

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

# Locked out of the Changing Room?

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A Gendered History of Surf Lifesaving in Canterbury 1917-1990

This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA Honours in History at the University of Canterbury. This dissertation is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of other historians used in the dissertation is credited to the author in the footnote references. The dissertation is approximately 9,992 words in length.

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## **Abstract**

Since its beginning in the early twentieth century, surf lifesaving in New Zealand has been a predominantly male sport. This research essay examines the position of women in the Canterbury Surf Life Saving Association (CSLSA). It studies the Minutes and Annual Reports of the CSLSA in order to shed light on male attitudes toward female participation in the sport. The male attitude towards female surf lifesavers has generally been negative, although the degree of this negativity has varied across different surf clubs in New Zealand and Australia. The CSLSA was heavily focused on its public image, and this image was predominantly masculine. Women were often seen by men as lacking the physical capabilities required to participate in surf lifesaving. This research essay also addresses domestic roles within the surf clubs that allowed women to have some involvement in the clubs. It also discusses how factors such as the outbreak of World War Two allowed for women to become active surf lifesavers and begin to have a voice. There were some successful women within the CSLSA, yet only two women achieved significant recognition within the Association's Minutes and Annual Reports. The main focus of this research essay is to determine male attitudes towards women within surf lifesaving in Canterbury.

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## Introduction

The CSLSA was formed in 1917 and set out clear objectives at its first meeting. These objectives were: to improve surf-bathing facilities, to assist surf-bathers, to promote rules for the regulation of surf-bathing and competitions, and to promote education about drowning.<sup>1</sup> The CSLSA also claimed that its purpose was to bond together Canterbury clubs to teach members that their main objective was the saving of human lives.<sup>2</sup> The CSLSA is a significant association to study because the first surf lifesaving club in New Zealand was the New Brighton club, formed in Christchurch in 1913.<sup>3</sup> The Surf Lifesaving Association of New Zealand had the same aims as the CSLSA but noted that surf lifesavers did not have full responsibility for surf bathers' wellbeing. It stated that people who wished to participate in aquatic sport and recreation needed to accept a high level of responsibility for their safety.<sup>4</sup> Surf lifesaving associations in New Zealand were intended to provide 'education, training, dissemination of information, and specific rescue activities'.<sup>5</sup> Christine Thomas defined surf lifesaving in New Zealand as 'essentially a voluntary community service organisation which has a sporting side to it'.<sup>6</sup> Both the rescue and sporting sides of the CSLSA are significant to this research essay because they address which activities were considered to be appropriate for women. The first women's surf lifesaving teams were recorded in Taranaki in 1925,<sup>7</sup> but the main example of a women's team in Canterbury was the Central Brighton Ladies' team, which was not formed until 1963.<sup>8</sup> Women's clubs were not permanent, and women were eventually integrated into men's clubs. There are no longer any women's surf lifesaving clubs in New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> The aim of this research essay is to identify the treatment of women in surf lifesaving in Canterbury and identify the extent of female participation within the sport.

During one of the early meetings of the CSLSA in 1917, the chairman Mr Benson 'expressed the hope that parochialism would be entirely absent in the deliberations of the

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<sup>1</sup> Christchurch City Libraries Archives Collection [hereafter CCLAC], CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Canterbury Surf and Life Saving Association: Proposed Rules, 7 February 1917.

<sup>2</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, First Annual Report of Surf Lifesaving Association, 21 November 1917.

<sup>3</sup> C. Thomas, 'Promoting Change – Women in Surf Life Saving', *New Zealand Journal of Health, Physical Education & Recreation*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1992, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, 'The Participation of Women in the Surf Life Saving Movement in New Zealand', Report prepared in partial fulfilment for a degree in physical education, University of Otago, 1988, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, 'The Participation of Women', p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *New Zealand Journal of Health*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, *New Zealand Journal of Health*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Forty-seventh Annual General Meeting, 17 October 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas, *New Zealand Journal of Health*, p. 19.

[Association]’.<sup>10</sup> It seemed that the CSLSA did not want to take an insular approach to the way that it ran the organisation. However, parochialism was sometimes displayed by members of the Association in regards to its treatment of female competitors. It is significant that the CSLSA identified that it did not want to be narrow-minded, because it appears that its members did not see the conservative nature of its decision to exclude women. This is perhaps because at this time, men did not even consider allowing women to participate in their sport. The CSLSA’s meeting minutes frequently displayed a negative attitude towards women participating in surf lifesaving.

This research paper addresses three major themes that I have identified within the history of the CSLSA from 1917 to 1990. Chapter one discusses the CSLSA’s focus on public image and how this impacted upon its decision-making. Public image was an important aspect of the CSLSA because it linked directly to sponsorship funding. This chapter also focuses on the Association’s relationship with Surf Lifesaving Australia and how this relationship was viewed by the CSLSA. Chapter two focuses on the way that femininity was seen as a hindrance to the Association and how traditional gender roles were used to limit female capabilities and potential. Chapter three describes the factors that allowed for female success, including World War Two and the attitudes of some male members. It also discusses where the Association inhibited female participation. This chapter focuses on two prominent women, Jan Pinkerton and Christine Thomas, who were the only women to gain significant recognition within the CSLSA.

The main source used in this research essay is the Minutes and Annual Reports of the CSLSA 1917-1990. This is a primary source held by the Christchurch City Libraries Archives Collection. It is a valuable source for understanding the CSLSA’s official opinion on matters, but it is an ‘insider source’ and has its biases. The Minutes and Annual Reports were written by an organisation as a means of recording the events discussed during their meetings. As a result of this, the written minutes do not include information on events that members of the CSLSA wanted to exclude. To attempt to lessen this problem, it is necessary to consult secondary literature in the area. This can be problematic as much of the work written on surf lifesaving in Canterbury has been written by men who used to belong to the CSLSA. These works should not be discredited; instead, they should be studied with the awareness that there is a potential for bias within the works.

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<sup>10</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 30 May 1917.

Most of my analysis is based on male viewpoints because there were very few women allowed to attend Association meetings. As a result, I was unable to gather a large amount of information on women's experiences within the CSLSA. Instead, this research paper focuses on how men viewed women and how the male opinion impacted female participation. The Minutes and Annual Reports also lacked depth in some areas which hindered my ability to fully understand events. For instance, the CSLSA noted brief descriptions of its inward correspondence but did not describe this correspondence in detail. The Minutes of the Management Committee of 8 April 1987 made mention of potentially useful inward correspondence 're Women in Surf Life Saving' but did not discuss it any further.<sup>11</sup> This correspondence would have benefitted my understanding of the attitudes of other New Zealand and Australian club members. Nonetheless, the Minutes and Annual Reports offer a large portion of the CSLSA's history for analysis, so they have proven to be a valuable source.

Another limitation of the Minutes and Annual Reports is that they were written by men in a male-dominated association. This provides little opportunity for women's concerns to be addressed. However, this is an advantage in addition to being a limitation. In order to address women's experiences, men's experiences must also be studied comparatively. The comments that men made regarding women's rights to participate in surf lifesaving provide evidence of attitudes towards gender within the sport. There is generally very little written on female experiences within a male dominated organisation, so drawing attention to what is left out of the records can be useful in understanding the treatment of women within surf lifesaving. A similar understanding can be seen in Angela Wanhalla's 'Maori Women in Waka Traditions'. Wanhalla wrote that the role of women in Maori society cannot be judged purely on their presence, or lack thereof, in Maori traditions. The narrators have always been men, so '[w]hat was deemed significant has been edited and reconstructed throughout the process of ... writing'.<sup>12</sup> This same concept can be applied to the male-written meeting minutes of the CSLSA.

This source also has limitations through its presentation of views from only one association. It addresses the singular CSLSA, not the entirety of surf lifesaving in Canterbury. Each CSLSA meeting had delegates present from various clubs around Canterbury, and each meeting addresses an overview of these clubs. The Minutes and Annual Reports are a valuable

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<sup>11</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of Management Committee of 8 April 1987.

<sup>12</sup> A. Wanhalla, 'Maori Women in Waka Traditions', in K. Pickles and L. Fraser (ed.), *Shifting Centres: Women and Migration in New Zealand History*, Dunedin, University of Otago Press, 2002, p. 20.

source to identify club members' attitudes because they provide a consensus of the affiliated Canterbury clubs. Due to the time and word limitations on this research essay it is not possible to also conduct primary research on individual clubs throughout Canterbury. This makes the Minutes and Annual Reports particularly valuable as they provide a record of people's opinions from the majority of surf clubs in the region.

There is a small amount of literature on Canterbury surf clubs. However, existing historiography does not critically address gender. The authors of these works tend to be amateur historians that write to commemorate an anniversary of a surf club. These authors are often old members of clubs and therefore have a personal investment in their work. Examples of this are Ray Cairns and Barry Turpin's work on New Brighton and Taylor's Mistake, and Lindsay Tointon's history of the CSLSA.<sup>13</sup> This Canterbury-specific historiography means that historiography from a broader area needs to be studied in order to gain a better understanding of attitudes towards women in surf lifesaving.

Nonetheless, male authors have the advantage of having been allowed to participate in surf lifesaving since its origins, so these men may have extensive background knowledge on the area and may be able to include their own experiences. In contrast to this, Thomas' reports and articles are valuable because they offer the rare insight of an active female CSLSA member.<sup>14</sup> Some of the existing historiography was also produced by the Surf Lifesaving Association of New Zealand, which presents a possible implication of the content included in the text.<sup>15</sup>

Historians Caroline Daley and Charlotte Macdonald have addressed sport, leisure or surf lifesaving in a national context.<sup>16</sup> Daley's *Leisure and Pleasure* addressed leisure time in New Zealand. She also looked at how expectations for swimming costumes changed over time.<sup>17</sup> Macdonald's 'Ways of Belonging: Sporting Spaces in New Zealand History' identified

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<sup>13</sup> See R. Cairns, *Surf, Service and Sport: 75 Years of the New Brighton Surf Lifesaving Club, 1910-1985*, Christchurch, The Club, 1985; Cairns and B. Turpin, *Guardians of the Mistake: the history of the Taylor's Mistake Surf Lifesaving Club, 1916-1991*, Christchurch, Raven Press, 1991; and L. Tointon, *The History of the Canterbury Surf Life Saving Association*, Christchurch, Canterbury Surf Life Saving Association, 1967.

<sup>14</sup> See Thomas, 'The Participation of Women', and Thomas, *New Zealand Journal of Health*.

<sup>15</sup> See B. Harvey (ed.), *Between the Flags: 100 Years of Surf Life Saving in New Zealand*, Wellington, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> See C. Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2003; and C. Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935 – 1960*, Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure*, pp. 143-159.

the idea of different sporting ‘spaces’ for men and women.<sup>18</sup> In New Zealand, it was normal to separate the sexes between gender-specific sports. Macdonald’s *Strong, Beautiful and Modern* drew on similar subject matter. This book incorporated her interests of women’s, gender and feminist history with sport, health and fitness. Again, Macdonald addressed the belief that it was necessary to separate men and women through different sports because of biological differences between the sexes. National fitness movements in New Zealand aimed to improve women’s rhythm and grace, whereas exercises for men focused on strength and power.<sup>19</sup> This is important when attempting to understand male attitudes towards women in sport.

In order to discuss the CSLSA’s relationship with Surf Life Saving Australia I have consulted various Australian-focused texts. Caroline Ford’s *Sydney Beaches: A History* and Douglas Booth’s various articles on surf lifesaving in Australia and New Zealand have been significant sources for this.<sup>20</sup> Some authors, such as Sandra Coney, wrote about New Zealand surf lifesaving and included comparisons with the lifesavers’ Australian counterparts.<sup>21</sup> This comparison is useful to determine how the treatment of women in surf lifesaving in Canterbury differed from Australia and other New Zealand regions.

Some historiography on Canterbury surf lifesaving has been written during the period covered by the Minutes and Annual Reports. This can be beneficial as it means that the historiography reflects attitudes of the time. An example of this view is Norman Ingram’s *A Factual History of Surf Life-saving in New Zealand 1910-1952*,<sup>22</sup> which represents quite a different viewpoint on female participation than what is found in Peter Oakes’ *100 Summers of Service*.<sup>23</sup> The viewpoint of the early- to mid-1900s male can also be seen in newspapers. Newspaper articles offer the opinions and experiences of people outside of the CSLSA, thus providing useful context for the events and attitudes depicted in the Minutes and Annual Reports. Newspaper articles used in this research essay, primarily sourced from Papers Past,

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<sup>18</sup> C. Macdonald, ‘Ways of Belonging: Sporting Spaces in New Zealand History’, in G. Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 288.

<sup>19</sup> Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern*, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> See C. Ford, *Sydney Beaches: A History*, Sydney, NewSouth Publishing, 2014; and articles by D. Booth, ‘Healthy, Economic, Disciplined Bodies. Surfbathing and Surf Lifesaving in Australia and New Zealand, 1890 – 1950’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1998, pp. 43-58; Surf Lifesaving: The Development of an Australasian ‘Sport’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 17, 2000, pp. 166-187; and ‘The Dark Side of Surf Lifesaving’, *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2002, pp. 7-13.

<sup>21</sup> S. Coney, ‘Amazons of the Sea’, *Broadsheet*, no. 128, 1985, pp. 14-19.

<sup>22</sup> N. Ingram, *A Factual History of Surf Life-saving in New Zealand 1910-1952*, Wellington, New Zealand Surf Life-Saving Association, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> P. Oakes, *100 Summers of Service: New Brighton Surf Bathing & Lifesaving Club’s Journey Through 100 years of Surf Service & Sport*, Christchurch, Verve, 2010.

provide some knowledge on attitudes around surf lifesaving between 1911 and 1940. This knowledge is useful because it shows a different viewpoint to that of the official viewpoint of the CSLSA.

## Chapter One: The Significance of Public Image

Public image was incredibly important to the CSLSA. The proposed rules for the Association explicitly stated that all members were to display appropriate language and behaviour.<sup>24</sup> If this was not obeyed, the Association stated that it could deal with these members in any way it deemed fit.<sup>25</sup> This was a military-based approach. Katie Pickles wrote that in the early twentieth century, military order and drill became popular and ‘uniformity and conformity were an important part of inculcating citizenship’.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Macdonald discussed the military-based aspects of marching and wrote that there was an emphasis on conformity in clubs, because ‘[t]o dress in uniform and perform in unison was the goal’.<sup>27</sup> As a new organisation, the CSLSA needed to enforce strict rules in order to establish a strong identity that lined up with its aims. Behaviour that was disapproved of by the CSLSA was sometimes dealt with in a public manner. In 1922, two men refused to participate for the Canterbury team in an event.<sup>28</sup> In response to this, the CSLSA issued a censure notice to be published in the *Lyttelton Times* because it was the ‘only way the association could properly express its disapproval of the action [its members] had taken’.<sup>29</sup> More significantly, however, the CSLSA focused on using publicity to generate more funds and, particularly, more members. Throughout the Association’s meeting minutes, there were frequent complaints that lifesaving clubs had a serious lack of public support.<sup>30</sup> This public support was important in the early years of the CSLSA because the Association lacked the funding to support having patrolmen on the beaches for the whole year.<sup>31</sup> The CSLSA was given an annual grant through the lottery board, but sponsorships and donations were the main income to supply the ‘professional yet voluntary rescue service’ it provided.<sup>32</sup> At one stage in the meeting minutes, the secretary began to blame

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<sup>24</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Canterbury Surf and Life Saving Association: Proposed Rules, 7 February 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Canterbury Surf and Life Saving Association: Proposed Rules, 7 February 1917.

<sup>26</sup> K. Pickles, ‘Kilts as Costumes: Identity, Resistance and Tradition’, in B. Labrum, F. McKergow and S. Gibson (ed.), *Looking Flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2007, p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> C. Macdonald, ‘Moving in Unison, Dressing in Uniform: Stepping Out in Style with Marching Teams’, in B. Labrum, F. McKergow and S. Gibson (ed.), *Looking Flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2007, p. 187.

<sup>28</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 2 March 1922.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Surf Club Dispute’, *Lyttelton Times*, 23 March 1922, p. 8. Found in CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939.

<sup>30</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 19 January 1925. This is the first instance of the CSLSA addressing its lack of public support.

<sup>31</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Thirteenth Annual Report 18 November 1929.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, ‘The Participation of Women’, p. 6.

the public and accuse it of a ‘lack of practical sympathy towards beach patrols’.<sup>33</sup> At the CSLSA’s fifteenth annual meeting, he wrote,

[i]t is a great pity that the public of Canterbury do not realise and appreciate the valuable work that is being done solely for their benefit in keeping patrolmen on the beaches ... a serious tragedy alone will bring home to the public the really valuable and humane work that is being done on their behalf.<sup>34</sup>

Because of this lack of public support, the Association relied on sponsorship for funding. For example, in the 1970s the CSLSA had sponsorship from companies such as Lion Breweries, Schweppes and Jim Beam.<sup>35</sup> Members were very aware that keeping the identity of the CSLSA was important for maintaining these sponsorships.<sup>36</sup> Sponsorship, media and publicity were addressed more frequently in the later meetings, from the late 1970s onwards. The minutes of the first ever CSLSA Management Committee in August 1979 detailed the Association’s aims for more publicity and the channels it would go through to receive this publicity.<sup>37</sup> In the meeting minutes, two members, Mr Lee and Mr Tointon, agreed that the CSLSA ‘must be careful to maintain [its] public image’.<sup>38</sup> Comments of this nature indicate that the Association was conscious in the type of image it was projecting to the public, so it is worth considering the nature of this public image and particularly its links to the image of the masculine lifesaver.

The CSLSA’s depiction of the masculine, heroic lifesaver is evident throughout the meeting minutes and secondary literature. In 1933 the secretary of the CSLSA wrote, ‘it is of paramount importance that the general public should realise to the full, the *fine humanitarian work* that is being carried out by our life-savers in *risking their lives at any time* to make the beaches as safe as possible for all who bathe on them’.<sup>39</sup> This language suggests that the male lifesaver was doing the public a favour by selflessly risking his life in order to save people. The idealising nature of this phrasing occurs in other areas of the meeting minutes, although these usually occur within the first 20 years of the CSLSA’s existence. In the twentieth annual report of the CSLSA, the secretary made note of the Australian team’s upcoming visit to New Zealand. He wrote that the team’s action against local Canterbury teams would make the visit

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<sup>33</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Notice of Fourteenth Annual Meeting 4 December 1930.

<sup>34</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Fifteenth Annual Meeting 3 December 1931.

<sup>35</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of Management Committee of 11 November 1981.

<sup>36</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Eighteenth Annual Meeting 22 November 1934.

<sup>37</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of Management Committee of 15 August 1979.

<sup>38</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 25 November 1970.

<sup>39</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Seventeenth Annual Report 14 December 1933.

‘an epic in our Life Saving history of Canterbury’.<sup>40</sup> Evidently at this time the CSLSA saw events as part of a historical narrative. During this period, this narrative featured only male participants. The heroic figure can also be seen in *Between the Flags*, which stated that ‘[w]omen were originally welcomed but in the 1930s the bronzed heroic tanned man was the idealised image at the beach’.<sup>41</sup> This indicates that women did have some involvement in surf lifesaving in the 1930s, but ultimately it was the heroic male lifesaver that became the public image for the sport. Additionally, in Oakes’ book on surf lifesaving in New Brighton, the author described the first surf lifesavers at New Brighton as being ‘stalwart men’.<sup>42</sup> This image is linked to a newspaper article about a rescue in Sydney which discussed a ‘tale of heroism’.<sup>43</sup> Despite being about a Sydney-based lifesaver, this article is useful as it portrayed the type of image that was being projected. The language in this article depicted a heroic narrative, describing the brave men in the rescues as being ‘beaten mercilessly’ by the waves and using ‘a mighty effort’ to ‘wrench [themselves] free of the despairing grasp’ of the drowning girls.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in 1938, the Hon. P. C. Webb said that the New Zealand Government appreciated the work of lifesaving organisations because,

it is there that heroism of the greatest type finds expression ... [l]ife-savers risk their own lives in order to save others, and I do not know of any more courageous work being done by men and women in New Zealand today than life-saving on our beaches.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly Webb included women in this depiction, although there is little evidence that suggests that women were working in patrols on beaches at this time.<sup>46</sup>

Swimming costumes are also significant when considering the public image of surf lifesaving associations. After being granted access to surf clubs, women still faced problems regarding what was considered to be appropriate female behaviour. Costumes were an example of this. An article in the *Temuka Leader* discussed a costume dispute in Australia. Thirty Anglican clergymen petitioned surf costumes, claiming that the dress in mixed surf bathing

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<sup>40</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Twentieth Annual Report 16 November 1936.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Heroes of the Surf: Two Brave Men’, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 15 February 1911. Available from: Papers Past, (accessed 8 September 2016).

<sup>44</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Life-Saving Team for Empire Games: Farewell this Morning’, *Evening Post*, 8 February 1938. Available from: Papers Past (accessed 10 August 2016).

<sup>46</sup> The first evidence of women having patrol duties was a mention in CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1965-1969, Minutes of meeting of 27 March 1968.

should always come below the knees to ‘conserve modesty’.<sup>47</sup> The secretary of the National Council of Women responded saying, ‘[d]on’t you think you would have an army of very ugly people if surf bathers wore costumes below their knees? ... Personally, I think our girls look very attractive on the beaches’.<sup>48</sup> In response, Mr C. D. Pearson, president of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia, recommended a costume that came half way between the thighs and the knees because it was ‘modest but attractive’.<sup>49</sup> The main issue that arises from this discussion is the question of how attractive women looked on the beaches, thus indicating that the female bather’s image was important to surf lifesaving associations.

The idea of longer costumes as being problematic for competitors is also evident in the meeting minutes for the CSLSA. In a meeting of April 1959, the minutes read, ‘[t]hat short costumes be permissible for wearing in all surf ski, surk [sic] boat, surf canoe, paddle board, beach sprint, beach relay, surf race and beltman’s events at the National Championships’.<sup>50</sup> The Association does not provide the reasoning for this, but an article written by Lyn Bunton may provide an explanation for the approval of shorter costumes. Bunton carried out a study with high school students to identify issues with gender roles and sport.<sup>51</sup> Within the study, the students discovered that it was very difficult to participate in sport with excessive amounts of clothing on.<sup>52</sup> This is particularly significant in surf lifesaving, where water-logged clothes would slow competitors down both in the surf and on the beach. Thus, costumes that were longer or had more fabric than necessary made it harder for participants to compete. This is especially useful when studying women because in the early years of surf lifesaving in New Zealand, women were expected to dress modestly. Concerns about costumes and modesty can also be linked to belief that sunshine for women was ‘the complexion’s enemy’.<sup>53</sup> However, Ford noted that this is problematic because women were told through the media to seek the health benefits of a sun tan while still maintaining a feminine complexion.<sup>54</sup> Macdonald also addressed the idea of the bronze and muscular male lifesaver as the embodiment of health,

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Bathing Costumes Should Come Below Knees’, *Temuka Leader*, 18 February 1928. Available from: Papers Past, (accessed 7 September 2016).

<sup>48</sup> *Temuka Leader*.

<sup>49</sup> *Temuka Leader*.

<sup>50</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Minutes of meeting of 9 April 1959.

<sup>51</sup> L. Bunton, ‘Breaking Through’, *Women in Action Conference*, 8-11 May 1993, Victoria University of Wellington, pp. 1-8.

<sup>52</sup> Bunton, *Women in Action Conference*, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> C. Ford, *Sydney Beaches: A History*, NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2014, p. 74.

<sup>54</sup> C. Ford, *Sydney Beaches*, p. 74.

beauty and modernity.<sup>55</sup> Women were less capable of achieving this heroic status because the projected image was predominantly male.<sup>56</sup>

It is worthwhile to consider how the CSLSA's treatment of women differed from that of other surf lifesaving associations. In Australia, women were banned from rescue work and competition in 1914 because, according to male surf lifesavers, 'conquering the sea was a man's prerogative and women were deemed physically too weak to carry a heavy belt and line or to swim competitively'.<sup>57</sup> Booth stated that New Zealand allowed more female participation than Australia, and women were an 'integral, and welcome' part of the early surf lifesaving movements in the country.<sup>58</sup> However, women were not as welcome in the CSLSA as Booth claimed. In January 1929, the 'question of the desirability of Lady members entering into surf competitions' was addressed during a meeting of the CSLSA.<sup>59</sup> It was decided that women would not be allowed to compete. This is discussed in more detail in chapter three. At a much later time in 1970, when female participation was both allowed and more common, women still faced resistance to participating in all aspects of the sport. At a meeting on 18 February that year, Mr Carpinter criticised that a woman was being appointed to patrol duty on one of the beaches.<sup>60</sup> He said that experience and physical ability should be taken into account for appointing patrolmen, and perhaps this is related to his belief that women should not be appointed to patrol duty.<sup>61</sup> In 1970, women were allowed to participate in competitions, but perhaps because this patrol position was paid, men were more reluctant to allow women into what was generally considered to be a male area. Women may have not have had the experience needed for the position due to a lack of opportunities to develop their skills.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, in 1973, members of the CSLSA expressed concern about the possibility of three women being appointed to select the New Zealand Ladies' Surf Life Saving Team to tour Sri Lanka in November 1974.<sup>63</sup> The issue in this case was not with women competing; the problem was with women being involved in a managerial, decision-making role. While New Zealand surf lifesaving associations' attitudes towards women were not always positive, New

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<sup>55</sup> Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern*, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> See Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern*, p. 100. Macdonald includes a poster that combines an image of a bronzed, muscular lifesaver complementing the modern architecture of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

<sup>57</sup> Booth, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, p. 184.

<sup>58</sup> Booth, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 7 January 1929.

<sup>60</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 18 February 1970.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes of meeting of 18 February 1970.

<sup>62</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 19 September 1973.

Zealand women still gained access to the clubs earlier than Australian women. It was not until 1980 that the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia allowed women to become active surf lifesavers.<sup>64</sup> Ford attributed this to external political pressure, not internal cultural shifts.<sup>65</sup> As a result of this, even after women were allowed to participate, they still faced the problem of ‘rampant misogyny’ within the surf clubs.<sup>66</sup> Many women therefore found it difficult to participate, despite officially being allowed entry to clubs. Booth wrote,

[e]ven when individual clubs had relaxed their no-women rules, the men-only culture remained firmly in place ... In the 1950s, Queensland’s Surfers Paradise Surf Life Saving Club finally allowed women into the clubhouse but only on Sunday nights to cook the evening meal!<sup>67</sup>

A similar issue can be seen in New Zealand surf clubs. Margaret MacLaren, a female surf lifesaver from Auckland, said, ‘[o]ne of the reasons [men] didn’t want women in the clubs was that the clubs functioned as a kind of escape where men could be as revolting as they liked. The men saw the entry of women as a kind of brake on drinking, sexual talk and blue movie stuff’.<sup>68</sup> The CSLSA’s meeting minutes made no indication to this because they were written primarily by men.

It also appears that during the 1980s, after women were allowed to participate in competitions, the CSLSA sought to use female accomplishments to demonstrate to other provinces and countries that it had a successful team of athletes. In 1980, a member of the CSLSA expressed concern that the Welsh Ladies’ Tour was not planning to visit the South Island.<sup>69</sup> His reason for concern was that he believed that a visit to Canterbury was warranted because Canterbury was the ‘strongest ladies [sic] province in NZ’.<sup>70</sup> Evidently the CSLSA decided to change its stance on female participants when it began to see women as a positive publicity aspect for Canterbury clubs. This would have been in response to changing times as a result of second wave feminism, and coincided with the time period when a significant amount of women began to enter politics.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, less than a year later in 1981, the CSLSA

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<sup>64</sup> Ford, *Sydney Beaches*, p. 211.

<sup>65</sup> Ford, p. 212.

<sup>66</sup> Ford, p. 212.

<sup>67</sup> Booth, *Journal of Sport History*, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 17 September 1980.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes of meeting of 17 September 1980.

<sup>71</sup> C. Sowerwine and P. Grimshaw, ‘Equality and Difference in the Twentieth-Century West: North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand’, in T. Meade and M. Weisner-Hanks (ed.), *A Companion to Gender History*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, p. 586.

noted its support for the selection of a New Zealand ladies' team to send to Australia for the first time.<sup>72</sup> This was much later than when men's teams had begun participating with Australia. Competition between Australian and Canterbury male teams had begun in 1927 when the CSLSA first wrote to Surf Life Saving Australia to allow an Australian team to visit New Zealand.<sup>73</sup> When the CSLSA decided to support sending a women's team to Australia it was needed to 'press the Australian Association to receive a competitive team'.<sup>74</sup> This pressure was required because Australia was much less receptive of female surf lifesavers.<sup>75</sup> Patricia Grimshaw noted that between 1880 and 1980, New Zealand women 'sustained certain advantages over their cross-Tasman sisters ... concepts of sexual egalitarianism received a less hostile response in New Zealand'.<sup>76</sup> This can be seen when comparing female experiences of similar time periods. Coney wrote that when female Auckland lifesavers Kate Sheriff, Muriel Brown and Alice Armitage started in the sport, they were 'respected and encouraged by men'.<sup>77</sup> In comparison, their Australian counterparts in 1953 were reprimanded for organising a surf carnival at Maroubra because, according male surf lifesavers,

[w]omen are too weak for such a strenuous sport ... [w]omen endanger their own lives and the lives of others by competing in such events. They are not strong enough physically to carry a heavy belt or line or to swim competitively in surf races.<sup>78</sup>

Pickles and Wanhalla's article on Huria Matenga discussed how Matenga and Grace Darling's rescues at sea were seen as unique because they were women. The narrative surrounding these women's acts of rescue depicted them as 'exceptional in the assertion that they had performed a 'man's work''.<sup>79</sup> This idea of the sea being a place of a 'man's work' can be applied to surf lifesaving, particularly in Australia, because men saw surf lifesaving as a male-only sport. The idea of women as being physically weak is also evident in the meeting minutes of the CSLSA, although it is less explicit and does not occur throughout the Association's later years.

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<sup>72</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 12 August 1981.

<sup>73</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 28 June 1927.

<sup>74</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 12 August 1981.

<sup>75</sup> Australia did not allow female surf lifesavers until 1980. See Ford, *Sydney Beaches*, p. 212.

<sup>76</sup> Booth, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Coney, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> K. Pickles and A. Wanhalla, 'Embodying the Colonial Encounter: Explaining New Zealand's 'Grace Darling', Huria Matenga', *Gender & History*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2012, p. 378.

The CSLSA's public representation was a key aspect of the organisation's identity. The Association was in need of greater public support to secure additional funding, and this made public image a priority from the beginning. A lack of government funding meant that the CSLSA had to rely on sponsorship money to fund all of its activities, such as patrols. The image that was constructed was initially an overwhelmingly masculine one. However, in the CSLSA's later years, the successes of the women's teams were viewed in a positive light. This positivity contrasted with the negative treatment of Australian women within the sport. Female surf lifesavers in New Zealand were not always treated with respect, but these women generally had a more positive experience than Australian women during the same time period. This would have worked in favour of the CSLSA in terms of its public image.

## Chapter Two: Femininity as Weakness

In the earlier years of female participation in surf lifesaving in Canterbury, many CSLSA members held the belief that women lacked the physical capabilities of competing at the same level as men, or even competing at all. *NZ Truth* reported that in 1929, women in Canterbury were disappointed that they were still unable to participate in competitions.<sup>80</sup> Much of the historiography surrounding surf lifesaving in New Zealand acknowledges the male belief that women lacked the physical capabilities to compete in surf lifesaving. Tointon wrote that in 1943, the CSLSA recommended a maximum and minimum swimming distance for women because it was concerned for female wellbeing.<sup>81</sup> The Association also believed that the six-man competition was ‘too tough’ for women.<sup>82</sup> In the same year, the New Zealand Ladies’ Individual Surf Race Championship was taken out of the New Zealand Championships programme until 1959 because of ‘possible physical strain’.<sup>83</sup> These views also occur throughout the meeting minutes for the CSLSA, and originate from the Association’s inability to understand why women wanted to participate. During a meeting in 1938, the idea of women’s teams in the National Surf Lifesaving Championships was addressed.<sup>84</sup> It was decided that the CSLSA should oppose this motion, and ‘suggest separate competition [for women] *if considered necessary*’.<sup>85</sup> This phrasing suggests that the CSLSA did not see female participation as necessary, and it seems that the all-male Association did not understand why women wanted to participate in the sport. Women were later allowed to participate in competition events, but their events were restricted due to their perceived physical inferiority.<sup>86</sup> During a meeting in March 1944, the secretary wrote,

it was unanimously decided that in view of the fact that there was a great physical strain on Lady competitors in this event, it would be in their interests if this event was eliminated with a further recommendation that for all Ladies Surf Events the distance of the buoy from the back should be reduced to a minimum of 80 yards and a maximum of 100 yards.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> ‘EQUALITY? Women and Surf Competitions’, *N.Z. Truth*, 7 February 1929. Available from: Papers Past, (accessed 23 August 2016).

<sup>81</sup> Tointon, *The History of the Canterbury Surf Life Saving Association*, p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> Tointon, p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 13 October 1938.

<sup>85</sup> Minutes of meeting of 13 October 1938.

<sup>86</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Minutes of meeting of 22 March 1944.

<sup>87</sup> Minutes of meeting of 22 March 1944.

There were no women present at the CSLSA's meetings at this stage. This means that despite the decision being agreed upon by all members, there were no female members present to discuss whether or not they believed that the previous conditions were too difficult. The same problem is repeated in the meeting minutes of February 1956 when the Taylor's Mistake Surf Club wrote to the CSLSA to request the reasons for the ladies' team not taking place at a carnival at South Brighton earlier that month.<sup>88</sup> The reply provided to the club was that the referee claimed that 'the sea was too rough for the ladies to compete and *in his opinion* the conditions did not warrant them taking part'.<sup>89</sup> Again, this was a decision regarding female participation that the women in question had no say in. This decision was based on a fundamental belief that the biological difference between men and women impacted a woman's ability to compete. Before cancelling the event, the referee could have asked the ladies' team if they wanted to participate, but he chose to make a decision based on his perceived idea of their physical ability. This perceived inferiority was also reflected in the experiences of Bryony Coutanche, a female surf lifesaver from Auckland. She discussed a time when there were women's board races at Muriwai in the heavy surf, and when the competitors got back to the beach, an official told them that there were few or no women's events in competitions because they 'held up the programme'.<sup>90</sup> This implies that women were required not to disrupt the existing schedule, and were expected to fit in with the men's programme. It is likely that women were unable to develop their abilities in the surf because they were not given adequate time or sufficient resources to practice. In 1985 Coutanche said that board riding was almost exclusively male and when she tried to learn, she was told by men to stay away from their waves. She said, '[t]he men are awful when you're learning it's hard'.<sup>91</sup> While this is not a depiction of the Canterbury clubs, it is likely that this attitude would have occurred throughout New Zealand clubs. The last mention of female physical inferiority in the meeting minutes for the CSLSA was in the meeting of February 1956, so it is possible that over time women were accepted as different but not inferior to their male counterparts.<sup>92</sup> An article from *N.Z. Truth* in 1929 reinforced the view of women as physically inferior in the surf while simultaneously recommending that they participate. It claimed that 'the greatest majority of people getting into difficulties on [Canterbury] beaches are members of the fairer sex'.<sup>93</sup> However, the author of

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<sup>88</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Minutes of meeting of 29 February 1956.

<sup>89</sup> Minutes of meeting of 29 February 1956.

<sup>90</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 19.

<sup>91</sup> Coney, p. 19.

<sup>92</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Minutes of meeting of 29 February 1956.

<sup>93</sup> 'EQUALITY? Women and Surf Competitions', *N.Z. Truth*.

the article continued to contradictorily write, '[w]oman has progressed so far with her usurpation of the masculine sporting realm, that it would make little difference were she allowed to enter into surf competitions'.<sup>94</sup> This second statement suggests that women had improved their skills to compete with men, but the author's first statement indicates that women should be trained in surf lifesaving because it would solve a major problem on the beaches. Thus, despite believing that women could improve their physical abilities through surf lifesaving, the author still reinforced the idea that women in general are physically inferior and problematic when it comes to the surf.

Women's traditional societal roles had an impact on their capability to participate in lifesaving clubs. *Between the Flags* claimed that during the 1950s, the 'baby boom' years and social expectations meant that women left surf clubs when they got married.<sup>95</sup> Writing in 1988, Thomas, a Canterbury female surf lifesaver, agreed with the belief that when women reached their twenties, they participated much less in sport in order to dedicate more time to marriage.<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, Thomas noted that this decrease in active female participation could also be attributed to women becoming more involved in their work commitments.<sup>97</sup> A similar trend can be seen in Turpin and Cairns' *Guardians of the Mistake*. In the 1950s, female surf lifesavers were very successful in competitions for the Taylor's Mistake club.<sup>98</sup> However, starting from the 1960s, their participation numbers declined.<sup>99</sup> Turpin and Cairns attributed this to 'motherhood and family life'.<sup>100</sup> Evidently marriage and raising a family became a priority for many women, and their time previously spent participating in sports was reallocated to fulfilling the role of the housewife. W. J. Moorhead agreed that women were a 'familiar sight' in surf lifesaving clubs but over time they began to disappear, probably to take on additional roles in the home.<sup>101</sup> MacLaren believed that motherhood played a significant role in the decline of female surf lifesavers.<sup>102</sup> In 1985 she said, '[i]t hasn't been acceptable for women to spend all their time on the beach like men do, not because of the male clubbies but because of

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<sup>94</sup> 'EQUALITY? Women and Surf Competitions', *N.Z. Truth*.

<sup>95</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 98.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas, 'The Participation of Women', p. 36.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas, p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Cairns and Turpin, *Guardians of the Mistake*, p. 141.

<sup>99</sup> Cairns and Turpin, p. 141.

<sup>100</sup> Cairns and Turpin, p. 141.

<sup>101</sup> Ingram, *A Factual History*, p. 141.

<sup>102</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 17.

women's families'.<sup>103</sup> MacLaren's teammate Sue Donaldson attributed the decline of female lifesavers not to family, but to husbands and boyfriends,

[i]t's always the woman who has to change, not the man, it really annoys me. Often the woman has a far better future in surf life saving than he has in the sport, but we change to keep the peace. Half or more of the women drop out before they're 22. Women don't come back to coach and into administration. They don't put anything back in, so they're not taken quite as seriously.<sup>104</sup>

This idea of the presence and behaviour of men severely impacting women's participation is shared with other female surf lifesavers. Coney noted that all the women she spoke to when writing 'Amazons of the Sea' for *Broadsheet* in April 1985 stressed the importance of having older female role models within the clubs to encourage female participation.<sup>105</sup> MacLaren attributed this to her belief that boys tried again if they failed whereas girls struggled with public failure and therefore needed more encouragement.<sup>106</sup> She addressed an important factor for female participation: the presence of women in clubs would attract more women.<sup>107</sup> The problem was that getting women into male-dominated clubs in the first place was difficult. Coney attributed this to the 'macho' image projected by surf lifesaving clubs.<sup>108</sup> However, not all women viewed this masculine presence negatively. Bryony Coutanche said that the ability to cope with men dominating the clubs gave her the confidence to go into other male-dominated areas.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Donaldson was elected on to the management committee of the Auckland Surf Lifesaving Association as the only woman.<sup>110</sup> She said that at first she felt a little intimidated and she had a very different viewpoint from the men, but this did not stop her from contributing to the Association.<sup>111</sup>

Writing in the 1940s, Moorhead reinforced traditional gender roles as he claimed that the female sections of surf lifesaving clubs should be strengthened so that they are 'equal but complimentary to the men's section'.<sup>112</sup> It is evident that Moorhead did not believe that

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<sup>103</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 17.

<sup>104</sup> Coney, p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> Coney, p. 18.

<sup>106</sup> Coney, p. 18.

<sup>107</sup> Coney, p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> Coney, p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> Coney, p. 18.

<sup>110</sup> Coney, p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Coney, p. 17.

<sup>112</sup> Ingram, *A Factual History*, p. 141.

women's sections of surf lifesaving clubs should be significant on their own. Instead, he thought that these sections should support the male surf lifesavers. He also believed that female surf lifesavers were useful because he held that girls were better at bandaging and first aid than boys, and would be able to use this knowledge at a 'later stage in life'.<sup>113</sup> Thus, a major problem for female participation in surf lifesaving was male sexism. Many of the men in surf clubs did not believe that it was a woman's place to be out participating in the surf. Instead, women were best suited to family life, and if they were to be a part of the clubs, they were seen to be most useful when they carried out 'feminine' tasks.

Some of the most noted contributions women had to surf lifesaving organisations was their ability to cook and manage the catering at events. Thomas, a member of the CSLSA and the Advisory Committee for Women in Sport and Recreation, addressed this issue. She wrote that, '[s]ince the early days, women have filled largely stereotypical roles as tea and scone makers, serving on committees as secretaries and generally playing a supportive role to the men'.<sup>114</sup> Thomas' involvement in surf lifesaving is beneficial as she was able to provide female insight from within a male-dominated association, and her opinions were generally respected by the CSLSA. The stereotypical role Thomas mentioned can be seen in an article from the *Canterbury Star* in 1920. It discussed the opening of the Sumner Life Saving and Surf Bathing Club and the 'ladies who so kindly lent assistance'.<sup>115</sup> It depicted women in their domestic role: '[t]he pavilion was beautifully decorated with evergreens and flowers, and a very dainty afternoon tea was laid upstairs for members and guests'.<sup>116</sup> Thus, the feminine stereotype developed in the 1920s from what people witnessed at events. The newspaper's language contributed to this stereotype by describing the afternoon tea as 'dainty' and praising the women's abilities to decorate using flowers.<sup>117</sup> The article did not mention if the women were a part of the Sumner Club, but based on the time that the article was written, these women were probably only linked through the club through their husbands or partners. Six of the seven women mentioned were married, so it is likely that being a wife of a club member allowed some access to club activities. However, this participation was only allowed when it came to the 'feminine' ability to cook, and not to participate in the actual sport.

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<sup>113</sup> Ingram, *A Factual History*, p. 142.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas, *New Zealand Journal of Health*, p. 19.

<sup>115</sup> 'Women Folk', *Canterbury Star*, 26 October 1920. Available from: Papers Past, (accessed 23 August 2016).

<sup>116</sup> *Canterbury Star*.

<sup>117</sup> *Canterbury Star*.

Throughout the meeting minutes of the CSLSA, female involvement was recognised most often when it related to a womanly stereotype. At the Annual General Meeting of 1976, Mr Pocock mentioned the important contribution of women towards a seminar during the tour of the Victorian team to Canterbury.<sup>118</sup> This important contribution was nothing to do with the sport itself; instead, it was the women's 'tremendous job with the luncheon'.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, during a meeting on 26 August 1964, Mr Lee requested the assistance of two women from each surf lifesaving club in Canterbury to help with catering for the National Championship.<sup>120</sup> The most significant aspect of this is that he specifically asked for women when he could have asked for any two members of each club. This was not unique to the CSLSA. In Australia, women contributed to surf lifesaving as members of ladies' committees where they assisted in organising social functions, making sandwiches, and running fundraising activities, but were never allowed to participate in the sport.<sup>121</sup> When the CSLSA formed sub-committees for the 1971 National Championships, men were nominated for the accommodation, transport, entertainment and publicity committees, and the only female nominee was nominated for the catering committee.<sup>122</sup> It is likely that this woman, Mrs Pocock, was not a member herself and was instead appointed to help because her husband was a CSLSA member. Throughout the entirety of the meeting minutes from 1917 to 1990, the only people associated with any catering-related events were women. This indicates that this role was better suited to women than other club roles, such as organising transport. Additionally, in September 1973 the meeting minutes stated that the CSLSA was looking for a shorthand typist 'Lady Member' who could become minute secretary.<sup>123</sup> The desire to have a female minute secretary was probably because typing was a female career option at the time, and the CSLSA wanted to make use of someone who had adequate skills for the job.

Women were often seen as incapable of becoming successful surf lifesavers. A major problem that resulted from this belief is that women were frequently denied the opportunity to participate and prove their abilities to the surf clubs. Initially, men did not understand why it was necessary to allow women to participate in the sport. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes were at play when men made decisions on female involvement in the clubs. Many

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<sup>118</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1974-1978, Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 5 August 1976.

<sup>119</sup> Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of 5 August 1976.

<sup>120</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Minutes of meeting of 26 August 1964.

<sup>121</sup> Booth, *Journal of Sport History*, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 18 February 1970.

<sup>123</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 19 September 1973.

women were forced to resign themselves to organising the catering because they were denied access to competitions. Some women may have been happy in this role, but there were many who wanted to participate in competitions and patrols. The first half of the Minutes and Annual Reports of the CSLSA paid most attention to women when they discussed the valuable female contribution to the cooking at their events. This tended to overshadow any female successes in the actual sport.

### Chapter Three: Female Success

Women's participation in surf lifesaving in Canterbury was first allowed in 1928. The Ladies' Sumner team was granted permission to compete for surf medallions and in club lifesaving events.<sup>124</sup> However, as mentioned above, in 1929, the question of the 'desirability of Lady members' led to the decision that female competitors would not be allowed.<sup>125</sup> The outbreak of World War Two forced the CSLSA to change what it considered to be appropriate. The Association chose to cease sending teams to compete in the national championships as it could not justify the cost during wartime conditions.<sup>126</sup> In 1940 the National Surf Championships were cancelled altogether for the same reason.<sup>127</sup> Much historiography in the area of female participation in surf lifesaving claims that women played a large role in fulfilling the duties of surf lifesaving clubs while existing male members left to fight in the war. In 1941, the New Brighton surf club invoked War Emergency Regulations that allowed women to patrol the beaches.<sup>128</sup> Coney noted that during the war, women became the 'backbone' of surf lifesaving.<sup>129</sup> Oakes wrote that there would sometimes have been no surf patrols in New Brighton during the war without female surf lifesavers.<sup>130</sup> Surf Life Saving New Zealand's book claimed that women were prominent on New Zealand beaches in the 1940s, but when men returned to surf clubs, women were reduced back to their roles of baking and fundraising.<sup>131</sup> It was this issue that triggered some women to think about creating ladies' clubs.<sup>132</sup> Tointon wrote that 'the girls did a great job in taking over the duties of their male confreres' during World War Two.<sup>133</sup> However, he noted that after the war, attitudes changed, and many men reverted back to the belief that for women, surf lifesaving should only be a social event.<sup>134</sup> This reinforces the view presented in Surf Life Saving New Zealand's book. Most of the existing historiography tends to agree that women had more access to the sport during the war, and then after the war, attitudes returned back to what they used to be.

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<sup>124</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 8 March 1928.

<sup>125</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 7 January 1929.

<sup>126</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1939, Minutes of meeting of 2 May 1939.

<sup>127</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Minutes of meeting of 18 September 1940.

<sup>128</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 24.

<sup>129</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 16.

<sup>130</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 113.

<sup>131</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> Harvey, p. 13.

<sup>133</sup> Tointon, *The History of the Canterbury Surf Life Saving Association*, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Tointon, p. 11.

The CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports make very few mentions of women participating in the sport during the war, but there is some evidence that suggests that women were working in patrols. A newspaper article titled ‘Surf Gala Day at Lyall Bay: Canterbury Women’s Team’s Success’ is included in the meeting minutes of 17 March 1943.<sup>135</sup> The article reads, ‘[a]ddressing the competitors after the march past, Mr. Fraser complimented the teams on their fine display, and thanked the association for carrying on its fine humanitarian work in the absence of senior members overseas’.<sup>136</sup> This is the most explicit mention of women taking over the previously male patrol slots in Canterbury during the war. In 1941, the CSLSA decided that a ladies’ competition would be held in the next season, perhaps because of this extra involvement in patrols.<sup>137</sup> This meeting also noted that all clubs in Canterbury had a depleted membership, so women were used to build up falling club membership numbers during the war.<sup>138</sup> The inclusion of women in patrols therefore gave women more access to the clubs, and perhaps this is why the decision was made to hold a women’s competition in 1942. Other newspaper articles also demonstrate the necessity of female participation during the war. An article in *The Press* in 1940 stated that in Sumner, women and junior members were ‘required to maintain the club’,<sup>139</sup> signifying that beach patrols would not have been possible if these two groups had not filled in for the large amount of men who left for military service. In New South Wales, Australia, the local surf lifesaving association refused to allow women to patrol the beaches during the war, despite there being an absence of male surf lifesavers.<sup>140</sup> This was because women were considered to be too weak to carry out safe rescues.<sup>141</sup> In New Zealand, surf lifesaving associations were more desperate for people to fill in the depleted patrol slots. In December 1940, the *New Zealand Herald* published an offer of assistance, seeking to fill depleted ranks in the surf lifesaving clubs.<sup>142</sup> The Women’s War Service Auxiliary had volunteered their services, but more women were still needed to help.<sup>143</sup> The offer of assistance appealed for any competent swimmers or any women living near beaches who were willing to train for patrol work.<sup>144</sup> Thus, surf clubs were so desperately in need of people to work the

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Surf Gala Day at Lyall Bay: Canterbury Women’s Team’s Success’, *Wellington Domain*, 17 March 1943. Found in CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956.

<sup>136</sup> *Wellington Domain*.

<sup>137</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Minutes of meeting of 26 November 1941.

<sup>138</sup> Minutes of meeting of 26 November 1941.

<sup>139</sup> ‘General News’, *The Press*, 2 December 1940. Available from: Papers Past (accessed 12 September 2016).

<sup>140</sup> Booth, *Journal of Sport History*, p. 9.

<sup>141</sup> Booth, p. 9.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Beach Patrol Work’, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 December 1940. Available from: Papers Past (accessed 23 August 2016).

<sup>143</sup> *New Zealand Herald*.

<sup>144</sup> *New Zealand Herald*.

patrols during the war that they were willing to accept anyone who had the basic necessary skillset. The first record in the CSLSA's meeting minutes of women participating in an event was during the war, in February 1942.<sup>145</sup>

Some men were not opposed to women participating in surf lifesaving. Throughout the meeting minutes of the CSLSA, there is evidence that several men motioned for more female participation. This is significant because women did not attend any of the Association's meetings until the meeting of 26 August 1964, so they were not able to speak for themselves.<sup>146</sup> At this meeting, J. Claxton and J. Waldron were the first women to be appointed as delegates at any of the CSLSA's meetings, and this was because they were members of the newly created Central Brighton Ladies' Club.<sup>147</sup> There is no mention of female members in other Canterbury surf lifesaving clubs until 23 October 1968 when Miss E. Carruthers was a proxy for Mr P. Davies of the Waimari club.<sup>148</sup> This evidence indicates that there must have been some female members in clubs that were not female-only, but the meeting minutes provide no further insight into this. It was important that female club members were allowed to attend CSLSA meetings because it gave these women an opportunity to have an input in the decisions of the Association, and it gave them a medium to complain. Miss Power and Miss Dynes complained at a meeting in 1969 about the poor conditions experienced during the Ladies' 6 Man Rescue and Resuscitation event.<sup>149</sup> Prior to Central Brighton Ladies' involvement in the meetings, there was no way for women to have any input into the running of their events, and involvement was necessary to increase female participation. In an article discussing possible solutions to increase female participation in surf lifesaving, Thomas wrote that '[t]here needs to be adequate female representation on all decision making committees to provide a female perspective and to give input on all matters that affect female members of the organisation'.<sup>150</sup> The creation of ladies' clubs was therefore important because these clubs gave women an opportunity to be present at the CSLSA's meetings.

The Central Brighton Ladies' Club was formed in the 1963-64 season in response to more women wanting to participate in surf lifesaving. New Brighton would not allow women

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<sup>145</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1939-1956, Results of Competition at Waimari 1 February 1942.

<sup>146</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Minutes of meeting of 26 August 1964.

<sup>147</sup> Minutes of meeting of 26 August 1964.

<sup>148</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Minutes of meeting of 23 October 1968.

<sup>149</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 19 February 1969.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas, 'Targeting Women – Women in Surf Life Saving', *Women in Action Conference*, 8-11 May 1993, Victoria University of Wellington, p. 1.

to join their club, so some of the women decided to start their own club. Barry Readman, a male New Brighton club member, said that the men did not want women to participate because ‘[t]hey were sheilas ... and it was the same as you don’t have ham sandwiches at a banquet’.<sup>151</sup> This attitude pushed women to start their own club, even though they did not have their own changing facilities or clubrooms.<sup>152</sup> The Central Brighton Ladies’ Club merged with the New Brighton club in October 1970, and this meant that there was no longer any need for female delegates to be present at CSLSA meetings.<sup>153</sup> Prior to this merge, there were at least two women from the Central Brighton Ladies’ Club present at each meeting of the CSLSA. There were no female delegates present at the meetings again until October 1977.<sup>154</sup> Thomas again highlighted the importance of having women involved on committees when she discussed surf lifesaving in Bay of Plenty. In 1988, she wrote that ‘there was a high proportion of males on the district committee, [therefore] female concerns tend to be ignored no matter how much pressure competitors apply’.<sup>155</sup> Thomas offered a solution to this problem,

[b]ecause women are not represented on these ‘important’ committees where policy changes are discussed and implemented ... they do not have the same access of input into these decisions which never the less affect them. I believe there should be a defined number of positions on each of these committees to be specifically filled by women.<sup>156</sup>

Having women-only seats on the committee would ensure that the concerns of both men and women would be heard at surf lifesaving association meetings. This was necessary because both sexes did not share the same experiences within the sport, so it is not possible for one sex to represent the concerns of both. Similarly, Surf Life Saving New Zealand’s book suggested that existing male clubrooms were usually small and lacked female changing rooms, so women usually preferred their own clubrooms.<sup>157</sup> This was a significant aspect of participating in a water-based sport, so access to female changing rooms would have had an impact on women’s capability to participate.

In the entirety of the Minutes and Annual Reports 1917-1990, there were two prominent women who featured in managerial roles. This was not until the late 1970s. The two prominent

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<sup>151</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 113.

<sup>152</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1965-1969, Minutes of meeting of 27 March 1968.

<sup>153</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1969-1974, Minutes of meeting of 28 October 1970.

<sup>154</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1974-1974, Minutes of meeting of 26 October 1977.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas, ‘The Participation of Women’, p. 23.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas, p. 36.

<sup>157</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 97.

women were Jan Pinkerton and Christine Thomas. Pinkerton was elected as the first female captain of the New Brighton club in 1981, which was a significant achievement as New Brighton had refused membership to women only 18 years prior to this.<sup>158</sup> Pinkerton also captained the ladies' inter-district team in 1978 and participated in many women's events.<sup>159</sup> In October 1979 she was appointed as the new delegate for New Brighton at CSLSA meetings, and perhaps it was this additional responsibility that contributed to her becoming the first female captain of her mixed club two years later.<sup>160</sup> Pinkerton attended management committees from 14 September 1983 and was appointed to the Patrol Efficiency Committee.<sup>161</sup> Pinkerton's role was significant because she was a successful sportswoman and was, at the time, the only woman on an all-male association board. Similarly, Thomas' name appeared frequently throughout the meeting minutes from March 1989 onwards.<sup>162</sup> Thomas prepared field reports for the Association and other CSLSA members praised her efforts.<sup>163</sup> While Thomas' achievements in a male-dominated club were significant, it is worth noting the way that she was identified in the minutes. Throughout the meeting minutes, she was addressed in four different ways: C. Thomas, Christine Thomas, Chris Thomas, and Ms. C. Thomas.<sup>164</sup> In the meeting minutes, men were always addressed by an initial and a last name without any differentiation. It is therefore significant that the treatment of Thomas' name differed as it perhaps indicates that the CSLSA was unsure of how to address her as an important female in a male-dominated organisation. Coney addressed something similar in her *Broadsheet* article. At the surf house of the Auckland Surf Life Saving Association, Coney described the honours wall with 'row on orderly row of men's names. The women's names are very, very few. They stand out with their honorific Miss and Mrs, beside the confident bluntness of the men's names'.<sup>165</sup> This idea is repeated throughout the CSLSA meeting minutes when delegate names are compiled in a list. Men were listed by a first name initial and then a last name, but women nearly always had a title before their last name.<sup>166</sup> Evidently the CSLSA found it noteworthy to identify which delegates were women throughout the meeting minutes. This obvious

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<sup>158</sup> Oakes, *100 Summers of Service*, p. 128.

<sup>159</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Team Manager's Report Interdistricts Waipu Cove 1978.

<sup>160</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 10 October 1979.

<sup>161</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 26 October 1983.

<sup>162</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 29 March 1989.

<sup>163</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 24 January 1990.

<sup>164</sup> See CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 24 April 1990, and Minutes of management committees of 24 April 1990 and 27 June 1990.

<sup>165</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 14.

<sup>166</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1956-1965, Minutes of meeting of 24 June 1964.

difference in male and female names is something that Coney highlighted in her article on female surf lifesavers.

There is also evidence of other women being successful in surf lifesaving in Canterbury. The first explicit mention of a paid female beach patroller was Miss Anne Irwin in 1975.<sup>167</sup> In December 1976, 13 out of the 27 competitors who gained awards recorded in that month's meeting minutes were women.<sup>168</sup> Separate awards were created for women, such as the 'Lady Surf Life Saver of the Year' in August 1977.<sup>169</sup> Women were generally not considered for life membership or service awards because they had not been allowed to participate for long enough to qualify for these awards. Female-specific awards gave women the ability to achieve similar successes to the opportunities that men had access to. This feeling of achievement was important and is identified by MacLaren. In 1988, she said,

[i]t is generally not accepted in New Zealand that women can become passionate about sport but it is changing. It's very important that women do some sort of physical activity whether its [sic] swimming or yoga or walking. It's given me something that all my years in academic work and young mothering didn't give me – confidence and a sense of self.<sup>170</sup>

Women could compete for national titles in surf lifesaving from 1944, and in the 1970s, mixed teams of men and women were accepted in some areas of New Zealand.<sup>171</sup> It was important for women to be able to compete and achieve personal goals because this would encourage them to continue in the sport.<sup>172</sup> Thomas believed that competition was essential for all surf lifesavers because it helped to build the stamina and fitness required for patrols.<sup>173</sup> Thus, the ability for all surf lifesavers to participate in competitions was necessary for both personal benefit, and for the benefit of the beaches. Some women also wanted to compete against men, and while men were more willing to allow women to compete in the 1960s and 1970s, they were reluctant to allow women to compete against men. Abbie Day was an Auckland female surf lifesaver and organised girls versus boys carnivals in the 1960s.<sup>174</sup> She said, '[w]e'd have given the men

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<sup>167</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1974-1978, Report on Paid Beach Patrols 1975/76 Season.

<sup>168</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1974-1978, Minutes of meeting of 15 December 1976.

<sup>169</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1974-1978, Minutes of meeting of 4 August 1977.

<sup>170</sup> Coney, *Broadsheet*, p. 19.

<sup>171</sup> B. Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 2006, p. 381.

<sup>172</sup> See Thomas 'Targeting Women', pp. 1-4.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas, 'The Participation of Women', p. 21.

<sup>174</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 105.

a go but they won't compete against us, so the boys will have to do'.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, Pat Ellison was denied the recognition that she aimed for. She started the Moana Rua Women's Surf Life Saving Club in 1958 and trained female swimmers to be lifeguards.<sup>176</sup> She was nominated for president of the Surf Life Saving Association of New Zealand three times but was told that a woman would never be the president.<sup>177</sup> Nonetheless, women were given more opportunities to compete over time, and the meeting minutes of 10 October 1979 provide the first evidence of women being appointed as examiners to surf awards.<sup>178</sup> This is significant because it meant that women were respected enough to be trusted in a position of power. A mention of the Patrolwoman of the Year award in meeting minutes of 1989 suggests that there were multiple women working in paid patrol positions by this time.<sup>179</sup> Pickles and Wanhalla wrote that 'western custom considered it the place of men to rescue women in chivalrous fashion', so it appears that in the 1970s and 1980s, female surf lifesavers were no longer an 'exception to the rule' of men always carrying out rescues.<sup>180</sup>

In the later decades of the CSLSA, women secured more opportunities for participation. Initially, it was World War Two that provided women an opportunity to become involved with surf clubs. Many men were deployed overseas, leaving depleted club memberships behind for women to fill. However, when men came back from the war, they expected women to leave the surf clubs. Over time, attitudes towards women began to change, and the CSLSA became more accommodating to female participants. Pinkerton and Thomas achieved significant recognition, and there is evidence of other women participating in the sport during the CSLSA's later years. Women in Canterbury worked to create the Central Brighton Ladies' Club, which provided them with the opportunity to have a say at the CSLSA monthly meetings. The treatment of women in surf lifesaving in Canterbury improved from the 1970s onwards.

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<sup>175</sup> Harvey, *Between the Flags*, p. 105.

<sup>176</sup> Harvey, p. 105.

<sup>177</sup> Harvey, p. 105.

<sup>178</sup> CCLAC, CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of meeting of 10 October 1979.

<sup>179</sup> CSLSA Minutes and Annual Reports 1978-1990, Minutes of management committee of 28 June 1989.

<sup>180</sup> Pickles and Wanhalla, *Gender & History*, p. 366.

## Conclusion

Women's experiences in surf lifesaving have been ever-changing throughout history. When the CSLSA was established, women were not welcome as active participants in the sport. Women were expected to prioritise fulfilling their duties as mothers and housewives over dedicating time to sport. However, there have still been successful women throughout the history of the CSLSA. Some male Association members motioned to allow female participation, and this was essential for allowing women entry into the competition aspect of the sport. In addition to this, the creation of the Central Brighton Ladies' Club was significant in Canterbury surf lifesaving as it allowed women entry to CSLSA meetings as club delegates. World War Two also provided opportunities for women to become involved in beach patrols.

Female agency and determination should not be overlooked when identifying the extent of women's participation in surf lifesaving. Women often asked Association members to allow female or mixed events at competitions. When women were refused entry to surf clubs in Canterbury, they formed a new women's-only club. Throughout surf clubs in New Zealand in the 1900s, women have expressed interest in participating in the sport, even when they were only given recognition for their catering abilities. Despite the CSLSA being a male-dominated organisation throughout 1917-1990, women still appeared in the meeting minutes and in historiography on the area. This indicates that not all women gave up when they were told that they were incapable of becoming surf lifesavers.

It is also useful to compare New Zealand's treatment of female surf lifesavers in relation to its closest neighbour Australia. This contrast indicates that New Zealand women were granted more opportunities and were generally given more respect than Australian female lifesavers were. However, this does not mean that the concerns of New Zealand female surf lifesavers were invalid. These women still struggled to find an outlet to voice their concerns and to be given a fair opportunity to participate. As this research essay has shown, some women did achieve success by securing managerial roles for themselves within the organisation, although this was rare. Women were also given more opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s to participate in more competitions, have paid patrol work, and even be appointed as surf examiners.

Many men of the CSLSA decided that women were incapable of participating in surf lifesaving, without giving these women an opportunity to prove themselves. Despite the many obstacles that these women faced, it is evident that changing male attitudes and female

determination allowed women in Canterbury to have some involvement in surf lifesaving. This research essay has shown that levels of female participation in surf lifesaving varied between different surf lifesaving associations. In the early years of the CSLSA, attitudes towards women's involvement in the sport were overwhelmingly negative. Over time, the CSLSA became progressively more accommodating towards women's wishes to participate in the sport, and from the 1970s, more women were able to secure opportunities to become active surf lifesavers. Despite lacking access to basic facilities such as women's changing rooms, the female pursuit of equality was sought after on the beaches, the surf, and the clubrooms of Canterbury.

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