

I then transcribed the audio interviews and e-mailed each participant the transcript of their interview so they had the opportunity to review the conversation, make changes, or insert additional information. This was my way of participant checking (Amis, 2005), returning the interview transcripts to the participants so they could “confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). I received positive responses approving the transcripts from all six of the students who chose the traditional interview format. Once I received all of the written interviews, I transferred them into separate documents in order to better keep track of the participants.

All of the documents—field notes, interview transcripts, e-mail texts—were then uploaded into HyperResearch, a qualitative coding software program designed to facilitate the process of interpretation and analysis. Appreciating that using a coding program could make my work more systematic, thorough, and faster (Weitzman, 1999), I decided to try it. I approached the use of HyperResearch as a means to assist me in

keeping track of large amounts of information and streamlining the coding process, considerations that are important when faced with the already overwhelming task of completing a dissertation (Davidson & Jacobs, 2008). Through careful and continuing reading of the uploaded data, I first engaged in open coding to identify and categorize key concepts present in the empirical data (Creswell, 2003). I developed a total of twenty-two open codes. I then grouped similar codes together to create a list of significant themes appearing across the data. Three main themes were apparent: 1) being fit for the working world; 2) getting and/or maintaining a “fit” body that looks good; and 3) the importance of gymming to young women. All three of these themes were relevant when placed within the context of a neoliberal India in which the individual is becoming increasingly responsible for her/his own health and well-being, and the body becomes an external marker of not only physical health, but moral virtue as well.

Even though this chapter evolved into something different than what I initially planned, the process of confronting personal discomfort and negative emotions while in the field was valuable for my own growth as a scholar. It was an important reminder that researchers must remain flexible, as fieldwork always retains the potential to be unpredictable even if it is occurring in a place of familiarity.

Chapter IV

My serious study of yoga began in Los Angeles ten years ago at, of all places, the Hollywood YMCA. At the time I studied Anusara yoga, a relatively new style then gaining recognition for its uniquely “American” approach to the practice. I enjoyed the

early morning classes, the sense of community forged in the studio, and the increased connection I felt with my body. When my membership to the YMCA expired a year later, I began to experiment with other styles of yoga, trying various studios and different teachers in the general vicinity of my neighborhood. I tried Iyengar (too slow), Bikram (too hot), and Kundalini (just too bizarre). I also tried Ashtanga yoga for the first time and was struck by the practice's physical rigor and set structure. I did not particularly like the rigidity of the practice, and I remember being told that Ashtanga attracted very driven personalities who like control and routine. I eventually moved away from Ashtanga and embraced a *vinyasa* practice that allowed for more creativity and spontaneity, but my brief fling with Ashtanga had ignited an interest in its practice and increasing popularity in the West. After all, Madonna credited her impressively sculpted arm muscles to her regular Ashtanga sessions!

Through my yogic wanderings, I took a few more Ashtanga classes here and there, came to understand the dedication of its followers, and met numerous people who had traveled to India to study with Pattabhi Jois. While I never adopted Ashtanga as my preferred style of practice, I was always in awe, perhaps naïvely, of the people who had made the trek to Mysore. In my eyes, these yogis were something special. Their travels to India had imbued them with a palpable sense of physical and social capital that translated into a revered status in the yoga studio and amongst lesser-experienced practitioners. So when Charlie and I made the decision to move to India, I knew I had to capitalize on the chance to study in Mysore. Not to necessarily enhance my knowledge of Ashtanga yoga, because it is not a style that particularly resonates with me, but rather to immerse myself in the Ashtanga community and experience the hype of Mysore for myself. I also must

admit, quite sheepishly, that I yearned to return to the United States and proclaim to my yoga friends that yes, I had indeed spent a month in Mysore at the Jois *shala*. I wanted the physical capital—“in Mysore I could bind on both sides in Marichyasana D”—and the social capital—“I had *chai* with Kino MacGregor after conference one afternoon”—that comes with making the trip to India. Yet, after completing my month of study and research in Mysore, chasing this capital had ultimately become unimportant for me as I realized that my experiences in India were much deeper and more meaningful than that.

My research strategies in Mysore centered on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with foreigners who had traveled to India specifically to study at the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute. The participation aspect of my research involved registering for five weeks of study at the *shala* in January and February 2011. I was expected to practice every day except Sundays and moon days (full or new moon), and I was given a practice time of 9am. Since the Ashtanga style is a self-guided practice, each yogi completes the series on their own time and at their own pace, receiving physical assists from the instructors where needed but otherwise practicing independently. Therefore, the *shala* operates on a rotating basis—as one student finishes, another takes her/his place in the room. Waiting students sit in the foyer outside of the practice room, anxiously anticipating the call for “one more” to come and take a place. Given this system, we were advised to arrive fifteen minutes before our allotted start time to keep the queue organized and moving. So my day usually started upon rising at 7am, then a brief bucket bath, a cup of *chai* while checking e-mail or finishing field notes from the day before, making the ten-minute walk to the *shala*, stopping to say hello to the puppies that lived in the park along the way, and finally arriving to quietly take my place in the

foyer. The politics and negotiation of space within the *shala* could make for an academic study on their own, as there were distinct, yet unspoken, rules about the use of space and who had access to certain spaces. My practice took about ninety minutes, so I would finish up by 10:30am, buy a fresh coconut to drink from the vendor outside, and then meet up with my new friends for lunch at one of the Western-style cafes close to the *shala*. Since I was relatively new to the Ashtanga style, my teacher Saraswathi (Pattabhi Jois's daughter) recommended that I also practice in the afternoon for a few days until I became more familiar with the postures in the primary series. So, for my first week, I practiced both in the morning and in the afternoon, a schedule that was physically exhausting but provided interesting insights into the role of the *shala* in the local community. With the exception of the local district police commissioner, only foreigners practiced in the morning. The afternoon session, however, was filled with local Indians and just a small smattering of foreigners. I found this segregation fascinating and would have loved to investigate it further. However, my research focus was on the experiences of the foreigners, so I had to file this idea away for possible future examination. At the conclusion of each day, I wrote extensive field notes detailing my observations, thoughts, and questions.

I gave myself a week in Mysore to settle in, get comfortable with the practice, and meet some people before asking for interview volunteers. The social scene in and around the *shala* was very open and surprisingly welcoming, although some of the more established, senior students and teachers deliberately avoided interactions with beginning students, preferring instead to either socialize with each other or pursue other educational activities that complemented their yoga practice, such as learning about Indian classical

music, taking traditional painting classes, or reading spiritual texts. After getting to know the community and realizing that there were at least 200 people from over twenty countries studying at the *shala*, I decided to concentrate my efforts on finding American yogis to interview. I made this decision deliberately for several reasons: 1) my own positionality as an American who practices yoga would allow me to better relate with my interview participants; 2) I felt comfortable in my familiarity with American yoga culture, but knew nothing about yoga culture in Japan, Finland, or Brazil for example, which would limit my ability to connect with interviewees from other countries on an intimate level; and 3) establishing relationships with American yogis might provide me with future access to various Ashtanga studios, teachers, and students should I choose to pursue additional research up my return to the United States.

In order to recruit interview participants, I simply asked. I was aiming for fifteen interviews, and I wanted to have a mix of women and men, long-time students of Ashtanga and newcomers, various professions, a wide age range, and people who had been to India before and those who had not. Everyone had a story to tell, and everyone had thoughts about the Ashtanga practice and the importance of studying it in India. In that regard, it was not difficult to find interesting people suitable for an interview and willing to talk to me. If I had a particularly stimulating conversation with someone at lunch or at the coconut stand, I would ask them for an interview or, alternatively, ask them for suggestions of other people to solicit. The entire process went very smoothly, no one declined my request for an interview, and I enjoyed some extremely thoughtful conversations. Due to time constraints and an unfortunate series of physical assaults that left me shaken, I ended up with thirteen interviews—ten women and three men, a fairly

accurate reflection of the overall gender ratio of foreigners at the *shala*. The ages ranged from 28 to 54. One was an absolute beginner, while one was a senior teacher authorized by Jois who had been to Mysore six times before. Eight of them were visiting India for the first time. They were from Los Angeles and New York, Chicago and Seattle, and places in-between. One was Hispanic, one was black, and the rest were white. Quite obviously, they all had the financial means to make the trip to India and spend at least a month in Mysore, so there was little diversity in their socio-economic status. All of them were very generous with their time, their thoughts and experiences, and their willingness to help me.

Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and followed a semi-set structure in which all participants were asked the same core questions but were encouraged to take those questions in different directions. This flexible structure allowed for additional, unplanned questions depending on the nature of the conversation, and it opened up space for a meaningful dialogue. In order to ensure the comfort of the participants, I let them each decide where the interview would take place. Some opted for their personal apartment, while others preferred to talk while having lunch or getting a cup of tea. Each participant signed the IRB consent form before the interview began, and everyone agreed to have the interview audio-taped. Upon my return home to Sonipat, I transcribed the interviews myself and created separate text documents for each interview. I then e-mailed each document to its respective interviewee in order to facilitate a participatory review process. I asked each of my participants to read the transcript, edit it as necessary, insert additional information, or otherwise alert me to questions or problems they had. The goal here was to ensure that the participants viewed the transcripts as

accurate and to give them each an opportunity to amend their thoughts and/or augment them (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Out of the thirteen interviewees, I received e-mail responses from ten of them approving the transcripts. Four of them offered extensive additional thoughts in their e-mails, which I then transferred to a separate document.

All of the documents—field notes, interview transcripts, e-mail texts—were then uploaded into HyperResearch. Through the process of reading and re-reading the uploaded data, I developed a total of forty-three open codes that represented key concepts and ideas (Creswell, 2003). I then grouped similar codes together to create a list of significant themes appearing across the data. These themes included: 1) Ashtanga yoga as a disciplined, daily commitment; 2) the importance of having a teacher; 3) gaining knowledge from, and studying at, the source of Ashtanga; 4) managing the physical body and pain; and 5) impressions of Mysore and India. Each of these themes could have been expanded into a full chapter, but I decided to focus on the last one and connect it to the notion of authenticity, which was heavily implied in the theme of studying at the source.

Upon reflection, and methodologically speaking, the most interesting part of my research in Mysore was the process of making myself vulnerable and the resulting inversion of power relations (Chacko, 2004). I made myself vulnerable by admitting that I was a beginning Ashtanga student and was very nervous about practicing with such seasoned yogis. I purposely adopted the role of the supplicant, so that my fieldwork was “predicated upon an unequivocal acceptance that the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher” (England, 1994, p. 243). My interview participants, with one exception, knew much more about Ashtanga yoga and its community than I did, and I was able to

use this knowledge imbalance to shift a sense of power over to them. The one-on-one interview format has the potential to be mired in asymmetrical and exploitative power relations because the researcher is automatically holding control over the proceedings and the interviewee can easily feel intimidated. However, by framing myself as a beginner, I opened myself up and surrendered to the knowledge and guidance of those I interviewed, thereby helping to equalize our power relations.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview questions for university students in north India (chapter III):

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. Where are you from?
 - c. Tell me about your family. How many siblings do you have? What do your parents do for a living?
 - d. Did you play sports as a child? If so, which ones and why?
2. How often do you use the gym at the university?
3. What types of exercise do you do at the gym (run on the treadmill, lift weights, stretch, etc.)? Describe a typical workout/exercise session.
4. Why do you exercise? What are your health and fitness goals?
5. Is gymming/exercising a social experience for you? Do you and your friends exercise together, or is it something you do by yourself?
6. Do you belong to a gym at home, away from the university? If so, which one and what types of activities do you do?
7. What is your favorite type of exercise? Least favorite? Why?
8. Which people do you admire in terms of fitness and body image? In your opinion, is there anyone who has the perfect body (a specific actor, actress, sports star, etc.)?
9. What type of career are you pursuing? What is your dream job?

10. For female participants--Does the gym offer a space for building community and social interaction? Are you treated differently within the gym than outside of it? Do you think gymming and exercising are good things for young women? Why or why not?

Interview questions for American yoga practitioners studying at the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore, India (chapter IV):

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. Where are you from?
 - b. How old are you?
 - c. What do you do for a living?

2. Tell me about your yoga practice.
 - a. How long have you been practicing?
 - b. Which style(s) do you practice? Why?
 - c. Where do you practice? Studio? Home?
 - d. How did you first learn about Ashtanga? What attracted you to Ashtanga?

3. Why are you studying at the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute in Mysore? What brought you here? Why India?

4. What do you hope to gain from studying here? What are your primarily goals and objectives for your time here?

5. Tell me about the social interactions in and around the *shala*. How would you characterize the sense of community here?

6. Will you share what you learn here back home? If so, why and how?

7. In your opinion, is there one form of authentic yoga? If so, where can we find it?

8. What are your impressions of Mysore and India in general? Is it what you expected it would be?

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