

## Muscle-bound Yogis Kristopher Torres

My wrists hurt. My arms are sore. My back aches. For the past half hour, my body has been contorted in ways I feel it was never meant to be twisted. Who is to blame? Yoga.

Before being bent out of shape, I hesitated in doing yoga. I thought it would hurt my pride. But John Sivils and I wanted to share a “new experience” together. So we weighed in our choices —doing yoga and getting a pedicure. In the end, we choose doing yoga.

Before being in the yoga session, I couldn't help, but replay different scenarios in my head. I was sure there would be a lot of stretching. The instructor would probably be a soft-spoken elderly hippie. I began to imagine a room full of women wearing 80s gym wear. Perhaps, they would all be talking in “spiritual terms or metaphors.”

“This pose is called the monkey handle.”

“Think of this pose like if you are inside of a seed...”

For me, yoga has always been a thing women do. Men bench press and weightlift. That's how guys exercise. Women do Zumba and yoga. That's how girls exercise.

I believe my upbringing in Puerto Rico has influenced the way I perceive how men and women work out, since Puerto Rico has a masochistic culture. Part of my upbringing involved sports. I have been playing basketball since I was six years old. It happens to be one of the three major sports played in Puerto Rico. Due to its physical contact, girls typically don't play, especially on official teams; although, I have seen a few girls shooting hoops. But seeing a girl play on an men's basketball team is a strange and rare sight. For me this would be the American equivalent to having a girl play on an official football team. But that never happens, right?

In middle school and high school, I also played volleyball. Unlike in the U.S., both girls and guys have official volleyball teams in Puerto Rico. Volleyball is not considered an unmasculine sport. Actually, it's quite the opposite. Volleyball happens to be highly regarded. Basketball is the same way. Yoga, on the other hand, is seen as neither a sport nor macho.

However, my preconceptions could not prepare me for this yoga session. After arriving at the Arkadelphia Health Club, John and I entered a candle-lit room. On the far right corner a barefooted man was stretching, his face touching the floor. After exhaling, he stood up and approached us. No doubt, this dude

was a body builder. He probably weighed two hundred pounds and benched three hundred and fifty pounds or possibly more. He had biceps the size of my head and quads the size of logs. I wondered, “What is this guy doing here? Doesn't he know that the weights and barbells are in the other room?” Then, he asked as he flexed, “You guys here for yoga?” We couldn't help, but nod. Apparently, he was the yoga instructor. He got some papers from a table and handed them to us. They were injury waivers. Confused, I looked at John, who had a similar expression, and thought, “What kind of yoga are we going to be doing exactly?” We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into.

With a room of three average guys, a Goth chick, and a hippie, this strong instructor began the yoga session. We immediately began stretching and testing the limits of our flexibility and strength. After a while, one of the “yogis” asked the instructor when we would actually begin doing yoga. I looked at the instructor puzzled. “What had we been doing for the past ten minutes?” I thought. He laughed and told her that this was yoga mixed with Pilates. No wonder it seemed to be different from what I imaged yoga to be. It was a hybrid.

Each pose and movement required extreme amounts of balance, focus, and breathing. Before every pose, we began by getting into downward dog. In non-yogi terms, downward dog involves placing both your hands and feet on the ground as you lift your butt into the air. It is used as a resting pose in between other poses, but I found it just as strenuous.

I had just finished planking when we reverted back to downward dog, then to a side-plank. In order to plank, I was supposed to look down and place my feet together. Then, I needed to lift my hips, keeping my back straight. I had to support my upper body with one arm, while the other one was extended upward, stacking my legs on top of each other. I struggled to get into the proper positioning, but even after I did it, I had a hard time holding.

However, the next two poses, the crow and crane, were even harder. They were basically the same pose, but with some alterations. I needed to get into —what looks like— the starting position for leap frog. Afterwards, I pressed my knees onto my triceps. With my toes I pushed my legs off of the yoga mat, balancing my body with only my arms. While attempting to do this pose, I doubted it was even possible to do. Looking at my instructor, I noticed that he had already perched himself on his large arms. How in the world? You would think that this stiff body builder would have a hard time performing these poses, but he managed to

do every single one. It was incredible, almost surreal. I was the only man. Meanwhile, John and I had no clue what we were doing.

After fifty minutes of painful poses, I am done. My joints are really hurting. And I feel that if I keep going I will get arthritis. After untwisting out of the "human pretzel" pose, I look at John. I can tell he wants to get out of here just as bad as I do. Quickly and quietly, we escape.

As we head back to OBU, I can't help, but think about how wrong I was about yoga. It is not an un-macho thing. In reality, it actually challenged my "machoness." It is an exhausting and grueling workout. There is nothing un-macho about yoga. Although I still don't like doing yoga, I now have a deeper appreciation for those who do it regularly. So if yoga is your thing, go ahead and do it with pride. And as for me, I think the next thing I'm going to do is get a pedicure.

