

Finding Religion, Spirituality, and Flow in Movement

An Ethnography of Value of the Hula Hooping Community

Martha Smith Roberts and
Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand

ABSTRACT: “Moving the body is like religion and moving my body is the portal to that place.” This is one woman’s description of her practice of hoop dancing, a form of hula hooping that combines adult sized hoops and dance music. Her experience is not unique; in fact, the number of descriptions of hooping as a practice that is “like religion” serves as the basis of our research. In this essay, we examine the connection between embodied experiences in the hoop, the identification of those experiences as religious or spiritual, and the communities that are created as hoopers attempt to continually recapture the experiences (of flow) that they deem extraordinary. New religions studies is a field interested in the emergence of new religious paths, and our contribution to this academic discourse is in the form of an ethnography of value of the hoop community as an emerging religious path. Our work attempts to reconceptualize *newness* in the field through innovations in the hoop community. We examine the ways hoopers deem transformational experiences within the hoop as spiritual or religious and how they construct paths to truth and authenticity through embodied practice. These new religious *movements* are not institutional nor are they tied to formal creeds; rather, they reflect the ways in which religion has become a category of experience that can create meaningful communities of practice for individuals.

KEYWORDS: hula hoop, spirituality, ethnography of value, religious experience, embodiment, HoopPath, dance, flow, music

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“Open, open, open,” repeats a man from a small stage situated in the center of a gymnasium. He paces as he talks into his microphone headset. Forty hoopers move large plastic hoops around their bodies, as slow, hypnotic music plays in the background. “The hoops the Maidan used were made out of actual trees. The energy that made those trees was present in the human form of the Maidan,” the man, Jonathan Baxter, explains. “I share this story with you because they thought of their time in the hoop, they thought of their time in their bodies . . . as an opportunity to connect with a network into an ancestral wisdom,” he continues. “Some of the Maidan believed they could connect to previous experience through the action of the hoop. Open up your brain. Open up your heart. Open up your ideas. Open. Open. Open. Open. Open,” he soothingly repeats. “Trust me on this one, guys. Trust me.” He continues to pace the platform, moving the hoop around his body as those around him do the same. “Imagine that just being in the meditative space, just telling yourself you might be open is all you need to do. Can you feel your dance emerging, tapping into an ancient feeling of you?”¹ While Jonathan Baxter’s HoopPath workshops are unique in their use of the myth of the Maidan (an order of holy women, who, through various experiences and situations, help hoopers be in the hoop and in the world) as movement archetypes, what is not unique is the view of hula hooping as a religious and/or spiritual experience that has transformed their lives in numerous ways.

When Wham-O trademarked the hula hoop in 1957 the toy’s creators did not suggest it could be used as a powerful tool for personal transformation. The transition of a children’s toy into a tool for a spiritual practice emerged out of festival and rave cultures of the 1990s. Importantly, the addition of music to the practice of hula hooping created this new form of hoop dance. Groups of geographically separated hoopers began to congregate in-person at music festivals and virtually on blogs, chat rooms, and other online group spaces where they could discuss techniques. Specific styles of hooping began to emerge, and hoop teachers traveled the country to share their skills with others.² Most hoopers explain they were not looking for a religious experience when they picked up their first hoop. Rather, they had an unexpected transformational experience, which many then label as spiritual or religious. For these hoopers, the body in motion is the source of spiritual truth and authority (as opposed to a charismatic leader or sacred text). It is only after these individuals have this experience that they seek a language to describe that experience to others. Within the larger hoop community, we see a variety of interpretations of similar experiences.

In this essay, we are interested in the moment and process by which many hoopers, such as Jonathan Baxter, identify hula hooping as religious or spiritual and the embodied practices and communities they create in order to continually recapture the experience they deem

special. The point when a new religious path is identified is a central animating question within the field of new religions studies.³ We contribute to this academic discourse by presenting an ethnography of value of the hoop community. Ethnographies of value, according to Ann Taves and Courtney Bender, investigate “the ways that people in various contexts *decide* (or *experience* or *identify*) what is of value as well as the processes that allow them (and us) to assign or apprehend such things.”⁴ This approach to the study of religion focuses “on the processes through which people mark things as special or singular both through discourse and behaviors.”⁵ Utilizing this approach, we investigate the *new* through innovations in the ways individuals deem or value transformational experiences within the hoop as spiritual or religious, interpret those identifying qualities in various ways, and construct paths to truth and authenticity through embodied practice. Based on our fieldwork, we argue that for many hoopers, movement with one or more hula hoops serves as an experiential catalyst to deeming hooping as spiritually or religiously valuable. These experiences then serve as a foundation for a disciplined practice shared with other hoopers and the basis of a new community.

This ethnography of value is based on ongoing fieldwork beginning in 2010. To investigate the hula hooping community, we joined online social networking sites, followed hooping blogs, attended several hooping events, created an online anonymous survey (which over 500 hoopers took in the span of two months) and interviewed hoopers.⁶ In the process, we found a thriving subculture that attributes meaning to their hoop practice in diverse and compelling ways: some who draw upon traditional religious language and symbols, others who utilize metaphysical teachings, and still others who create their own unique spiritual narrative. Our survey results revealed that Jonathan Baxter’s HoopPath classes and workshops were the most popularly attended hoop events.⁷ Because of this, we focused our participant observation efforts on HoopPath’s workshops, retreats, and social media presence. To ensure that we included a broad array of hoopers, we also utilized information from Hooping.org, the main social media hub of the United States hooping community.⁸

HOOPING MOVEMENT AND FLOW

“Moving the body is like religion and moving my body is the portal to that place,” one hooper explains.⁹ To start with the movement of hooping, then, is to describe what it is that hoopers actually do with their bodies, the experiences they have in their hoops, and how this is later interpreted through the language of religion. While hoopers interpret their hoop practice in multiple ways, the word flow is often used as a way to explain this experience. Flow is described as an



Illustration 1. *Jonathan Baxter leads hoopers in meditation exercise. HoopPath retreat, Chapel Hill, NC, 2013. Photo by Cassandra Kapsos.*

alignment of body and mind in the hoop, though it means different things to each hooper.

The experience of flow is one way to examine the kinds of movement that hoopers describe. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes ways in which movement and practice are generative of “flow experiences” that can be interpreted in religious frameworks. For Csikszentmihalyi, these flow experiences describe the alignment of body and mind that emerges out of a repeated practice requiring skill and commitment and that produces a sense of “effortless action.” These experiences can arise in a variety of activities, from sports to writing or work, but they stand out from everyday life and are interpreted in multiple ways by those who experience them.¹⁰ Some of the hoopers we spoke with mentioned this research on flow states, but even those who had not been reading the scholarship were self-reflexive about cultivating flow experiences.

The basic movement of hoop dance involves two crucial elements: music and a hoop. Bodyrocking or core hooping is often the first technique hoopers learn, and the term describes hooping around the trunk of the body. Eventually though, many hoopers become proficient with the hoop on other body parts: arms, shoulders, legs, faces, and every other imaginable combination of the hoop and body. In the hours and days spent dancing with their hoops, hoopers cultivate a movement practice that can range from recreational to disciplined and that can incorporate a number of variations in style and skill. All of these



Illustration 2. *Hoopers practice shoulder hooping at HoopPath retreat, Chapel Hill, NC, 2013. Photo by Cassandra Kapsos.*

variations are legitimate ways to practice. Dancing with the hoop is the practice, and as such, all of this variety becomes unified under the umbrella of experience.

Within this larger category of practice, some experiences become representative of the ideals and possibilities of a hoop practice. While hoop practice can be a disciplined exercise in frustration (some techniques are extremely difficult and take weeks or months to master), hoopers' descriptions of their flow experiences often contain references to being one with the hoop, feeling a state of bliss, and experiencing a loss of time. One hooper surveyed explains,

It's an effortless, timeless feeling. . . . I suppose some psychologists would call it a state of ecstasy or an out of body experience, but it is more than that. . . . There are various levels of flow for me. One where I know I am hooping and every movement flows to another without conscious

thought, but the second level and deepest level is one where I am in a state of exuberance, bliss, and surrender. Words cannot do it justice. I don't feel this way every time I hoop—I normally stumble upon it without meaning to.

Our research shows that flow is the most popular term used by hoopers to explain the feelings that arise during their hoop practice. Flow is a state hoopers value and many hope to achieve. A quick search for “flow” at Hooping.org offers a representative sample of how this concept applies. Usage ranges from casual descriptions and accolades of hoop practice (e.g., lovely flow!) to tutorials (“Find Your Flow and Keep it Flowing”¹¹) and philosophical musings on the nature of the physical and emotional experience of hoop dance (“When the Hoop Disappears”¹²). The common thread tying all of these examples together is the sense that flow is a positive experience of hoop dance where mind and body are joined in movement.

As Rachel Conlisk notes in her Hooping.org column, “Find Your Flow and Keep it Flowing,” that moment when “you will suddenly flow from one move to another without having to think, plan, or pull your concentration face at all” involves a combination of drills and muscle memory cultivated over time. Combining this practice with creativity and free hooping allows for the development of flow states that eventually happen both inside and outside of the hoop: “If we can activate this state of confidence, freedom, and unconscious self-expression in our hooping, we can unlock it in other areas of our life as well. Is it really any coincidence that so many hoopers say hooping has changed their life?”¹³ For Conlisk, flow is an experience that emerges out of a hoop practice and then takes on a greater significance.

Online, many hoopers offer descriptions of their flow states and the significance of flow in their lives. The focus on flow and its cultivation is central to hoopers' individual and community identities. Flow is often cited as the experience that brings hoopers into the practice. In another Hooping.org column, Shannon Loucks explains her own hoop journey:

When I first began hooping I was very much aware of where the hoop was at all times. My focus was on keeping it up or deciding where to move it or when to move it. I was conscious of the hoops [*sic*] presence the entire time. Then one day, there was a moment when the hoop fell away. I was waist hooping to a favorite song and all I knew was that I had fallen into the music. I was dancing. Yes, the hoop was still there, but its size and shape had disappeared. We were no longer separate. We were one, moving together in perfect unison. It was magic and I later learned that this is where flow exists.¹⁴

For many hoopers, flow represents the best of hooping and the best of themselves. It is not a constant state in the hoop, but it is an affective,

embodied experience many hoopers have had and want to continue having. So while flow experiences are often described as somewhat unpredictable in nature, they are also seen as the inevitable outcome of regular practice.

The significance of movement is thus not only tied to flow states, but also to the movement of a disciplined daily hoop practice. In an essay titled “How to Explain Hooping to People Who Don’t Hoop,” Jonathan Baxter articulates the drive to return to the hoop daily: “When the hoop found me, I’m positive that my Soul must have been famished. I think that’s why I was so pulled to it and so zealous about maintaining a daily practice. I had not even realized I was hungry. . . . The thing was: I couldn’t explain it to ANYBODY.”¹⁵ Physical activity and the body are the catalysts for the experiences Baxter has in the hoop, though the transformation he experienced also lies beyond the physical. Yes, hoop dance is exercise and a great workout, but for Baxter it is much more than that. He explains how hooping gives him “a space to listen” and “a kind of peace with myself” he has never had before. Hoop dance for Baxter “is our opportunity to let our soulful senses open, explore, and ultimately, feed us with that which our physical senses cannot see, touch, taste, smell, or hear.”¹⁶ For Baxter, the flow state can overcome the limitations of the body, and this emerges from his disciplined physical practice.

The innovative movement of hoop dance, often connected to the concept of flow, becomes the grounds for a new understanding of spirituality and religion. This experience is classified as religious or spiritual by many hoopers, ascribing value to the experience. We join other scholars who investigate religious and spiritual encounters in unexpected places. These scholars assert that rituals of transformation (physical, emotional, and spiritual), pursuits of truth, devotion to myths and symbols, and the construction of community can be found in surfing,¹⁷ popular culture,¹⁸ weight loss programs,¹⁹ sports,²⁰ and Burning Man,²¹ to name a few examples. The beliefs, practices, and moral codes of these groups and individuals do not necessarily exist in tension with existing religious and social groups; this is not the quality these alternative religious paths share in common.²² Rather, Eileen Barker argues, it is their *newness*, their innovations, beliefs and practices, their agility in combining elements from different sources into a cohesive organization, and attracting a first generation of followers.²³ Thomas Robbins teases out this distinction a bit differently, by contrasting the categories of new and alternative religions. He argues *new* refers to chronologically or organizationally new groups only; groups in tension with society should be considered alternative.²⁴ These approaches offer ways in which scholars of new religions have sought to better define their object of study around the concept of newness.

The scholarship of new religions studies locates newness in both chronological newness and innovations in religious practice and

belief. This newness is often expressed relationally through tensions with dominant groups. The experience of hooping as innovative movement builds on and confounds these classifications. Flow experiences are not an inherently religious practice central to a new religious movement. Instead, as we will show, their value as religious or spiritual is negotiated by each hooper, and hoop practice is deemed to be valuable to the collective group because of its multiple potential meanings, some of which are certainly new, but many of which are quite familiar. What then appears to be new about the hoop community is the innovation in a movement that seeks to reconcile religious tensions in the practice itself.

For the hoopers, the experience of flow within the hoop provides insight to the connection between physical movement and tapping into an internal source of authenticity, self-expression, and truth. In this article, we argue that by taking seriously how hoopers embody, experience, and describe their hoop practices, we are better able to understand the processes by which religious and spiritual paths emerge. In this way, hooping is another example of the appearance of a *new* religious or spiritual path investigated by scholars of new religions studies. The process by which these hoopers value physical movement in the hoop is the object of our academic inquiry. An ethnography of value of the hula hooping community asks scholars to reconsider how we understand and interpret movement and what that can teach us about the *new* of new religions studies. Thus, we want to begin with movement—bodies in motion—and follow hoopers' descriptions, classifications, and interactions as they build their own movement: constructing a community based on hoop dance practice.

As we shift to a focus on the centrality of movement, we acknowledge that previous scholars have also found this framework useful in analyzing phenomena that confound religious categorization. Bron Taylor, for example, has written extensively on the spiritual cultures of surfers and surfing, where practice is central. Taylor notes the “soul surfers” he studies prioritize practice, direct experience, skill, and community.²⁵ The practice of surfing becomes a vehicle for self-realization and transformation in a variety of contexts. Taylor observes, “Individual surfers and surfing cultures are complicated and diverse, and they often reflect broader patterns of the society in which they are situated.”²⁶ Much like the hoopers we study, Taylor’s soul surfers often use language commonly associated with religion to describe their experiences. While Taylor’s argument goes on to classify soul surfers in terms of a new, aquatic nature religion, our study of hoopers is not aiming to impose a classification. Instead, we are interested in what the hoopers’ own use of classificatory language tells us about their practice and our scholarly categories.

The experience of hooping differs for each hooper, but all share the focus on the hoop, the acquisition of hooping skills, and the feelings that



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Illustration 3. *Opening meditation during “Hoop Church” at HoopPath retreat, Chapel Hill, NC, 2013. Photo by Cassandra Kapsos.*

arise in the experience of hooping. Beyond the experiences of flow, many hoopers also credit hooping with long-term transformations of mind and body. Hoop practice is movement that hoopers experience as both mundane and extraordinary. To identify as a hooper is to practice this movement and to share this experience. Since this experience is shared, discourse and community develop as well. The focus on the body and the diverse but connected experiences associated with the hoop lead us to questions about the formation of communities based on practice, not belief. When the heart of the community and the source of spirituality is an object-centered embodied practice, as is the case with hooping, the community supports an array of beliefs and interpretations of the practice.

THE LANGUAGE OF TRANSFORMATION

Individual hoopers who responded to our survey consistently reported they began hooping because they saw others hooping (in public or online) and thought it looked fun, beautiful, or cool. The physical movement of hoop dance drew them to the practice, but motivations varied. Some hoopers stated they wanted a new hobby, a form of exercise, or physical rehabilitation. None of those surveyed stated they began hooping in search of a spiritual or religious experience or community. Rather, the spiritual dimension of hooping was something they

discovered unexpectedly while hooping. At some point, this physical pastime became something much more significant to a growing number of hoopers. One hooper describes their experience this way, “My hooping started as Exercise. That has become only a benefit. . . . Hooping is the first thing in my life that has tapped into my soul and helped me to create and dance from inside myself. I am able to reach into my insides, into my soul and find a light and a joy that I never knew was there and had never found with any other activity.”

When asked to describe their hooping practice, 43 percent describe hooping as “spiritual” and eight percent describe their practice as “religious.” When expanding upon these descriptions, hoopers shared a variety of responses. One hooper explains the spiritual aspect of hooping for her as “how I feel when I’m ‘in the zone’ while I’m hooping. When I get deep into a dance, I am taken to this place where all I can think about is my body and the hoop and how they are moving together. All my energy is focused on that one thing, and there isn’t room for anything else. I love that feeling.”²⁷ The use of feeling as a way to describe the spirituality of hooping is pervasive. Another hooper shares, “Hooping puts me in a meditative state. It clears my mind. If I’m sad, mad, disappointed, happy, whatever . . . all of that goes away in the hoop.” Hooping is more than exercise and more than a hobby for these individuals.

The moment or process through which hoopers identify spiritual meaning in the practice of hooping is often associated with a moment or process of physical, mental, or emotional transformation that helps individuals gain greater insights into who they are and their relationship to the world around them. As one hooper explains:

I first started hooping for exercise purposes, but then I quickly learned that it was more fun than anything, and if I can have fun while working out—awesome! Then I started to see the meditative qualities of it. I began to notice my mind state before, during, and after. I could tell that it was a positive thing in my life. Then I began to grow as a hooper, and in a lot of ways, as a person. I started feeling like I was becoming the person I had wanted to be my whole life. I started changing my life more to resemble my ideal ‘me.’ This is when the journey became spiritual.

This move from exercise to something more is a common narrative in the hoop community. One hooper states: “I had originally looked to hooping as a form of exercise, but it ended up being so much more. It is something I go to when I am feeling troubled. I feel like it has been a great tool in making me feel more centered and calm.” Another hooper explains: “I was drawn to [hooping] for recreation, and I found out almost immediately that it was also a spiritual/meditative tool. I started hooping nonstop when I first picked it up, and I believe I healed some emotional trauma with the hoop.”

In a 2015 Hooping.org article on grieving and healing with the hoop, several hoopers share stories of working through loss. Lara Clark's story of recovering from tragedy highlights the unexpected aid of hoop dance, "It took me a few months, but I googled how to make a hoop, made a few and I was hooked. I didn't initially think of myself as hooping to help with the grief, I just enjoyed how hooping felt."²⁸ Eventually, she credits hooping with transforming her experience, "With hooping I was having much less of that ugly sinking feeling associated with my grief. Instead, it was as if I could sink into my heart and feel closer to my Mom and sister there—I could miss them and be with them at the same time. Was that grief I was feeling? I don't know, but it sure was healing."²⁹ The unexpected experiences of transformation and healing in the hoop reveal the ways the hoop becomes a space for personal growth, even if that was not the original intention.

Hooping's transformative, meditative, and healing properties manifest in a variety of narrative and visual accounts. Natalie Kane's story of recovery from sciatica, Shea Brock's article on hooping with chronic pain, Taylor Tinkham's testimony about her recovery from a spinal cord injury, and Theresa Rose's story of weight loss are just a few examples. The idea that the hoop is a tool for shaping one's life is a common theme among hoopers. Sharing narratives of transformation allows individuals to participate in a collective experience with their fellow hoopers. In describing their transformations, hoopers on Hooping.org also use religious language and make references to consciousness raising, divinity, spirituality, and meditative practice.³⁰

Jonathan Baxter, founder of HoopPath, had an experience of transformation that mirrors those of many hoopers. Baxter began hooping regularly in 2002 to help recuperate from an atrophied shoulder. "That's when my own hoop story began," he explains.³¹ Baxter soon discovered benefits beyond his physical rehabilitation. His depression was slowly dissolving, his self-consciousness fading, and his confidence and happiness were growing. This experience changed him forever.

Our survey results indicate religious terms and concepts figure prominently among the language used by hoopers to describe their experiences hooping and the impact of hooping on their lives. One survey participant articulates her hooping experience this way:

Exercise is a secondary reason why I hoop, definitely not the main reason. Hooping is my church. If I truly want to exercise, I go to the gym and get on a treadmill and run or do elliptical. . . . Hooping is where I commune with God. It's my quiet space where I can quiet my mind and just be. . . I stopped going to church about 6–7 years ago and use my hoop time as my spiritual haven . . . my place to find/meet God and be gracious for what He provides, and I usually become overwhelmed with my gratitude of movement.

Others describe hooping as a way to “tap in to the sacred within” and “to celebrate my dharma.”

Like many hoopers, Baxter describes his own personal hoop practice in various ways. In a 2014 interview, Baxter explains, “my practice is spiritual sometimes, and physical [exercise] sometimes, and work related sometimes.” For Baxter, and other hoopers, the practice and one’s consciousness determines the experience. The practice of hooping is not inherently exercise, spiritual, or meditative. Baxter teaches that meditation requires disciplined focus and clarity of mind. He explains,

Meditation is less about what you were focused on and more about the intent of the space you were stepping into. . . . The movement component of hooping is what makes it an effective meditative form. You have a lot of restless energy that the hoop occupies. It is almost like a cross-cancellation in math terms. The activity required and the restless energy you have are matched. . . . What is left can be really revelatory. Your worry and anxiety gets cross-cancelled. What hooping really did for me is to help me see what were the mechanisms of my mind. What were the triggers and reactions of my mind. And what is me.³²

HoopPath philosophy and methods intentionally cultivate the meditative qualities of hooping. Transformative experiences become a foundation for a long-term practice that is both physical and spiritual.

For hoopers outside of traditional religious systems, hooping can become a tool for spirituality. In her video post about her own personal hoop journey, Jamie Novlesky narrates over music and a silhouette of her hooping in the sunlight: “Hoop dancing is my passion. It is my spiritual ritual that connects me to the divine. It is not only my creative source, but my creative outlet as well.” Later in the video, text scrolls over an image of multi-colored hoops radiating from the chakras. It reads, “Hooping is a doorway into a place of transformation, healing, and connection to my spiritual consciousness.”³³

How and why people deem their experiences as religious or spiritual is rooted, according to Ann Taves, in the process of reflection where experiences “may be caught up in preexisting systems of belief and practice, may generate new or modified beliefs and practices, or may lose their specialness and become ordinary.”³⁴ While this essay focuses on the experiences deemed religious and spiritual, it should also be noted that hoopers who do not value their experience in this manner often occupy the same spaces as those who do. As one survey participant explains, “I think hula hooping is a fun activity! I don’t feel hooping will heal depression as some have claimed! I don’t find it spiritual or meditating either! I feel ppl [*sic*] take that part to extremes!” Those who deem their hooping as religious or spiritual primarily fall into two categories: those who integrate hooping into their preexisting systems of

belief and practice and those who generate new or modified beliefs and practices.

Perhaps no one better exemplifies a hooper who has generated a new set of beliefs and practices based on his transformational experience in the hoop than Jonathan Baxter. Using a blindfold to avoid the stares of neighbors as he hooped in his backyard, he had to feel the hoop through the darkness, and “he made a simple and transformative discovery: his body could communicate directly with the hoop.”³⁵ One of the most profound experiences to come out of Baxter’s backyard blindfold hooping sessions was the intuited story of the Maidan (pronounced “myDAN”). As he hooped, their story developed. The Maidan are “the ancient order of holy women who connected to their ancestral energy, the Spirit Wind, through Hoop Meditation.”³⁶ This is the epic myth of the Maidan tribe. Each Maidan’s life represents a story of individual struggle, tragedy, and victory.

Baxter describes the way in which the story developed:

Almost every time I would hoop I began to collect pieces of a narrative. Small bits of a story trapped in a world’s past. Every day with my hoop I would visit and commune with the characters of the story until over time it felt as real to me as any of the stories of my childhood. This story was teaching me how to hoop, but it also was teaching me how to be. It was revealing to me again and again that happiness was not a destination that we one day arrive at in this world, but rather it was the way we walked through this world. This story that taught me how to hoop is the story of the Maidan.³⁷

For Baxter, the HoopPath practices are the vessel that brought the narrative of the Maidan to his consciousness, and that narrative then began to guide his practice. The language of that narrative became a part of the symbolic inventory of the community. The power of intuition, mind, and myth-making are fundamental to HoopPath spirituality, and they also clearly correspond with the embodied practice. In the example of Jonathan Baxter, we see a person not seeking a spiritual practice and certainly not hooping with the intention to encounter the Maidan and base his livelihood on his hooping. Baxter’s personal journey and approach to hooping has drawn an ever-growing number of students to his workshops, retreats, and social media over the last decade.

Many hoopers draw upon preexisting meaning systems, often attributing a combination of religious and spiritual qualities to hooping. For example, one hooper gave an inclusive description: “Hooping is . . . spiritual in that I am expressing through physical motions and melding together mind/body/spirit [and] religious in that it reaffirms I am one within the universe.” Here, religion and spirituality are complimentary. Jonathan Baxter’s HoopPath workshops are full of religious concepts. For example, the 2013 HoopPath retreat, titled “Sangha,” involved breaking

participants into “tribes,” morning yoga sessions, meditation, a solstice gathering, retelling of various portions of the Maiden myth, “Hoop Church,” and lots of hooping. These religious concepts are offered as language templates to describe the ineffable journey within the hoop. To be clear, hooping is the central practice. Hooping is the vehicle facilitating one’s journey to the authentic core residing in the body.

Hoopers who belong to organized religious groups may describe hooping as distinct from their tradition, “I am a Christian. I admit that I use the gift of dance that the lord has giving me to worship and praise him. I think that people mistake the joy of creating and connecting with people as its own religion, because we tell ourselves that it is not right to open up to others.” Others share, in online forums like Hooping.org, the ways hooping has enriched their religious lives. In “Hooping for Jesus” Shannon Loucks interviews hoopers about their Christian faith and hooping practice. For these hoopers with a traditional faith system, Loucks found “the hoop has truly been a way to deepen their connection with God.”³⁸ While these hoopers did not start hooping as an act of worship, they eventually merged the two. Sara Janssen explains that for her, hooping is a faith tool, “I don’t know if there is a specific time that I ‘discovered’ it. I tend to look at everything in my life as a spiritual endeavor. But there was a moment of realization, where I thought, ‘Wow, this is going to change me.’”³⁹

While these hoopers utilize language and symbols traditionally associated with religion, many hoopers who describe their hooping practice as “spiritual” define this term in contrast to religion. One survey participant wrote, “I wouldn’t describe it as religious because religion, to me, is a structured form of ‘meditation’ ruled by someone else’s beliefs that were handed down. Religion is a form of controlling others, in my opinion.” Another hooper describes hooping as “everything but religion. To me, religion is when humans get in the way of the divine, trying to solidify something beyond our capacity.” When asked whether HoopPath was a religion, Jonathan Baxter explains,

I don’t see [HoopPath] as any sort of religion because I am not asking anyone to buy into any belief system. And, the HoopPath community—the people who come to my workshops—it involves atheists and evangelicals and every which way of the spectrum. So if it was like a religion it would be pretty hard to have a tent big enough for all of those people.⁴⁰

For many hoopers, there is a sense that religion forces a prescribed truth upon the individual that is limiting and, perhaps, even harmful to the individual. For these hoopers, truth lies in the individual and hooping helps the individual to access that truth. Rigid, dogmatic, belief systems defining who is inside or outside a community are seen by many of our survey participants as unnecessary obstacles to spiritual development.



Illustration 4. *Hoopers listen to Jonathan Baxter speaking at HoopPath retreat, Chapel Hill, NC, 2013. Photo by Cassandra Kapsos.*

This spiritual but not religious identification has become the subject of much scholarly attention in recent years.⁴¹ Courtney Bender and Ann Taves argue, “Many who say that they are ‘spiritual not religious’ within the United States and Europe, however, use spirituality to designate something that is not religious. . . . Indeed, we observe that spirituality and spirits are often invoked as an aspect of secularity or are aligned with it.”⁴² In these instances spirituality is either “the truth of religion that is ‘beyond’ the history of religious traditions” or “a historical quality of human searching for the divine.”⁴³ Spirituality, as described by Bender and Taves, may, for many people, “be compatible with secularism and incompatible with religion.”⁴⁴

For many of the hoopers we surveyed and interviewed, their experiences hooping brought about an unexpected experience of physical, emotional, or mental transformation. Many identified this experience as spiritual or religious. Unpacking what these terms mean to individual hoopers reveals the ways the search for self-expression and authenticity lead to new valued paths of embodied practice.

COMMUNITY OF MOVEMENT

The focus of our investigation thus far has been the movement of hoop practice itself and how embodied movement is interpreted by

hoopers—notably, we are curious about those who deem this experience religious or spiritual, and how these discursive acts of description combine with practice to transform these individuals and their interpretations into a community. In other words, what kind of *organized movement* emerges from *individual embodied movement*? The community is not united by a shared belief system, so how does the community articulate the boundary between insiders and outsiders? In order to answer these questions, it is important to keep the focus of inquiry on the physical practice of hooping and the shared understanding among hoopers that movement with the hoop provides a variety of meaningful experiences. For hoopers, the experience of hooping itself becomes primary in community formation. If we consider the movement of hoop dance to be the experiential catalyst in our case, and the language of religion and spirituality that describe it to be a deeming of sorts, then we might also borrow Taves's language of "the path," which is very fittingly a term used by hoopers themselves (the HoopPath in particular), to discuss the way in which a flow experience in the hoop becomes a disciplined practice that is shared with others as the basis of a community.

What we have found while conducting our ethnography of value of the hula hooping community differs in a few important ways from Taves's examples. First, while there are hoopers (as mentioned in the previous section) who incorporate hooping into their current religious system and ascribe the feeling of flow to previously identified deities, this is not a central or unifying quality. Second, there are no written, sacred texts that develop as the central locus of belief for all hoopers. While we might argue about the "texts" of instructional books, videos, and blog posts, these are by no means canonized as sacred or applicable to all hoopers. What we do find both comparable and helpful from Taves's theory is her discussion of language and path as group formations that meet the needs of many individual, diverse members. For hoopers, these processes reveal the ways in which placing movement at the center of the community allows individual hoopers to be the sole authority of their embodied experience.

Catherine Albanese's work on metaphysical religions serves as an important supplement to Taves here. Albanese argues that metaphysical traditions see practices of body and mind as having a significant practical application, a salvific quality.⁴⁵ The path of hoop dance also relies on the efficacy of the practice, and while the transformative effects of hooping vary for each hooper there is a sense of progress that pervades the discourse of hoop dance more broadly, one that we see in the narratives of transformation shared by hoopers. Firmly situated in the metaphysical tradition, the path of hoop practice is a conduit for transformation, one disconnected from any particular belief or text.⁴⁶

Hoopers also fit well among other forms of mid-twentieth-century religiosity. Carol Cusack argues, since the mid-twentieth century, “the related processes of consumerism and individualism predisposed individuals to experiment with new religions and to understand self-transformation as an ongoing process with no particular terminus.”⁴⁷ This is evident in the hoop community, where self-transformation and self-discovery are valued, no matter which path the hooper chooses to pursue. David Lyon agrees, observing that “being authentic, expressing oneself, is raised to a high status. . . . The voice within assumes a new authority at just the time when other, traditional authorities are being more and more radically questioned.”⁴⁸ Cusack concludes, “This quest for authenticity and self-discovery leads to the creation of new religious paths constructed on novel interpretations of experience.”⁴⁹ The physical movement of the path of hooping, rather than the language to describe the path or the experience of hooping, is what unifies the hooping community.

For Taves, a path is a composite formation that offers a “way to refer to practices deemed efficacious relative to a goal.”⁵⁰ She further clarifies a path as a “set of transformative practices,” emphasizing the link between “practices and transformative power.”⁵¹ For Taves, “The key to the groups’ ultimate success lay in their ability to transform problems that were initially of limited concern . . . into paths that offered spiritual solutions to more generalized problems.”⁵² To do this, the hooping community, which contains those who find hooping spiritual or religious, as well as those who see it purely as recreation or exercise, constructs the boundaries of the community around the object of the hoop and the acquisition of hooping skills. From this shared path of movement practice, hoopers recognize each other as part of a unique community.

A path based on a movement practice allows for group identification, personal interpretation, and a multivalent sense of transformation itself. Several survey participants shared this sentiment. One notes, “[Hooping] is a conduit to a larger community of people that share the same sorts of experiences in their hoop.” Another hooper echoes this sentiment, “If I see someone walking down the street carrying a hoop, I know they understand something that I get as well.” Many participants in our survey describe the object of the hoop and the shared practice it represents as universal signals of group membership. One survey participant explains, “Having hooping as a common ground has allowed me to meet and become friends with men and women I would otherwise never interact with. I am a somewhat shy person, but whenever I see a person hooping, I feel like I have to go over and talk to them.” Participants seem to be aware, and even proud, of the fact that a shared practice is enough to form a bond.

The path of hoop dance as the center of community is reinforced by hoopers’ own descriptions of the group. As one hooper states, “There is

nothing unique about the hooping community that differentiates itself from any other community . . . except that they come together for the hoop.” The individuals in our survey consistently depict community boundaries as exclusively tied to the shared practice of hoop dance. Community belonging extends to anyone who has a hoop practice, regardless of their beliefs, experiences, or interpretations of the value of hooping. This notion is commonplace among individual hoopers, and it is also visible at workshops where hoopers gather to learn new hoop techniques.

Jonathan Baxter is very cognizant of the various intentions hoopers bring to their hoop practice. After a HoopPath workshop Baxter explains, “Today, we learned a bunch of techniques, but people could have been operating on a number of different levels. But, the physical one was always there. So, the emotional one, they could have been operating in that one the whole time. They could have been in their astral place. They could have been meditatively experiencing their atman or soul. But, they were definitely hooping.”⁵³ This recognition of the common practice amidst interpretative differences is one that Baxter finds essential to hoop community formation and maintenance.

This sentiment extends into the online community as well, where the inclusion of a variety of interpretations of hoop dance is encouraged. Many hoopers see Hooping.org as both a site of connection to community and a space where community boundaries can be discussed and debated.⁵⁴ Abby Schwartz explains how this sense of belonging affected her:

There really is a recognition you share when you discover that someone else enjoys hooping too. Like you are both in on this really great secret and instantly, your obsession is validated. Hooping.org has expanded this sense of community for me, connecting me to fellow hoopers across the U.S. and across the pond. There really is something special about hoopers, too. Is it me or does this feel like a much more accepting and supportive group of people than most?⁵⁵

The online community has always been an important part of community connection for hoopers, and Hooping.org actively seeks to maintain a sense of inclusiveness that highlights the practice of hooping as the center of the movement.

Repeatedly, hoopers note that it is the practice (not one particular interpretation or belief) that unites the community. In fact, practice and the hoop itself are the only two stable markers of the hoop community, which in other ways sees itself as very diverse. This community identity is evident at hoop workshops and in online discussions, and hoopers in our survey also use a practice-centered inclusive language to describe the group: “The hooping community takes place over many different mediums, high tech, low tech, group classes, individual practice, trick

tutorials, and event invitations. We are many kinds of people, races, genders, sexual orientations. We have many different music preferences and dance styles. . . . But we have one thing in common; hoopedance makes us feel good! And we can all find a place in the circle.”

Hoopers acknowledge there are a variety of reasons why people hoop and all of these reasons are to be respected. Experiences in the hoop serve to demarcate group boundaries, but the authority to define one’s hoop experience is completely in the hands and heart of the individual hooper, thus the hoop community emphasizes the importance of tolerance, diversity, and inclusivity. The path of the hoop community is thus conceived as a movement practice able to unite diverging interpretations and create diverse forms of transformation. This path places experience at the center.

CONCLUSION

By studying why individuals value hula hooping as a religious or spiritual practice, we gain a better understanding of the emergence of religion in unconventional places and the role of physical movement as a path to spiritual truth and authority. Our project is not to define hooping as a new religious movement; instead, we are interested in how hoopers themselves have categorized their practice and their community based on shared experiences. These shared experiences do not just happen in the hoop, they also happen in the discourses of interpreting what happens in the hoop, and in the negotiations of community boundaries in relation to all of the above. Because of hoopers’ broad embrace of multiple ways of valuing the experience of movement practice, experience is both unifying and diverse.

In this sense, experience is actively constructed by the community even as it constructs the community. Joan W. Scott’s 1991 article “The Evidence of Experience” argues that “the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself” unless we actively seek to “attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences.”⁵⁶ For Scott, “experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.”⁵⁷ In the hoop community, we see these processes as hoopers center experience and the authority of the individual as the core of their community.

Flow experiences become central to the hoop community not because they are classified as inherently religious, but because they are part of a valued movement practice on a shared path of individual transformation. Like other religious or spiritual paths, hooping is not

a religion that is contrasted with the secular. As Taves and Bender remind us, “the secular-religious binary has its limits . . . these limits are particularly evident if we consider how, in many secular spaces, terms and concepts (and experiences) people consider ‘spiritual’ interact with and inflect either ‘religion’ or ‘secularity.’”⁵⁸ To say our work is an ethnography of value is to also reiterate that “our interest is not in ‘the spiritual’ or ‘spirits’ per se, but in the way these and other related terms are at work in the world.”⁵⁹ With this in mind, the future of the hoop community and its significance remains uncertain. There may be changes in practice, schisms, or new boundaries that form; the growth of this new movement will provide much to analyze in the coming years.

In other words, some of the possibilities of creating meaningful communities of practice that embrace diverse interpretations of experience exist in the hoop community. Our work illustrates how new religions studies, as a field interested in newly emerging religious groups and movements, might consider the multiple forms these movements are taking in the twenty-first century. Communities that do not identify exclusively as religions have a lot to teach us about the future of the field of new religions studies in an increasingly diverse American landscape. As those who identify as spiritual not religious or unaffiliated are on the rise, and traditional institutional religious identifications decline, shared experiences of movement practices can serve as the foundation of meaningful communities.⁶⁰ What makes the hoop community interesting is not that it is unique from other communities, such as surfers, yoga practitioners, or burners, but rather that these phenomena share new, innovative ways of conceptualizing movement, religion, spirituality, and community.

ENDNOTES

¹ Field notes, HoopPath retreat June 2015. The story of the Maidan, an ancient order of mythical hoopers, is a template for HoopPath practice; we explain this story later in the article.

² For an overview of the history of the hoop community see Jan Camp, *Hoopdance Revolution: The History of Hoopdance*, (California: Arc Light Books, 2013).

³ David G. Bromley, “Perspective: Whither New Religions Studies?” *Nova Religio* 8, no. 2 (2004): 83.

⁴ Ann Taves and Courtney Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” in *What Matters?: Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age*, eds. Courtney Bender and Ann Taves (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 10.

⁵ Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 10.

⁶ To better understand the makeup of the hoop community, we conducted a voluntary and anonymous online survey of hoopers from December 2010 to March 2011. Five hundred hoopers participated in the survey, which contained

multiple-choice and open-ended questions about general demographics and hoop practices. The community itself has marked features: the majority identify as female, white, 25–45 years old, and most have a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of practice, our survey data showed that the vast majority of hoopers primarily practice alone and use music; many also hoop with friends and participate in online hoop social network websites. They also attend classes, workshops, and retreats. YouTube is the most common resource that hoopers utilized in their practice: it is more popular than DVDs, online classes, forums, or in-person classes.

⁷ Over 44 percent of the hoopers in our survey had attended a HoopPath workshop or retreat. The next most attended events were Burning Man, with 19 percent attendance, and Hoop Camp with 16 percent. Because of this, we have chosen to focus much of our attention on hoopers who have participated in HoopPath. We have attended HoopPath workshops around the country and three annual homecoming retreats in North Carolina. HoopPath is generally recognized as a space for those hoopers who use the hoop as a meditative or spiritual tool.

⁸ Hooping.org, founded by bloggers Philo Hagen and Vera Fleisher in 2003, emerged as a new hoop community space that remains one of the most popular virtual spaces for hoopers, spiritual or not. Regular blog posts, featured videos, yearly “hoopy awards,” a Hooping Idol competition, and more make this the go-to site for staying in touch with fellow hoopers, catching up on new trends, and learning new hoop moves. See also: “About.” *Hooping.org*, at <http://www.hooping.org/about/>; accessed 19 July 2016. Jan M. Camp, *Hoopdance Revolution: Mindfulness in Motion* (Berkeley, California: Arc Light Books, 2013).

⁹ *The Hooping Life*, directed by Amy Goldstein (Venice, CA: Span Productions, 2010).

¹⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement in Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1997): 28–34.

¹¹ Rachel Conlisk, “Find Your Flow and Keep It Flowing,” *Hooping.org*, 13 August 2014, at <http://www.hooping.org/2014/08/find-your-flow-and-keep-it-flowing/>

¹² Shannon Loucks, “When The Hoop Disappears,” *Hooping.org*, 22 April 2013, at <http://www.hooping.org/2013/04/when-the-hoop-disappears/>

¹³ Rachel Conlisk, “Find Your Flow and Keep It Flowing,” *Hooping.org*, 13 August 2014, at <http://www.hooping.org/2014/08/find-your-flow-and-keep-it-flowing/>

¹⁴ Shannon Loucks, “When The Hoop Disappears,” *Hooping.org*, 22 April 2013, at <http://www.hooping.org/2013/04/when-the-hoop-disappears/>

¹⁵ Jonathan Baxter, “How to Explain Hooping to People Who Don’t Hoop,” 14 February 2014, at <http://www.hooppath.com/baxters-thoughts-on-things/how-to-explain-hooping-to.html>; accessed 22 December 2016.

¹⁶ Baxter, “How to Explain Hooping to People Who Don’t Hoop.”

¹⁷ Bron Taylor, “Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 923–951.

¹⁸ Michael Jindra, “It’s About Faith in our Future: Star Trek Fandom as Cultural Religion,” in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 165–179;

Eric M. Mazur and Kate McCarthy "Introduction: Finding Religion in American Popular Culture," in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, eds. Eric M. Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2001): 1–15; David Chidester, "The Church Of Baseball, The Fetish Of Coca-Cola, And The Potlatch Of Rock 'N' Roll," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 213–232.

¹⁹ Michelle M. LeWica, "Losing their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 180–200.

²⁰ Joseph Price, "An American Apotheosis: Sports as Popular Religion," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, eds. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 195–212; Chidester, "The Church Of Baseball."

²¹ Sarah M. Pike, "Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art: Making Sacred Space at the Burning Man Festival," in *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*, eds. Eric M. Mazur and Kate McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2001): 155–176.

²² Two major themes dominate the discourse on defining new religious movements; a focus on the attributes that create *newness* and a focus on the *tensions* that new religious movements have with existing religious and social groups. J. Gordon Melton has argued that the defining feature of new religious movements is found in their tensions with dominant religious groups. In contrast, Eileen Barker argues that the religious tensions that Melton identifies are *not* primary; it is the "newness" that is primary, that attribute allows us to understand any tensions that they may or may not have with society. These two tropes remain central for new religions studies, and many scholars have contributed nuance to these two main frameworks. David Bromley, for example, synthesizes these approaches by proposing that the study of social and cultural dimensions be subsumed under the concept of alignment, defined as the degree of congruence with the dominant culture and dominant institutions. See J. Gordon Melton, "Perspective: Toward a Definition of 'New Religion,'" *Nova Religio* 8, no. 1 (2004): 73–87; Eileen Barker, "Perspective: What Are We Studying?" *Nova Religio* 8, no. 1 (2004): 88–102; and David G. Bromley, "Perspective: Whither New Religions Studies?" *Nova Religio* 8, no. 2 (2004): 83–97.

²³ Barker, "Perspective: What Are We Studying?"

²⁴ Thomas Robbins, "Perspective: New Religions and Alternative Religions," *Nova Religio* 8, no. 3 (2005): 108–109.

²⁵ Bron Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 925.

²⁶ Taylor, "Surfing into Spirituality," 925.

²⁷ Throughout this article, we will utilize quotes taken from our anonymous online hoop survey.

²⁸ Philo Hagen, "Hooping and Grieving: Healing in a Circle," *Hooping.org*, 5 November 2015, at <http://www.hooping.org/2015/11/hooping-and-grieving-healing-in-a-circle/>.

²⁹ Hagen, “Hooping and Grieving.”

³⁰ Lauren Nunn, Hooping.org Facebook Group Post, 7 October 2015, at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/hoopingdotorg/permalink/1606875706229909/>. Philo Hagen, “Sciatica: How Hooping and Yoga Solved Her Back Pain Problem,” *Hooping.org*, 28 October 2014, at <http://www.hooping.org/2014/10/sciatica-how-hooping-and-yoga-solved-her-back-pain-problem/>. Shea Brock, “Hula Hooping With Back Problems,” 28 April 2014, at <http://www.hooping.org/2014/04/hula-hooping-with-back-problems/>. Philo Hagen, “Hooping For Syringomyelia and Scoliosis,” 7 September 2011, at <http://www.hooping.org/2011/09/hooping-for-syringomyelia-and-scoliosis/>. Nico Colindres, “TED Talk on a Hoop Revolution with Theresa Rose,” 15 January 2013, at <http://www.hooping.org/2013/01/ted-talk-on-a-hoop-revolution-with-theresa-rose/>.

³¹ Camp, *Hoopdance*, 119.

³² Jonathan Baxter, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 10 August 2014.

³³ Philo Hagen, “Spiritual Hoop Journey,” *Hooping.org*, 20 April 2009, at <http://www.hooping.org/2009/04/spiritual-hoop-journey/>.

³⁴ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 162–163.

³⁵ Hagen, “Getting Ourselves Animated.”

³⁶ *HoopPath: The First Steps*, DVD, 2008.

³⁷ *HoopPath: The First Steps*.

³⁸ Shannon Loucks, “Hooping With Jesus,” *Hooping.org*, 18 December 2012, at <http://www.hooping.org/2012/12/hooping-with-jesus/>.

³⁹ Loucks, “Hooping With Jesus.”

⁴⁰ Baxter, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 10 August 2014.

⁴¹ See: Ann Taves and Courtney Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” in *What Matters?: Ethnographies of Value in a Not So Secular Age*, eds. Courtney Bender and Ann Taves (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁴² Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 6.

⁴³ Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 6.

⁴⁴ Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 6.

⁴⁵ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 15.

⁴⁶ Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand and Martha Smith Roberts, “Hula Hoop Spiritualities: Social Media, Embodied Experience, and Communities of Practice,” in *Practical Spiritualities in a Media Age*, eds. Curtis Coats and Monica M. Emerich (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), 67–88.

⁴⁷ Carole M. Cusack, *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 25.

⁴⁸ David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 3.

⁴⁹ Cusack, *Invented Religions*, 25.

⁵⁰ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 164.

⁵¹ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 178–179.

⁵² Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 223–224.

⁵³ Baxter, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 10 August 2014.

⁵⁴ Gray-Hildenbrand and Roberts, “Hula Hoop Spiritualities,” 67–88.

⁵⁵ Abby Schwartz, “8 Surprising Things Hooping Has Given Me,” *Hooping.org*, 24 March 2015, at <http://www.hooping.org/2015/03/8-surprising-gifts-hooping-has-given-me-2/>.

⁵⁶ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1 July 1991): 778–9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 779–780.

⁵⁸ Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 10.

⁵⁹ Taves and Bender, “Introduction: Things of Value,” 10.

⁶⁰ See the recent survey data from Pew and PRRI, which document growing numbers of unaffiliated Americans. Recent data places the “nones” between approximately 22 percent and 25 percent of the population. “Religious Landscape Survey,” *Pew Research Forum*, accessed 28 September 2017 at <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/> and Betsy Cooper, et al., “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” *Public Religion Research Institute*, 22 September 2016, accessed 28 September 2017, <https://www.prii.org/research/prii-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.