

*Abstract*

## **Yoga with/in Gym Atmospheres: Exploring Healthism, Sensory Engagements, and Power in University Settings**

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The Okanagan Charter aims to embed health equity in universities by emphasizing the connections between people and their environments. With an increased focus on student and staff wellbeing, many universities offer yoga classes in their group fitness programs as a holistic wellbeing resource. Yet, practicing yoga in gym-like spaces promotes a discursive delivery of yoga entangled with healthist prerogatives. Environments full of exercise equipment and advertisements for strong bodies minimize the spiritual prerogatives of the practice in favor of a Western aesthetic of health. In this project, I draw upon *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses) to understand the complex interplay of sensory stimuli, moving bodies, and social justice in a university gym setting. While withdrawal of the senses promotes an inward

focus away from healthy body discourse, so doing may rely on replicating culturally appropriative, hegemonic re-imaginings of yoga through sensory-material elements. To understand this dynamic, I draw upon diffractive auto/ethnography to explore my practices and privileges as a yoga teacher in my university recreation centre. Through a creative method of self-inquiry, I literally and figuratively weave together observations, materials, images, and reflections from 250 site visits. These elements come together into three narratives that provide a framework for drawing upon *pratyahara* as a conceptual tool for reflexive practice. This creative project moves at the intersection of critical theory and yoga studies, highlighting the challenges for accessible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive health promotion through yoga.

*Keywords: healthism, pratyahara, health promotion, diffractive methodologies*