

King's Professors examine how the threat of personal failure feeds into lululemon's success

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London, ON -Promoting problematic ideals of what it takes to be a model citizen may be the key to lululemon athletica's remarkable success, according to a research paper by King's faculty recently published in the *Canadian Review of Sociology*.

In *This is not your practice life: lululemon and the neo-liberal governance of self*, Dr. Christine Lavrence and Dr. Kristin Lozanski, of King's sociology department, examine lululemon's website and in-store branding tactics. They argue that the success of lululemon's branding strategy is rooted in neoliberalism, a political ideology that has gained momentum in the last 30 years. Neoliberalism puts the responsibility on individuals to mitigate and manage the risks and uncertainties in their lives.

The study examines lululemon's 'manifesto', a consistent feature of the company's successful but relatively low-budget branding strategy. Printed on the store's reusable bags, the manifesto gives consumers advice on how to live well. "Stress is related to 99% of all illness," it claims, and "Nature wants us to be mediocre because we have a greater chance to survive and reproduce. Mediocrity is as close to the bottom as it is to the top, and will give you a lousy life". Lavrence and Lozanski argue that such branding moralizes success and failure. If a person isn't perfectly healthy, for example, this must be because of poor choices the person has freely made.

"We felt this was an interesting and important project because our analysis of lululemon demonstrates the ways that a popular and seemingly apolitical brand is, in fact, highly invested in promoting the ideology of individualism. We look forward to learning how consumers of lululemon respond to this ideology, a question that is at the centre of our ongoing follow-up project," says Dr. Lozanski.

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