

# Women on Waves

*'Investigates the influences of the dominant male discourse on the self-concept, embodied practice and experiences of female surfers and studies how they try to negotiate their position'.*





**Universiteit  
Leiden**

Institute of Cultural  
Anthropology and  
Development Sociology

**Juul Hesselberth**

**S2220393**

**Visual Ethnography**

**Metje Postma**

**27-06-2019**

## **Abstract**

Anthropological research on gender in sports have tended to focus on institutionalized sports, thereby neglecting recreational practitioners. Despite the fact that women increasingly participate in recreational surfing, the surfing world is still dominated by men in terms of values, representation, conceptualizations, expectations and organization. This study looks at the negotiations and position of surfing women on the hierarchical ladder of the surf spot 'Superbank' to understand how the dominant male discourse of surfing has influenced the self-concept, embodied practice and experiences of female surfers. The output of this research is twofold. First, a written thesis which answers the question: '*how does the dominant male discourse in surfing influence the self-concept, embodied practice and experiences of female surfers and how do they negotiate their position?*' Second, a 30 minute ethnographic film which focuses on the lived experiences of women who surf in competition. I argue that the self-concept of women is most negatively influenced when the embodiment of the masculine discourse creates a discrepancy of the ideal and real self. The sexualization, patronization and/or domination of surfing men strengthen conflicting feelings within women and thereby limit their freedom in moving through space. Looks influence the amount of limitations women face whilst surfing, with those not suiting the surfer girl image receiving the most backlash. However women are now taking on masculinities and femininities at the same time which – together with the growing amount of women in the water – is contributing to the normalizing of different (female) understandings of surfing values, expectations and representations. Women negotiate their freedom in ways that at times disrupt, challenge, change or confirm the masculine discourse.

**Keywords:** *visual ethnography, embodiment, habitus, masculine discourse, space*

## **Acknowledgements**

This research would not have been possible if it wasn't for all of the locals who helped me find my way in Coolangatta. If it wasn't for Gabriel Zaicew – whom with a great sense of humor always picked me up when I was down - I would not have been able to finish both my article and film. I am thankful for Izzy Hobbs who took me in from day one and helped me get in contact with nearly all of my interlocuters.

Thanks to Grace and Audrey Styman for having an endless amount of time to answer all of my questions, making me feel at home, for sharing not only love and kindness but also for all the surfboards that I could use. I would like to thank Jess Grimwood for an intense week of discussions, laughter and openness that I have never experienced before. I am thankful for Kirsty Best whom showed me a different side of surfing that I wasn't aware of, for her kindness and for hosting me at the surf competition at Noosa.

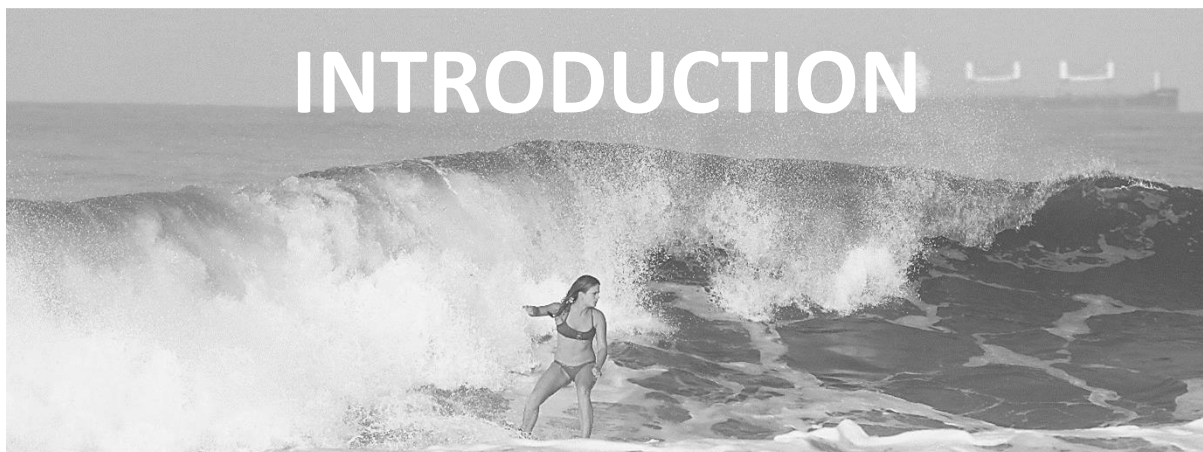
This research would not have been possible if it wasn't for the always critical eye of Metje Postma, who helped me gain new insights that I could not have reached myself. Thank you always being understanding, your time, but foremostly for your honesty.

Lastly I'd like to thank Noud Vrolijk, Sylvia van Dijk, Martin Hesselberth and Kyra Lenting for their never ending emotional support.

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*\*also includes the booklet 'a guide to understanding surfing', which needs to be held next to reading the article to fully understand all surf rules, boards and terms.*



I paddle out confidently, I've been surfing for three months straight and I feel the strongest I have ever felt. I quickly notice that I am the only girl in the line-up and that the level is quite high and I start to feel a pressure to show that I can actually surf. The wave is a point break with a hollow take-off, but nothing I haven't surfed before. I try to position myself in the middle of the line-up, for which I have to pass three guys. I feel their eyes gliding over my body whilst I paddle by and I wonder why I didn't just put my lycra<sup>1</sup> on. In the distance I see a set of waves rolling through, but I am not the only one to notice. Together with ten men I paddle towards the take-off zone and try to position myself properly. My physical strength isn't however close to any of the men and although I position myself in the right place, they only need two big strokes to lay in a more favorable position. With a growing frustration I am trying to compete against a group of men, which after half an hour results in catching my first wave. Despite all my efforts I fall in my take-off and hit my board with my cheek. Rattled I come up and decide to take it easy and wait to catch left-over waves this time. I again wonder how I've managed to go from my confident self to my frustrated self.

Although this describes a negative experience, it isn't an uncommon one. I have been self-evaluating why I tend to get frustrated and I've come to the conclusion that I get too worked up about things that don't have anything to do with the actual riding of the wave. I think about how I look, how I can impress others and the unfair competition against men. How come that I so very often get out of the water angry, whilst my male partner doesn't? This research is a result of my personal interest in wanting to understand how these frustrations grow and might have impacted my skill development, but also to understand the experiences of fellow female surfers whom have expressed similar feelings. To enable my studies I was curious for a place that has an above average amount of female surfers in the line-up.

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<sup>1</sup> A sun protecting surf t-shirt.

Coolangatta lies in the southern suburb of Queensland Australia and has approximately 6000 inhabitants. Many of my interlocutors referred to Coolangatta as 'the surf mekka' of Australia, since the headquarter of the World Surf League (WSL) and the High Performance Center (HPC) are located here, which brings many professional surfers and coaches to Coolangatta. My research took place at one of the most well-known surf spots in the world called Superbank, which as a result of its extremely good wave has seen an increase of surf tourism that has come with a crowded line-up (Reuters, 2007). On a good surfing day, the line-up can have over 500 surfers, accompanied with an aggressive atmosphere (Reuters, 2007). Seven-time world champion women's surfing Stephanie Gilmore, who grew up near Coolangatta, speaks of the amount of people in the line-up: 'growing up at Snapper Rocks it's so crowded, you have to be assertive in the line-up. You have to be competitive' (Gilmore, 2018). Multiple interlocutors pointed out that this is a very particular and extremely competitive surf spot which is not easily compared to other surf spots in the area, or possibly in the world.

#### The context and relevance

In sport and society the domination of men has for a long time been socioculturally invisible, since masculine perspectives have often taken a centered position in social discourses (Ford & Brown, 2006). Sport scholars have started to deconstruct modern sport discourses and argue that the practice of sport is culturally defined, socially constructed and historically produced to serve those who are in the most dominant groups of society (Hall, 1996). Dunning and Hargraeves (as cited by Olive, McCuaig & Philips, 2015, p.2) argue that sport remains dominated by men in 'in terms of values, conceptualizations, expectations, participation, representation and organization'. This domination can be seen in the often sexual representation of female athletes that mostly exist for male consumption (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000). For most men practicing sport means a conformation of their masculinity, whilst the participation of all women is seen as in conflict with the values of femininity (Lefkowitz-Horowitz as cited in Messner, 1994). The resistance of women in sport comes from two directions, women going against the status quo and men trying to maintain it (Messner as cited by Olive, McCuaig & Philips, 2015). For women who practice sport it is still a challenge to break with cultural assumptions and ideas about differences between men and women (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015).

Although more and more women have entered the 'male-dominated surfing sphere' of surfing this does not yet mean that equality can be found the sport (Ford and Brown, 2006, p. 100). In surfing similar patterns can be found: women have been (hyper) sexualized by media (Comer, 2010; Schumacher 2017; Booth, 2001) and treated as of less importance

than men: scholars argue that surfing women are marginalized (Booth, 2001; Comer, 2010; Lisahunter, 2018; Olive, McCuaig and Phillips, 2015; Waitt, 2008, Uekusa, 2018). Even though the competition world of surfing has many similarities to other institutionalized sports, studying women who sport recreationally needs other ways of conceptualizing processes of powers that exclude (Rowe, 1998). Recreational surfing experiences are embodied, cultural and relational (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015) and need to be studied accordingly. This study aims to understand how institutionalized practices such as media, competition and historical narratives are influencing the embodied, relational and cultural practices of recreational surfers. In my audiovisual and written research I want to contribute to the discourse that is aimed at decentering the male discourse in sport, by focusing on female surfing. I phrased my research question as followed:

*'How does the dominant male discourse in surfing influence the self-concept, embodied practice and experiences of female surfers and how do they negotiate their position?'*

To be able to answer this question this study looks at the embodied lives of women who on a daily basis surf and negotiate their freedom at the surf spot Superbank. My writing has been strongly influenced by having an audiovisual approach as method and vice versa. MacDougall (1998) explains that images are better than text to address issues of body practices and the role of senses and emotions. Filming can to some extent allow the viewers to 'be, see and feel there' (Spinney, 2015, p.231). With my 30 minute ethnographic film I aim to answer the research question by focusing on women who surf or have surfed in competition. With both text and film I want to reach a broad audience and create a consciousness of the dilemma's surfing women face. With this combination the art of noticing (Tsing, 2015) becomes easier. She argues that by listening to separate, simultaneous melodies, moments of dissonance and harmony, one is noticing 'multiple temporal rhythms and trajectories of the assemblage' (p.24). Film as a contribution to text helps since it becomes possible to re-watch, relisten and observe the multiple layers of situations, practices and interactions. I stress it is important to watch the documentary next to reading the article to get a fuller understanding of the answer to my research question.



Current debates in anthropology regarding gender in sport and surfing are highlighted and discussed in this piece, with a focus on the concepts of gender discourses, space, (hyper) sexualization and self-concept. Besides an interdisciplinary approach I have used an intersectional approach, which means I consider the historical, social and political context to get an understanding of the experience of individuals and where they all intersect (Aylward, 2010). An intersectional approach according to the Center for Women's Global Leadership (as cited by Yuval-Davis, 2006) contributes to get a fuller diversity of women's experiences and improves women's empowerment.

#### Gender discourses in sport and surfing

By studying a discourse, power relations between certain groups can be understood (Given, 2008). Foucault understood the term discourse as 'historically contingent cultural systems of knowledge, belief and power' (Baxter, 2003, p. 45). This power is expressed through language, behavior (Given, 2008). Foucault (2012) understands power as to be everywhere, so it does not inherently exist in structure or in agency. Power he argues works more like a 'regime of truth' that every society has. With the 'regime of truth' he means the discourses the particular society holds and the techniques and procedures that are seen as truth (Foucault, 2012). This regime of truth exists according to Foucault (2012) through institutions and science and are reproduced amongst others by media, politics, the educational system and economic ideologies. Most importantly Foucault (2012) argues that power works on the body by disciplining it through its various institutions like the medical-, punishment- and educational- regimes. To challenge this power is to try to remove or undermine this regime of truth from the cultural, economic and political (Foucault as cited by Rabinow, 1991). Foucault's theorization makes it impossible according to Cronin (1996) to determinate the social place where power or resistance is to be found. Moreover, a danger of Foucault's theorization of power is that it is reducing the subject to 'a mere reflex of bodily habits induced by external stimuli' (Cronin, 1996, p. 61). Bourdieu focuses on habitus, which he

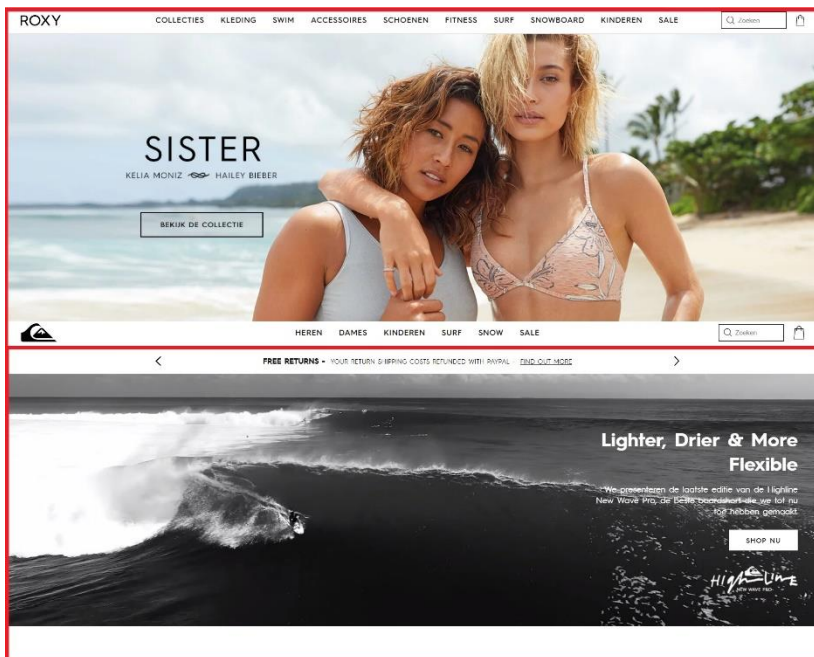
defines as: 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant as cited by Navarro, 2006, p.16). Foucault's regime of truth gives room for understanding how discourses hold power, whereas Bourdieu's theorization of habitus gives room to understand how this power becomes embodied.

A discourse can both enable and resist power (Gaventa, 2003), however when discussing resistance, both Bourdieu and Foucault have been critiqued by feminist scholars. Their theorizations both come close to determinism in the sense that they argue that individuals do not have the agency to resist their gendered discourse. Foucault claims that critical thought cannot transform power relations or discourses and that individuals are only trying 'to minimize harmful modes of domination within relations of power' (Thorpe, 2009, p. 509). Bourdieu's habitus gives more room for the effects of critical thought according to Thorpe (2009). Being reflexive of one's habitus learns us of the power it has over us, which then gives room to change our perception of a situation and thereby our response (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 as cited by Thorpe, 2009). However when Bourdieu talks of gendered habitus he argues that this reflexive awareness is a very uncommon situation (Thorpe, 2009). Sweetman (2003) disagrees however and asserts that reflexive awareness is becoming more common as result of economic, social and cultural shifts, which lead to a disruption of social positions. A feminist extension of the work of Bourdieu is useful for understanding 'change and continuity, intervention and repetition in gender identities and embodied practices in contemporary physical cultures' (Thorpe, 2009, p. 509). To understand how individuals embody, reenact but also resist dominant discourses I combine Foucault's theorization of power with Bourdieu's habitus from a feminist point of view.

Butler (1988) considers gender identity to be a social construct, which is re-created by the act of one's performance. Even though performative acts may seem like a personal choice, they always work within the existing framework of cultural sanctions and proscriptions of a shared social structure (Butler, 1988). An institution in which gender is more naturalized than in sport is hard to find (Messner, 1994). But what does the discourse of women in sport then look like? Hall (1988) argues that an obsession exists with the femininity (and masculinity) of female athletes, but not with the masculinity (and femininity) of male athletes. According to Anderson (2009) sport has constructed men to show, value and reproduce traditional ideas of masculinity. Whilst women are 'objectified and demonized for their femininity' (Anderson, 2009, p. 9). These discourses have foremostly been shaped by

hegemonic media<sup>2</sup> and the structure of sport institutions (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

Booth (2001) claims that surfing is bound up in a fraternal structure, which can be recognized in the struggle of women who are trying to become professional surfers and in how women are portrayed as sexual objects in surf media (Booth, 2001). To understand the gendered discourses of surfing, a short exploration of the masculinization of surfing is needed. Surfing quickly moved away from a culture of blurred gender boundaries and anti-aggression in the 1960's to an image of masculinity that opposed the image of femininity in the 1980's (Stedman, 1997). In surf magazines the white, courageous, able-bodied, athletic, heterosexual men began to be defined in relation with the heterosexual female surfing body, that was often portrayed as sexy, athletic, tanned, passive, blonde haired and blue eyed (Henderson, 2001). These images since then have constantly been recreated by Western practitioners (Ford & Brown, 2006).



*Image 1.* This picture shows the latest update of the Quiksilver and Roxy pages of the Netherlands. Roxy is the female version of Quiksilver. Whilst two female athletes are depicted in bikini's, the male athlete is being shown on an extreme hollow dangerous wave on the male version of the sites.

Product design as part of the sport's technique also contributed to the masculinization of surfing, especially with the introduction of the thruster (Stedman, 1997). This surfboard was one of the most popular surfboards in the 1980's which privileged power over aesthetics and enjoyment (Stedman, 1997). Manufactures of surfboards did not want to create other types of surfboards than the thruster, because they were afraid that this would go against the

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<sup>2</sup>Noteworthy is that although hegemonic masculine images are continuously put out in the world, we have to keep in mind that readers will interpret these images in ways that can be different than how they were intended and that surfers aren't just mere passive readers (Wheaton, 2003).

'imagined hard core image' of surfers (Tracks as cited by Stedman, 1997, p.82). Eventually apart from the thruster the twin fin surfboard was invented, according to Stedman (1997) a board well suited for female surfers. Although it is questionable whether a twin fin suits a woman better, at the time this board was perceived as being feminine. Besides a lack of opportunities in choosing different surfboards that suited women better, Freya (advanced shortboarder, 31) argues that when she was young there were no options for female wetsuits yet. Nowadays she argues that although there are more clothing options for female surfers than ever before, some surf brands are purposely designing bikini bottoms that with moving will go in between your butt cheeks. Product design around the 1980's contributed to the exclusion of women in surfing, whereas now some products are contributing to the sexualization of female surfers. The influence of power surfing is still felt in surf culture and consequently style and power still is seen as that what defines good surfing (Gane as cited by Beattie, 2001). This was confirmed by many interlocuters in the field, of which one was Carlo whom stated the following:

*'[...] surfing is style and power. There's nothing else really [...] probably the biggest compliment you can get.'* (Carlo, intermediate shortboarder, 30)

McGloin and Evers (as cited by Waitt, 2008, p. 78) suggest that nowadays the 'privileged construction of masculinity' in the Australian surf celebrates violence, strength, competitiveness, heterosexuality, athletics and whiteness. According to Crombie (as cited by Waitt, 2008) this body culture creates an enactment of a gendered and racialized ownership of surfspots<sup>3</sup>. According to Waitt (2008) the unequal constructed gender practices within Australian surf comes from how certain styles of masculinity are culturally valued and at the same time how other expressions of masculinity and all expressions of femininity are disregarded, also described as hegemonic masculinity<sup>4</sup>. The impact of this male discourse is felt in a surfers habitus. Through a practical engagement with the sport surfing, a surfers habitus develops (Thorpe, 2009). This habitus has already been 'inscribed in the body and subsequently take place without overtly direct conscious awareness of the principles that guide them' (Ford and Brown, 2006, p. 126). This habitus is shaped by how surf knowledge is being transferred through observation, magazines and films, comments of peers and instructors which then become embodied (Thorpe, 2009).

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<sup>3</sup> Surfspots are also places where gender intersects with discourses formed by Australian settler masculinity, nationality and citizenship (McGloin as cited by Waitt, 2008). Although I do acknowledge other minorities exist within the surfing spaces of Australia, in this research I will focus on the ambiguous status of female surfers as not complete insiders nor complete outsiders (Langseth, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the subordination of women and other gender identities that are seen as feminine, justified by the legislation of the dominant position of men in society (Connell, 2005).

### Embodiment and space

Ingersoll (2016) describes the ocean as constantly fluid, always changing and moving, like our identities and like our bodies. Ingersoll (2016, p. 132) who is a surfer herself says she relies upon 'an affective response to a lifetime of observations: impressions, sensations, and an embodied response to the constantly evolving rhythms of the sea'. To understand the shapes of the ocean helps to understand how this space 'inhabits the bodies of surfers and surfers inhabit space' (Waitt & Warren, 2008). Waitt (2008) argues that gender and surf space are mutually created. He continues that in his research the 'local specificity of embodied gender identities in surfing is complex and manifested in the complex spatiality's of embodied identities' (Probyn 2003 as cited by Waitt, 2008, p. 77). Embodiment I understand as studying the body from the physical, cultural and mental point of view, in which the body is agentic, lived and inscribed (Davis, 2014). The spatial dimension of surfing is that different places and moments of the ocean offer different ways in which gender norms are challenged, reenacted or reshaped (Waitt, 2008). Surf spaces help to shape the gender subjectivities of surfers, so when women and men are negotiating one of the best places in the ocean to catch waves they will feel their gender subjectivity differently through how the surf space is pressing onto the surfer's body (Waitt, 2008). Simultaneously ideological systems contribute to the multiple subjectivities of people (Probyn, 2003). The fluid nature of the ocean makes it difficult to fully grasp the impact of all the different conditions a surf spot has on the embodied practice and experiences of surfers. To understand the gendered embodiment of surf space of Superbank I focus on a wave shape that was to be found most regularly, which entailed mid-sized waves that weren't shaped like the well-known Superbank pointbreak, but mainly consisted out of multiple surf spots within the Superbank wave.

### (Hyper) sexualization and objectification

The difference between discussing sexuality and sexualization lies in that in sexualization someone is objectified whereas in discussing someone's sexuality one is not (Davis as cited by Wanneberg, 2011). I understand objectification as a person to be considered an object, with no autonomy, integrity and easily replaced (Wanneberg, 2011). The term 'schizoid dynamics' was coined by Renold and Ringrose (2008, as cited by Duschinsky, 2013, p.261), which they describe as the way in which women are supposed to 'just be themselves' but at the same time are asked to possess norms of 'free, self-possessed desirability and established norms of femininity'. The pressure of these contradictory norms are felt by those who are most privileged, and even stronger by those who don't have similar economic or cultural resources as the more privileged (Ringrose and Renold, 2011). According to Duschinsky (2013) the term sexualization partly exists out of these contradictions. The term doesn't have one single meaning, but exists out of

contradictions of the discourse of feminine innocence, whilst also having to display sexual desirability (Duschinsky, 2013). He argues that the reference to sexual shines a light on how sexuality has become an imperative part of female gender performances, whilst the reference of the word socialization refers to how these norms have become engrained in culture (Duschinsky, 2013). Sociologists also refer to a term that goes even further, called 'hyper sexualization', which Grossman (as cited by Johansson, 2018, p.12) defines as 'when images excessively represent narrow ideas of sexual appeal above all other qualities'. Authors claim that media's hyper sexualization of women contribute to systematically neglecting, muttering and distorting the image of women (Johansson, 2018). Hatton and Trautner (2011) argue that hyper sexualization can be recognized in the media by how different factors (image wise and textually) all revolve only around sex. Although both men and women are increasingly sexualized by the media, hyper sexualization still mainly involves women (Hatton & Trautner, 2011). Images are ways for surfers to learn about surfing techniques and styles, but also how to allocate authority (Booth, 2008). 'Surf media has long trivialised, marginalised and sexualised women who surf, and surf histories largely continue to exclude women from their narrative' (Olive, 2015, p.4). The exclusion and/or the representation of women as being passive has made it difficult for women to become accepted in the water and claim authority (Olive, 2015). This study tries to understand how the sexualized representation of female surfers influence their self-concept when practicing surfing.

### Self-concept

The term 'self-concept' is explained as how an individual believes in herself, including in her attributes and who and what the self is (Baumeister, 1999). This self-concept is formed by interpretations of one's environment and influenced by assessments and reinforcements by significant others (Ross & Broh, 2000). The self-concept exists out of three paths according to Rogers (2013): the view you have of yourself (self-image), how you wish to be (ideal self) and how you value yourself (self-esteem). When the self-image and ideal-self aren't found to be close, it affects the self-esteem (self-confidence and body-confidence). The theory of social comparison speaks of how individuals look for imageries outside themselves to assess their own skills and opinions of their abilities (Reichert, 2016). Taussig (1990) considers mimesis to be a way copying and imitating the nature and culture of others: 'the nature that culture uses to create second nature (p.233). Since women have for a long time mainly seen examples of how men practice the sport, women are creating a second nature by trying to own these examples. This becomes difficult since women are then trying to measure themselves to an ideal that they might not be able to reach in a similar account. The consequence is that sportswomen have to negotiate what their self-concept is in a sport

world that is dominated by male values and sexualized images of women. Reichart (2016) argues female athletes will use these images for their social comparison. When this comparison isn't realistic it cannot only reduce their body confidence (Lin & Kulik, 2002), but also cause self-objectification. Self-objectification happens when individuals judge their body for its value and attractiveness to others (Reichart, 2016).



An objective or neutral knowledge does not exist according to Mosse (2006). Therefore it is important for a researcher to make their position within their research known, since a researcher's history, physicality and positionality inform the theoretical stories they tell (Rice, 2009). I - as not only a visual ethnographer, but also as a twenty five year old western, white, middle class Dutch female intermediate surfer - have influenced the connections I was able to make, the entrances I had to the community and how people responded to me. To enable my written and audiovisual auto-ethnographic study during my two and half month stay I made use of filming as main method, but I also used participant observation (Bryman, 2016), semi-structured and unstructured interviews with twelve interlocutors (ten women, two men)(Van Teijlingen, 2014) and enactive ethnography (Wacquant, 2014). Through using these methods I was able to rely not only my personal embodied experiences, but also was able to understand the embodied experiences of others better. Fabian (1971, p. 25) posed that: 'in anthropological investigation, objectivity lies [...] in the foundation of human intersubjectivity'. Dilemmas of my embodied subjectivity have become a central ethical consideration (Rice, 2009). I made use of reflexive ethnography (Sluka and Robben, 2007), which meant in the process of my fieldwork, content analysis of written and audiovisual work and in editing I have been reflexive on how I gathered my data.

Filming can create new frameworks and methods that abandon the idea that text is better for ethnographic representation and help reject the idea that a pure objective social science is possible (Pink, 2013). Garret, Pink, Rose and Spinney (as cited in Evers, 2015, p.2) argue that filming to enable doing research is effective at 'evoking and enacting experiential knowledge-cognitive, stimulating recall, spatial, material, sensory, emotional and affective of social worlds and people's lives'. Using film as method gave room to rethink, relisten and re-watch situations that unfolded while I was filming. However, having a camera with me all the time also came with obstacles:

*'Sometimes I feel like Izzy doesn't really like to be filmed, but whenever I ask her she says she doesn't mind. I do feel uncomfy with the camera, maybe she feels it. I am trying to get more comfy with it, but the group of friends make fun of me walking around with the camera the entire time as well [...] I do get the feeling it makes my relationship with Izzy more distanced than it would have been if I hadn't been walking around with the camera the entire time'. (excerpt journal)*

Taking out my camera for everything - I realized – made not only her feel uncomfortable but also myself, which sustained each other. As Tsing (2015) argues, encounters we have in the field contaminate us, change us and will send us in new directions. After following Izzy (19) I decided that with future interlocutors I needed to first try and build up a relationship off camera. Izzy pointed me in the direction of Jess (31), who still competes in the qualifying series (QS). The connection we had was very strong from the beginning, which resulted in us both feeling comfortable with the camera around. Since this new approach worked out so well I approached Grace and Audrey (24) and Kirsty (52) in a similar way. Grace and Audrey (24) are a twin who used to surf on shortboards in the QS, whereas Kirsty used to surf on a longboard in the WSL. I chose to follow Kirsty because I also wanted to show a different surf style than shortboarding in the film. In choosing women for the film I consciously chose women who do not fit the marketed surfer girl image because of either their looks, style, age or sexuality.

To grasp the 'fleeting, ephemeral and often embodied and sensory aspects of movement' (Spinney as cited by Evers, 2015, p. 2), I chose to film everything hand held. Firstly because filming hand held shows a more active image of a life that is full of movement, but secondly because I aimed to use enactive ethnography as another method for my writing and filming. Enactive ethnography is an autoethnographic tool to enable learning through the body and action (Wacquant, 2014). Enactive ethnography emphasizes that the act of observing is a highly physical process (Delica and Hansen, 2016). To practice surfing on a daily basis with my interlocutors helped me understand their lives in and out of the water. After every surf session I wrote about how I felt, the progression I thought I was making, my frustration and the tips I got. Barret (as cited by Evers, 2009, p. 894) supports the importance of researching through the body, he argues that bodies need to be involved to get insights that are 'imaginative, sensual even, in that they speak to experience, which includes the senses rather than simply cognition'. Moreover, my bodily experiences are immediately visible whenever I film hand held. The more action there was, the more shaky the footage; the more relaxed I was with my interlocutors, the calmer the handling of the camera was.

To convey a sensorial experience of the lives of my characters, a core aspect of my film became showing the emotional and lived experiences of their daily lives. Plantiga (2009, p. 5) disagrees with the 'strong Western thought' that emotion is an obstacle to critical thinking. He continues that emotions influence the production of cultural and individual memory. Emotional intensity is needed for recalling images, information and consciousness (Plantiga, 2009). Since I want to create a consciousness amongst my viewers on gender issues in surfing, memory and thus emotion are of core importance. A result became that I selected only those surfing women for the end film with whom I shared a strong connection and with whom emotional openness persevered throughout our entire relationship. MacDougall (2005) poses that even though most anthropologists choose interlocutors who stand out, in visual anthropology one is always looking for those interlocutors who are either strong in their manner, verbally and/or in their relations with others.

Observational films rely on the idea that films about people need to be fair to them (Carta, 2015). Upon entering Coolangatta I had an idea in my mind what kind of story I wanted to tell in the film: the impact of gender power differences in the line-up on the daily lives of female surfers. I expected with doing interviews on camera that my characters would be at least as enthusiastic about this subject as I was. However in one of my first on camera interviews with Izzy I quickly noticed a resistance. The moments that I saw and heard passion was when we were talking about her work and not when we were speaking of gender power differences. Since I felt the pressure of having her answer more passionately on camera on my subject - I realized afterwards – I started asking steering questions. For my research this means I do not use answers of Izzy (or other interlocutors) that resulted from steering questions. Moreover, I realized I needed to follow their passions instead of holding onto my academic thoughts on the film. Henley (2007) argues that observational filmmakers need to recognize that the stories of their subjects might be more important than the stories the filmmaker wants to tell. This falls in line with the argument of Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) arguing that the observational needs to be undertaken from the perspective of everyday life and not just from a place of theory. Lastly, Pink (2013) argues that visual research is only ethical ethnography when interlocutors are active participants in the research. By focusing on stories that started from within their passions and life and by letting them sign an informed consent they became actively part of the film. Some experiences of my characters had similarities which made me connect the stories of Kirsty, Jess, Grace and Audrey into one film. They all share the story that they have surfed or surfed competitively and never fitted the image of the marketed surfer women. According to Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009, p.552) observational film isn't about making an 'accurate transcription of the world. Instead it hinges upon connection, expressed in an almost intangible, empathic moment'

In the editing process I tried to find a balance between realism and constructivism, simplicity and complexity, resonance and dissonance (Suhr and Willerslev, 2013). In the piece of Audrey and Grace I show a story line of a 'a day in the lives of', which is a constructed reality, since I have not filmed this in one day but during multiple days on different moments of the day. It seems like a simple life at first but gets more complex when the emotional struggle of the felt pressure of femininity in the surf industry is discussed. Here the viewers will learn about the dissonance and resonance of their beliefs, in how they have changed slightly towards their expected image, whilst they also express they are against this asked feminine image. Eisenstein (as cited by Begin, 2006) argues that montage – the juxtaposition of two images – can create a new reality. It can be considered as a technique that creates ambiguity that is asking the participation of those who are viewing the film (Begin, 2006). By letting my viewer actively participate in the viewing, together with the juxtaposition of image, I aim to unsettle preconceived meanings.

Surfing has been on film for many years already. Filmic representation of surfing has been 'the most significant [...] development' in Australian film production (Thoms cited by Beattie, 2001, p.333). Booth (2008) argues that surfing media has been driven to create affective experiences. As Beattie (2001, p.343) argues 'the spectacular style of independent surf video is grounded in an aesthetic of motion and speed, produced predominantly through rapid editing'. In many surf movies when female surfers are depicted it is in a sexualized manner with images that focuses on their bodies instead of their athletic performance (Thorpe, Toffoletti & Bruce, 2017). By focusing on the emotional and lived experiences of female surfers I try to break with this dominant trend. I was strongly inspired by the film 'Minding the Gap', by Bing Liu (2018) who himself is part of a group of male skaters whom he follows around capturing them growing up whilst feeling the pressure to be a man. The closeness in the film creates a feeling as if you are part of their group. This honesty, observational hand held style is what I have tried to achieve in my film as well. For the filmic representation of female surfers I am strongly inspired by the short film 'The Tempest' (Monster Children, 2016), which shows Stephanie Gilmore surfing in Indonesia. The portrayal is like a dance between the ocean and her, she appears skillful, strong, stylish and athletic.



*'I was on holidays once years ago and I went surfing here somewhere [...]. It was so crystal clear the water [...] It was just the cleanest nicest wave I have ever ridden [...]. There were 10 people down there instead of 200 [...] I just came up from that duck dive and thought I found paradise. And I was just like: fuck it, I'm moving here. [...].*

*When you asked whether I still see it as a paradise: yes it is a paradise but with its flaws [...] now I can see its lacks and its deficiencies. [...] There is a lot of weight placed on surfing here [...] You can ask anyone what the winds are doing tomorrow and everyone will know [...]. Yeah but if you ask them what's happening in Syria they have no idea.*

*Coolangatta [...] it typifies so much of White Australian aspects [...] it's the idealism of a white Australia which is reflected in terms of easy lives. In itself it's a little bubble [...] that is turned into a bubble of professional surfing as well. The higher up you are in the surfing hierarchy the more you are seen as a king and queen here and have more rights to do whatever you want and everyone that's associated with those people gets the flow on effects. I've never thought about it that way, but it is like that. [...] So being the king and queen of Snapper Rocks is being the king and queen of surfing. It has nothing to do with competitive surfing but the way the industry is being set up. I don't like say queens because like we would all consider Steph[anie Gilmore] to be the queen here but she doesn't act like the other 'kings'. She doesn't behave like she owns the place. It's almost like a kingdom instead of a free society'. (Freya, advanced shortboarder, 31)*

#### Understanding the Superbank hierarchy

Surfers tend to shape their lives around the sport and make sure their jobs are flexible so they can always paddle out. Freya for example argues that the sport has influenced where she lives, the work she does and the social life she has: *'it has totally influenced my entire being'*. So what is it that makes surfers come back to the ocean day in and day out?

*There is something about being in the ocean that is really nice like that for me. When I jump in the ocean, I might have had a really rough day, and just feel like none of it mattered at all'* (Kirsty, advanced longboarder, 52)

Catching a wave creates a feeling of freedom, it gives a feeling of being 'stoked', in which surfers feel 'intense elations that ensnares a board rider... a fully embodied feeling of satisfaction, joy and pride (Evers as cited by Roy, 2014, p. 46). In moments of catching a wave all (social) constructions become lost, since 'body, wetsuit, surfboard, water energy and emotions momentarily blur into one' (Evers as cited by Roy, 2014, p. 47). To enable getting as much of these short moments of freedom as possible, one preferably wants to get the most wave access without interference of others. Freya describes Superbank as an hierarchy in which its king and queens get the most waves and thus enjoy the most freedom in this space.

So first let's try to understand how the hierarchy of the surf spot Superbank works exactly: Superbank is often described as a pointbreak with a wave of approximately two kilometers. It is arguably one of the best barreling waves in the world (Reuters, 2007). However this wave is a man-made wave, for which sand needs to be pumped to make it work. The pumping of the sand isn't done throughout the whole years, which is why the wave isn't always breaking like the perfect pointbreak surfers recognize from images in the magazines. Freya explains how the line-up of Superbank works:



*'Snapper (1) behind the rocks is the most competitive spot in this whole coast, wide of the rocks you get the leftovers. Little Mali (2), that's another little shortboard set-up, you actually never witnessed it [...] the break hasn't been breaking like the true Superbank. [...]. Rainbow Bay (3) [...] is seen as a sort of a more relaxed zone where it's more social, more longboarding, chilled out and then it moves back into Greenmount (4) which can get really good barrels down there. So shortboarders frequently go there, but it's usually seen as where you go when you don't want to do the competition of it. It just goes from the most intense high level surfing spot in the world, where it is dangerous to be, hundreds of people in one very small area. And then chills out a little bit, more community focused'. (Freya, advanced shortboarder, 31)*

Thus let's consider Snapper Rocks to be the place highest in the hierarchy and further down to be lower in the hierarchy, also confirmed by Carlo:

*Snapper, behind the rocks snapper, where you've got the crew of what you call shortboarders, like rippers, like that's pretty much from world champions to really good surfers. Mixed into them you'll have a couple of really good longboarders as well [...]. That's like the top of the pack, which then filters down to Rainbow. It's not always ability wise, but mostly it is ability wise (Carlo, intermediate shortboarder, 30)*

As Carlo explains in Coolangatta the top of the hierarchy is created mostly based on skill, although still vaguely he notes that it might not be fully dependent on it. Van Ingen (2003) argues that space is always connected to the social construction of dominant ideologies. Freya also notes that Coolangatta typifies much of white Australian aspects. Waitt (2008, p. 78) argues that in Australia for many young white men surfing still is 'an initiation into a normative embodied affirmation of Anglo Celtic Australian manhood'. At Superbank on days when the waves vary from small to mid-size the line-up is quite equally filled with men and women. However, the further you move up in the hierarchical ladder, the more men and the less women there are. I aim to understand why there are less women higher up in the surf hierarchy and whether this hierarchy is merely based on skill.

### The gendered skilled body

Parsonage et al (2018) argue that men have physical characteristics that suit the sport of surfing better than women do. Women on average tend to have less paddle power than men do (Parsonage et al, 2018):

*'I do sometimes watch guys when they paddle into a wave and you are like 'ah they are so strong' [...] I wish I had that power. You know two strokes and they are kicking it on this tiny little wave'. (Jolene, intermediate longboarder, 50)*

I do not want to argue here that the power differences mean that women aren't strong enough to catch waves but more that the power differences becomes prevalent in having to share their sport arena with men whom tend to be stronger on average. This power difference can be contested by using different materials:

*'I just paddle around people and just go deeper than most (shortboarding) men' (Christina, intermediate longboarder, 30).*

Women who surf on a longboard surrounded with men on shortboards will have more wave access, since they can get on the waves earlier and need less power. When women surf in a line-up mainly filled with men on similar boards with a similar skill level, the power differences become prevalent again. Grace who's been surfing her entire life and currently is doing so at the top of the Superbank hierarchy argues that men with a similar skill level to her are still able to get more waves:

*'I mean sometimes I'll catch a similar amount of waves, but majority of the time their wave count would be way higher'. (Grace, advanced shortboarder, 24)*

It is easier for most male surfers to develop their skill level since they are generally able to and out paddle men with a lower or similar skill level and almost all women. Since most women have less paddle power than men they have less access to waves and thus slower skill development. Physical power is partly an influence of why there are less women surfing Snapper Rocks and why there are more women surfing Rainbow Bay. However it isn't purely paddle power that influences why women aren't moving up the hierarchical ladder. In the negotiation of surfing spaces habitus comes into play.

### The male discourse and the female body

When one is surfing, one is constantly interacting with other bodies, selves, objects and environments (Ford & Brown, 2006). The body is put in practical engagements with the world that leaves marks (Ford & Brown, 2006). Practicing surfing then means that the surfing body also becomes the surfed body (Ford & Brown, 2006). The inscription of the body with experience, as explained earlier is understood as habitus (Ford & Brown, 2006). The male discourse of surfing has made it seem natural that performing masculinities is essential in

getting wave access: Waitt (2008) argues that using strong and aggressive paddle movements is needed to ensure priority when sitting at the peak of a line-up. If women conform to this aggressive masculinity they will be given precedence in the line-up (Waitt, 2008). Especially if a surfer wants to surf at Snapper Rocks, one needs to obtain an aggressive paddle style to ensure wave access. Superbank is always extremely busy (Reuters, 2007), but the most crowded place remains Snapper Rocks, where *'on a good day over a hundred people gather behind the rock in a place of about ten square meter'* (Freya, 31). Wave scarcity leads to people (sometimes literally) fighting over waves and ignoring the established rules of surfing (Uekusa, 2018).

*'[...] it (Snapper Rocks) can get really bad, if the waves are like halfly decent at least, the aggressive vibe will get like this. I've seen people fighting and chasing each other in the water'* (Christina, intermediate longboarder, 30).

Waitt (2008) argues that women feel their gender stronger when a strong aggressive competition for waves is present. While watching a surf contest, Jess and I talk about Molly, whom according to Jess should become the next female surf champion:

*'[...] She's really aggressive in the water, which I feel girls aren't really, or they struggle to be'. [...] I just feel naturally they are a bit more tentative, a little bit softer, Meagan is just like WRAAGHH'*. (Jess, advanced shortboarder, 31)

Thorpe (2009) argues that women because of their instilled gendered habitus from different historical periods, social, cultural and political contexts respond differently to these situations. For Molly and Jess the masculine value of having to be aggressive has already become natural and hasn't been problematic for themselves, whereas for many other women taking on these masculinities does feel unnatural. Waitt (2008, p.91) argues that some women tend to 'feel estranged from surfing because they have no desire to embody a female masculinity' (Waitt, 2008, p.91). Freya explains that she doesn't like the competition and danger that comes with surfing Snapper Rocks:

*'These days the older I get the more I'm happy to just go into Rainbow (Bay). I never saw myself as being good enough ever and actually not good enough to be behind the (Snapper) rock competing without fear of my safety or the safety of others. And I've been surfing a long time but those... they have been surfing as long as me and longer and they are pro's and they all want to be pro's [...]'*. (Freya, advanced shortboarder, 31)

Freya – in contrast to her own skill judgement, is a very competent surfer who could handle the hollow wave of Snapper Rocks – argues that one of the reasons she doesn't want to surf Snapper Rocks is because she feels as if she isn't competent enough to be there. Snapper Rocks currently is still mainly surfed by men, the surfing space as a male territory, creates feelings for women as if they are almost 'trespassing into prohibited territory' (Roy, 2014, p. 44). In this case she expresses fear more so for the competition against (male) pro surfers and the crowds than the actual wave itself. Another fear she feels is the position she is sometimes in because of the crowds:

*'You just get pushed so far in such dangerous positions to get waves out there (Snapper Rocks), it's not worth it for me'. (Freya, advanced shortboarder, 31).*

On average women are less fond of risk seeking than men (Diehm & Armatas, 2004), which for some women is a reason to move down the hierarchical ladder into Rainbow Bay where the wave is more mellow. At Rainbow Bay many women are surfing on longboards. Longboarding for a long time wasn't popular, but it has gained a new interest among women (Olive, 2015). In a big part of the longboard community of Rainbow Bay women are very aware of their looks and seem to paddle out in very uncomfortable clothing:

*'They paddle out wearing big earrings and necklaces and the latest and at times quite revealing bathing suits and bikini's. It doesn't seem comfortable, I see some of them constantly pulling up their small bikini bottoms'* (excerpt journal)

Not all women are out in the water to develop their skills, some expressed how they value being in nature, how they like the social part of surfing, but also how they like that surfing provides moments in which they can meet potential male partners. When the focus of women lies mostly on their looks instead of becoming skilled they are confirming and strengthening the male discourse of surfing. Surfing performance and experiences are of core importance to be culturally recognized as a surfer (Olive, 2016). To be convincing as a surfer it is crucial that you perform well, since the practice is 'immediately visible and therefore classifiable by others' (Ford & Brown, 2006, p.132). Women who do want to be skillful tend to feel a pressure surf like a man to gain respect (Booth, 2001; Roy, 2014).

*'She (Grace) told me she lost pleasure (in competition surfing) since everything got so serious and she felt a huge pressure on women surfing, she felt like she had to do airs, whilst she doesn't know how to do them. She was getting more and more angry, she explained that for Audrey (twin sister) this was even worse'. (excerpt personal journal)*

Grace and Audrey have always surfed in competition, where this pressure is felt strongly since they are continuously compared with the competencies of men. The embodiment of these male values has created a feeling of discontent with their surfing skills since they felt it was expected of them to copy (mimesis) the surfing skills of their fellow male pro surfers which they couldn't reach. Since their ideal self and actual self weren't aligned within Grace and Audrey it affected the way they looked at their selves. Grace and Audrey both expressed they haven't felt *'body-positive'* for years. Surfing women are constantly searching for their place within the masculine discourse of surfing in which certain aspects have become natural whilst others haven't. Women trying to internalize the masculine values in surfing according to Evers (2004, 2006) can result in them feeling confused and ashamed, questioning their female understanding of surfing. Although it might now seem as if this is only an internal struggle of women, men also play a role in maintaining the masculine discourse of surfing and the strengthening of conflicting feelings in women. In the following section I'll discuss how some men respond in a way that continues to differentiate women in the surf.

#### The unease of men: domination, sexualization and patronization

Surfing women in Coolangatta whom have a masculine surfing style inflicts backlash more so for women who have a masculine look, than for women who have a feminine look. Waitt (2008) argues that for women in his research being 'sexy' meant that they were protected from harassment. Audrey and Grace are two of the few women who on a daily basis surf at the top of the hierarchy and receive continuous backlash on their 'masculine'<sup>5</sup> looks:

*'Probably the worst one was, I had literally just paddled out the key hole at Snapper, I hadn't even gone for a wave. I just sat up. And this guy that has just verbally abused me and Grace for years turned around and said: 'fuck off you fat lesbian slag'. And I said excuse me what? And he goes: 'that's right you are a fat lesbian slut!'* (Audrey, 24, advanced shortboarder).

Butler (1988) explains that when women show 'masculine' looks and movements it goes against their prescribed gender identity and everything that is different from its socially intended gender is subject to punishment (1988). Showing masculinities in this space where the male discourse rules then becomes an act of defiance of the male discourse, with some men responding in an insulting way to maintain their domination. Foucault (2012) argues that punishment ensures docile bodies, these comments can come across as punishment for their masculine behavior. Power normalizes and ensures that bodies keep on serving

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<sup>5</sup> In quotation marks because this I do not consider their looks masculine, this is only so in the eyes of the masculine discourse of surfing.

relations of dominance and subordination (Foucault, 1990). The first time the long two kilometer wave of Superbank started working Grace paddled out at Snapper Rocks where a guy dropped in on her. Since the wave hadn't been working for a while, the competition and aggression was very high. This was the first wave she caught after competing her way through the line-up for already half an hour. When a guy dropped in on her first wave, her first response was to put up her middle fingers. A picture of this event got shot and was put up on Facebook (see picture), on which she received comments on her look by male surfers:

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- *'Isn't that a man in a one piece ladies swimsuit?'*
- *'If it's not a bloke I bet she doesn't have a boyfriend'*
- *'I guess he figures she's not sucking his dick so not much to lose'*
- *'It's her own fault, she looks out of place anyway'* (male surfers on the internet)

Surfer men of the internet<sup>7</sup> from all over the world, decided to respond on her looks instead of on the guy who is in the wrong by dropping in on her. By doubting she is a highly skilled surfer he is rejecting the idea that she can actually belong there. In saying this he is drawing upon his embodied cultural knowledge of what surfing is to him. By arguing against her skill and her looks, they are trying to subordinate her to their dominant position. These responses influenced Grace strongly:

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<sup>6</sup> Noteworthy is that the guy depicted in this picture paddled to Grace afterwards to tell her he was really sorry and didn't see her. For this guy the act of dropping in was an accident instead of a form of dominance.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymity appears to be a key motivator for cyber bullying (Wright, 2013), these comments therefore might be more aggressive than they would have been in face-to-face encounters. Moreover internet trolls are roaming on the internet, whom are purposely trying to disrupt a social setting on the internet, with no reason (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus, 2014). Although all the comments are made by male surfers (when checking their facebook pages) it can't be ruled out that these comments are an act of trolling.

*'I don't know it's taken a lot of uhm inner self confidence or inner beliefs to wanna wear a bikini out in the water, and this is the first season I've worn one and to have comments like that made it doesn't really matter if I'm in a bikini or not I'm still gonna get called a bloke, but...I don't think I look like a bloke, but I guess to some people I probably do'. (Grace, 24).*

Becoming very aware of your body while trying to practice surfing, makes itself felt through what Ahmed (2013) calls an embodied discomfort that creates a feeling of being uncomfortable, awkward and unsettled, which results in feeling as if your body is out of place. Grace tries to find validation from within herself, but is not able to let go of how others look at her body. When self-objectification occurs, motor-driven tasks are negatively influenced (Reichart, 2016). To become a skilled surfer is all about being able think less and feel more (Evers, 2006). By becoming overly conscious of yourself interferes with the body become one with the wave, which Evers (2006, p) describes as 'when this happens surfing is experienced as a sort of moving assemblage of swell, ocean, surfboard and surfer' (Evers as cited by Roy, 2014, p. 46).

The subordination of women in the line-up isn't only tried to be reached by insulting women, but also by actively limiting their space to move in the ocean. A way to achieve this is the act of 'dropping in'. To ensure to get the most wave access in crowded places surfers tend to break the rules of surfing (Uekusa, 2018). Uekusa (2018) argues that whenever wave scarcity is present, those who are already marginalized in the surf are the first ones to get lesser wave access and backlash. Evers (2006) argues that men dropping in on women is a form of insult. Roy (2014) considers the act of dropping in to be gendered territorialization:

*'There's a lot of guys out there [...] that don't give a shit and it's like they'll drop in, I'll be out there and I'll be paddling for a wave on the inside. I've got priority and guys will paddle next to you and look you dead in the eye and still drop in on you and you'll be behind them like like: 'Oi get off' and they still look back and just keep on going' (Izzy advanced shortboarder, 19)*

By insulting women and by purposely dropping in or snaking them men try to maintain their domination of the surfing space, which to white settler-Australians that use surfing to claim dominance over beach territories is very natural (McGloin, 2005). Now we have established that some men respond to women they accuse of looking too 'masculine' and who, through their looks challenge the masculine values in surfing, try to maintain their power. We must also look at the embodied and emotional experiences of women who do fit the stereotypical surfer girl image more. These surfing women often have to deal with guys trying fix them,

whilst being constantly under a masculine heterosexual gaze (Waitt, 2008). During one surf session at Kirra I was struggling to catch waves at an all-male line-up at Kirra. My male friend paddled up to me and said: *'just drop in on them, you've got pretty eyes and a nice bum, they wouldn't mind'*. Being rattled by this comment in which my body had suddenly gone from a sporting body to a sexualized object, I didn't know what to say. This sexualization isn't necessarily always this blunt. The celebration of femininity and sexuality is a big part of the longboarding community of Rainbow Bay. Within this community style and power are also highly valued, but being graceful even more. Although men on longboards are still catching more waves than most women, they aren't necessarily seen as the best surfers:

*'[...] you see you see some guys [...] and they're trying to like surf like a shortboard type style and all of it just it doesn't look right. But then you get these girls and they got so beautiful graceful style. The whole graceful female style riding like a traditional single fin longboard [...] and it's just it's so fluent and (they are) so in tune with it and it's so graceful. [...] Oh my God it's just beautiful to watch. (Mark advanced surfer<sup>8</sup>, 42)*

Although the acceptance of femininity here gives room for a different understanding of (female) values in surfing, men when they talk about female longboarders mainly express they like to watch them 'being feminine', which immediately puts them underneath the masculine gaze again. For men firstly their skills would be valued, whereas for women the first validation they get is for the look of their style and body, not for their performance. McNay (1999) argues that the strength of Bourdieu's theorization of habitus lies in recognizing that it is very difficult for women to break with their gendered habitus. Another form in which men comply with the difficulties for women to break with their gendered habitus is them trying to offer support and advice to female surfers (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015).

*'I used to drop my back knee sometimes. They'd be like, try to give me pointers. And I'm like: 'I DONT WANT YOUR POINTERS, leave me alone! Shit like that.. (Christina, intermediate longboarder, 30).*

Almost all of my female interlocuters have personal experiences in which they received tips from male surfers. Although it is often meant as a kind gesture by men who may be unaware of the underlying prejudice, for women this often feels patronizing or condescending (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015).

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<sup>8</sup> Mark didn't want to be put into being either 'a shortboarder' or 'a longboarder'. He many shapes of surfboards which is why he rather wants to be considered a surfer than to be put in one category.

*'Sometimes I find it a little bit condescending. It's a hard one to say I think most of the times it comes with a really good intention. They're just stoked that there's girls out in the water surfing [...] but then yeah sometimes it's just like, you know I can surf I don't need you to tell me how to do it'* (Kerstin, intermediate shortboarder, 29)

When women reject the help of men in the ocean it is often responded to as if women are hypocritical: you want to be included but you do not want my support? (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015). Although the surfing of women is more and more valued as being skilled, technical and stylish, many men still do not know how to handle and value women in the surf (Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015). Booth, Evers and Ford and Brown (as cited by Olive, McCuaig & Phillips, 2015) argue that the role that men play in the ocean continues to differentiate surfing women. If male surfers cannot recognize different female versions of surfing, women will continue to struggle to be valued as a surfer (Booth, 2001). Izzy confirms this by arguing that she feels like she's often not considered to be *'just another surfer'*. Audrey expresses similar thoughts:

*'I think you just want to be to be treated like a normal person out there, why can't they just treat us like one of the boys? I mean...[...] (you) kind of just want to be treated normally you don't want to get abuse thrown at you!'* (Audrey, 24, advanced shortboarder)

The domination, sexualization and patronization of men in the line-up all become imprinted in the habitus of female surfers. Waitt (2008) argues that women – in the light of expectations created within the male discourse of surfing and because of the resistance from men - are now taking on femininities and masculinities at the same time. McNay (1999) argues that gender reflexivity arises when tensions are being felt when women have to negotiate female roles that are conflicting. This gender reflexivity is a first step towards change. In the next section I'll discuss how surfing women of Coolangatta are trying to negotiate their way to surfing freely in the surfing space.

### Searching for a female discourse

Women aren't just mere passive agents that are undergoing the male discourse.

Chambers (2005) argues that when women enter male-dominated spaces they create or adopt strategies to manage this new culture they are entering. McNay (1999) argues that a growing amount of women in a new space can contribute to a destabilization of gender relations, but can also strengthen them. The discourse in surfing now exists out of the existing performative and cultural understandings of male surfers, whilst little room remains to talk about different female understandings of surfing (Olive, 2016). Stedman (1997) argues that it is a common approach for female surfers to try to maintain their own experience of

surfing. Olive (2015) contributes by finding that women in terms of expressing style and behavior find it important to surf like a girl. Women on longboards and funboards are present from Rainbow Bay down to Coolangatta Beach. Women on these boards are trying to create an own understanding of surfing:

*'I feel it's (longboarding) is more like flowing with water, whereas shortboarding is just like fighting with it. I also just really like the feeling of [...] being able to highline, instead of ripping apart the lip. I don't want to be doing these powerful turns, I am more one of those persons that likes to surf cruisy. I feel like I've achieved the graceful thing too'.* (Christina, intermediate longboarder, 31).

In longboarding women and men are nowadays celebrating femininity more than ever, which gives room for those who are feminine to move more freely. Some women use their femininity and good looks to their advantage:

*'Emily would always drop in on guys I think she'd be like: 'I don't care'. Because she's pretty, like a pretty hot young girl. Yeah. I think that men will sometimes let you go because you're female'.* (Christina, 31, intermediate longboarder)

Women dropping in on men purposely by using their looks to get away with it, or women flirting their way through the line-up will gain them wave access and therefore skill development. Although more skilled women in the line-up in itself will challenge the idea of women as passive agents, using sexuality as a strategy is strengthening the masculine discourse of surfing. Even if this isn't problematic for these women, getting wave access then becomes more difficult for women with a more masculine look. Women surfing at Superbank who look masculine receive the most backlash, which only strengthens when they move up the surf hierarchy. However, many women do no longer accept different active forms of repression and respond by either confronting these men verbally or even at times physically:

*'Apparently the same guy also threatened Jess and called her a 'fucking lesbian', she paddled up to him and punched him in the face. After what she had done she starting feeling bad and paddled up to him to tell him she was sorry and if asked she needed to bring him to the hospital' (excerpt journal)*

Foucault (as cited by Pickett 1996) argues that if people are the product of modern power, everything we do and think are an expression of that power. Thus, if we let ourselves be guided by our norms and moral codes to limit how we express our resistance and self-

creation we can make, we then are trapping ourselves in the system we are trying to escape, since it 'will be rebellion in the name of ideals drawn from modern power (Foucault as cited by Pickett, 1996, p. 465). One could argue that in a short moment Jess frees herself of what normative female behavior in the line-up is supposed to be and therefore shows a limitless expression of resistance. By afterwards doubting herself she is becoming aware of that her act that doesn't suit her gender identity. Ahmed (2013) argues that even if others use their anger for bad reasons, it doesn't mean that you do not need to continue explaining why your anger is reasonable. With her anger she shows that she is no longer accepting aggressive forms of power maintenance of men. Roy (2014) describes this anger as a feminist anger, with which she tries to change a 'cultural logic from within' (Muñoz, 1999).

Grace and Audrey surf Snapper Rocks nearly every day and very often do either confront men with their comments, or respond to their territorial behavior in a similar account. They expressed to '*have pushed them of their boards*', '*purposely drop in on them next time*' and '*if they snake me, I'll snake them back*'. However having to take on masculinities and femininities the same time to keep an own place in the line-up has a profound impact on the embodied, emotional and practical experiences of female surfers (Waitt, 2008). Being in the surf industry for years and constantly being judged for their looks has lowered the self-esteem of Grace and Audrey. Certain comments and insults inflict a frustration and pain that they at times rather avoid than confront:

*'Sometimes [...] if I paddle out and I see a few people that I don't enjoy surfing with I will catch a couple of waves and just come in cause it's not worth it. I know they are the type of people that I'll know I'll get worked up about so just try to come in. I guess in the end it's your demons not theirs'. (Grace)*

Considering the emotional impact the responses of men at times have on women who surf at Snapper Rocks, one might wonder why they do not just move down to a place where they do not have to confront these performances of masculinities. Women who move down the hierarchical ladder tend to convince themselves to accept these left-over waves and their marginalized position (Uekusa, 2018). This allows them to not only develop their skills, but also to not have to deal with a form of masculinity they do not feel comfortable with (Comley, 2016). Although they are with these tactics trying to negotiate their vulnerability, they are at the same time reproducing the existing hierarchies in the line-up (Uekusa, 2018). Grace and Audrey describe themselves as '*very stubborn*' and stress they find it important to '*stand their ground*'. It is within their habitus that they keep wanting to compete within male-dominated territories, whereas for other women it is easier to let that go.

For some women moving down the hierarchical ladder means finding freedom. Jolene expressed that when she was young she used to surf at Maroubra in Sydney, where she'd get '*spat upon*', or told to go home. Feeling fear of paddling out into the line-up is part of an interplay of knowledges and feelings on how spaces are gendered (Crouch 2010). Jolene now consciously chooses to surf at places where there are more women out in the water, such as Rainbow Bay:

*'When I moved up here the first thing I noticed was how many women were in the water. Yeah. So instantly I was like OK. Now I can... I feel like I've got people! [...] It felt safe.* (Jolene, intermediate longboarder, 50)

Fear shrinks bodies and makes it difficult for them to move in space (Roy, 2014), whereas being safe creates a feeling of freedom. To understand the workings of power and the responses that power elicits, it is necessary to understand what women see as freedom in surfing and what barriers they face in finding freedom (Thorpe, 2009). Women are becoming more and more aware of their marginalized position but aren't just accepting this, most of them try to contribute to a more welcoming, free and safer environment for women:

*'If there's a group of women out there and we all know each other and it's a really nice feeling out there everyone would cheer each other on waves and that's when you have a really good surf. Because no one is fighting for the waves we are all taking it in terms and you know having a chat and enjoying the whole moment'.* (Lynn, beginning longboarder 61)

Moreover, an unspoken rule exists that women who surf should not make it harder on each other:

*'It is girl code to not drop in on each other. We already have to battle the men, so don't try to make it even harder on each other'.* (Kirsty, advanced longboarder, 52)

Sometimes women paddle out with a group of females to actually physically try to take over the place (Comley, 2016). Audrey expresses that men find that difficult sometimes, but she seems to feel empowered by the impact the amount of women in the line-up have on some men:

A: *'...and especially up here there's a lot of like amazing women surfers that live up here and we surf every day and I think that guys just find it hard that maybe there's girls that surf better than them. And I'm sorry about that..haha'*

J: *'but not really sorry?'*

A: *'not really sorry no'* (Audrey, advanced shortboarder, 24)

The growing amount of female surfers in the line-up also means a growing amount of women who are enjoying the space they are in. Ahmed (2013, p.165) argues that when one experiences pleasure in a space, it is a form of 'entitlement and belonging'. She continues that this shows the relation between pleasure and power. Roy (2014, p.46) argues that being stoked in surfing spaces has a feminist potential, since it 'saturates surfing spaces', and is 'uniquely affectional, spatial and embodied'. This feeling of stokedness being shared throughout the line-up I experienced many times surfing at Rainbow Bay being surrounded by many women:

*'The clouds were insane, the sunset colored them all purple, pink and orange [...] In Cooly a concert was going on and because of the offshore winds the music was carried all the way into the line-up. I heard 'here comes the sun' playing and I felt like the luckiest person on earth. It was as if this pure emotion of happiness was felt through the entire line-up. The vibe was so good, everyone was cheering each other on and when I looked around everybody seemed to be smiling'* (extert personal journal)

Besides feeling empowered by a growing amount of women out in the line-up, local pro surfer and seven times world champion Stephanie Gilmore helps creating room for different types of female surfers:

*'I love Steph Gilmore<sup>9</sup> I love how she surfs, I would love to be able to surf like her [...] younger girls [...] they look up to her, Steph Gilmore is from here and all the little girls want to be like her, they want to surf like her, they want to dress like her'* (Izzy, advanced shortboarder, 19)

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<sup>9</sup> To understand how Stephanie Gilmore surfs and in her own why is creation a different female understanding of surfing, I'd recommend watching the following video:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6\\_beTvQdJI&t=78s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6_beTvQdJI&t=78s)

Although she can be considered a pretty female surfer she foremostly is recognized for being a highly skilled surfer showing a style that is not only celebrated by women, but also recognized by men:

*'Steph Gilmore can paddle out and she can be the best surfer in the water. Yeah and I'm telling you against QS guys and like few CT guys and stuff like that. Steph is just amazing. Top three surfer out in Coolangatta hands down. [...] Absolutely no dramas ever.'* (Mark, advanced surfer, 39)

When talking about kings and queens of Coolangatta earlier on, Freya expressed that Stephanie Gilmore doesn't act like she own's the place, whereas other professional male surfers do. As Mark expresses as well, she is always friendly in the water and doesn't comply with the aggressive atmosphere. Moreover, she is not accepting being sexualized by the industry anymore:

*'You know when she won the seventh title? Tracks and sports illustrated said that they would do the cover for her if she would do it in a bikini. And she was like nah I'm not doing it. Tracks didn't want to do it unless she was in a bikini. She's won like seven world titles, it's like what the fuck. And because she is who she is, she was like nah I'm not doing it.'* (Jess, advanced shortboarder, 31)

With younger girls and women taking Stephanie Gilmore as an example shows a promising future of women not accepting their prescribed gender identity from the surfing industry. If girls take into example a professional surfer who is already carving out a different (female) understanding of surfing, this discourse can only grow.



To find out *'how the dominant male discourse in surfing has influenced the self-concept, embodied practice and experiences of female surfers and how they negotiate their position'* this study took a close look to where, why and how female surfers position themselves on the hierarchical ladder of the Superbank located in Coolangatta Australia.

It requires strong physical power, balance, flexibility and persistence to be able to surf (Olive, 2016). Recreational surfing compared to many other sports is different in that the arena is not only a constantly changing environment, but is also shared with people from different ages, nationalities and genders. Within this shared arena women have to compete against men who are generally stronger, which results in less wave access. However, many more reasons contribute to why women generally have less wave access. Waitt (2008) argues that 'surfing spaces are neither intrinsically oppressive nor liberatory, but offer variable pressures and possibilities for gendered embodiment'. Superbank is an extremely crowded surf spot (Reuters, 2007), which generally results in wave scarcity, aggression and the breaking of rules (Uekusa, 2019). Snapper Rocks is often the most crowded and aggressive place of the line-up. This means that especially at Snapper Rocks if one wants to ensure peak priority one needs to show aggressive paddle movements (Waitt, 2008). However the masculine discourse of surfing that has become embodied by both male and female surfers has created a pressure on women of having own not only masculinities, but also femininities (Waitt, 2008) The higher up the hierarchy of the Superbank the stronger women tend to feel their gender. Not all women are able to take on these masculinities and therefore purposely choose to move down to Rainbow Bay where more forms of femininity become accepted.

The conflicting gender roles that women are negotiating on a daily basis are being strengthened by how certain men respond to the growing amount of women surfing at the

Superbank. Still a big group of surfing men that reside at Coolangatta are differentializing female surfers by either sexualizing, patronizing or dominating them. The self-concept of women is most negatively influenced when the embodiment of the masculine discourse creates a discrepancy of the ideal and real self. Being either pushed to become overly self-aware or being very self-aware is negatively influencing women's sports performances. Condescending comments, at times unsolicited physical help and the active limiting of the surfing space by male domination inflicts feelings of either a heightened self-awareness, anger, frustration or fear. Anger disrupts execution and the controlling of performance (Wittman, Arce & Santistseban, 2008), frustration being closely tied to anger also results in performance impairment (Tenenbaum, Singer, Stewart & Duda, 1997) and lastly fear makes bodies shrink and is then literally shrinking their freedom of movement (Roy, 2014). These emotions all cause women feeling limited in their freedom to move across space, which is why more women are found when one is moving down the Superbank hierarchy. Ahmed (2013, p. 70) explains: 'spaces extend the mobility of some bodies; their freedom to move shapes the surface of spaces [...].

This isn't static however, for women who choose to move down the hierarchical ladder, whilst strengthening the masculine discourse, it can mean freedom to them. In Rainbow Bay femininity is mostly celebrated when women surf on longboards at Rainbow Bay. A result is that feminine women are more free than masculine looking women to move across the surfing space. Some feminine women use their sexuality to their advantage by flirting their way through the line-up and are being excused for dropping in on men. Although having more skilled women in the line-up is changing the masculine discourse of surfing, these acts are concurrently strengthening the masculine discourse of surfing. Women who receive most backlash at line-up of the Superbank are those who do not fit the surfer girl image, which were mostly women of age, lesbians or masculine looking women. Those who are least able to move freely throughout the surfing space are the ones who are very aware of their marginalized position and according to McNay (1999) become 'gender reflexive', the first step towards change. The already marginalized women go against the subordination by men more actively than women who are less marginalized.

The growing amount of women who are surfing and whom are trying to create a safer environment for women contributes to the normalization of different (female) understandings of surfing values, expectations and representations. More women expressing pleasure in the surf space creates a feeling of belonging (Ahmed, 2013), which results in feelings of freedom and empowerment. When more women are in the water less negative emotions are invoked, which frees women in their movement across space, since becoming comfortable in the surfing space goes hand in hand with becoming a skilled surfer (Roy, 2014). Even if freedom

isn't reached, at least showing a more fluid identity can challenge the 'ultra-masculinist regulatory fictions of the surf space' (Waite, 2008, p.91).

The negotiation of the position of women to move more freely across the surfing space is very layered and complex in which their acts sometimes even simultaneously disrupt, challenge, change or confirm the masculine discourse. To respond to power is in the agency of individuals and groups, which doesn't just have a dual output of either reenactment or resistance, but is deeply layered and fluid. As Roy (2014) argues, in the constantly fluid nature of the ocean it is difficult for dominant gender configurations to become established (Roy, 2014). This offers women an empowering way of experiencing their bodies and the space they are in (Roy, 2014). I argue - similar to how Evers (2004, 2006) whom studied how gender, emotion and performativity intertwine – that gender is just like the ocean always unstable and subject to change.

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