



## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

### Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

Application Deadline: March 11, ~~2004~~ 2005

Please print and complete this checklist and attach it as the cover page of your grant application. For more information about RSC grants, please see <[www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/facdev/grants/RSC.cfm](http://www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/facdev/grants/RSC.cfm)>.

#### FACULTY INFORMATION

Name: ELLEN RIORDAN Dept.: COMMUNICATION STUDIES  
Email: eriodan@gac.edu Rank: VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
2ND YEAR OF A 3 YEAR CONTRACT

#### CHECKLIST

☒ **Description of previous projects (and outcomes) funded by RSC grants**

*NO PRIOR FUNDING RECEIVED*

☒ **Complete project description, including separate statements of:**

1. **Purpose.** What are the intellectual, conceptual, or artistic issues? How does your work fit into other endeavors being done in this field?
2. **Feasibility.** What qualifications do you bring to this project? What have you done/will you do to prepare for this project? What is the time period, i.e. summer, summer and academic year, academic year only? Is the work's scope commensurate with the time period of the project?
3. **Project Design.** This should include a specific description of the project design and activities, including location, staff, schedules or itineraries, and desired outcomes.

☒ **RSC Budget Proposal Form attached as last page of application**

☒ **Eight copies of complete application (including this checklist) to be submitted to the Faculty Development Resource Center (SSC 119)**

☒ **If successful, my proposal can be used as an example to assist future faculty applicants. This decision will not in any way influence the evaluation of my application.**

Yes / No (please circle one)

**Purpose:**

This research project represents my continuing work in the areas of feminist media scholarship and video production. My main objectives for this project are: 1. to produce several scholarly articles for presentation at academic conferences, and 2. to produce a documentary making theoretical issues surrounding a humanities-based inquiry accessible to non-academic audiences. This grant would allow me to achieve the first objective, and further my research to begin work on the second objective.

The central topic of this project concerns the commodification of Yoga in the West. I have listed specific research questions in the Project Design section that will be addressed in this portion of the study; however, the following questions inform my initial interest in the topic and will be pursued for the documentary:

1. How has commodification affected Yoga as a spiritual practice?
2. If commodified Yoga promotes a practice aimed at individual self-improvement through physical fitness, can it continue to be a path for "self-transformation" and "self-transcendence" for those who wish to pursue a spiritual path?
3. How can feminist theories of embodiment help explain the experiences of Yoga practitioners?

By addressing these questions, I hope to draw attention to the interplay between commodity production and women's experiences of their bodies as both material and cultural sites.

For this particular study, I will focus on the media's role in the process of commodification, and the significance of this in terms of representing women's bodies. This research is interdisciplinary in nature, in that I will draw upon a body of literature from feminist media studies that addresses issues of representation and commodification. In addition, I will rely on theories of feminist embodiment, epistemology and phenomenology.

### **Feasibility:**

In addition to my area of expertise in feminist media studies and political economy of the media, I also have worked with video having taught production courses for the last 10 years. My experience with Yoga includes being a practitioner for 20 years and having completed one hundred hours of teacher's certification.

The time period for this study is summer 2004 and the results will be presented at the International Association of Media and Communication Researchers conference at the end of July in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I do not intend to complete the documentary portion of this project, but I will continue to pursue grants and external funding for the production aspect.

Although I do not anticipate working on the documentary portion of this project during the summer, I do anticipate shooting some video footage of Yoga classes in the Twin Cities/St. Peter/Mankato area. I plan on editing the footage together in an artistic presentation that will accompany the conference presentations.

### **Project Design:**

#### *Background:*

According to two recent articles, the number of people practicing Yoga in the US is somewhere between 18 and 20 million.<sup>1</sup> With the average Yoga practitioner spending approximately \$1,500 annually on related items such as classes, props, clothing, workshops, videos, books, etc., Yoga can be said to generate more than \$27 billion annually for the US economy. While these trends bode well for the US economy and many business owners specializing in Yoga-related products, the commercialization or commodification of Yoga has given rise to concerns. Many teachers, practitioners and researchers of Yoga question the integrity of making big money from a practice that has its roots in renunciation and asceticism. Even many of those who do not necessarily seek spiritual enlightenment through Yoga also have wondered if commercialization is changing its very essence. These concerns are fueled by the reality that Yoga in the US is often equated with a fitness program helping one sculpt a perfect body, even though the tradition of Yoga is less about the body and more about self-transcendence, or going beyond one's egocentric state.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wild, Russell. (2002) "Yoga, Inc.," *Yoga Journal*, November, pp. 108-113, 157, and Feuerstein, Georg. (2000) "Georg Feuerstein Comments on Contemporary Yoga," <http://www.yrec.org/>.

*Study:*

This first portion of the research will include reviewing archived issues of both *Yoga Journal* and *Yoga International*. This will require trips to publishing houses in Santa Monica, California and Honesdale, Pennsylvania, respectively. The research questions to be addressed for this study include:

1. What role do the media play in transforming Yoga from a tool for spiritual practice to a commodity for the marketplace?
2. Do these two Yoga publications reify a type of Orientalism as part of the commodification process?
3. What discursive strategies do these two publications use to interpellate women as social subjects?

The methodology will be a qualitative analysis of images and discursive strategies prominent in the editorial and visual content of the two publications. The theoretical framework for this paper is informed by critical cultural studies and feminist political economy, leading up to questions that can be addressed using feminist theories of embodiment.

Feminist political economy integrates an examination of capitalism and patriarchy, thereby making it an entry point for the study of commodified culture. In addition to offering a critique of macro-level social structures, feminist political economy stresses the importance of understanding issues of identity, subjectivity, pleasure, consumption, as well as visible and invisible labor in the day-to-day lives of women. Drawing from both feminist and political economic theories, it offers ways to think about how knowledge is simultaneously gendered and economic.

Work in feminist political economy in the field of communication varies. Some scholarship looks toward gendered and economic relations and how they affect women's work (see Martin 1991, 2002). Other researches integrating feminism and political economy look not only at the cultural and legal implications of women's work, but also at representations of that work (see Ross, 2002; Hauserman, 2002). Others scholars look toward policy issues and how they affect women's lives (see Balka, 2002; Mukherjee, 2002). Still others researchers are concerned with understanding how entertainment and consumption practices can inform identity (see Fejes, 2002; Curry & Valdivia, 2002; Riordan, 2001). Evident by this brief review of work, scholars working in the area of feminist political economy integrate multiple methodologies to unlock complex relationships between highly abstract concepts – patriarchy and capitalism – that have very real consequences for the lives of women and men. In relation to this particular study, feminist political economy will help address the question of commodification, more specifically the role media play in transforming a “use value” into an “exchange value,” and how commodities are subsequently connected to issues of identity formation through consumption.

Theories of consumption are rooted in cultural studies and can be traced backed to political concerns coming out of Marxism. One of the driving concerns of cultural theorists is that advertising artificially stimulates consumption or the creation of false needs. Herbert Marcuse (1968) furthers this, suggesting that the

ideology of consumerism also functions as a form of social control by generating false needs. In a move away from Marxism, and with attention toward theorizing desire, Lacanian psychoanalysis suggests that the ideology of consumerism can be viewed as attempting to fulfill the original loss of the mother (Lacan, 1977). While not all feminist scholars rely on psychoanalysis, many agree that consumption is about fulfilling dreams and desires, and forming identities.

In her book *New Age Capitalism*, Kimberly Lau (2000) locates consumption of alternative health practices such as Yoga, tai chi, macrobiotics, and aromatherapy within the context of global capitalism. Lau suggests that this "new age" thinking becomes a way of life where personal transformation can be seen as "remedying social and environmental illness" (4). Rather than see these alternative health practices as benefiting society at large (as participants imagine), Lau suggests they fall in line with American traditions of self-reliance and individualism. As such, Lau finds these types of practices problematic in that they reinforce the notion that individualism and personal empowerment benefits the body politic, thereby relieving participants from further social responsibility.

Over the last decade, the rhetoric of empowerment in the US has been commodified in popular discourse and in self-help literature (much of which is aimed at women), thereby confining agency to an individual level, and not contributing to structural transformations that will indeed change the lives of women living within patriarchal and capitalist structures. It will be necessary to situate this discussion of empowerment in the context of Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, since contrary to Western belief systems, Hinduism and Buddhism stress that change must occur from within the individual and cannot be imposed on others (this principle, however, differs greatly from a Western idea of individualism). For this reason, it will be necessary to examine the discursive strategies in the context of Orientalism, to see whether or not notions of the East are indeed reified, and subsequently commodified as empowerment.

Feminist theories of embodiment will contribute to the larger research project in several ways. One area is to analyze the embodied practices of Yoga from a feminist phenomenological perspective. Primarily influenced by the 20<sup>th</sup> century work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology explores the lived body as the seat of self. Contemporary feminist (i.e., Iris Marion Young, Carol Bigwood, Elizabeth Grosz, and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone) utilize the body as the primordial condition of experience to understand women's experiences of pregnancy, birth and movement with a culture dominated by andocentric values. Such feminist philosophers argue that as sites of agency, our gendered bodies help to condition and remain as largely untapped philosophical resources.

The study of feminist epistemology, which emerges out of postmodern philosophy, will also help conceptualize this research project. This area of feminist philosophy explores the primacy of communities and our relationships with other people. Instead of the isolated subject typical of most traditional Western philosophy, postmodern feminists argue that it is through our relationships to others that enable us to develop 1. a dynamic sense of self, 2. our knowledge claims about the world works, and 3. a responsive ethical framework

to guide our actions. Of particular interest might be the work of Donna Haraway who postulates that our bodies are “material-semiotic” nodes of experience. In other words, on Haraway’s reading, bodies are neither fundamentally biological nor cultural but exist in the interaction of the two. Instead of a biological bedrock upon which culture inscribes its values and expressions, the human body is a complex of exchanges between flesh and cultural practices.

This study attempts to bring together feminist political economy with postmodern theories of feminist epistemology. It attempts to make explicit the connection between how the process of commodification – in this particular instance Yoga, a tool for a spiritual practice aimed at self-transformation – can shape the way women experience their bodies as material and cultural. I suggest that while the consumption of Yoga does fit in with existing theories of consumption, pleasure and desire, it is also necessary to understand how the packaging of empowerment shapes the way women experience their lives. The foremost purpose of this study is to show the link between theories of commodification and consumption, and how the media play a role in manufacturing desire through the reification of particular ideas and values. While numerous studies have shown this relationship, the importance of this study is to show how commodification shapes the way women experience their bodies as material and cultural sites.

# BUDGET PROPOSAL FORM

## Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

ITEM	AMOUNT
<b>Equipment (not to include computer hardware)</b>	\$
1: Cost:	
2: Cost:	
3: Cost:	
<b>Materials</b>	\$
1: Cost:	
2: Cost:	
3: Cost:	
<b>Personnel (check the faculty book white pages for recommended rates)</b>	\$
1.	
2.	
<b>Travel Costs * SEE BELOW</b>	\$ 1,500 —
Airfare:	
Mileage: Number of miles @ \$0.36/mile	
<b>Lodging</b>	\$
Number of days @ \$ /day	
<b>Other Expenses (check the faculty book white pages for excluded items)</b>	\$
1: Cost:	
2: Cost:	
3: Cost:	
<b>Faculty Stipend</b> (\$500 professor; \$600 associate professor; \$700 assistant professor)	\$ 700 —
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	\$
<b>AMOUNT REQUESTED</b> (not to exceed \$1500 + stipend commensurate with rank)	\$ 2,200 —

\* TRAVEL FOR ARCHIVES :

YOGA JOURNAL , BERKELEY, CA \$ 300. —

YOGA INTERNATIONAL , HONESDALE, PA \$ 300. —

IAMCR CONFERENCE , PORTO ALEGRE BRAZIL \$ 900. —

\$ 1,500 —