Perspectives and Experiences of Female Surf Lifesavers
in
Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and understand the experiences of female surf lifesaver athletes in Aotearoa New Zealand. The popular image of lifeguards, particularly in the media, has long been based on a particular heroic masculinity, yet women have been active participants in surf lifesaving in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1911 (Harvey, 2010). Jaggard (1999) dubbed female lifeguards as the 'forgotten members' of surf lifesaving clubs, this research refocusses the narrative and seeks to highlight women's experiences in SLS sport. This study is qualitative and used an interpretive approach grounded in feminist theory. The research consisted of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with six women who competed in the *Under 19* or *Open* categories of surf lifesaving sport in the summer of 2020/2021. Three guiding topics led the conversations: connections to blue space, female athlete experiences in surf lifesaving sport in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the significance of required volunteer patrol hours to athletes.

Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data collected from interviews; three core themes were identified. The first theme explores participants connections with blue coastal space, which was a key landscape for participants' experiences in sport and leisure. The second theme identified highlights the complex and nuanced social culture of SLS sport. The final theme revealed the gender discourses around key topics such as embodiment, experiences of motherhood, inclusion, and marginalisation. This research explores the complex ways in which women navigate societal expectations around their bodies, their time, and what it means to be a female athlete.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Surf lifesaving in Aotearoa New Zealand is an iconic first response service. If you visit beaches in the summer you will often see red and yellow flags with dutiful lifeguards patrolling the beaches to keep swimmers safe. Ask a local where a safe place to swim is and you will most likely get the response "between the flags", marking supervised swim areas at more than 80 beaches across the island nation. Among the lifeguard volunteers are athletes who participate in the sport side of surf lifesaving, surf lifesaving sport (SLS sport). The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women surf lifesaver sport athletes in Aotearoa New Zealand, in order to provide an alternative perspective from the often male dominated sport narrative. Sport has long been seen as a man's domain, and traits such as strength and dominance accredited to the male gender (Burstyn, 1999; Connell, 1995; Drummond 2020).

The popular image of lifeguards, particularly in the media, has historically been one based on heroic masculinity. In a book about Australian lifeguards the lifeguards were described as: "Sun Bronzed, iron muscled surf gods... big bold, brown beach dwellers, fearless in the face of massive waves, rip tides and man eating sharks" (Carter, 1968, p. 6.). Across the Pacific, the American television series "Baywatch" also reflected a portrayal of hyper masculine lifeguards which was not reserved solely for Americans and Australians. The Melbourne Age (1956) notably called the New Zealand team competing at Bondi for the first time "tall bronzed gods from the other side of the Tasman'' (Harvey, 2010, p. 47). More recently international reality television shows have premiered showcasing surf lifeguards, yet female cast members

are notably absent or few in popular programmes. After eight years with a male only cast, Australian reality TV show "Bondi Rescue'' showcased their first female guard in 2014 (10play, 2020). In Aotearoa New Zealand, "Piha Rescue" and "Bay Patrol" show a more inclusive side of surf lifesaving, yet these 'reality' shows focus on entertainment not the true realities of lifeguarding.

In reality around half of SLS participants in Aotearoa identified as female, and have been patrolling beaches since 1911 (SLSNZ, 2020a). As Bob Harvey, past chairperson of SLSNZ, said "It's not all about tanned and bronzed bodies, it's about the amazing tenacity, courage and sheer guts of men and women. It's the history of New Zealand, in some ways" (SLSNZ, 2020a). By framing this study with an interpretive approach informed by feminism I planned to examine female athletes' experiences and narratives in surf lifesaving in Aotearoa New Zealand. Using an interpretive framework with a foundation of feminist theory, the study aimed to increase understanding of females experiences in SLS sport in Aotearoa New Zealand by centring women's voices in the male dominated domain of sport.

1.1 Research questions

The research questions of this study explored female surf lifesavers' perspectives and experiences in the sport, and their connections to the 'landscape' of their sport, coastal blue space. Three questions guided this research:

1. What are the connections the participants have with coastal blue space?

2. What are female surf lifesavers' experiences in SLS sport?

3. What role does volunteer lifeguarding take for the participants?

The first question addressed the physical 'landscape' of Surf Life Saving by considering the emergence of a plethora of blue space research including for wellbeing. The second question explored the different narratives of teenage and adult females experiences in the sport. All SLS sport athletes must also be club members who complete volunteer hours in order to qualify for competitions. Acknowledging the unique volunteer requirement of SLS sport, the third question investigated the importance of volunteer hours and club memberships to the participants.

1.2 Research contexts

Aotearoa New Zealand has dedication and responsibility to bi-culturalism, as recognized in the Titiri o Waitangi. In this study I use the term Aotearoa New Zealand to acknowledge Māori (Indigenous peoples) and Pākehā (European descent nationals). People in Aotearoa New Zealand have widespread access to blue space and beaches with over 15,000 kilometres of coastline (Swim Guide, 2020). In 2015 one third of the New Zealand population cited taking part in their chosen sport or recreational activity on the beach or in the ocean, and over half of the population said swimming was an important part of their lifestyle (Sport New Zealand, 2015). To understand the importance of lifeguards in Aotearoa New Zealand culture, the benefits of beach use and safe access for communities must be examined.

Research has recognized the importance of human relationships with the ocean, and how they can shape our personalities, sense of self, wellbeing, and spirituality (Olive et al., 2020). There has been an increasing visibility of seas and oceans among public consciousness, concerning both sustainability, environmentalism, and the use of blue space for leisure (Foley et al., 2019). Research exploring our connectedness to the sea through non-traditional sports such as surfing, surf lifesaving, sailing, kayaking, and diving is proliferating (Olive et al. 2020). With the global COVID-10 pandemic causing restricted travel for New Zealanders, personal experience with the oceans and seas of Aotearoa has increased and can be seen as a health resource during a time of global stress (Wheaton et al., 2021).

Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) is a charity in which participants volunteer as surf lifeguards, protecting locals and visitors on Aotearoa New Zealand beaches (SLSNZ, 2021). The red and yellow flags have become characteristic of Kiwi beaches with swimmers looking to the flags for a safe space to enter the water (Phillips, 2006). 'Swim Between the Flags' is almost synonymous with summer, with media advertisements encouraging beach goers to choose lifeguarded areas for swimming and recreation (NZ Herald, 2019). Almost just as recognizable as the flags are lifeguards, dressed in visible red and yellow shirts, patrolling the beaches and surveying swim areas. Given the contribution surf lifesavers make to water safety and beach education, lifeguards play an integral role in the safe use and promotion of coastal blue spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.3 The Researcher

I am an American who has been living in Aotearoa New Zealand since 2018; a love for the coast and affinity for 'beach towns' brought me to the Bay of Plenty. I have grown up in a family of competitive swimmers and triathletes. My mother, a competitive pool swimmer herself, had my sister and I enrolled in a swim club from a young age. I have since participated in a varied assortment of oceanic leisure sports from wild swimming to free diving, sailing, and surfing to name a few. I grew up in the Sonoran Desert, an unlikely start for an ocean lifeguard, yet family holidays, without exception were to the coast. My early oceanic memories include getting rolled by waves in Hawaii and jumping into the chilly California Pacific waters. My father, an Ironman athlete, instilled a deep respect for the ocean in my sister and me from an earlier age. Some of my earliest memories are him instructing us "It doesn't matter how well you swim, it matters how well you hold your breath, keep calm" as we'd emerge from the washing machine of a wave to the head.

A coastal dweller in my adult life, my own ocean lifeguarding experience began on a small island off the coast of California in 2015. Working at Catalina Island Camps in collaboration with Ocean Futures Society and Jean-Michel Cousteau, my appreciation and curiosity for coastal landscapes grew. A particularly foundational experience for me diving with Cousteau was when he popped up from a kelp forest and reminded us "you protect what you love and understand" before continuing to explain various sea life. This phrase cemented my interest in human connection with coastal blue space, while an academic background in Public Health (BSc) grounded my interests in wellbeing and health promotion. This phrase for me

cemented an interest in human connection with coastal blue space, while an academic background in Public Health (BSc) grounded my interests in wellbeing and health promotion. Thereafter much of my professional life has centred around water safety and use of blue space for recreation.

A frequent beach goer, I had not known of the existence of Surf Life Saving clubs before my move to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018 and was introduced to them through friendships with club members. While I am not and have never been a SLSNZ member, the connections I have with the sport through friendships sparked my interest in the experiences of its athletes. A desire to more fully understand and explore the experiences of female athletes in SLS sport led to the initial research questions for this thesis.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including this Introduction. The second chapter presents a review of literature around surf lifesaving, contextualizes gender and feminist research in oceanic sport, and concludes with a discussion of blue space themes. In chapter three I introduce the theoretical framework, methodology, and introduce the participants for this study. In the fourth chapter I present themes that were identified using thematic analysis. Finally, in the conclusion, I address limitations of this study, highlight key findings from analysis, and conclude by proposing future directions for research.

Chapter Two: Review of literature

Diverse bodies of literature are relevant to the topic of surf lifesaving and surf lifesaving sport. While I recognize that this review of literature cannot fully introduce all academic fields that relate to surf lifesaving sport. I aim to highlight some important themes, divided into three sections. The first presents a historical review of SLS sport, the ways in which lifeguards are currently portrayed in the media, through to current initiatives to increase female participation in SLS sport. The second aims to contextualize different themes surrounding sport as a gendered space. I begin by discussing feminism in sport and defining sex and gender; next I present research on women's experiences in different oceanic sports. Followed by a discussion of benefits and challenges in mixed sex/gender sport practices. The final part of the section focused on gendered social norms at coastal landscapes and their implications.

In the third section I introduce research on sport and blue space. I begin by defining blue space, and human connections to blue space. Continuing I present different ways in which blue space is used to promote human health and wellbeing. However, when researching health promotion, it is important to consider who is excluded from those landscapes, which is highlighted in the final section of this review. By exploring the histories of SLS sport, reviewing gender themes, and the landscape of the sport: coastal blue space, I identify the significant gaps in literature this study will contribute to.

2.1 Between the flags: Surf lifesavers place on the beach

2.1.1 Setting the scene

Surf lifeguards in Aotearoa New Zealand are idealized as strong capable individuals tasked with keeping their regional beaches safe. They can easily be spotted, wearing their recognizable red and yellow, patrolling beaches in the summer season. In the 2020/2021 season there were 19,645 total members of surf lifesaving clubs (SLSNZ, 2021b). These lifeguards are all volunteers and do not include regional paid lifeguards. The range of volunteer lifeguards in the SLSNZ institution includes children 14 years of age or older, young adults, and adults (SLSNZ, 2021b). Members must achieve a bronze medallion to become a qualified lifeguard. The bronze medallion is a course certificate which includes first aid, CPR, theory questions, and timed physical requirements (SLSNZ, 2021b). The drowning rates in Aotearoa New Zealand have been rising over the past five years, and the summer holiday period of 2021 saw a 180% increase in drowning deaths (Drowning Report, 2021). Lifeguards play an essential role in keeping the beaches of Aotearoa New Zealand safe.

While lifesaving and community service is at the heart of SLS clubs, an initiative to keep club members physically fit saw the creation of SLS sport (SLSNZ, 2021a). A unique aspect of SLS sport is that to compete you must also be a refreshed volunteer SLS lifeguard and complete required volunteer hours each season. Members have to dedicate time in summer to patrol beaches, time to train, and additionally to compete if they choose to be active in sport. SLS as a sport, referred to as SLS sport here, is composed of multiple athletic disciplines: beach sprints,

beach flags, beach relays, surf ski races, kneeboard races, inflatable rescue boat skills, surf

canoe, surf boats, pool rescue, ocean swim, and ocean rescue events (SLSNZ, 2021c). A cost,

both time and monetary, is associated with SLS as members must provide their own wetsuit,

swimwear, swim fins, and goggles (SLSNZ, 2021b). Participation in SLS sport also requires

additional competition equipment, with some items such as kneeboards being very costly.

SLS sport is unique in that it encompasses many aspects of traditional sport, including

coaches, sport governing bodies, contests, winners, teams and clubs. However, SLS sport also

encompasses elements of so-called 'lifestyle sports' (Wheaton, 2004), which are discussed in

more detail on page 15. A few of the non-traditional elements include lifeguard patrols carried

out with mixed ages, genders, and skill level groups which is not often found in other traditional

competitive sports.

To understand experiences in surf Lifesaving sport it is important to understand the

associated sport and national governing body Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ). The first

SLSNZ club in New Zealand was introduced to Wellington in 1910, modelled on the Australian

clubs created in 1906 (Harvey, 2010). Surf Lifesaving is often light heartedly described as New

Zealand's "best import from Australia" (SLSNZ, 2021a). Historically, in Aotearoa New Zealand

when beach swimming became more popular as a leisure activity in the early 1900s, drownings

increased across the country (Harvey, 2010). In response, communities created local surf

lifesaving clubs (SLSNZ, 2020a). While men dominated the clubs, during World War I women

took over the majority of lifeguarding duties. However, when the men returned from overseas

the women were removed from their active roles on the beach. In response, women contested

marginalisation by creating their own clubs; the first all ladies surf club was formed in 1932, the

Milford Girls Surf Lifesaving Club (Harvey, 2010, p. 43). Women continued to form their own

clubs, competing against the male clubs in many cases. In the 1970s faced with dwindling

participant numbers, many female clubs merged with existing SLSNZ clubs (Harvey, 2010).

Most textual histories of SLS portray clubs as groups of like-minded people, instead of

complex social structures consisting of hierarchies and interconnected relationships (Booth,

2008). It is important to note most histories have been written by club members, therefore club

histories are inevitably partial, and women's experiences may not be consistently featured.

Additionally, no qualitative studies could be identified where women themselves were asked

about their experiences. Moreover, research on SLS sport is heavily Australian centred.

It is important to note that while often grouped together, Australian and New Zealand

lifesaving histories are incredibly distinct. However, I briefly present histories of SLS in Australia

as this is where the majority of SLS research is conducted, as is important to contextualize

discourses surrounding SLS. The rules and regulations of SLS sport participation for females

have historically been different between the two countries. For example, Australian SLS

committees refused to let women patrol in the absence of men in the first and second World

Wars while New Zealand women took the role of lifeguards during both instances (Booth, 2002;

Jaggard, 1999). However, Jaggard (1999) refutes critics who claim that Australian women

primarily served lifesaving as in fundraiser functions and not active lifeguard members. He cites

several instances of women drilling, marching, sprinting, swimming and rowing, and even women qualifying for the bronze medallion (Jaggard, 1997). Yet these details are not included in written club histories in Australia. There are also many examples of Australian women completing bold surf rescues from as early as 1928 (Booth, 2002; Brawdly, 1995). Exclusion from SLS club rooms in Australia had few exemptions. For example, a club in the 1950's changed the regulations to allow women into the club house, on Sunday nights only to prepare dinner (Brawley, 1995).

While Australian women were officially excluded from SLSA until the 1980s, Aotearoa New Zealand women have remained active members throughout the sport's history (Harvey, 2010, p. 97), including in their own clubs. The female only clubs competed against the male clubs in many cases, and shared beach spaces (SLSNZ, 2020). For example, a 1944 image shows four New Zealand women completing a rescue, carrying a fifth woman; the team won all races but one (Harvey, 2010, p. 96). In the 1950s women's participation in clubs began to decrease (Harvey, 2010, p. 98). The women's events at the 1952 national championships were cancelled due to few entries. It was noted in the 1955 Wellington Ladies report that four women had ceased membership, their reason being they had married (Harvey, 2010). Once again a decrease in club members in the 1970s saw many female clubs begin to merge with the men's SLS clubs. This was the case for Wellington Ladies Club, created in the 1940s; after winning a national title in 1945; faced with dwindling membership numbers they merged with the local men's club Lyall Bay in 1976 (Harvey, 2010, p. 23). Most separate men's and women's SLS clubs had merged together by the end of the 1970s (Harvey, 2010).

In the early 1970s the first New Zealand women were awarded the paid lifeguard

positions, eight years before their Australian counterparts were even admitted into SLS clubs

(Harvey, 2010). Even with these advancements it was not until 2000 that women were included

in all the same events as men at carnivals. The last event added for women was the boat race

(Harvey, 2010). It took 90 years from when surf lifesaving began in New Zealand for adult

women to have all the same events as their male counterparts. The time it took for women to

have the same events could be seen to be illustrative of the pervasive and hard to shift

gendered understandings lingering in sport.

2.1.2 Portrayal of lifeguards globally and in Aotearoa New Zealand

The image of lifeguards, particularly in the popular media has long been depicted as one based

on a particular heroic masculinity. In print there has been both the glorification of male life

savers and the exclusion and marginalization of women. An Australian Newspaper, The Sunday

Telegraph, printed a statement from the then SLS President in response to a petition to allow

women to join SLS clubs in 1975, it read: "a woman's place in a surf club was making tea and

raising funds" (Daly 2002, p. 63).

In Aotearoa New Zealand historic print sources show examples of blatant sexism, for

instance a 1937 magazine comic from the Bulletin (New Zealand) depicts a boat of male

lifeguards reaching for an unconscious woman in the water held by another male lifeguard: the

caption reading "Go and get one for yourself" (Harvey 2010, p. 13.). Where women were depicted as lifeguards, the imagery was still steeped in hegemonic masculinity. This is one example of how women in sport have been represented as 'Other', where society defines a female body as an object as opposed to "body-subject" (Davies & Weaving, 2009, p. 14). For example, a 1940's Newspaper comic calls for women to join surf lifesaving clubs as men go to war. The comic reads "The Man Who Wouldn't be Resuscitated" and depicts multiple female guards grabbing the unconscious man and performing mouth-mouth resuscitation with the man, still conscious, with a cheeky smile on his face (Harvey, 2010).

More recently in Aotearoa New Zealand *Bay Patrol* came on the air in 2021, a reality TV show that follows Mount Maunganui lifeguards on their daily beach patrols. The show is a spinoff of the popular *Piha Rescue*, a reality television show that follows the lifeguards of Piha SLSC. The show features eleven main guards, of which two are female. While still a television programme, the representation of strong capable female lifeguards in Aotearoa New Zealand shows progress in the inclusion of women as active and important SLS members. Individuals and organisations such as SLSNZ are recognizing the importance of women's inclusion in SLS sport and initiatives to increase participation are discussed in the next section.

2.1.3 SLSNZ current initiatives for female participants

There are recent initiatives in SLSNZ to encourage more female participation in the sport, particularly in the open category. Phoebe Havill, SLSNZ lifeguard of the year in 2021, was only

the second women to be awarded the accolade which is given to one lifeguard a year that shows skill, experience and dedication to volunteer lifeguarding. She called for more women leadership roles in SLSNZ and started Wāhine on Water with three others in 2019 (Brownline, 2022). She notes in an interview that around half of volunteer lifeguards are women, but only 28% are qualified to operate an inflatable rescue boat (IRB), a key skill to becoming a more senior lifeguard (Brownline, 2022). Wāhine on Water was created to encourage more women to qualify to operate inflatable rescue boats (IRBs). Havill commented "Sometimes I think that females aren't the first people to be thought of when thinking about training for IRBs, they aren't consciously excluded, but aren't shoulder-tapped or aren't shown the door to be involved." (Brownline, 2022, p. 1).

Furthermore, SLSNZ published a report during the completion of this thesis, a survey distributed to female members with the aim of "understanding the role of women in life saving and where there are possible gender and diversity gaps, understanding why the gaps exist, and working toward recommendations on how to bring equality and equity for all women who are involved with lifesaving in New Zealand" (Boardman & Fry, 2021, p. 2). The survey identified positive and negative experiences from female surf lifesavers. Some of the positive points included: hanging out with like-minded people, giving back to their community, the ability to be outdoors, and staying healthy and physically fit (Boardman & Fry, 2021). When asked what they didn't like about SLSNZ respondents answered with themes including: male dominated sexist behaviour, unwelcoming teammates, and elitism at competitions. Women in this survey called for more personal support in the form of role models and mentors; and more opportunities for

development and high quality training. This survey aids in setting the scene of SLSNZ female participants in my current study, and highlights institutions in SLS sport that are recognizing the importance of understanding female's experiences in the sport.

2.1.4 Lifestyle sports, sport cultural hierarchies, and subcultures

Lifestyle sports can be defined as "a specific type of alternative sport, including both established activities like skateboarding through to newly emergent activities like kite-surfing" (Wheaton, 2010, p. 1059). Wheaton (2010) continues to explain lifestyle sports can be further identified by participants defining the sport as part of their lifestyle and the sport tends to be non-competitive for most participants. These lifestyle sports vary (e.g. snowboarding, surfing, windsurfing, skateboarding) yet are typically associated with alternative lifestyle; which is a way of life that is different to the cultural norms at the time. In sport these alternative lifestyles are often closely associated with a social identity and lifestyles (Jarvie & Thornton, 2012; Wheaton, 2004).

Both surfing and windsurfing have been contextualized as lifestyle sports (Olive et al., 2018; Wheaton, 2004) and SLS sport can arguably be described as a traditional sport with aspects of lifestyle sport. Many lifestyle sports including surfing and windsurfing have been highlighted by commentators as a potential landscape for addressing gender disparities in sport (Maclean, 2016; Olive et al., 2015; Thorpe, 2005; Wheaton, 2004). SLS sport appears to share some key attributes with lifestyle sports such as mixed gender participation, and

intergenerational participation. As discussed below, in this study surfing is used as an example of immersive ocean sport, which while it differs in many ways to SLS sport, takes place in many of the same blue spaces.

Despite many similarities some commentators have posed SLS sport and surfing as natural enemies, with different cultures (Pearson, 1982; Booth, 2002). Booth (2008), whose research is primarily completed in Australia, posed SLS sport and surfing culture values in juxtaposition to each other; classifying SLS sport as very disciplined versus surfing culture as focused on self-interest and individualism. As described by Booth (2008) some surfers view themselves as a part of a "freedom loving subculture" while surf lifesavers "represent everything we [surfers] despise" (p. 166). However, some commenters note that surfing is not exempt from exclusion where young male shortboard surfers tend to be at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy (Ford & Brown, 2005). In contrast to Booth, Pearson (1982) also highlighted the similarities between the patriarchal surfing and SLS cultures in his research in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Historically subculture in sport has been attributed to a group of people that differentiate themselves from cultural norms and challenge dominant cultural beliefs and practices (Fine & Kleinman, 1979). However, Thorpe (2007) calls into question the beliefs that sport subcultures challenge dominant culture, in fact stating that they rarely do. Dant and Wheaton (2007) argue subculture can also be used as a structure for understanding hierarchies and power differences within a sport, describing subculture capital as a difference between 'us'

and 'them'. In the context of this research, in this study sub-culture is used to describe the specific cultures of sports that are not dominant.

There are many oceanic sports that share physical space in the sea and sometimes the same waves including surfing, surf lifesaving, windsurfing, and boogie boarding. Commentators have noted the ways in which power plays out in shared surf landscapes based on the craft used (Booth, 2004; Nemani, 2013; Stranger, 2011). For example, Nemani (2013) found bodyboarders she interviewed had all encountered patronising behaviours from short board surfers; Stranger (2011) referred to the invasion of short boarders' "territory" by bodyboarders at overcrowded Australian surf breaks (Stranger, 2011, p. 73). A hegemonic masculinity perspective can be useful to 'make sense of' these complex internal power relationships (Thorpe, 2007).

There is a generally accepted social hierarchy among board riders, which holds male short boarders at the pinnacle and subsequently moves downwards through long boarders, windsurfers, stand up paddle boarders, with craft you sit or lie on such as kayakers, and bodyboarders at the bottom (Nemani, 2013; Waitt, 2008; Waitt & Clifton, 2013). However, most commentators do not include SLS craft such as kneeboards, surf skis, surf boats, and surf canoe in surf sport hierarchy discussions.

There are complex ways in which power is asserted between members of a sporting community, including in lifestyle sports, as Booth (2004) highlights, surfers use non-verbal

intimidation in a surf break to assert power. While there are studies on female experiences of surfing (Comely, 2016; Olive et al., 2015; Wheaton, 2019) there are none that I could find on female surf lifesavers' experiences and narratives in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, power is not just asserted between different sports but on an individual level, such as in respect to sexuality, gender, and race.

2.2 Contextualizing gendered landscapes in oceanic sport

2.2.1 Feminism in sport

In this section I provide a brief introduction to feminist research to lay a foundation for understanding discourse on gender themes in surf sports and the methodology used in this study. Feminist scholarship encompasses a diverse set of viewpoints that cannot easily be summarized (Wheaton et al., 2018), especially in the scope of this thesis. However, I present a brief review of important feminist ideas salient to my study.

Historically, sport, impacted by societal gender expectations, was intrinsically seen as a male dominated patriarchal institution (Burstyn, 1999; Hargreaves, 1986; Theberge, 1985). Some of the western gender expectations were that women were seen as frail or weak with bodies biologically inferior to men (Hargreaves, 2002). Sport and leisure practices have been considered a gendered space occupied by men, and some argue continue to be, defined by the segregation or marginalization of women (Burstyn, 1999; Wheaton et al., 2018). Moreover, historically women's voices have been silenced, both as academics and as participants in research (Wheaton et al., 2018). In response, the modern feminist movement has led to an

expanding field of feminist research in sport, leisure, and physical education. Feminist scholars

questioned the inequalities in sporting worlds between men and women. In the 1960s new

waves of feminism and sport research focused on the different opportunities for men and

women in sport (Thorpe et al., 2020). Subsequent research in the 1980s developed ideas of sex

and gender, and the imbalance of societal power played out through sport and leisure

(Messner, 1988; Theberge, 1985; Thorpe et al., 2020; Young, 1980). Young described a

patriarchal society where women exist in a space defined by men, in which women are "Other"

(Young, 1980, p. 141). The variances in access to leisure spaces wherein men have greater

access to facilities were a key explanation for gendered bodies moving through the world

differently (Young , 1980).

Hargreaves' research in the 1990s and early 2000s changed perspective by focusing on

gender power relations, moving away from ideas of "otherness" (Francombe-Webb &

Toffoletti, 2018, p. 43-45). As feminist research continued into the 21st century focus shifted to

articulate and highlight women's experiences and ways of knowing (Barbour 2018; Thorpe et

al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2018). Generally, the modern feminist movement in sport has

gravitated towards understanding relational aspects of powder, assumptions of knowledge, and

who can be a 'knower' (Barbour 2018; Markula, 2018; Thorpe et al., 2020).

Recent feminist research has shifted to highlight the individuality of experience and

power relations, in partial response to the problematic practice of essentialising women's

experiences (Wheaton et al., 2018). Intersectionality is a feminist mode of thinking that

developed from critiques of feminism focusing on white heterosexual women and not

considering the experiences of queer, trans, and women of colour (Cooper, 2016; Olive et al.,

2018). Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in the early 1990s and called attention to the

multidimensionality of the experiences of women of colour (Crenshaw, 1990). Challenging the

propensity of researchers to group women of colour into one category, Crenshaw called for the

acknowledgment of "multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is

constructed" (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1245). In addition to race, sex, and socioeconomic status, the

ways in which social structures assert and assign power are often related to gender which is

discussed in the next section.

2.2.2 Sex, gender, and gender embodiment

lisahunter describes the foundations of sex, gender, and sexuality as "concepts deeply

rooted in cultural constructions often as taken-for-granted assumptions about identities, roles,

relationships, practices or behaviours and appearance" (2018, p. 22). In the western world, sex

and gender are often used interchangeably, however it is important to make a distinction

between the two here. Sex is often defined as a biological difference between men and women,

in which chromosomes and genitalia are used to assign people to one or the other sex and is

typically based on the assumption of binary categories (Lips, 1988). Sex however is increasingly

viewed as less of binary opposites as categories such as intersex are more commonly accepted.

Embodiment can be defined as a concept that "emphasizes the lived body of a subject who knows the world through bodily perception" (Haynes, 2012, p. 493). Additionally, embodiment is something that is constructed with the influence of society including culture, politics, and history (Haynes, 2012). Gender embodiments are societal constructions of gender ideals, these ideals are solidified in social interactions, and therefore play an integral role in maintaining social institutions (Mason, 2018). People in society often use the differences in gendered embodiments as 'proof' to maintain an unequal power balance between men and women where women are subordinate (Connell, 2009; Hargreaves, 2002). Particularly salient to this study and a sporting context, gender embodiments shape the ways we experience the world, and how we learn to use our bodies (Mason, 2018).

Gender embodiment is used to define and categorize the societal and social expectations that determine what characteristics are feminine and which are masculine, including how we use our bodies in sport and leisure practices (lisahunter, 2018). For example, a young boy in Aotearoa New Zealand may play rugby, and his sister netball, as these sports are gendered as 'boys' and 'girls' sports. 'Doing gender' is sometimes referred to as a way in which people act in social scenarios concerning the feeling of how they *should* act and is influenced by the environment and social settings (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Referring to the example above, the hypothetical brother and sister are 'doing gender' in sport based on what society expects for each of their genders.

Sport has been identified by commentators as one of the last institutions that continues to reproduce hierarchical distinctions between men and women (Connell, 2012; Hargreaves, 1994). In the field of feminist sport research some commentators focus on men and masculinities in a sporting landscape (Burstyn, 1999; Lawless, & Magrath, 2021; Magrath et al., 2020), while others focus on exploring women's experiences in sport and how they navigate a traditionally masculine domain. Feminist researchers of sport cite ways in which women continue to be excluded from leisure spaces; including identification of socio-economic status, race, sexuality, and gender as barriers (Hargreaves, 2002; lisahunter, 2018). Research shows where we can increase visibility, awareness, tolerance, inclusion and celebration of marginalized groups we enable inclusion in sport (lisahunter, 2018). The next section in this review focuses on research concerning women's experiences in oceanic sport and gender embodiment in surf sports.

2.2.3 Women's experiences in oceanic sports

The research on women's experiences in outdoor sport, including competitive ocean sport is limited but growing, inspired by feminist epistemologies. Challenging the masculine gendering of oceanic sport, a growing number of studies focus on female participation and experiences in ocean sports such as surfing and windsurfing (e.g. Comely, 2016; Olive et al., 2015; Thorpe, 2006; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998; Wheaton, 2008). However, there is very limited research on women's experiences in SLS sport, highlighting the need for research to centre experiences of women in SLS sport.

Additionally, research focusing on SLS sport has often highlighted men's experiences, or analysed masculinities in the sport (Booth, 2008; Drummond, 2002). In order to consider the experiences of women in other oceanic sports, this section aims to highlight women's experiences in surfing, bodyboarding, wild swimming, and windsurfing; as these sports seem most relevant to exploring SLS sport. While these perspectives are not generalizable to all women, or all oceanic sports, they do offer an opportunity for comparison with SLS sport.

Surfing discourses have largely focused on young, white men who participate in the highly athletic type of surfing, shortboard surfing (lisahunter, 2018; Wheaton, 2019). However, there is a growing body of research concerning female's experiences in the sport (Olive et al., 2018); such as, lisahunter who provides a rich analysis of sex, gender, and sexuality in relation to surfing (lisahunter, 2018). Surfing is often framed as a white, middle class, westernized, male activity, however there is contemporary focus on women's different experiences in the sport (Thorpe, 2006; lisahunter, 2018; Wheaton, 2019). In surfing there is no specific structure or rules for participation; Additionally, there is no separation of genders outside of competitive surf competitions. Nevertheless, the majority of surfers are men, and women have reported barriers to participation and challenges in creating space in a male dominated sport and culture (Comely, 2016; Olive et al., 2015).

Women have stated that in surfing they often feel patronised (Olive et al., 2015) and are labelled as 'women surfers' not just 'surfers' (Comely, 2016, p. 1290). While some women

describe encouragement and positive interaction from men while surfing they highlight that this 'special treatment' identifies them as different from other surfers (i.e. male surfers) (Olive et al., 2015). Women have stated that these positive interactions can sometimes be embarrassing and more difficult to navigate than negative and discriminatory behaviour (Olive et al., 2015). Surfing is a complicated social landscape, and where research highlights women's narratives of the negotiation of power in the waves is much more nuanced than previously noted (Olive et al., 2018).

In addition to gender, commentators have explored how sexuality, age, and race intertwine with gender to influence people's experiences in surfing (Roy, 2013; lisahunter, 2018; Wheaton, 2013; Wheaton, 2019). Speaking of her experience as a "Brown" Māori/Samoan woman bodyboarder in Aotearoa New Zealand, Nemani (2016) states "despite the physical prowess and courage I portrayed, I was still confined to the rules set by men in the surf field." (p. 101). Alternatively, in some windsurfing cultures, despite male domination, women feel as though they are judged by their dedication and skill (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). However, skill in windsurfing was still defined by a male standard similar to feelings of a 'boy's scale' where skill is compared to the performance of men (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

In an exploration of masculinity in bodyboarding in Australia, Waitt and Clifton (2013) highlight why bodyboarding is socially classified as a 'feminine' surf sport:

Shortboarder corporeal pride is derived from bodies that are physically able to express aggression, strength and fitness…measured against this accepted version of masculinity, bodyboarders are shamed for not being 'masculine' enough (p. 503).

In commentary on pride and shame, being perceived as feminine in the surf was a source of shame for male bodyboarders (Waitt & Clifton, 2013). This illustrates ways in which society places higher value on traits like power and dominance, often aligned with masculinity in sport. Young (2010) argues that when women are successful at sport, they are either labelled as not a 'real woman' or the sport is not a 'real sport'.

Similar to surfing, wild swimming (swimming the in the open ocean), in western contexts has historically been a sporting landscape that excluded women and non-white people (Throsby, 2016). However, many note wild swimming has drawn the recent attention of print media that question women's leading times in completing marathon swims (Knechtle et al., 2020). In April 2020, women's times were faster than men's in major open water swimming competitions, including swims across the Catalina and English channels (Knechtle et al., 2020). However, Throsby (2016) rejects the importance people place on women being 'just as good as men' in marathon swimming, arguing this still holds women in comparison with a hegemonic masculine ideal sporting body. Similarly, Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) found that women who showed prowess and skill at windsurfing were considered 'one of the lads' (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998, p. 264).

An important theme is women's ways of belonging, inclusion, and access to sport; which is examined through a lens of oceanic sport. A common thread across studies of women's experiences in ocean sports is the feeling and frustration of being perceived as not as capable. Ocean sport research explores different ways women contest being categorized as less capable in the waves, which includes acts of bravery such as taking on large waves (Nemani & Thorpe, 2016; Wheaton, 2000). Additionally, as noted a common theme is being judged on the 'boys' scale' where research shows the skill of women is still compared to men in the sport (Nemani, 2016; Throsby, 2016; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Despite challenges, many women in oceanic sport refuse to accept a marginalized status. Sometimes women create their own separate training groups and club, while others challenge marginalisation in mixed sex/gender practices. These experiences show the multiple ways women define their own place in oceanic sporting and leisure practices.

2.2.4 Benefits and challenges of sex/gender integrated sport practices

In this section I present a discussion on research that questions the benefits and challenges of mixed sex/gender practices in sport, and comment on the creation of female only training groups in action sports. SLS in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have storied histories with heteronormative young white men dominating the narrative. As discussed in section 2.1 SLS sport has been critiqued in the past as a hyper-masculine sporting landscape (Booth, 2001), yet a way to contest this may be through SLS sport practices. SLS sport trainings

are usually not segregated by sex/gender which is a unique aspect of the sport; in this way

some lifestyle sports can be compared with SLS sport. While the competition sport aspect of

SLS is largely segregated, training and volunteer hours have the capacity to be catalysts for

breaking down gender and age barriers. The issue of sex/gender integrated sport is not new;

with physical education research for example examining physical education in school as a place

to 'undo' gender (Benn & Dakags, 2006; Channon et al., 2016; Hills et al., 2021; Hills & Crosston,

2012; Maclean, 2016).

Some research on sex/gender integrated sport explores if integration during sport

practices reduces inequalities (Channon et al., 2016). Maclean (2016) observed when sport is

sex/gender integrated men and women form bonds and these friendships have greater power

than family or couple relationships to challenge gender norms. Furthermore, community sports

can help create social inclusion and encourage diversity (Cortis, 2009; Woods, 2021). Research

on training with mixed-gender groups in martial arts shows that athletes are judged by their

peers based on knowledge and skill as opposed to gender (Channon, 2013). Commenters have

identified sex/gender-integrated sport as a potential route to challenge masculine sport

assumptions (Travers, 2008). Considering the capacity for gender/sex integrated sports to

challenge gender norms, SLS has the potential to be a place of inclusion and therefore reject

stereotypical gender embodiments.

However, the usefulness of mixed gender sport training as an opportunity to dismantle

gendered sport assumption is still challenged (Hills et al., 2021). For example, a 2016 study

explored whether a men's practice basketball team training with an elite women's team could change their negative perceptions of women's basketball (Fink et al., 2016). Fink et al. (2016) found that men acknowledged the women were better basketball players than them, however, would label the women as 'honorary men' instead of challenging their assumptions of male sport superiority (Fink et al., 2016, p. 1325). Similar to discussions above on being 'one of the lads'. Additionally, Benn and Dagkas (2006) challenge mixed gender swimming lessons in schools as insensitive to some children's religious beliefs. For example, swimming costumes are not congruent to modesty standards of some religions (Benn & Dagkas, 2006), and therefore mixed gender swim lessons bring up issues of exclusion based on religious adherence further marginalizing young women in sport. In some contexts, sex/gender segregation is an important factor in inclusion.

Moreover, the development of friendships and friendly competition is not always the case with mixed-gender sport. Some commenters have found that while some women feel empowered, others feel patronized and belittled even though the males identified are sometimes their friends (Dicarlo, 2016; Comley, 2016). A way women have contested marginalization in action/lifestyle sport is through female-only sporting groups (Thorpe, 2008). In surfing, snowboarding, and skiing all female sport groups have increased the visibility and empowerment of women in traditionally masculine landscapes (Comley, 2016; Stoddart, 2011; Thorpe, 2008). Additionally, as noted above sex/gender segregated physical education classes can be important in considering religious requirements of students (Benn & Dagkas, 2006). The

conflicting findings on sex/gender integrated sport highlight both the potential of mixed sex/gender sporting groups to confront power imbalances and limitations and challenges.

2.2.5 The 'Beach Body'

A 'beach body' by the popular definition is a physique perpetuated by media and supported by society where bodies on the beach are expected to adhere to beauty standards (Field et al. 2019). This idea of a 'beach body' proliferates modern western culture as is evident in fad diets, gym advertisements, and social media influencer backed detoxes (Jordan, 2007; Prins & Wellman, 2021). Oftentimes the body presented as acceptable is, in the Australian ideal, 'blonde, blue eyed' and wearing a bikini (Kharmis, 2010). Magazines, and more recently social media and websites, illustrate the 'appropriate female form' that is required for recreation on beach space (Jordan, 2007). An analysis of Air New Zealand's in-flight magazine found those pictured on the beach were young, white, thin, and tanned (Small et al., 2008).

There is a notion that to be successful in a beach appearance you must have a slim, 'rigorously prepared body' (Booth, 2001, p. 18). Field et al. (2019) interviewed Australian women on their relationship with their bodies and the beach. A participant stated "Well, I don't look like that. I can't go (to the beach) if I don't look the same as all these other people (in the media) do. It gives you real insecurity" (p. 431). Additionally, women cited feeling watched, not just by men but other women as well. They also admitted to watching other women and comparing their bodies to their own (Field et al. 2019). However, the implications of the

societal pressure to maintain a 'beach body' are rarely considered including in relation to surf lifesaving sport, which often begins at 'nippers' at the age of four. Societal pressure has implications for the development of disordered eating behaviours in order to keep a slim body, particularly for female athletes (Heather et al., 2021).

In addition to a slim body, those on the beach are often expected to be tanned. Tanning is a popular beach pastime, notably a largely female Pākehā activity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Daley, 2003; Johnston, 2005). Perhaps one of the most prevalent social images of a 'beach body' is not one in the water, but one laying on the sand in the sun. In a series of interviews conducted on beaches in Aotearoa, young Pākehā women stated they felt more attractive when they were tanned whereas the men interviewed didn't tan 'on purpose' rather it was a by-product of participating in ocean sport or beach games (Johnson, 2005). Johnson (2005) concluded the activity of sun tanning was gendered and specific to white beach goers. Contrastingly, there is a considerable effort in Aotearoa New Zealand to reduce the population's sun exposure and mediate the negative effects. In response to public health efforts, findings from a 2007 study show some New Zealanders limit time at the beach due to concerns of too much sun exposure (Collins & Kearns, 2017). However, time spent on the beach is still of personal importance to many New Zealanders, which is explored in the following section.

2.3 Coastal Blue space: Benefits, inclusion and exclusion

2.3.1 Blue space, human connection, and Aotearoa New Zealand

Water and humans are innately connected, at the most basic level water makes up the majority

of our bodies and covers the majority of our planet (WHO, 2021). In turn, water has an

important connection to our overall health. Research has recognized the importance of human

relationships with the ocean, and how these can shape our personalities, sense of self,

wellbeing, and spirituality (Olive & Wheaton., 2021).

There is increasing interest in the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor water

bodies, known as 'blue space'. The term 'blue space' is used and defined in a range of ways, the

most basic definition being "all visible outdoor surface water" (White et al., 2016). Some

commentators expand on the definition excluding built spaces such as pools or fountains

(Britton et al., 2020), while others include built and urban blue space as an integral part of their

research (White et al., 2016). Blue space in this thesis is used in the most basic terms to mean

outdoor surface water, while coastal blue space is used to define areas where the ocean meets

land.

Aotearoa New Zealand is firstly a bicultural nation, however is comprised of multiple

diverse ethnicities. The majority of residents are Pākehā (New Zealand European), Māori,

Pacific Peoples or Asian people (Stats NZ, 2020). These diverse populations used coastal blue

spaces for many different cultural and wellbeing practices (Wheaton et al., 2021). Māori have

used wai (water) for sustenance, both physical and spiritual, for centuries since their planned

arrival in Aotearoa on waka (canoe) (Durie, 2003). A Māori world view includes a person's

whakapapa which "places human beings (e.g., Māori) in an environmental context with all

other flora and fauna and natural resources as part of a hierarchical genetic assemblage with

identifiable and established bonds" (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013, p. 112).

Recreation at the beach was largely a European export to Aotearoa New Zealand in the

1800s, where European New Zealanders used coastal blue spaces for recreational fishing and

leisure activities (Eames, 2018). As early as 1926, beach going was listed as the country's

residents favourite pastimes (Sport New Zealand, 2015). More recently among Māori

communities, waka ama (outrigger canoe) paddling and surfing have become popular

(Aramoana Waiti & Awatere, 2019; Liu, 2021). However, these activities are viewed as more

than sport and leisure among Māori communities as they also include cultural practices

(Aramoana Waiti & Awatere, 2019; Liu, 2021).

Coastal blue space is currently used for a variety of activities including but not limited to

gathering of kai (food); immersive ocean activities such as surfing swimming and diving; the use

of ocean craft for sailing, waka paddling, kayaking; and non-immersive activities like walking,

barbeques, yoga, dog walking, running, volleyball and frisbee throwing (Phillips, 2006). The

Aotearoa New Zealand tourism website boasts "With around 15,000 kilometres of coastline and

more than 25 marine reserves, ocean-scented scenery is entwined with New Zealand's

outdoorsy way of life" (Tourism New Zealand 2021, Beaches & Coasts). Additionally, one third

of the Aotearoa New Zealand population cited taking part in their chosen sport or recreational activity on the beach or in the ocean, and over half of the population said swimming was an important part of their lifestyle (Sport New Zealand, 2015).

2.3.2 Blue space and health promotion

There is growing interest in programs using blue space for health promotion, as there is a growing number of blue space health initiatives being created (Britton et al., 2020). Britton et al. (2020) questions how and why we use blue space and cites benefits of blue space leisure and sport as a possible answer to an epidemic of non-communicable disease such as obesity, type II diabetes and social isolation. In this section I present the different ways in which research seeks to understand the benefits of blue space on human physical and mental health.

In an Aotearoa New Zealand based study, views of the coast from your home were associated with lower reports of poor mental health (Nutsford et al., 2016). There has been an increasing visibility of seas and oceans among public consciousness, concerning both sustainability, environmentalism, and the use of blue space for leisure (Foley et al., 2019). In Europe coastal visits have been found to have a greater reduction in stress than visits to urban parks or the countryside (White et al., 2013). Additionally, many people from Europe and the United States seek coastal landscapes for holiday leisure (Eurobarometer, 2009; Houston, 2018).

The coast also provides a unique space for social interactions. In Aotearoa New Zealand family holidays are often spent at the beach, where "easy and free access to the beach has been seen as a national birthright" (Phillips, 2006, *Beach Holidays*). When families go to a coastal blue space together, children perceive their parents spend more time with them as opposed to a playground setting (Ashbullby et al., 2013). Additionally, parents believed children playing on the beach has long term health benefits. As one mother noted "I was really glad when she started going to surf club and they teach them all those skills of you know what to do in a rip so that I can trust her to go down there and know what she's doing." (Ashbullby et al. 2013, p. 3.2.2.). One father wanted his daughters to grow up playing in the water and continue the behaviour into their teenage years; "I want them to be little surf doodettes" (Ashbullby et al. 2013, p. 3.2.3).

Blue space can also play an important role in adult wellbeing including physical activity. Coombs et al (2010) found that when adults have access to natural environments they are more likely to be physically active. There is evidence that adults who participate in outdoor activities spend more time being physically active than those that do not exercise outdoors (Coombes et al., 2010). Physical activity is important for physical health, and time spent in natural environments is argued to be beneficial to psychological wellbeing (Ashbulby, 2013). There is also evidence that exercise in a natural environment can increase well-being benefits more than exercise in an artificial environment such as a gymnasium (Thompson Coon et al., 2011). Adults who exercised outside felt greater mental benefits including "revitalization and

positive engagement, decreases in tension, confusion, anger, and depression, and increased

energy" (Thompson Coon et al., 2011, p. 1761).

A systematic review of blue space interventions found most focused on active activities

on the coast such as swimming and surfing, with significant benefits on psycho-social wellbeing

of participants (Britton et al., 2020). An example of blue space used for health promotion is a

program using outdoor swimming (also known as wild swimming) to treat major depressive

disorder (van Tulleken et al. 2018). Interestingly, there is some evidence suggesting that living

close to blue space has a larger beneficial effect in lower economic status regions compared to

wealthier regions (Wheeler et al. 2002). Studies replicating Wheeler et al. with a wider sample

population may suggest blue space can act as a mediator in socioeconomic health disparities

(White, et al. 2020). Additionally, commentators in Aotearoa New Zealand are challenging

western epistemologies about the use of coastal landscapes; Māori ways of knowing are

integrated with western science to influence how we understand human connection to coastal

space (Wheaton et al., 2021).

2.3.3 Exclusion from blue space

Research exploring our connectedness to the sea through non-traditional sports such as surfing,

surf lifesaving, body boarding, kayaking, and diving is proliferating (Olive et al. 2020; Nemani &

Thorpe, 2016; Waitt, 2008; Wheaton & Olive, 2020). However, there are ways in which people

or groups are not included or marginalised in access to the ocean and ocean sport. Age, gender,

ethnicity, socioeconomic factors and cultural norms all play into who has safe access to blue space (Cosgriff et al., 2009; Flintoff & Webb, 2012; Nemani, 2016; Wheaton, 2019). Blue space while a place of relaxation and wellbeing for some can be a place of exclusion for others (Pitt, 2018).

How blue space can be used, and by whom, is based in histories of sexism, racism, and colonialism (Bell et al., 2017). For example, Nemani (2016) highlights the assumption in New Zealand society that Māori are not regarded as strong swimmers. There are similar assumptions in popular narratives that "Black people can't swim" (Flintoff, 2015, p. 201). There are different social and political factors perpetuating these stereotypes, including the systematic exclusion and segregation of Black Americans from swimming pools and the rejection of perceived "white" activities (Wheaton, 2013). These stereotypes extend deep into societal norms even at a young age, Black students in the US were quoted struggling with swimming class in school due to these stereotypes (Flintoff, 2015).

Wheaton (2013) identified segregation, socioeconomic status, and other opportunity based factors as possible reasons why African-American children are less likely to learn to swim in the United States. In Aotearoa New Zealand Pacifica people followed by Māori have disproportionately high fatal drowning rates, within the rest of the population (Water Safety New Zealand, 2022). While researchers are exploring blue space as a place of health and wellbeing promotion it is important to acknowledge that coastal blue space is not a safe, inclusive or welcoming place for all. Addressing who has safe access to safe coastal space is

salient to understand before recommending them as health promotion sites. Along with socio-economic factors there are also socially constructed paradigms around what bodies are 'acceptable' to 'take up' space on a beach.

2.4 Gaps in the literature

As discussed, while surf culture and female participation in action and oceanic sport has been increasingly studied, there has been very little attention directed towards female lifeguards and sports women (Fendt et al., 2012; Roy, 2013; Thorpe, 2006). The majority of research concerning surf lifesaving is quantitative in nature examining rescue times, injuries, and management of patrols (Morgan & Ozanne-Smith, 2013; Pietrzak, 2014; Diewald et al., 2019). Qualitative inquiries in SLS sport largely began with the publication of *Surfing Subcultures of Australia and New Zealand* (Pearson, 1979), following with glimpse into commentary on masculinities in SLS sport (Booth, 2004; Booth 2008; Drummond, 2001; Jaggard, 1997; Jaggard, 2001). The majority of these studies focus on men's experiences, and almost all are in Australia.

Commentary on female experiences and research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand is notably absent. As discussed in the previous section, SLSNZ has recently published a survey of female participants in SLSNZ in an effort to understand gender issues more fully in the club environment (Boardman & Fry, 2021). This is a large-scale survey that was distributed to all participants, to athletes and also volunteers as well. Thus, my study provides a more in depth evaluation of female athletes' experiences in SLSNZ sport. While this study does not provide

generalizable data, it does seek to more fully understand the lived experiences of the

participants.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter I present the methods and methodology relevant to this research. This study used an interpretive approach informed by feminist theory to support exploratory qualitative research. I begin this chapter by presenting the methodology, and theoretical paradigms underpinning this study. Then I discuss methods including, sample, recruitment, and interviews. Continuing I present ethical considerations, followed by data collection and use of thematic analysis. In the last section of this chapter I discuss reflexivity and my relevant biography.

3.1 Methodology and theoretical paradigms underpinning it

This qualitative research is based on the foundations of an interpretive approach, and also influenced by feminist theory. An interpretive approach assumes that social reality is not experienced in the same way for everyone, rather that social understanding is formed by life experiences and influenced by social, political, societal, and institutional contexts (Gratton & Jones, 2014). This approach is especially suited to this study because interpretive research is focused on "making sense of" and understanding complex social realities of participants, not searching for specific answers to hypotheses (Gratton & Jones, 2014).

The methodological approach adopted is also informed by feminist theory, as it is assumed women's experiences, inclusive of sport and leisure, are individual and different to other genders (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). A feminist research agenda generally identifies, questions, challenges and critiques gendered power and inequities and in turn provides a platform for change (Bell, et al., 2019; Wheaton et al., 2018). At the core, feminist theory

acknowledges that gender and culture involve power and privilege (Gill, 2001). A foundational

pillar of feminist research is to centre and validate women's perspectives and epistemologies

(Wheaton et al., 2018). Moreover, many feminists argue that feminist research should be done

"by women for women additionally, when possible with women" (Wheaton, et al. 2018, p.

203.). There is not one way to do feminist research, and there are many feminist theories and

associated practices including: "New materialist feminism, postmodern feminism, post-

structuralist feminism, Black feminism, queer theory, intersectionality theory" (Smith &

Sparkes, 2016, p. 75-76). For these reasons I found it necessary and important to use feminist

theory to inform the theoretical framework of this study. This study aims to highlight women's

experiences in a sport, SLS sport, where male voices have been dominant. This study aims to

highlight women's experiences in sport, therefore a feminist approach is integral to the

theoretical framework.

Women however are not a homogenous category, which highlights the need to

understand both the plurality of experience, and elements where societal discourses and

practices allow commonalities in women's experiences to be examined and challenged.

Intersectional feminism challenges the propensity of researchers to group women into one

category, (usually white, Western, often privileged women) acknowledging the complexity and

diversity of people's lived experiences (Ciurria, 2019). Additionally, reflexivity is essential to

feminist research and can be defined as "the tendency of feminists to reflect on, examine

critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Lumsden et al., 2019, p.

23). Feminist research recognizes that lived experience is the foundation of our behaviours and

actions (Stanely & Wise, 1993); this is true for both the participants and the researcher. Feminist reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher is a part of the world in which the study is taking place, and the inherent power of the researcher (Lumsden et al., 2019). A researcher must engage with their own biography to address how their own lived experiences can influence data collection and analysis (Hardy & Bryman, 2004).

Some feminist commentators argue qualitative approaches are best suited to feminist research (Wheaton et al., 2018), however many argue against dismissal of quantitative approaches to feminist research and highlights, that there is no one or right feminist method (Wheatherland, 2001). There have also been considerations if labelling research as feminist reduces the audience the study may benefit because of negative connotations of feminism (Fisher & Larson, 2016; Greenleaf & Collins, 2001). A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this interpretive research as it seeks to allow for subjective knowledge, and the highlighting of diverse experiences and knowledges of participants. Additionally, I rejected the idea of not labelling this study as feminist as doing so would suggest feminist research is in some way not as valid or affirm the marginalization of feminist research (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

As discussed in the review of literature, Feminist theory maintains the premise that western society is not inherently equal and there are power dynamics based on gender, with males holding the most power (Doucet et al., 2013; Messner, 1988; Theberge, 1985). Historically differences in gendered embodiments have been used as 'proof' to maintain an unequal power balance between men and women (Connell, 2009; Hargreaves, 2002).

Furthermore, feminist research is has been used to explore non-binary topics as well

(lisahunter, 2018). For these reasons I found it necessary and important to use feminist theory

to inform the theoretical framework, and methodological approach of this study.

3.1.1 Interviews

The study used qualitative semi structured interviews. Interviews are the most widely used

form of data collection in qualitative studies and involve a conversation that allows a

participant(s) to tell "stories, accounts, reports and/or descriptions about their perspectives,

insights, experiences, feelings, emotions and/or behaviours in relation to the research

question(s)" (Smith & Sparks, 2016, p. 103). This study used a phenomenological based

interview approach, focusing on participants' experiences and views. While qualitative research

does not typically have pre-set categories, it always has a focus (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). In my

study the three areas of focus were the significance of surf lifesaving sport participation to the

participant, their experience with required volunteer lifeguard service, and their relationship

with coastal spaces used for sport and leisure.

Interviews allow the researcher to find depth and nuance in participant responses (Bevir

& Blakely, 2018). There are several benefits to semi structured interviews, in comparison to

structured or unstructured interviews, one being the open exchange of ideas between the

participant and the interviewer (Galletta, 2013). Additionally, there is space for responses and

freedom for the researcher to follow up on topics of interest (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-

structured interviews may take unexpected leads, exploring a range of topics that were not pre-

set by the researcher (Bevir & Blakely, 2018). The questions in this study were pre-determined yet open ended to allow for a range of responses from participants.

A limitation of semi-structured interviews is the time involved and the resources needed. The participant numbers were limited for this reason as the twelve month time constraint for this research limited the number of interviews that one researcher could conduct. Using a rationale of limited resources, and a small potential pool of participants, six participants were recruited for this study. A constraint of semi-structured interviews is response bias which is a term that refers to participants answering questions differently (intentionally or unintentionally) than they may have normally, in response to different social pressures during interviews (Burchett & Ben-Porath, 2019). Acknowledging response bias, I made considerable effort to refrain from leading questions and to maintain a flexible questioning approach. As Smith and Sparks (2016) highlight while participants choose what they share and what they don't, the interviewer still holds significant power by choosing what to include in the write up of the study. Hesse-biber and Piatelli (2012) conclude some feminist interviews fall prey to the overgeneralisation that feminist commentators themselves are trying to dismantle.

3.1.2 Sample and recruitment

Six participants were recruited utilising snowball subject recruitment, sometimes referred to as chain referral recruitment. Snowball recruitment is participant driven and requires a participant to recruit people they know to also participate in the study (Allen, 2018). This technique is non-

random, and particularly suited to exploratory research (Allen, 2018). I identified two existing

contacts to be my first interviewees. I then asked these participants if they knew of anyone who

may be interested in the study. The participants reached out to their contacts and asked if they

were interested. If the person said yes, the initial participants sent me their contact

information. I then provided an information sheet and consent form and continued dialogue

with the referred contacts. I initially contacted 7 people and 6 agreed to participate. Every

person who showed interest in participating and completed a consent form was interviewed.

Considering the specific participant requirements listed below my recruitment process

can be classified as non-random purposive. Purposeful sampling is the most commonly used

sampling method in qualitative studies to satisfy criterion (Creswell, 1998). Notably when there

are strict participant requirements and limited space in the study, many perspectives are lost,

however it was important to the scale of this study to focus on a particular group. Participants

were from SLS clubs in both the North and South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand.

To participate in the study, you had to be over 17 years old, identify as female, be a

SLSNZ member, and had competed in SLS sport in the competitive season of 2020/2021. To be

a competitive surf lifesaving athlete you must also participate in volunteer patrols; however not

all patrolling lifeguards compete therefore it was necessary to distinguish participants as

current athletes. The participants all identified as female and ranged in age from seventeen to

mid thirties. All of the participants grew up in coastal towns in Aotearoa New Zealand, with

access to coastal space. Half the participants started SLS at the age of four with the other three

beginning the sport at ages 10 to 14. Two participants' families, children and parents, are

involved in SLS, two more had siblings involved and two were the sole participants in their

families. The women are all accomplished athletes, some competing for national teams and

internationally.

3.2 Ethical considerations

A hallmark of feminist research is it acknowledges the power imbalance between researcher

and informant (Burman, 1992; Jenkins, et al., 2019; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The researcher-

participant relationship is by nature hierarchical, and interpretation and representation from

the researcher is often politically charged (Hesse-biber & Piatelli, 2012). I aimed to reduce this

power imbalance by actively involving participants in the research process as much as possible

within the study parameters. In practice this included providing clear descriptions of the study,

using phone calls and email discussions before the research began. Additionally, employing

semi structured interviews and rapport building to aid in reducing power imbalances.

In feminist research there is often a re-evaluation of who can be a knower and what can

be known (Hesse-biber & Piatelli, 2012; Wheaton et al., 2018). To begin each interview, I made

it clear there were no wrong answers and that participants were the experts in the field not me.

I also highlighted both in the consent forms and before the interview began that they did not

have to answer any question I asked. Additionally, I allowed opportunities during and after the

interview for participants to add in anything they wanted to share that I did not ask about.

Three participants also added additional points after the initial interviews were finished via

email or audio message. In a further effort to reduce the power imbalance participants had time to edit, add, or retract statements from their transcripts. Lastly participants all created their own pseudonyms.

Feminists view ethics of care firstly from the lens of the interdependent nature of human relationships, "persons as relational and interdependent, morally and epistemologically" (Held, 2006 p. 6). This is to say people and the relationships they hold are fundamental to our everyday lives. I employed a feminist ethic of care in my research and a commitment to respond empathetically and sensitively before, during, and after data collection. Moreover, a feminist ethic of care promotes freedom of choice and autonomy, as opposed to dependence on power based relationships (Johansson & Edwards, 2021). This looked like preparing open ended questions for interviews, with care towards not leading responses and following the lead of topics broached by participants.

Held (2006) attributes emotions like empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness as morally necessary to maintain a feminist ethic of care. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the participants to bring up subjects they'd like to discuss or not. I often asked, "Would you like to say more?" which was sometimes met with a swift "no" and the interview would continue on to the next subject. I was very aware of the sensitivity of some subjects that may come up and took care to let the participant dictate where the conversation would lead.

In considering maintaining anonymity, Aotearoa New Zealand is a relatively small

isolated country with a population around 5 million, and the SLS sport community is even

smaller. If I were to provide a traditional quantitative description of participants including

pseudonyms, ages, and other identifying details including event categories they competed in,

participants could potentially be identifiable. With this in mind I have worked diligently to keep

the participants' identities anonymous. For this reason, in parts of chapter 4: Analysis and

discussion, there are no pseudonyms in relation to some direct quotes. This is to protect the

identity of participants. To further protect the anonymity of participants I give a general

description of the participant group below followed by the pseudonyms of the participants

instead of combined details under each name.

Ethics were pre-approved by the University of Waikato Human Ethics Research Committee, and

all participants completed an informed consent form before data collection began (See

Appendices A, B, and C).

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Six interviews were conducted over a three month time period in 2021. Interviews lasted from

34 minutes to 56 minutes. The first interview was in person, face to face, at the participant's

workplace before she started work. The participant chose this location because it was

convenient for her, and it would be private as we were the only two people in the building. It

was also a place she felt comfortable which helped equalize the power dynamics. Interviews

were originally intended to be in-person, or on zoom if the participant preferred. However,

after the first interview was conducted, Aotearoa New Zealand entered a Covid-19 government

mandated lockdown, subsequently in-person interviews were no longer an option. All

interviews were video recorded and later transcribed by hand. Transcriptions were sent to and

verified by participants. Each participant had two weeks to review the transcripts, ask

questions, make amendments, additions, or delete any information from the transcript.

To begin the interviews, I asked a few rapport-building questions. These would typically

include asking how the participant was feeling and where they were spending their lockdown.

Government mandated lockdowns can be an extremely stressful time, so I found it not only

rapport building but ethically necessary to check with the participants that this was a good time

for our discussion. Participants were in a number of locations, some in their homes, staying

with family, or at school accommodation. There were some difficulties with the online

interviews such as lagging internet or interruptions from family or flat mates that I adjusted to

at the time.

3.3.2 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) seeks to describe patterns in data and define relevant themes across

data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2021). TA is different to other theme defining analyses because it

does not seek to quantify themes found (Sparkes & Smith, 2015). TA is often used to provide

structure and identify patterns to aid in analysis of participants' perspectives, ideas, and

experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, TA is suited to understanding people's

experiences in relation to a topic and commonalities on how an issue is represented (Braun &

Clarke, 2013). The goal of this study was to explore a group's experiences in relation to surf

lifesaving, which is why TA is appropriate to use in relation to the study purpose.

TA is conducted in six steps: familiarization with the data, coding, generating initial

themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Nowell et al., 2017).

The following steps of TA that I used as a guide are all derived from Braun and Clarke (2021). In

the first step of familiarization, I aimed to become familiar with the data from listening,

transcribing, and rereading data sets. I transcribed interviews myself and did not use any

software, such as NVivo, in the coding process which allowed me to spend time familiarizing

myself with the data. In coding, the aim is to identify data that stands out and conceptualize

singular ideas. Coding is a process in TA where the researcher identifies particular parts of the

data set that are relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I did this by

creating codes and organizing data into themed sections. From the data codes, initial themes

were generated, organizing the codes into sets across the data.

There are two main types of themes in TA: semantic themes that arise from the data

quite explicitly; and latent themes which are far less obvious and more conceptual or implicit.

While the semantic themes seemed quite obvious, the latent themes only arose after careful

evaluation of both what had been said and what wasn't said. I used a back-and-forth method of

developing themes, by writing participant quotes on paper and organizing them into groups. I

then used sticky notes to form themes, colour coding subthemes and using an online mind

mapping platform to further organize the data. From here I was able to define and name

themes, I used short summaries for each section to better frame the themes. I identified

community, gender embodiments, and blue space connection as the three overarching themes

in the data. The final step, writing up, is encompassed in the findings chapter.

3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is imperative in social research to acknowledge the researcher cannot be separated

from the world in which the research is taking place (Lumsden et al., 2019), as discussed on

page 39. A commonly referenced limitation of an interpretive framework is the subjectivity of

data collection and analysis (Shipman, 1997). Challenging the assumption that subjectivity is a

hindrance to research, Braun and Clarke (2021) argue subjectivity is imperative to quality

qualitative data analysis. Recognizing that knowledge is situated and "inevitably and

inescapably shaped by the processes and practices of knowledge production, including the

practices of the researcher" allows a researcher to identify their own knowledge and

assumptions in relation to the study (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 12).

In line with best practices outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), throughout data

collection and analysis I kept all drafts of my notes and initial write-ups. Reviewing these notes

helped me to remain reflective and identify any erroneous initial assumptions I had previously

made. Continuing through to write the findings chapter I often referenced original transcripts

and audio recording to confirm what I had originally analysed was in fact what the participant

had said. TA was not a linear process, but a constant back and forth as Braun and Clarke (2006)

indicate. In this study this looked like multiple electronic mind maps and post it notes (See Appendix E).

Reflecting on my own lived experiences and place in the world before interviews and during analysis aided in remaining reflexive on my own point of view. Here I share my self-reflections and acknowledge my own experiences have shaped my knowledges. I am a female in my mid-twenties from the United States and have lived in Aotearoa for the past three years; my professional and personal relationship with sport and coastal spaces have shaped and inspired this study. I did not grow up in a coastal environment, yet my family took frequent trips to the beach. My father's favourite line when someone was sick or hurt is "go for a swim you'll feel better; ocean water will cure it". I am a trained professional ocean lifeguard, and I lived and worked on a small island as a lifeguard for many summers. However, I have never been a member of Surf Life Saving in Aotearoa New Zealand or any international surf lifesaving sport club. While not a SLS athlete I did grow up as a competitive dancer; I have an understanding of high pressure physical competitive environments.

I did have similarities with the participants given my age, gender, and participation in ocean sports, which supported initial rapport building between the participants and me. I was aware of the influence I could have on their responses, however my nationality and absence of connection to any specific SLS club leant to the moderation of this influence. As this research is on SLS female athletes' experiences, I have similar experiences but would not qualify as a participant myself. I was known to many of the participants before data collection began which

further encouraged a positive relationship. I worked diligently to ask open-ended questions and

not lead answers to further reduce my possible influence. This study was designed with semi-

structured interviews specifically to conduct this research with participants not on them.

Chapter Four: Analysis and discussion

The initial research questions explored female surf lifesavers' perspectives and experiences by discussing their connection to the ocean, SLS sport, and the significance of lifeguarding in their lives. This chapter discusses the three themes identified during thematic analysis of the data. The first section, *Coastal Blue Space: An intersection of connection, knowledge, and fun,* explores participants' connections to coastal blue space and the significance of blue space in their lives. These coastal space relationships are presented in three sub-themes; the first explores participants' connections to ocean landscapes; the second highlights skill and knowledge of participants; and the last presents leisure time at the beach. The second theme titled *A social landscape: Clubbie culture* examines the social aspects of SLS. This section includes*:* A presentation of team connections, the benefits of intergenerational sport, a coach's influence on athletes, cultural hierarchies, and a discussion of the SLSNZ motto 'In it for life'. Finally, the third theme *Gender discourses: conventional ideologies in oceanic sport*, explores gender discourses in a series of four sub-themes: Body image on the beach, experiences of motherhood in sport, mixed sex/gender sport practices, and finally the ways in which participants challenge the marginalization of females in sport.

4.1 Coastal blue space: An intersection of connection, knowledge, and fun

Surf lifesaving is a multi-faceted sport which combines elements of traditional sport, lifestyle sport, and community service (see Chapter 2). Competitive sporting events can be in a pool, on the beach, or in the surf, yet all participants are also lifeguards volunteering patrol hours on the beach and in the sea. Because of this volunteer requirement, the sport of SLS provides an

opportunity to examine the benefits and challenges to physical activity and recreation in relation to coastal spaces. Considering all participants lived in close proximity to the sea, and their sport took place at the beach and in the ocean, it was no surprise that our conversations often centred around participants' experiences at coastal spaces. The identity of many New Zealanders is connected to the ocean, not unexpected considering the relative availability of coastal landscapes in the island nation (Eames, 2018). The first theme examines findings about participants' experiences at coastal landscapes, specifically: Connection to the sea; Waves, skill, and knowledge; and Leisure time spent at the beach.

4.1.1 Connections to the sea: "A healing thing"

> I personally have a strong connection. Just today I went down and looked at the waves and it was so beautiful. I had such an amazing day today because of how good the ocean was. I was sitting out the back and the water was glassy and clear. Sometimes I just lay there on my board and put my hands in the water. Definitely I have a nice little connection, I think having grown up around the water I understand the water really well. I have respect for it. I think that helps like if a wave breaks on me I will get rolled by it. It's allowed to do that, it's the ocean and that's its prerogative. Definitely a big connection with the ocean and doing what we do in the ocean. (Izzy)

As noted earlier, human connection to the ocean is well documented across different oceanic sport, disciplines, and leisure practices (e.g. surfing, waka ama, bodyboarding,

swimming, and windsurfing) (Ashbullby et al., 2013; Olive & Wheaton., 2020; Phillips, 2006; Wheaton et al., 2021). There are a range of sports sharing the same oceanic coastal spaces and in some cases, the same waves. Contextually in Aotearoa New Zealand, an island nation, many people have strong connections with the sea and coastal spaces (Eames, 2018; Wheaton et al., 2020). In this study, participants all had a profound connection with the ocean, so strong that the conditions of the sea could affect their mood for the day. Some had elevated moods, and better days when the ocean conditions were favourable. Ana described feeling like she was completely disconnected from the land, a physical separation that allowed for mental separation as well:

> I love being in the ocean and wave riding, I go surfing as well. I love being in the
>
> surf. I love being out the back if the water is nice and calm and the sun is setting,
>
> then I feel like it gives you a different perspective because you aren't connected
>
> to the earth you are looking on to it. Taking a step back and you can look on. The
>
> ocean gives me that feeling of being away. It's just good vibes in the ocean. It's
>
> so relaxing and fun, there is so much you can do you can't really get bored with
>
> the ocean.

As discussed in the review of literature (Chapter 2), research has recognized the importance of human relationships with the ocean, and how these can shape our personalities, sense of self, wellbeing, and spirituality (Olive & Wheaton, 2021). Words like healing, appreciation, weightlessness, and escape come up across ocean sports research to describe

connection to the ocean (Throsby, 2013; Olive & Wheaton, 2020; Orams & Brown, 2021).

Consistent with the findings of Bell et al. (2015), in this study participants disclosed conscious

emotional connections to the ocean. Participants said they felt weightless, they loved the

feeling of their body in the water and being in the ocean was physically and mentally healing.

For example:

> You just feel so good after going in the water, it doesn't matter what's going on,
>
> after going in the water I feel like it's refreshing and nice and yeah it's fun... it's a
>
> healing thing, it's healing. (Brookie)

Participants also expressed how their bodies felt moving in the ocean. For example,

Emily said: "It is amazing for your body to move through water. I love the way my body feels

when I go through water. It's an amazing weightless feeling". Sentiments like Brookie's and

Emily's were common, with a focus on leaving their land-based stressors on the beach.

Participants recounted that they felt at home, calm, and at peace when immersed in the water.

Reflecting findings from Bell et al. (2015) and lisahunter and Stoodley (2021), participants felt a

sense of perspective, and a part of something larger than themselves while in the ocean.

Additionally, lisahunter and Stoodly (2021) found these moments happened when participants

were gazing to the horizon or sitting in the sea, not just when actively surfing or swimming.

Parallel to those findings, participants felt separated from their land-based everyday lives while

in the water, words like peaceful and calm were often used to describe 'being out the back' (i.e.

beyond the surf zone). For example:

Just today I went down and looked at the waves and it was so beautiful. I had

such an amazing day today because of how good the ocean was. I was sitting out

the back and the water was glassy and clear (Izzy)

Izzy added "Sometimes I just lay there on my board and put my hands in the water"

similar to findings in lisahunter and Stoodley's (2021) research in which surfers ran their hands

along the surface of the water while sitting 'out the back'. Additionally, participants spent time

at the coast in non-immersion activities, and just looking at the water without having to be

immersed had a positive effect on participants' reported feelings of wellbeing (see also Bell et

al., 2015; Wheaton et al., 2021). These findings contribute to the plethora of emerging research

on wellbeing and psychological benefits (i.e. stress reduction and improved mental relaxation)

to experiencing coastal blue space in a positive way (Bell et al. 2017; Bell et al. 2015) that these

findings support.

It is important to note that privilege, access, availability, and inequity are key factors

impacting who has safe access to enjoy the potential psychological benefits of coastal blue

space. While many participants in this study vouched for the healing nature of coastal space, it

is not a safe place, mentally and physically, available for everyone even in an island nation. As I

discuss in the following section, integral to these positive feelings of connection and mental

health benefits is a foundation of comfort in the water supported by skill, and localised

knowledge in coastal spaces.

4.1.2 Waves, skill, and knowledge: "It's not just who can paddle the fastest"

Reflecting on their connection with the ocean, knowledge and the ability to read the ocean appeared repeatedly in conversations. For example, Ana liked that she could use her skills developed during practices to navigate large surf, despite the risks:

> I think it's so unpredictable… I can use the waves, people struggle to get out on the board and I can try to catch up then [in a race], just by having good wave skills and practice I can catch up. So, it's fun when you pass people on the way in but if they pass you it's really annoying, but that is all part of the sport (Ana)

One of the participants felt that among her school peers she had elevated status as someone that was able to navigate large waves. This is similar to the 'beach cred' Wheaton (2000, p. 259) found as a cultural value system which gives increased status to those who take on large waves and show particularly impressive skills at the beach:

> I think it's looked at more as cool, because you can actually go in the surf in any condition and girls who can't do surf kind of look at you with admiration is what I find as well. The sport isn't that common everywhere in the world. People know that you can do that is quite cool. (Brookie)

Participants often talked about how you don't have to be the strongest, or the biggest, but you could win races based on reading the waves and tides. Libby noted "You have the awe, like watching people get pummelled by this wave compared to flat water racing. In the ocean there is so much more analysis like just thought that goes into who is the best not just who can paddle the fastest". This mix of knowledge, technique and skill, meant that participants who may not have been the strongest in a group could still win events based on knowledge and technique. A prevailing construct to sport as a masculine domain maintains men as the standard based on the assumption men are generally stronger (Burstyn, 1999; Drummond, 2020; Wellard, 2010) . If skill and knowledge are just as important as strength in being successful at SLS sport, the SLS sport community may be a place to challenge conventional hegemonic attitudes.

The unpredictability of the ocean was often discussed in relation to ocean knowledge. Participants acknowledged the power of the water, and their skill set to manage the risks. In unpredictable settings, participants were confident in their abilities, and waves were regarded as what made the sport so different from open ocean or pool swimming. Emma at one point quipped "well without the waves it really isn't surf lifesaving is it?". From the position of localized knowledge, sport, and skill the participants were empowered by their confidence in the sea. Participants enjoyed the unpredictable nature of the ocean conditions and a chance to use their prowess more widely. However, even with the knowledge and skills participants had, some acknowledged the ocean still scared them. As the following examples suggested though, for some participants the challenges of a dynamic oceanscape were an enjoyable aspect:

Me and my brother always go for like foamy bashes on the foamy boards and

like just smash into each other but just super fun, little waves you can still

manage to get injured on, one ripped the tip of my finger off. (Ana)

...Canoe is something that I like, because of the team aspect. The fun and the

carnage that can happen in the canoe. (Emily)

I 'ate it'- got dumped out the whole shebang… but it was the most fun I have had

in weeks just because there was surf (Emma)

It was scary and really cool, it was so peaceful out here… I'll just sit there and

look because it's so beautiful. I feel my happiest when I'm in the ocean. (Emma)

Research has suggested that some sporting men, and people with positions of power in

sport, have assumed women do not like risk or adventure sports because of the chances of

getting hurt (Atencio et al., 2009; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Thorpe, 2005). However, findings in this

study contested gender norm expectations in this regard and are discussed more fully on page

86. However, participants did not only enjoy time spent at coastal areas during large surf and

training, the beach was often a place of leisure and family time aside from their training and

patrols.

4.1.3 Leisure time at the beach: "I love it, I always find myself in the ocean"

Coastal space is not solely a place for sport but also leisure and fun (Foley et al., 2019; Olive &

Wheaton, 2021), which was reflected in participant responses. All participants recounted

spending time on the beach and in the water separate from training and competitions. The

beach is a place they go with their families, friends, or alone, they take their children, or play in

the surf with their siblings. This does not come as a surprise as one third of the population of

Aotearoa New Zealand cited taking part in sport and recreation on the beach (Sport New

Zealand, 2015). However, not all New Zealanders use coastal blue spaces in the same way.

While the beach is a popular holiday and recreation space, indigenous Māori traditions

understand coastal space as not solely a leisure and sporting landscape. Rather, the

environment is interconnected and interdependent with humans (Durie, 1998). As discussed in

the review of literature a Māori world view (Matauranga Māori) links and bonds humans to all

natural resources, flora and fauna, without making one more important than the other

(Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013). In addition to traditional Māori coastal blue space activities like

waka ama (outrigger canoe) paddling have increased in popularity as well as surfing (Aramoana

Waiti & Awatere, 2019; Liu, 2021). However, these activities are viewed as more than sport and

leisure among Māori communities as they also include cultural practices (Aramoana Waiti &

Awatere, 2019; Liu, 2021).

Participants in this research took part in both full immersion and sand-based activities

like walks, looking for shells, and having dinner with friends on the beach. As noted by Collins

and Kearns (2017), in Aotearoa New Zealand coastal spaces are largely social landscapes visited with friends and family and many family holidays are spent at the beach (Phillips, 2006). This was no different for the participants in this study.

Many of the participants reflected on who they went to the beach with. Some of the activities participants brought up included: bringing their children to play in the sand and look for seashells, picnics with friends, or walking alone. Some of the younger participants, in their early 20s, reflected that playing in the waves was how they spent recreational time with their siblings. For example; Ana noted that: "I surf [shortboard], me and my brother grew up surfing together. It's how we hang out together, so we like going surfing. I don't compete or anything, I'm not really good but I love it". Interestingly a 2017 study found that blue space has the greatest benefit for social interaction and psychological wellbeing of different natural landscapes (Bell et al., 2017). Bell et al. (2017) highlight social interaction and psychological wellbeing benefits from visiting blue space, similar to participants in this study. However, some participants in this study also said they go to the beach alone at times as the ocean is a place where they can gain mental clarity. Many of the women described times in which they'd go out in the water alone:

So, I've challenged myself to swim out with my eyes closed because why not, and I've gotten out without getting hit by a wave just by feeling it. I was doing a warm down at the end of the day and swam out. I realized I was in the middle of

the ocean and looked up and stayed there for ages. I loved it, I always find

myself in the ocean. (Emma)

Despite the benefits many people experience while immersed in the ocean, this is not a universal experience (see Wheaton et al, 2020). Notably what some participants recounted as fun and therapeutic, other non-oceanic athletes may find anxiety inducing. As Reid and Hunter (2011) highlighted, wellbeing and what enhances wellbeing is dynamic and differs for each individual. Milligan and Bingley (2007) addressed and challenged the assumption that natural environments are inherently therapeutic, finding a great diversity in young people's relationship with woodlands in the UK. Moreover, blue space can be a place of exclusion; some attitudes towards blue space can be linked to "past histories of exclusion and colonization" including in Aotearoa New Zealand (Wheaton et al., 2020, p. 87).

The participants all had ocean education, swimming skills, and had access to coastal space that many do not have. They also have been taught water safety and ocean skills from as young as four by volunteer and professional coaches. Giles et al. (2010) showed access to safe places to learn to swim is a socio-economic barrier for many young people. While coastal space plays a significant part in many New Zealanders lives it is important to recognize that not every person in Aotearoa experiences these landscapes in the same way. As noted earlier in Chapter 2 (p. 15) there are many socio-demographic factors determining safe access to blue space, and for those who are not water confident coastal space can be a dangerous place (Wheaton et al., 2020). The athletes in this study had opportunities to gain confidence in the ocean from young

ages, in 'nippers' (the youngest division of SLS), living in close proximity to the sea, and parents

and grandparents who supported them in safe swim practices. However, this is not the case for

all New Zealanders as both coastal use and drowning statistics illustrate.

While many participants spent a large amount of time at the beach outside of sport, two

of the participants identified limiting leisure time on the beach due to sun exposure being a

potential risk to their health. Participants also recounted the professional standard they wanted

to set for the public's perception of SLS with regards to sun safety (Sun Smart, 2021). This

behaviour included wearing the full and correct uniform (hats, long sleeve tops) to minimize

sun exposure on the beach and limiting sun exposure during leisure times. Collins and Kearns

(2007) similarly found some New Zealanders limited time at the beach due to concerns of too

much sun exposure. In Aotearoa New Zealand there is significant public health awareness

surrounding Sun Safe behaviours, and participants felt the responsibility to be seen "doing the

right thing" (Libby).

4.2 A Social landscape: Clubbie culture

This section examines the different relationships that are formed in SLS, including peer

friendships, intergenerational friends and mentors, coach interactions, and the cultural

hierarchies within SLS. The physical environment and sporting structure of SLS are not the only

factors affecting athletes' experiences in the sport as social agents such as family, friends,

romantic relationships, coaches and mentors also contribute to the overall experience of sport

(Coakley, 2007). Social relationships and interactions have the potential to increase athlete

enjoyment and performance (Bianco & Eklund, 2001), or can hinder athletic progress and have negative social implications (DeFreese & Smith, 2014). This section highlights the diverse relationships formed in a mixed gender intergenerational sport club setting. Here findings of participants' experiences in club social structures are presented including at personal, relationship, and community levels: team connections; intergenerational sport benefits; the influence coaches have; and more widely the community level SLS sport cultures.

4.2.1 Team connections: Supporting friendships

When asking accomplished athletes what their favourite part about competing was, one might assume the answer would be 'winning'. Interestingly for the majority of participants, competing and subsequently winning was not the highlight of competitions, rather cheering on other teammates was. Commentators on SLS culture have noted the emphasis on discipline and teamwork (Booth, 2004). As Emma said when asked about her favourite competition memory: "It's usually not when I'm actually racing um like if I get over a strong wave that's pretty cool but it's usually cheering on the other teams". While some participants did say winning was a bonus, all participants spoke first about the time they got to spend with their friends and club while competing. For example:

Interviewer: Do you have any favourite memories about competing?

Libby: Mainly it was the groups of friends it was my best friends that were doing

at the time. It was my friends at the surf club that would hang out together every

day or it was my friends from the other clubs That you only see when you're at a competition but those were some of the best memories.

My favourite memories are all when I am doing stuff with my friends, I love competing as a team. I think me, and my [two friends] are my favourite team. It's really fun to work as a team, and it's not that bad if you mess up, and the board rescue is so much fun. I have heaps of fun doing that. (Ana)

Yeah and a great part is you don't have to be amazingly super good at everything, but if you do it as a team. It has that element of working as a team, and like wow that wave was huge. That wave was awesome, we caught a wave from out the back, that kind of stuff. (Emily)

A unique aspect of SLS is the ability to compete by yourself or in teams, however you are always representing a club while competing. Studies have found making friends is a core motivator for children to join sports teams (Smith & Weiss, 2002), and sport friendships have been found to be particularly strong among youth (Smith et al., 2006). Moreover, young people who participate in mixed gender sport have reported enjoying making new friends, and challenge heterosexual societal norms by forming these friendships (Hills et al., 2021). Among female surfers the social connections formed with other surfers were a prominent reason for continuing in the sport (Lisahunter & Stoodley, 2021).

Participants spoke about the strong bonds formed with teammates while at competitions and many favourite memories were not based during competitions but spending time with their friends, from their own clubs, clubs across the nation and international SLS organizations. Friendships can be less bound by societal norms as opposed to family or romantic relationships (Allan, 2005), and youth sport teams are important contexts for promoting high quality friendships (Reichter & Weiss, 2019).

Maclean (2016) examined the capacity for mixed gender sport friendships to challenge hierarchical gender assumptions, finding barriers to intergender friendships are broken down at sport practices. While SLS members compete in gender categories, they often train together as a team. Some participants talked about how much they enjoyed going to support the male members on their team. Overarchingly being a part of a team and a member of a SLS club was an incredibly important part of why these athletes continued to be a part of SLS. Apart from SLS sport and sport squads, all ages of lifeguards patrol beaches together, promoting opportunities for intergenerational friendships. The importance of intergenerational sport and informal mentors is discussed in the next section.

4.2.2 Intergenerational sport: "A bunch of people have helped me along the way, there have always been people you look up to"

In addition to peer friendships, most participants reported having older peer mentors, mostly female, as well as coach mentors throughout their time in SLS. A mentor can be defined as "one who provides career advice, guidance, and psychosocial support by offering encouragement, counselling, confirmation, and friendship in order to help individuals develop a sense of

professional identity and greater self-confidence" (Bruening et al., 2008, p. 385). For some of

the participants, having an older mentor was a key reason why they stayed in the sport.

Additionally, participants reported wanting to be a mentor for younger female athletes, to

support them the way they were. A majority of the participants spoke about having older

female mentors in their club and wanting to be mentors for young athletes. Emily recounted

her mentors: "I had some older females that took me under their wing, really guided me. I got

to meet a whole new range of people, and I didn't even know it was a sport until then"

(Emily). Libby spoke on the helpfulness of multiple informal mentors:

> A bunch of people have helped me along the way, there have always been
>
> people you look up to. There is the part where you have friends that are
>
> different ages so it's really easy to learn from people that way. I definitely was
>
> informally mentored at the time. Especially being around different squads,
>
> different cultures and you have friends that have the same goals but might be in
>
> the different clubs. Those have been really helpful as well. (Libby)

The mentor-mentee relationships were not formed through a formal programme or

structure but emerged informally through the opportunity to train intergenerationally. The

participants in this study appreciated the opportunity to be mentored by and have

intergenerational peers. Additionally, participants benefited from both male and female

mentors. For example, Emily was taught by older mentors at her club:

Yeah that's definitely a big part of why I stayed in the surf… I enjoy the volunteer

work, just because of our patrols. I learned a lot from the older members. There

was one in particular that you'd sit on the deck of the surf club and he would say,

"Just watch". I'm like "what are you on about?" He'd be like, "do you see that

situation? This is what's going to happen." It is people like him that I really

enjoyed their time in the experience to teach you. (Emily).

There is anecdotal evidence that informal mentor relationships are important among

athletes, however there is limited empirical research on the topic (Hoffman et al., 2017).

Athletes that have positive high quality mentor relationships have reported a higher satisfaction

level than their non-mentored counterparts (Hoffman & Loughead, 2016). Moreover, past

research in Aotearoa New Zealand has highlighted the benefits of intergenerational sport and

movement (Barbour et al., 2020). Younger members can absorb wisdom and knowledge where

older members can be energized and find a sense of fulfilment at providing a mentor-mentee

relationship. Libby highlighted the importance of making connections where you otherwise

would not have the opportunity:

I think the mix is super important, an under 16 boy can chase me on the

board and when he grows up he will be in front, but he had that experience. I

see it as really good…. When you have the mix it's so good because anyone can

help you or chase. Or make sure you are being accountable. When we've trained

outside the squad you can ask anyone including a boy do you want to go for a

float and they'll be like yup. Which is something you may never otherwise do, so

limiting for no reason.

Emma mentioned different club dynamics, and how some of the intergenerational aspect of the

sport plays out in a club:

You do like pimples vs wrinkles which is like the old guys vs the young guys. They

set up a funny challenge … you just do funny things racing each other just

challenges.

The willingness to mentor up and coming athletes appeared to be attributed to having

mentors themselves, similar to Hoffman et al., (2017) findings. In this study, informal

mentorships appeared important to these participants' continuation in the sport. As discussed

in the review of literature, there are current initiatives like Wāhine on Water which have been

created by female SLS members to mentor and encourage other women to become IRB crew.

Sporting women in SLS have acted and are creating supportive environments for both volunteer

lifeguards and competing athletes. Along with informal mentors many participants spoke on

the important influence coaches had on them, which will be discussed in the next section

Coaching matters.

4.2.3 Coaching matters

The participants in this study provided a unique outlook on coaching in SLS. All the participants

have been coached and some were coaches themselves, both volunteer and paid. The athlete-

coach relationship is arguably one of the most important relationships in competitive sport (Bartholomew et al., 2009). The participants' narratives focused on the social aspect of a coach rather than improving athlete performance. There were rarely comments on the quality of their coach in regard to training and performance, but more so their relationships and views of their coach as a leader. Coaching is regarded as a social activity (Jones, 2011), and athletes' wellbeing can be affected by their perceived social environment (Barcza-Renner et al., 2016). The participants in this study had both positive and negative experiences with coaches. Positively, participants discussed the beneficial impacts a coach has had on their lives, specifically leading by example. For instance, Libby's coach created an environment of inclusivity:

> He has a lot of knowledge, dedicates a lot of time, he is a really good coach. There is a lot of behind the scenes as well he's been a really good influence, another reason the team has been so successful is he is really inclusive. At the club there is always room for more people you also will share with other clubs especially at holiday time. Other clubs or people will come here on holiday and he goes out of his way to make people feel welcome. If they need gear he will lend it out to them. It creates relationships. Before I went to uni[university] he had a good relationship with the coach [at the University] so I could go right to training [at the club].

These interactions show that coaches are not just important for increasing athletic performance but have a strong social impact in an athlete's life. Research has shown that when

youth athletes are in a caring sport environment they show greater social skills such as empathy, taking initiative, and helping others (Fry et al., 2020). Coaches have also been shown to have a strong influence over athletes' development, not just in training environments, but through their social actions and behaviours (Felton & Jowett, 2013). When speaking on positive coach relationships participants would often recount one-on-one time spent with the coach.. Participants also drew attention to the importance of their coaches when they first started the sport:

> …it took me a while to kind of come out of my shell I guess and get the hang of it. There were my coaches who were awesome and taught me the ropes and threw me into the deep end and away I went. (Emma)

Unfortunately, the power of a coaching role can also negatively affect athletes. Not all participants spoke positively of previous experiences with their own coaches in SLS or with coaching colleagues when coaching themselves. Generally, women are under-represented in sport leadership compared to men (Evans & Pfister, 2021; Hovden & Tjønndal, 2019), and there is a specific lack of women in sport coaching, with limited role models for female athletes wanting to coach (Carson et al., 2018). This underscores ways in which a sense of community can be enhanced or negated by coaching practices. Commenting on coaching culture Izzy explained how one coach's comments on her body weight, though possibly well intended, left a lasting impact. As Izzy explained:

When I was 16 and going through puberty my swim coach [for SLS sport] told me

she noticed my body was starting to change. So, she told me to stop eating as

much at dinner time and stop eating as many carbs and things. I looked thin and

I thought I was fat. I look back at photos now and I am like, bro. I think being in

togs and your body is on show all the time. People think it's ok to make

comments, and even though they are well intended, she just wanted me to do

well in performance but ya that is definitely an issue. …. I used to think that

having some fat on me was literally the worst thing that could happen, I was

terrified of that. Then when the coach sort of reaffirmed that, when you are a

fifteen/sixteen year old girl that was really sad. I think that people should have

more knowledge around letting people follow their natural process and it's all

growth and body changing, just don't comment on it. (Izzy)

Izzy's comments were reflective of some of the documented attitudes and practices

around 'slim to win' diet culture in high performance sport. Studies have shown that a coach's

comments and attitudes about the weight of athletes can elicit and aggravate disordered eating

behaviours (Kerr et al., 2006; Muscat & Long, 2008). While many coaches might monitor their

athletes for disordered eating, as noted by Plateau et al. (2014) coaches often rely on weight as

a measure to do so, possibly overlooking athletes that are struggling with disordered eating yet

not losing weight. This is reflected by some participants in this study who felt because they

were not 'underweight', adults in their lives did not recognise body image struggles.

Surf lifesaving is a sport where bodies are on display, which can heighten an athlete's body awareness and scrutiny similar to findings from Greenleaf (2004) and Reel and Gill (2001). Additionally, "for swimming there is the additional pressure that comes with the perception held by many top swim coaches that lower body weight and body fat improves swimming times" (Reel & Gil, 2001, p. 1). An Australian study highlighted the power differentials in coach to athlete relationships, wherein coaches exhibited a 'slim to win' culture heavily focused on an athletes body as a tool to manipulate (McMahon et al., 2011). Akin to Izzy's statement above, a coach's comments, even if intended to increase performance, can have a lasting effect on body satisfaction, awareness and in exacerbating disordered eating behaviours among elite athletes (Muscat & Long, 2008).

A few participants highlighted changing attitudes in SLS, including the increase of females in leadership roles in clubs. The SLSNZ governing board consists of 9 members: three men and six women (SLSNZ, 2021) however the 2021 annual report shows men are still the significant majority in leadership roles across Aotearoa New Zealand (SLSNZ annual report, 2021). Exploring the experiences of female high performance coaches, a 2012 study found some women in coaching roles across many different sports felt isolated and unsupported (Norman, 2012). All the participants in this study reported having mostly male coaches, although half of them were also already coaching or wanted to be. This could signal a changing tide toward more female coaches in SLS despite lack of current representation in coaching roles. While coaches are often leaders in sport culture there are cultural beliefs and practices that can affect experiences in sport as discussed in the next section.

4.2.4 Cultural hierarchies: 'The beachie'

As previously discussed, there is a generally accepted cultural hierarchy in oceanic surf sport which places male short boarders at the pinnacle and subsequently moves downwards through long boarders, windsurfers, stand up paddle boarders, with craft you sit or lie on such as kayakers, and bodyboarders at the bottom (Nemani, 2013; Waitt & Clifton, 2012; Waitt, 2008). Most researchers however do not include or discuss SLS craft such as kneeboards, surf skis, surf boats, and surf canoe in their researched hierarchies. Within the sport of SLS there are many different disciplines, and a social structure and cultural hierarchy based on which event you compete in became apparent during discussions.

As signalled in the introduction of this thesis, there are many different sport disciplines encompassed by SLS including beach events (sprints, flags, relays, 2 kilometre run), surf ski, kneeboard, IRB, surf canoe, surf boat, pool rescue, surf swim, tube rescue, board rescue, and iron person events. While not all events were discussed in the interviews, it became apparent that for some participants, 'iron person' competitors were viewed as the top athletes, cascading to the bottom of the hierarchy 'the beachie'. An iron person is an athlete that competes in the 'iron' event which is a race comprising the disciplines of swimming, running, knee boarding, and surf ski paddling. A beach athlete or 'beachie' is an athlete who primarily competes at the beach events; aptly named, they compete on the sand not in the ocean or pool. The majority of interviewees participated in ocean and beach events, although those

competing in both would generally brush over their beach event status. One athlete touched on the role that event status had in gaining athletic respect among peers:

> If you were a beachie you weren't seen as amazing as an ironman. You had to swim, do the ski, and that kind of stuff…. but the things that stand out to me is 'Oh you're a beachie or an iron man'. They jump out as me because you are a different kind of athlete, you aren't any good compared to someone that's out in the water all the time. Or you're a boatie or a whatever, there is that stereotype.

Addressing windsurfer cultural hierarchy, Wheaton (2000) found that while a group may participate in the same sport there are ways in which participants are assigned places in a cultural sport hierarchy. There were no direct derogatory comments towards beachies by participants in this study, however most participants that competed in beach and ocean events would focus our discussion on the ironwoman event, suggesting that they held the ironwoman event as the most important in SLS. This notion of the iron people quite literally being at the pinnacle of SLS is blatantly displayed in some media portals. For example, the iron person event is commonly promoted as an event for the 'fittest' athletes, and the Australian SLS event Nutri-Grain iron man/woman series website calls the iron person event "the pinnacle of Surf Life Saving Australia's elite sports program" (Iron Series, 2021).

A further way in which potential cultural hierarchies were evident was in the differences in reputational status between clubs around the country. One participant from a larger club felt having more club members, new equipment, and a flat beach for training gave her club a competitive edge. Athletes from smaller clubs felt elated when they won at national competitions, noting it was a more challenging feat for small clubs and that some smaller clubs struggle to even have enough members to put together teams. Moreover, the physical beach your club patrolled, including whether your club beach was small or large, busy or quiet, and the general ocean conditions played into club status for some.

4.2.5 In it for life: "A club is a big family"

Remarkably when asked if they would continue in SLS in some form through sport or lifeguarding, every participant responded yes. The majority of participants wanted to continue competing; others had goals of leadership in SLS, however all wanted to continue being a member of their club in some capacity. Attitude, social influence and self-efficacy are attributed as key predictors for life time activity patterns in sport (Holt & Talbot, 2011). Additionally, family participation and socialization in a sport has the most propensity to encourage sport participation in young adult athletes (Birchwood et al., 2008). Participants' families participated in SLS, but many also had the sense of community within their club.

Many of the participants referred to their club as a family. This social aspect of SLS is enhanced by lifeguard patrols in addition to athlete training. The role of friendships, mixed-

gender and intergenerational involvement, provide a non-traditional opportunity for social

interactions in a sporting environment. Research from Sport New Zealand highlighted that

giving back to the sport, family members playing in the sport, and love of the sport are key

motivators for volunteering in sport (Sport New Zealand, 2007). Other studies of sport in

Aotearoa New Zealand have found that social interaction with whānau and community was a

significant outcome of sport participation (Gordon et al., 2013). Participants throughout this

study highlighted different groups within their club community, experiencing a friendly

comradery with groups they may never have contact with otherwise. As Libby said: "At the club

there is always room for more people you also will share with other clubs especially at holiday

time." In this study it was clear the SLS motto of 'In it for life' rang true for the athletes:

I think you're in it for life. With lifeguarding I'll keep doing that (Brookie)

It's just such a fun sport. I can't see stopping. I just do it because I enjoy it, and if

I win that's a bonus (Ana)

So, I started at surf club when I was about four, like I said we lived right by the

sea. So, my older siblings did it. So ya I've literally been involved since nip nips.

The little nips haha ya so I've been in surf club my entire life. (Izzy)

Ya, yes, for me it's a huge part of, not just the sport life, I love paddling and being

in the water I'd do it anyway. Being in the squad I can help the coach and I want

to see them do well. (Libby)

Lifelong sport participation is important for many reasons, including benefits for

physical and mental health as discussed in the review of literature (chapter two). SLS in

this regard is an important facilitator for physical activity, with those that are heavily

involved reported wanting to continue in the sport. However, there are challenges to

maintain sport participation, more so for women than men. How gender expectations

change the way we participate in sport is presented in the next theme.

4.3 Gender discourses: Challenging conventional ideologies in oceanic sport

As discussed in the review of literature, SLS sport, lifeguarding patrols, training and club

activities are not separated by sex/gender, however competitions are in gendered

(male/female) categories. In this context SLS sits somewhere between many traditional sex-

based competitive sports (e.g. netball, rugby) and lifestyle sports, where participation is

informal. However, surfing is similar to SLS sport in that leisure and recreational surfing is not

sex/gender categorized, yet competitions such as the Olympics and the New Zealand National

Surfing Championships are.

Pearson (1982) called attention to the similar masculine characteristics attributed to SLS

and surfing in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, contradicting Booth (2004) who claims SLS

is the main promoter of hegemonic masculinity in his comparison of the two sports. This study

sought to explore the experiences of women athletes and gain a greater perspective on their

experiences and narratives. Findings exploring gender discourses in SLS sport are discussed in

the three following sections: The beach body: Bodies on display; Super mum or super athlete?;

Deconstructing the 'Boys Club'; and Contesting marginalisation.

4.3.1 The beach body: Bodies on display

From puberty to post-teenage years, to postpartum, bodies are on display at the beach. As

discussed in the review of literature, magazines and more recently across social media and

websites, these sites illustrate the 'appropriate female form' that is required for recreation at

beach landscapes (Jordan, 2007). While I did not directly ask my interviewees about issues

concerning body image, given the societal focus on women's bodies it was not a surprise our

conversations included discussions about body image, togs (swimsuits), disordered eating in

sport, and the challenges of aging bodies.

There are complex ways in which socio-cultural expectations affect both an athlete's

physical and mental health, and as has been signalled earlier, a focus on leanness for

performance adds complex layers of pressure to athletes (Thorpe & Clarke, 2020). Thorpe and

Clarke (2020) found a dominant belief among female New Zealand athletes was that a lower

body weight equates to better physical performance. A recent survey also found that many

sex-specific appearance related pressures in elite athletes in Aotearoa New Zealand are still

prevalent, underreported, and undertreated (Heather et al., 2021).

The complexity of how participants experienced being in a sport on the beach showed in the range of ways participants spoke, or did not speak, about swimsuits and body image during our interviews. Some of the participants joked about togs coming off in the surf, commenting that only the younger athletes would wear a bikini rather than a full swimsuit. Many of the comments made were surrounding the functionality of a swimsuit as wanting one that would stay secure in the surf, so they could focus on racing. Additional to functionality there was consideration of how togs looked, that they were flattering and supportive. For example, Emma talked about finding a brand of swimsuit that was both functional and still flattering: "So I wear a one piece, I've found a brand that works well with my body and me. It's a nice shape, a nice cut, flattering, and supportive and stuff."

While some participants did not bring up togs at all, and others only briefly mentioned them, for some it was a challenge especially during puberty:

> In surf lifesaving, I'm not sure if it's the same for every girl but being in a sport
> where you are living in togs on the beach every day is quite hard. I think females
> go through puberty a little bit more noticeably, changing weights and changing
> body types and things. It's quite hard to be in little togs on the beach. I know I
> struggled with that for a while. I think that's one of the biggest issues for me.
> (Izzy)

Izzy was the only participant to highlight concerns about disordered eating and relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-s) as being integral to the way she experienced SLS sport. However, a study on elite New Zealand sports women found the majority reported feeling social pressures in their sport to look a certain way that may damage their health (Heather et al., 2021) revealing how widespread this issue is. Considering some of the participants were elite athletes competing at a national level, it is important to draw attention here to the pressures on elite women athletes even when comments are outliers in interviews.

Elements of SLS sport, particularly the requirement to wear revealing swimsuits in sport events, can heighten body awareness. While lifeguarding, athletes are required to wear covering clothing due to sun exposure, whereas in training and at carnivals athletes generally wear swimsuits. Studies among athletes in sports that require revealing uniforms (e.g. gymnastics, figure skating, swimming) have found increased body weight awareness and anxiety surrounding weight valued for performance.

Many of the other participants who did not discuss eating disorders however mentioned other challenges with body image such as their bodies changing particularly post puberty, after their teenage years, and after giving birth to a child. Notably non-mother participants worried about how childbirth would change their body's shape and abilities. The challenges associated with motherhood and SLS sport are presented in the following section.

4.3.2 Super mum or super athlete? Exploring the multiple identities of female athletes

Historically sport and motherhood have been presented as two opposite identities, one with traditional masculine characteristics and the other posed as the pinnacle of femininity (Bordo, 1990; Hargreaves, 1995). However, tides are changing as more mothers are visible as elite athletes (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Amongst the non-mother participants in this study some expressed excitement to have children but acknowledged they would wait until they had accomplished what they wanted to do in sport. There is a societal myth that motherhood and elite sport cannot co-exist (Jette, 2011), which some participants in this study spoke to.

The idea that to be a mother you have to give up training at a high level is so ingrained in societal expectations some participants were thinking of the effect motherhood would have on their sport performance long before they planned on having children. Additionally, there was an assumption among some participants that once you have children you no longer have time for yourself. As research studies have shown, some female athletes perceived motherhood as the end of their sporting freedom (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). As one participant put it: "I'm not married, and I don't have kids or anything, I've got the time" insinuating that once you have children you no longer have time for sport and training. Emma for example saw having a child as akin to a career challenging injury:

Interviewer: Do you see yourself continuing [in the sport]?

Emma: One hundred percent, something major would have to happen for me to

not do it. Like maybe a kid but then I'd always go back, ya a kid or massive

injury.

However, other non-mother participants in this research were excited to have children

and wanted them to be in SLS as well. They did note however in motherhood they would be

doing SLS more for fun than actively competing. The anxiety surrounding a postpartum body is

not unpredictable as social pressure to 'bounce back' to a pre-baby body is enormous (Maddox

et al., 2020). Emily highlighted the physical challenges of going back to sport after childbearing

as being "a real challenge, purely because I knew, this is the hard thing, this is what I was like

before babies (gestures hands apart) after babies, and I couldn't get my head between it. I

wanted to be back to where I was...". This showcased the societal pressure placed on mothers

to 'get their bodies back'.

Despite an increase of mothers in sport, they still have a minimal presence in sport

psychology research (McGannon et al., 2015). However, challenging the trope that motherhood

and high performance sports are not compatible are studies that show athlete mothers view

themselves as role models and view motherhood as an additional perspective on sport which

enhances their experiences (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, Spowart et al., 2010, McGannon et al.,

2015). However, motherhood and elite sports are complex and there are many challenges

associated with continuing to train. While these challenges cannot be generalised to the entire

population of elite sport mothers, some of the obstacles athletes face navigating motherhood

and sport include; "guilt, exhaustion and stress, social disapproval and organizational resistance to the presence of children in sport settings" (Leberman & Palmer, 2009, p. 305).

Additionally, there is societal pressure to be a 'do it all' by being a 'good mother' and an athlete as well. Physical activity in a world of balancing careers and motherhood has been touted as 'the third shift' (Maddox et al., 2020). There is a cultural expectation to 'do it all' which can lead to physiological distress for failing to meet unrealistic social expectations of the 'super mum' (Choi et al., 2005). However, sport specific research on athlete mothers has found that women restructured family and personal schedules under new constraints instead of completely forgoing participation in sport (Palmer & Leberman, 2009). One participant expanded on the pressure and expectations of trying to balance the many facets of being a mother, having a career, and being an athlete:

> I will see if I can coach that age group [my child's age group] and work through lifeguarding, hopefully, that's the plan. It's trying to work full-time, trying to do that job properly, and trying to be a mum properly, yes it's definitely a balancing thing.

Intriguingly, despite some hesitation on wanting children, the majority of participants, mothers and non-mothers, said they wanted their child(ren) to participate in SLS with them. While only one of the participant's own mothers was an active lifeguard, many saw the opportunity to share a community they loved with their family one day. The intergenerational

aspect of a SLS club could help families participate in sport together, a predictor of lifetime physical activity (Holt & Talbot, 2011). For example, participants envisioned their own children participating in their clubs:

I'll always help with the club. I want to do masters when I'm older. I want to be one of those 40 year old moms, my kids, they are definitely doing surf lifesaving. I won't force them, but I would really like them to do surf. Then they can decide they don't have to compete, but I want them to be in surf. (Izzy)

Another participant noted:

For me now that I'm older I appreciate those opportunities so much more. Me and my friend, we used to live at the surf club, we got sick of our parents, so we lived at the surf club. We were able to do some real cool things, that's what I want my children to experience. They don't have to do it for their whole lives like mum did, but I want them to see why I did it…. A club is a big family. It is what I really like about surf lifesaving, if you have a good group of like-minded people, it's like a family

Women who are mothers and athletes also see themselves as positive role models for children and other female athletes (Palmer & Leberman, 2009), and many

participants in this study wanted to remain athletes after having children. Notably the ability to continue in sport after child birth has been attributed to the privilege of support systems such as suitable child care, financial stability and social support (Wheaton & Thomlinson, 1998; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). SLS sport may provide a foundation for mothers to remain active in sport after they have children, based on the intergenerational club model (as discussed on page 67).

4.3.3 Deconstructing the 'Boys Club'

Many participants initially downplayed any challenges they faced as female athletes, with more than half responding with some version of a quick "no". However, once probed further, they continued to describe a 'boys club' mentality in which some felt 'othered' because of their gender. For example, Emily described a particular patrol as "a lot of masculinity happening". This is similar to a survey of women in SLSNZ; which found one of the main negative experiences women wrote about was a 'boys club' mentality in SLS clubs (Boardmand & Fry, 2021). When discussing women's experiences in surfing, Olive et al. (2013) also found women often avoided conversations of negative experiences, opting to focus on why they enjoyed surfing. Many of these SLS participants recounted behaviour that they interpreted as light hearted banter. However, as Comley (2016) highlighted, any differentiated behaviour is 'othering' different genders, contributing to the marginalization of females. For example, Emma discussed perceived being underestimated by the males in her club:

Interviewer: Have you had any challenges being a female athlete in surf lifesaving?

Emma: Um I think in the overview no, but there are little things like the, I guess banter between the guys and girls at surf, cause most of the girls don't challenge me. Like there aren't many girls I'm like, oh need to pick on her, because she will challenge me. I normally target the guys. Like one of the sessions last year I purposefully put myself in the middle of the guys, and they were like "go to the girls side" and I was like "no if you beat me I'll move". That was pointless. Why are you talking up a storm trying to get me to move when I'm better than you? So, it's little things like that where they underestimate the girls when we've got it. Like I've had to race boys at competitions cause it's challenging, and they are like you won't beat me. Then I do beat 'em.

Moreover, some participants expressed a sense of needing to beat the boys if they wanted respect on the starting line. This belief is similar to findings in other sports where women feel the pressure to perform to male standards to be respected within the sport culture (Comely, 2016; Wheaton, 2000). Interestingly, no one reported feeling patronized by these experiences like the surfers in Olive et al. (2013). However, participants reported feeling like they were perceived by others (both men and women) as not as good as the males. Some participants felt empowered by beating the men, and they liked the respect it earned them among the 'boys club'. Similarly, Nemani and Thorpe (2016) and Wheaton (2000) found that physical capital for women participating in surf sports is accessed by shows of bravery and skill

through taking on large surf. Booth (2004) even deemed those who go out in large surf as "surfing's warrior caste" (p. 104). Historically there has been a special reserved prestige for both surf lifesavers and surfers who take on particularly large surf, who are assumed to be men.

My findings suggested that status was seen to be increased by being better than the males in the club, and some participants also found respect was more available for those women who took risks in large surf. Parallel to findings in windsurfing, credibility was gained on taking risks and 'going for it' (Wheaton, 2000, p. 260). Some participants felt that some of their female teammates were just there to flirt with the boys, and were scared of big waves, which 'opened the doors' for a negative perception from the males in the club. There was therefore an opinion shared that if you show up and 'do it properly' then you are protecting yourself from being looked down on or treated differently. Interestingly there was a sentiment among a few participants that the girls who get upset are taking banter in the club the wrong way, rather than being critical of the male culture that promotes this practice.

Banter played an interesting role in gender dynamics, some found it light hearted and fun, while other participants felt it could be exclusionary. Banter is complex and has been categorized by some commentators as a 'double edged sword', similar to this study, it can be both 'inclusionary' and 'exclusionary' (Nichols, 2018; Lawless & Magrath 2021). Several studies on banter in sport have acknowledged it is hard to define, yet generally is accepted as teasing and playful remarks (Hein & O'Donohoe, 2014; Lawless & Magrath 2021). In some cases, banter

can be a form of indirect sexism "which manages to express sexism whilst at the same time denying responsibility for it" (Mills, 2008, p. 12). Banter in this study was no less complex, and both positive and negative aspects of banter were addressed by participants.

A few participants viewed being accepted by the males in the participants' SLS clubs as a symbol of skill, for example if you were better than the guys you could join their side of the line up. This has been referred to as 'the boy scale', by which all athletic performance is judged in relation to the men's performance standards in the sport (Thorpe, 2008). Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) found that women who exhibited a high level of skill in windsurfing would not be considered a 'female windsurfer' but alternatively seen as 'one of the lads' (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998, p. 264). Similarly, in this study, some participants talked about being 'one of the boys'. For example, Libby noted: "It felt like I could always act like one of the boys, get along with them, I feel like even with the old boys they respected me to a degree". Feminist researchers have noted women often do not condemn cultural norms as problematic yet blame themselves and others for non-conforming behaviours (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This data suggests the social construction of a 'boys club' is not as straightforward as the boys are 'in' and girls are 'out'. In a context of gendered power, it is important to consider who benefits from upholding social constructs.

Brookie, along with others, liked being able to train with mixed genders:

It's a cool squad to be a part of, I'm also really lucky because my club, I love

training against the boys. I love being a girl, I actually feel like it doesn't affect me

at all. If anything, I think it's better because if I train with them and beat them it's

more hype.

The issue of the 'old boys club' is nuanced and complex, where some participants liked

to train with the boys, others preferred having a female only squad. In contrast to the boys

club, many of the participants reported training in a group of like-minded females. Many teams

within SLS are referred to as separate 'boys' and 'girls' squads yet there was no formal creation

of these groups, they were social groups or sometimes deemed 'squads' within clubs. These

groups were talked about in a very positive way, as friends to train with, and hang out with

outside of training and competitions. Female only clubs were first formally initiated in Aotearoa

New Zealand in 1932, in response to the return of men from war and the subsequent exclusion

of women from the clubs they once were active members in (Harvey, 2010). Thus, female only

training groups are not a novel construction in SLS in NZ and were often used to contest

females exclusion from 'the boys club'. While there are no longer sex/gender segregated clubs,

half of the participants said in their clubs they had a group of females they would train

separately with.

Some participants chose their club based on the presence of other women and 'like

minded' people. Participants said they wanted to be at a club with likeminded people, which

they described as having the same gender and similar age to them. Similar to the participants

in this study, female surfers and golfers reported choosing to participate in their sport at places with more females present (Comely, 2016; McGinnis et al., 2005). As discussed in the review of literature, joining an all-female sport group was a way many women have challenged male dominated spaces (Thorpe, 2008), and these all female groups have increased the visibility and empowerment of women in action sports, a traditionally male landscape (Comley, 2016; Stoddart, 2011; Thorpe, 2008).

Women in this study reported a strong sense of community in these all-female groups, particularly the women in their late teens and early 20s. Brookie talked about looking up to the group of women in her club when she was younger:

Everyone's pretty supportive and friends. There is a core group of girls who are supporting each other. It's not just within the club, the girls will hang out with each other because you are all friends. You want to spend more time with them, that's not just training and comps (competitions).

Findings show that all women sporting groups and clubs can help increase visibility of women in elite sport, and help women increase their skills in typically male dominated fields (Stoddart 2011; Thorpe 2008). As discussed in the review of literature, mixed sex/gender sporting groups have been under scrutiny from physical education researchers as a place to 'undo gender' (Hills & Crosston, 2012; Lines & Stidder, 2003), however there is limited research on high level sport trainings being integrated and some research supporting gender-integrated

sport in certain contexts (Channon et al., 2016). However, it is argued that when males and females compete against each other in physically demanding sports, it can challenge ideas of what femininity is and debunk the gender expectations that men are naturally stronger, faster, and more athletic.

The participants in this study contradicted themselves as well. That is, they liked that they could have male friendships in sport and they also enjoyed their all-female training groups concurrently. This highlights the complexity of the social structures in sport. As mentioned before, feminist studies sometimes can fall into over generalising women's experiences. The nuances of gender relations within a club in my study show it is more complicated than some researchers present. These findings illustrate both gender-integrated and single gender groups within a sport have different challenges and benefits. That is, no one situation suits all athletes in the sport, and both options have potential benefits in reducing marginalisation for particular women. Moreover, considering gender is not binary, having one training group could include otherwise excluded gender identities. The social worlds of sport are complex, and the ways in which women navigate male dominated arenas dynamically change based on the context for each individual woman. The ways in which participants contested the marginalization of women in sport are explored in the final section Contesting marginalization: "It's always good to prove people wrong".

4.3.4 Contesting marginalization: "It's always good to prove people wrong"

As noted above, participants were hesitant to speak negatively about experiences with their male counterparts in training. When asked about challenges in SLS as females, many would switch phrasing with some version of 'It's not a challenge but…'. Thereafter the participants spoke about struggling with being perceived as not as good as the men in their club. Participants experienced frustration that they continually beat male times in a race during training yet were still being perceived as less capable athletes. In recent feminist research on surf culture, women reported needing to 'prove' themselves and their skill in the water as women, where men in the same study did not report the same sentiment (Comley, 2016; Olive et al., 2013). As noted earlier the participants were also empowered by their confidence and skills in the sea. However, there were subtle ways in which they expressed being treated differently because of their gender. Furthermore, the interviews gave examples of the durability of discriminatory comments or behaviour. For example:

> Aussie is pretty bad honestly, like one time I heard, the female finals had been, and the announcer said, 'oh and this is the event that everyone has been waiting for all day', and it was the open male final. I was like, are you kidding me? Things are getting better in New Zealand. Like we have equal prize money now and I think it's equal in Aussie but there are a few older attitudes that have stuck around. (Izzy)

Some participants said they didn't mind being perceived as less capable but did feel the pressure to 'prove people wrong'. For example:

Interviewer- Have you had any challenges as a female in surf lifesaving?

Emma- Not so much challenging, like it's harder but [when] people say our skills aren't higher or not as fast but it's always good to prove people wrong… being perceived as not as capable but we are.

Participants talked about how men were allowed to compete in the large surf during carnivals while the women were moved down the beach to smaller waves, which they experienced as particularly demoralising. Such decisions are made by event organisers and have been protested by competitors and their coaches. Participants recounted numerous times during a competition in large surf it was standard practice to move the girls and women water events to an area of beach with smaller surf, leaving the men to compete in the large waves. Participants were particularly passionate about this topic, some saying they wrote letters to SLSNZ leadership to contest this practice. The athletes noted it would make more sense (from a safety perspective) to move the younger competitors, both girls and boys, to small surf and let all adult categories compete in the larger surf:

Up until 2020 nationals, under 15 females couldn't race iron [iron person event] they had to race diamond which is one less leg. So, they don't or didn't do the ski

race because they were 'less capable' then I think plenty of us emailed and complained so they changed it. (Emma)

Other than that, I get weird, I get annoyed when they move the females, if the surf is huge. They move the female arena down to where the surf is smaller. I think that they should keep the open females and under 19 females in the big surf and move the younger people down to smaller surf. So, there is a little bit of a.. Ya that is one thing that annoys me…. I know a lot of the older girls, myself included, would have rather stayed in the bigger surf. Cause it's just saying like 'oh no girl will ever be as good a lifeguard as a male'. (Izzy)

Like if surf was bad but they might put the under 16 girls on instead of older people, but those things were never too bad, and I never cared too much. It's just kind of annoying. (Libby)

Drummond (2021) chronicled similar dissatisfaction with moving some but not all SLS sport arenas in Australia:

An official announcement was made that all under 17 events for males and females, as well as the under 19 females and open women would relocate to a beach 20 km south where it was far more sheltered and the waves much smaller.

The under 19 males and open men would, however, remain at the original beach

and continue to compete (p. 11)

Drummond (2021) argues that this practice classifies men's bodies as expendable, and

thus promotes hegemonic masculinity in SLS sport. Drummond (2021) highlights the issue as a

serious safety concern for the young men sent out to 'test the waters' before the women's

categories would be allowed to compete; arguing it would be more appropriate to move all

arenas if the surf is deemed unsafe.

As discussed earlier, females in SLS sport have not been given the same opportunities as

their male counterparts in the past. Athletes in this study have expressed ways in which they

too have been treated differently including the relocation of a sporting arena, not being offered

the iron person event, and male competitor favouritism by an announcer in Australia. These

attitudes of masculine superiority are still prevalent today, behaviours that will require an

ongoing attention in the SLS community to enact lasting change. Additionally, including women

in leadership to address these challenges and concerns.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Traditionally sport, including ocean sport, has been a man's territory, a place to assert power over others, a landscape that excluded and marginalized women's participation (Comely, 2016; Olive et al., 2015; Thorpe, 2006; Wheaton, 2019). Moreover, ocean lifeguards and SLS have been associated with shows of masculinity, machismo pride, and male-dominant culture. Some of the findings are in line with previous qualitative feminist studies in ocean sports, however, there is very limited research concerning the experiences of female SLS athletes and no research was found, except for one survey, concerning the research questions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Nevertheless, in Aotearoa New Zealand women have been participating as lifeguards in SLSNZ since 1911 (Drummond 2020; Harvey, 2010). Using an interpretive approach informed by feminist theory, this research has explored the experiences and narratives of female athletes in SLS by investigating their connection with coastal spaces, experiences in SLS sport and with volunteer life guarding. This research aimed to make sense of, and understand complex social realities of participants; however, this research did not search for specific answers to any pre-constructed hypothesis. Furthermore, in line with feminist aspirations, this study sought to articulate and highlight women's experiences in sport in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This research therefore provides a fresh perspective. The perspectives here are sometimes contradictory, nuanced, and complicated, yet they provide an intriguing glimpse

into a SLS culture which is historically centred around male narratives. I do not presume to argue the findings derived from the six participants to be generalizable to all women in surf lifesaving, however their voices highlight shared experiences and unique outlooks, further emphasizing the importance of considering female epistemologies and experiences in sport.

5.1 Limitations

This research project is a Masters study, subsequently was conducted with limited time and resources. Hence the scope of the research was restricted in two key ways: 1. The number of participants 2. Time spent with each participant. In a study of a larger scale, more participants would be beneficial to gain a broader picture of women's experiences in SLS sport, including challenges and opportunities in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the pool of female SLS athletes still competing in the over 19 category is relatively small. It would also be beneficial to a larger scale study to recruit a greater diversity of participants including a greater age range, more participants who had children, and participants of diverse ethnicities.

There are 74 different SLS clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand, each with their own cultures and unique make up of members. In this study the six participants were members of five clubs, in both the North and South islands of Aotearoa New Zealand. Due to the practical restraints this study could most accurately be described as an exploration of the six participants' experiences as female athletes in SLS sport in Aotearoa New Zealand through an interpretive feminist lens. As noted throughout this study a small group of women's perspectives cannot (and should not) be generalized to a larger population.

In chapter 3 section 4, I discuss limitations of the study methodology (p. 50) and the importance of reflexivity and give an account of my own lived experiences (p. 49). As a researcher my understanding of feminist reflexivity developed during this study, this became particularly evident during analysis of the role of banter in a sport environment. I have been one of the only females in a male dominated outdoor kayaking industry and have encountered both the positive and negative effects of banter in a sport environment. By acknowledging my own lived experience during analysis, I practiced a growing awareness of feminist reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Additionally, I had the privilege to have two supervisors providing mentorship during this study, and we often discussed the interview process and the thematic analysis processes. This assisted me to reframe themes I may have initially mis-labelled and expand my perspective and understanding of my theoretical approach. Moreover, one supervisor was a member of surf lifesaving New Zealand, and one was not. This gave an 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective to challenge or confirm assumptions I may have made of SLS sport and SLS in Aotearoa New Zealand as an outsider myself.

5.2 Key findings

There is a plethora of research emerging on the use of blue spaces for well-being (Ashbullby et al., 2013; Olive & Wheaton., 2021; Phillips, 2006; Wheaton et al., 202l). This study contributes to the body of work through acknowledging the oftentimes therapeutic nature of the sea. While participants had a variety of different experiences in the sport, the most unifying topic

was their strong connections with the ocean. In many ocean recreation and leisure studies, words such as 'healing, appreciation, weightlessness, and escape' saturate the data explaining people's experiences in the sea (Throsby, 2013; Olive & Wheaton, 2020; Orams & Brown, 2021). Participants in this study were no different, for example many used the words healing, calming, and described feeling weightless. The beach was widely recognized as a place of wellbeing and health promotion among the participants.

The experiences of these six female surf lifesaving athletes supports growing feminist research in human health, sport and leisure, illustrating the ways in which we 'do gender'. Gender embodiment relates to the societal and social expectations that determine what embodied characteristics are feminine and which are masculine (lisahunter, 2018). People often use the differences in gendered embodiments as 'proof' of male superiority in sport to maintain an unequal power balance between men and women (Connell, 2009; Hargreaves, 2002). Previous research has framed sport as an arena for displays of hypermasculinity and institutionalized sexism (Brustyn, 1999), yet female participation can subvert these norms. SLS can be a way to challenge dominant expectations of femininity and what it means to be a female athlete. This research shows the complicated ways in which women navigate societal expectations about their bodies, their time, and what it means to be a female athlete.

The non-gendered/sex/age segregated training squads in SLS provided a particularly interesting lens into the ways SLS could challenge gender ideals and hierarchies. Surf Lifesaving New Zealand has acknowledged the value of women's experiences as important to the

continued growth of the sport and clubs in a published report on women's experiences in SLSNZ (Boardman & Fry, 2021). Previous research suggests sex-integrated sport can be a potential route to challenge the hypermasculinity in sporting cultures (Travers, 2008). However, the usefulness of mixed gender sport training as an opportunity to dismantle gendered sport assumption is still challenged (Hills et al., 2021). The findings in this study were sometimes contradictory, yet despite some challenges the majority of participants enjoyed trainings that were not segregated by gender/sex. SLS has the potential to challenge often accepted heteronormative assumptions and ideals in sport however institutionalized sexism remained a point of contention for participants, more than personal interactions. For example, not including the same events for male and female categories and moving female competitors to smaller surf were cause of dissension among the participants.

There is a notion that to be socio-culturally 'successful' at coastal spaces you must have a slim, 'rigorously prepared body' (Booth, 2001, p. 18), and some participants felt the societal pressure to maintain a slim and physically fit body. While these pressures were not expressed by all participants, they had a large impact on those who did experience them. Notably the pressure put on athletes from coaches to remain slim for sporting performance can cause a myriad of negative health outcomes (Heather et al., 2021). Also highlighting women's unique experiences in SLS, the theme of motherhood was prominent among mothers and non-mother participants. Most notable was the expectation of limited time once you become a mother, similar to Wheaton's (2000) findings. Alternatively, the balancing of career, motherhood, and physical activity (Maddox et al., 2020) was a concern for participants. The availability of

volunteering with family members at a surf club could combine physical activity and family time, potentially giving mothers more time to be active with their children.

Participants often talked about complex social hierarchies and relationships in the club culture, both positive and negative. For example, within the different SLS sporting events a clear cultural hierarchy was established by participants, placing the iron person event at the pinnacle and beach events on the bottom. Not unlike hierarchies established in surfing (Booth, 2004; Nemani, 2013), this led to some participants feeling like their event status further marginalised them in SLS sport.

The intergenerational aspect of patrols and training were particularly interesting aspects of SLS for participants and they provided an opportunity for informal mentorships and friendships that may not occur otherwise. The responses across different aged participants indicated all of the participants plan to stay active in their clubs throughout their lives reflective of the SLS motto of 'In it for life'. Additionally, a few participants were in SLS clubs with their parents, and the majority wanted their own children to participate with them when they were old enough. Intersectional feminist approaches encourage researchers to recognise the multiple identities of women and their experiences (Ciurria, 2019). While feminist intersectionality is not fully developed in the scope of this thesis, aspects of feminist intersectionality were useful in engaging with perspectives of women that were different ages and in different stages of life. This framework was helpful in contextualising the multiple ways participants experienced different aspects of their sport.

5.3 Areas for further study

This research was an exploratory study, examining the overarching experiences of female athletes in SLS sport. There is a myriad of possible research that can stem from this initial exploration. Particularly, further exploration of sex/gender mixed sport practices and intergenerational sport is recommended to expand on the benefits and usefulness as there are contradicting findings from other commentators (Travers, 2008; Hills et al., 2021). Moreover, the different relationships formed as a result of patrols, competitions, and training contributed to deep bonds between participants and other club members. A further examination of mentorships in SLS sport from both male and female mentors may contribute to exploring the decrease of female athlete participants in the teenage years.

As noted in the review of literature the majority of research on SLS sport has been Australian focused (Booth, 2008; Daly, 2002; Jaggard, 2001; Jaggard 1997). However, it is important not to generalise Australian findings to those athletes in Aotearoa New Zealand, considering SLS sport in the two countries have different histories of inclusion and exclusion. SLS sport has strong foundations in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, and insight into female Australian surf lifesavers' experiences could provide a compelling comparison to this study. Lastly, this was a relatively small scale study, a similar study with more participants of diverse backgrounds would be useful to further explore themes identified in the analysis of data collected.

5.4 Final considerations

As research on wellbeing and blue space continues to grow, important questions of who is benefitting from blue space initiatives remain. As highlighted in the review of literature drowning rates in Aotearoa New Zealand have been rising over the past five years, with the summer of 2021/22 being the worst drowning rate since 1982-83 (Drowning Report, 2021). Drowning is the leading cause of recreational deaths in Aotearoa, and there have been an increase in calls for culturally appropriate water safety education programs (Corlett, 2022). Further considerations need to be made when recommending immersion and other coastal blue space activities for wellness, leisure, and recreation.

The sport of SLS is a social landscape, and in this thesis the complexity of the SLS sport culture is only just beginning to be uncovered through the narratives of six participants. Considering the storied histories of masculinity and sport in SLS, this research is an important step towards understanding. Looking forward, programs such as Wāhine on Water aim to increase opportunities by providing female mentorship for lifeguards (Brownline, 2022). The program is an example of women in the sport carving out their own places and contesting marginalization through female leadership. Participants in this study highlighted other areas, such as representation in coaching, where change needs to continue.

In Aotearoa New Zealand SLSNZ sport and lifeguard service remains a publicly visible institutional space where there is an opportunity to challenge conventional cultural norms that reinforce ideals of masculinity in sport. Changing cultural beliefs and attitudes takes time; sport

has long been considered a male domain yet through proactive initiatives the tides are turning

in many once male-dominated activities. Participants in this study shared how they constructed

their own place in SLS sport, acknowledging the women who mentored them, and carving out

places for the next generation of surf lifesaver athletes. This research gives others a glimpse

into the world of SLS sport athletes and the sport's complexities and possibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Approval

The University of Waikato
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Human Research Ethics Committee
Roger Moltzen
Telephone: +64021658119
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

3 May 2021

Rachel Onken
Te Huataki Waiora School of Health
DHECS
By email: ronken218@gmail.com

Dear Rachel

HREC(Health)2021#11 : Experiences of Female Surf Lifesavers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Thank you for your responses to the Committee feedback.

We are now pleased to provide formal approval for your project.

Please contact the committee by email (humanethics@waikato.ac.nz) if you wish to make
changes to your project as it unfolds, quoting your application number with your future
correspondence. Any minor changes or additions to the approved research activities can be
handled outside the monthly application cycle.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Regards,

_____

Emeritus Professor Roger Moltzen MNZM
Chairperson
University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Experiences of Female Surf Lifesavers in Aotearoa New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

This research project is part of a Masters in Health Sport and Human Performance at the University of Waikato, undertaken by Principal Researcher Rachel Onken. Rachel has a Bachelor of Science in Public Health from the University of Arizona. She is supported by supervisors Marg Cosgriff (Senior Lecturer) and Belinda Wheaton (Professor) at Te Huataki Waiora, the School of Health at the University of Waikato.

In this project I am interviewing surf lifesaving athletes who identify as female and who are over the age of 16 to explore their experiences in the sport. I am interested in athletes' experiences in the sport of surf lifesaving, their experiences as volunteer lifeguards, and their connection to the ocean. I would like to interview you for this project. I will be conducting interviews lasting around 30 minutes to one hour, in a location of the participants choice. Locations can be physical in the Bay of Plenty or over zoom video call.

I encourage you to read this information sheet carefully before making your decision to participate. It is important that you know that you will not have to answer *any* question you don't want to, and you can stop the interview at *any* time. Also, if you choose to participate and want full anonymity, we will do everything we can to ensure your identity is protected; your name will never appear in publications deriving from this research. You will be able to choose your own pseudonym for representation in the thesis or any publications arising from this study. However, your gender will be known, I will do everything possible to anonymize the location and club you are from. Thank you for considering this invitation to share your experiences in surf lifesaving sport.

Contacting the Researchers
If you have any questions or if you have concerns about ethical matters or other issues related to the research, please contact the lead researcher, research team or the Dean of Research for Health, Sport, and Human Performance:

Rachel Onken
ro77@students.waikato.ac.nz
027 226 4272

Supervisor
Belinda Wheaton
bwheaton@waikato.ac.nz
+64 7 856 2889 ext 6205

Supervisor
Marg Cosgriff
cosgriff@waikato.ac.nz
+64 7 856 2889 ext 3540

Associate Dean

Brett Langley
blangley@waikato.co.nz
Te Huataki Waiora Health, The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
University of Waikato

Use of Information
The data collected will be used in a thesis report and possible academic outputs. The research will be viewed by my supervisors, both employees at the University of Waikato and accomplished researchers themselves. Additionally, data from this study will be condensed into a 1-2 page summary for participants to view.

Participants' Rights
As a participant you have the right to:

• Refuse to answer any particular question or withdraw from the study at any time. Your data (i.e. the interview transcript) can be withdrawn up to 2 weeks after the return of transcripts to you. You can withdraw by emailing or calling any member of the research team.

• Ask any further questions about your participation.

 • Be given access to your individual transcript and to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

Please provide a physical address or email address on the Informed Consent Form so that we can send you a copy of your interview transcript. You are encouraged to read the transcript carefully and change, add or delete any comments if you so wish.

Records
All records from the interviews will be kept confidential. They will be archived for five years and then destroyed according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. The
audio recordings will be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research process. Any other use of audio recordings will not occur without your permission.

Appendix C: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

I have read the **Information Sheet for Participants** and have had the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

1. I understand that I can withdraw at *any* time, and my data can be withdrawn up until 2 weeks after the return of transcripts.	
2. I understand that I can decline to answer any particular question in the study.	
3. I understand that I can refuse discussion on any issue.	
4. I understand that I can refuse the recording of any part, or whole, of the interview.	
5. After having read the transcript, I have the right to request to erase or change any record with which I am uncomfortable up to two weeks after the transcripts were returned to me.	
6. I understand the researchers will keep all records from the interview confidential.	
7. I understand that all data will be archived for at least five years according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations.	
8. I consent to the data being used for publication and teaching purposes. I understand there will be no use of the audio recording besides the principal researcher and supervisors.	
9. I understand that my name will not be used in <u>any</u> published or unpublished work, and the researcher will do everything possible to keep my identity anonymous/hidden. I understand that I have the right to choose my pseudonym.	
10. I understand that if I have any concerns I can contact any of the research team: Rachel Onken (ro77@students.waikato.ac.nz), Dr. Belinda Wheaton (bwheaton@waikato.ac.nz), Prof. Marg Cosgriff (cosgriff@waikato.ac.nz), Acting Dean Brett Langley (blangley@waikato.co.nz)	

Please complete the relevant details below,

Signed:..

Date: ....

Name: ....

Age: ....

Gender: ....

Pronouns: ....

Email address for transcript : ....

Chosen name for the research report: ....

Appendix D: Guiding Questions

1. Take me back to when you first got involved in Surf Life Saving, what was the beginning for you? [starting age, why did you get involved, were any of your friends involved, parental influence, mentors]

2. What is your favourite part about competing? [example of the time]

3. Can you tell me about the volunteer patrol hours? [time commitment, community, unique for sls]

4. Can you describe your club to me, what is your experience as a member of it?

5. What is the most challenging part about being an [female] athlete in surf lifesaving?

6. Do you see yourself continuing in the sport?

7. Tell me about what the ocean means to you, is it different than swimming in a pool?

8. Is there anything you would like to add that I didn't ask about?

Appendix E: Electronic Mind Map Example