



## COMPETING FOR WAVES: THE UNJUST REALITY OF WOMEN´S POSITION IN THE WORLD OF SURFING

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### ABSTRACT

Throughout the years, women have suffered from oppression delivered by the male chauvinism. This maltreatment was present in every aspect of life, and surf was no exception. Since surfing has existed, it has been thought to be a sport just for men. Has this misconception driven women to avoid the sport at all costs for several years or dedicate themselves to completely different activities? This paper will provide an insight on the evolution of women´s role in this sport. Moreover, the situation which women from all over the world have been forced to bear has been analyzed. For many years, women have lived in a sexist society, which has given privileges to men in every aspect of life. Due to this fact, men have built this idea of superiority when compared to women. This misconception has driven male surfers to think that they are the only one worthy of surfing at a competitive level. They often insult and assault women who attempt to join the surf world. Fortunately, this sexist way of conceiving women´s role in surfing has changed with the passing of time. Consequently, nowadays it is able to see millions of woman enroll in the historic sport. Even so, many years of unfair differences and oppressions had to pass in order for women to be treated equally in the Surf world.

**Keywords:** Surfing, women surfers, gender discrimination in sports, media image, comparative sports

## DALGALAR İLE YARIŞMA: SÖRF DÜNYASINDA KADINLARIN HAKSIZ REKABETİ

### ÖZET

Yıllar boyunca kadınlar, erkek şovenizminin bakışı ile karşılaşmışlardır. Bu eziyet ve muamele ile hayatlarının her alanında yüz yüze gelmişlerdir; o bakımdan sörf bir istisna değildir. Sörf sporunun ortaya çıkışından bu yana, sadece erkekler için bir spor olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu yanlış kanı yüzünden kadınlar yıllar boyunca bu spor etkinliğinden uzaklaştırdılar mı veya kendilerini başka sporlara mı yönlendirdiler? Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde, bu çalışmada kadınların sörf sporundaki rolü incelenmektedir. Ayrıca dünyanın her yerinden kadınların karşılaştığı zorluklar da analiz edilmiştir. Uzun yıllar boyunca, kadınlar ne yazık ki birçok alanda erkeklere verilen cinsiyet ayrımcı toplumlarda yaşamıştır. Kadınlara erkeklerin üstün olduğu fikri benimsetilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu yanlış kanı sörf sporunda da erkeklerin tek rekabetçi olduğu düşüncesini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu bakımdan sörf yapmak isteyen kadınların uğradığı aşağılayıcı hareketlerin ve sözlerin nedeni bu durumdan kaynaklanmaktadır. Neyse ki, zaman içerisinde sörf sporu içerisinde kadınların rolüne ilişkin düşünce değişmiştir. Sonuç olarak, günümüzde milyonlarca kadını spor dallarında aktif olarak görmek mümkündür; özellikle de tarihi spor dallarında. Her ne kadar günümüzde kadınlar sörfte başarı sağlamış olsa da, geçmişte sörf yapabilmek ve kendilerini kabul ettirebilmek için haksız rekabetlere ve baskılara maruz kalmışlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sörf, kadın sörfçüler, sporda cinsiyet ayrımcılığı, medya imajı, karşılaştırmalı sporlar

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## INTRODUCTION

Three Hawaiian princes [1] in the city of Santa Cruz first introduced surfing to California in 1833. Since then, surfing has become a fairly populated sport where both males and females participate competitively. Furthermore, commercialization [2] has made surfing an extremely popular sport and this has resulted in an abundance of surfers in beaches, whether it be for recreational or spiritual purposes. It is this abundance of people that has led to turmoil regarding contrasting beliefs and gender roles within the surf community. Gender roles within the male dominated sport have led to severe cases of intimidation in which male surfers ensure their domination at the expense of humiliating and objectifying women. A woman's image in the surf community is a complex issue because oftentimes both male and female surfers alike will degrade female surfers. According to Cotterill and Letherby [3] societal beliefs stereotype women, as the weaker links while men are perceived as protectors. If women choose to move away from such stereotypes their sexuality is questioned, and they are considered unfeminine for choosing to stand up for themselves and excel in a male-dominated sport. Despite these obstacles, women have fought for equality, and today, through the creation of new technology and the revival of old technology; women [4] have altered the surf world and, in effect, redefined a surfer's perspective on womanhood. By believing in themselves and training to their full capacity regardless of their gender, these female athletes have boosted the confidence of young female surfers and created an inviting environment where they know they can succeed. Nowadays we possess countless proficient female surfers who excel at what they do. In fact, we even have women that surf better than men. This proves that gender has absolutely no effect when it comes to sports like surfing, in which there is no contact between competitors. Women have shown to the world that this sport is not designed just for men and that they do not need to be treated differently when competing.

In this study, recent research points to more updated reasons for sports segregation in surfing have been analyzed. It is investigated in conceptually not only whether women and men are only different in sports preferences but also whether different behaviors in competitive situations affect their choices. Since gender differences in areas of sports have a significant impact on their status by changing their well-beings, the expectations of young cohorts as well as their experience, preferences and sports background are becoming watershed at this point to explain girls'/women's future outcomes. The remainder of the study is organized as follows. In the next session, a short insight to the history of women surfers is provided. Section 2 indicates a brief survey on challenges of women surfers in the world. Section 3 describes the media effect on surfers' image and compares Europe with USA. Section 4 provides a summary of the main findings for women surfers, the gender segregation in surf world and implications for policies.

## WOMEN SURFERS IN THE HISTORY

It is a common notion that women who participate in traditionally 'male' activities, tend to be less feminine [5]. This, in part, is founded on the fact that, in order to perform adequately in an activity or a sport, muscles are needed, which, in turn, are the landmark of male dominance and male sexuality [6]. As a consequence, women who defy these stereotypes are often victimized through sexist and heterosexist discrimination and verbal harassment, while having to deal with media indifference and lack of endorsement [7]. Moreover, female athletes with strong and toned bodies are often labeled as too 'masculine.' Although physical activity and sports are means of female empowerment [8], it is apparent that if women need to adhere to feminine standards in order to be accepted as female athletes, they will be disempowered as well [7]. Nevertheless, not all activities and sports abide by that rule. Sports and activities that have been traditionally considered as feminine, including dancing, gymnastics, tennis and ice-skating, are immune to these standards to reach acceptance. Still, women who wish to actively take part in sports that are heavily colored by their male representatives need to overcome several barriers to gain acceptance. We should not underestimate the importance of gender relations when we assess leisure phenomena that have been an integral part of the male domain until now. Evolving definitions of gender and gendered societal roles have to impact and change leisure cultures and the way we experience them. In conjunction with the rising numbers of women wishing to take part in traditionally male-dominated activities, offers researchers grand opportunities to evaluate how women experience these activities, and how such experiences integrate into the context of their wider lives [9].

The topic of oppression towards women in surf has been studied and analyzed by numerous researchers

across the world. Vlachos [10] stated the following in her research about gender inequality of women surfers: "After analyzing the research questions, the data, and my small sample of interviewees, I concluded that the research implied the following: women surfers are treated unequally through not having any major influence over the sport, through the many challenges that face them, and through limited media representation." She reached to the conclusion that women have faced numerous difficulties throughout the years when trying to make an influence in this sport. This means most that notable dominance of men in surf has made them the party who has a considerable influence in the sports, and it is they, who draw more interest when competitions take place. Sponsors widely prefer to represent a male surfer because they know that way they will earn far more money. Despite the fact that surf is no longer seen as a men-only sport, the spectators do not care too much about watching competitions which only feature female surfers. Just like in most sports in the world, the female version is far less popular resulting in smaller audiences whenever there is a tournament or competition featuring women. Vlachos stated that women would not be treated equally in any sport until they are treated equally in our society. Because our world thinks of men as the stronger of the sexes, and men completely dominate the field of extreme sports like surf, when women competitions take place, they are commonly seen as the boring or lighter version of the real tournament. For this reason, the main event of every tournament often features male surfers.

"Even though the numbers of women surfers are increasing, women are constantly playing "catch up" with men surfers because they can not compete with the sponsorship dollars and career spans that men surfers experience. Overall the majority of study participants felt that most of the influence over the future of surfing would still come from the male surfing community. Through my research, I concluded that traditional gender inequalities such as the notion that men are better at sports than women cause the imbalance of power between men and women surfers, which is why women surfers face great challenges in the sport." [10] Nevertheless, Caruso [11] sees this situation in a more optimistic way, as there are a handful of women who do not care at all about the standards and misconceptions about surf. In recent years, more and more women are getting involved in this sport. Women are starting to ignore these social barriers that prevent them from being athletic and feminine at the same time. Strong women who dare to challenge men in "their own sport" are no longer seen as lesbians who just want to prove a point. As Reed [12] indicates, women prove themselves as courageous by just entering the water when many others do not. Women have shown they are strong even in the strangle-hold and barriers of social beliefs and structural inequities of the sport. In the future of women's surfing is a hope that no girl will ever hear the words of Holly Beck's mother, "Surfing is for boys. Girls sit on the beach looking cute in their bikini. You're never going to get a boyfriend out there!" Reed also foresees a bright future in female surfing. It is no coincidence that she expressed such an opinion, for women are starting to realize they too can compete at an international level and make a living out of surfing. Sure, they still have some complications, like the fact that sponsors usually prefer to represent male surfers or the fact that women tournaments are not as popular as men tournaments around the world. Even so, these issues will start to resolve with time, provided women don't stop demanding a change in our way of seeing life. In some years, surfing will see the same situation that international soccer is seeing right now. Several years ago, female soccer went completely unnoticed which discouraged women who liked the sport from getting involved in the world of soccer. Nevertheless, people started seeing the potential these girls have and started noticing that these matches can even be more interesting than the ones they had seen every day. In fact, for the first time, ever women have been featured in a FIFA game developed by EA Sports. Back when this game was released, absolutely no one thought they would one day include women in the game. Female players, regardless of the sport, are starting to get noticed. Soon enough, there won't be differences at all in extreme sports life surf.

Another paper provided by Reed analyzes the current image of the surf girl. This is an image of a young and inexperienced surfer who rarely gets into the water and when she does, she ends up getting drowning or needing the help of a man. The media is the main reason why female surfers are not taken seriously. Most movies and TV series featuring surfer girls always portray them as passive people who just care about dating the surfer boys-the real surfers. Reed [12] states in her paper: "Hollywood has both helped surfing become more popular while at the same time restricting the realistic and positive roles for women and girls. On one hand, more women and girls are headed towards the beach to try this new active sport. And, on the other hand, experiences of women and girls show that they are not fully accepted as athletes. Gidget and other

media that constricted the role of the female surfer to one that is passive and inexperienced popularized the representation of a female surfer as a kook. This treatment continues to be replicated on beaches today.”

She concludes that while the media encourages women to try surfing, it causes people see these girls as inexperienced women who just want to have fun in the ocean. Embracing social equality also means putting aside the sexist movies and programs that portray women as incapable of becoming serious and respected athletes.

All in all, researchers have agreed that female surfers indeed suffer from some disadvantages when compared to male surfers. The difficulty to get serious sponsors willing to represent them and the fact that they are not taken as seriously as men, make their chances of achieving full equality in surfing pretty slim. However, they have already managed to stop this sport from being a men-only activity. Nowadays we are able to see women on every single beach, surfing alongside men. While it’s true that we still have more male surfers, the numbers are sure to even out if the female surfers’ population keeps growing at this pace.

## CHALLENGES OF WOMEN SURFERS

When it comes to women in surfing, they should begin by acknowledging that the same barriers exist in surfing as the ones already identified in other sports. There is a subconscious bias in people regarding the capacity of someone to become a surfer. Women’s need to keep a balance between work, family and surf, is more pronounced. Moreover, women often lack the necessary confidence. Fortunately, these are barriers that can be surpassed. For starters, this can be achieved through the promotion of female surfers as role models. There are already surf clubs founded by women all over the country. Through these clubs, women are able to build networks and meet other surfers with whom they share common interests; clubs such as these give women the chance to find female surfing role models. When this happens, women and girls find it easier to overcome the inherent bias of the surfer’s expected image. They will witness other women surfing. They will also see how other women can balance work, family and surfing. Women will have the chance to compare and contrast their own personal experiences in their struggle to make a stand in a traditionally man-dominated setting. Although confidence is one of the landmark traits of a surfer, female surfers may find themselves struggling with it, despite being skilled in their sport.

Yet, in the surf world, competitors must possess qualities like strength and fortitude to obtain respect from their peers, which makes gender roles amongst surfers in the ocean a recurring issue. For example, Booth [13] indicates how strength is, in most cases, recognized as a male trait and women are considered delicate. He justifies his thoughts by saying, “Male surfers considered physical prowess a masculine trait and they deemed women comparatively frail, delicate, passive, and neurotic. Of course, these views were not confined to surfing, and were consistent with traditional social thinking about sport.” In simple words, many males give in to the societal belief that women are inferior to men and thus, believe that women are not capable of performing well in any competitive sport. The perception that women are inferior to men is heavily believed in the sports world because though female athletes are more prevalent today, there are still few leading females who excel in the sports industry. For example, an English firm recently ran a survey with all its female employees, asking why they didn’t pursue higher positions. Their replies noted a lack of encouragement from their peers, and a lack of confidence as well. Things are not different for women in water either. For some, paddling for waves is a source of fear. They may be skilled enough to catch the wave and surf on it, but their lack of confidence may deter them from going for it. By adopting female role models, witnessing other women surfers in action, and supporting each other, they may gain more confidence. Also, today women account for only 42 percent of head coaches in women’s sports and 2 percent in men’s sports [14]. Assumptions that women are not capable of excelling in a predominantly male populated industry makes it much more difficult for women to enter the sports industry as players on a team and as head coaches for teams, especially male teams. Even when there are women in the sports industry, they are still considered incapable of leading a male sports team. The fact that males are more involved in the sports world makes it easier for women to feel intimidated and oftentimes men will take advantage of such insecurities to eliminate their competition. By lowering a female surfer’s self-confidence, male surfers, other female surfers, and society as a whole widen the gap of female surfers’ acceptance within

the surf culture and the sports industry altogether. Women are discouraged from surfing with males, because of the roughness of the sport. Society believes that women trying to surf alongside men are dangerous and that women should participate in ‘feminine hobbies’ such as dance and drama instead. This creates a gap for men as well because society makes it harder for men to begin sports like dance and cheer. If men participate in these sports they are often harassed by their male peers and questioned about their sexual preference.

By intimidating a female surfer, male surfers satisfy their need of defining male dominance. Booth [13] indicates how often times women are referred to as props to enhance men’s masculinity. He says, “Paradoxically, the fraternal structure of surfing culture and its close association with the beach meant that women helped men define their masculinity.” In other words, male surfers utilize women and humiliate them to prove their dominance and gain respect from their peers. Female surfers are not found threatening if they are easily put down, which is why male surfers attempt to shame the women to express themselves as the dominant figures and to lower a woman’s self-esteem, which altogether lowers their confidence in surfing. For example, Ashley Lloyd, a surfer, spoke about proving herself amongst male surfers as she was growing up in the 1960s, when there were very few women surfing. She said, “Growing up surfing, I have always felt like I had to prove myself because I’m a girl. So, I suck. Because I’m a girl surfer and girl surfers don’t surf well, don’t you know that?” [15]. She continues to discuss that if she committed a mistake while surfing, oftentimes she would lose her place in the beach and would not be able to catch another wave. If it were a male who missed a wave it would be humiliating as well, but it would not draw as much attention as a female surfer because it is easier to admit defeat if it is done so by another male surfer. Men feel insulted when a woman attempts to surf at an advanced level so they choose to attack the female surfers and bruise their self-esteem which can, in effect, ruin their chances in doing well in a competition.

By ruining the confidence in female surfers, male surfers strengthen societal beliefs that women can not handle competing against men because they are considered too emotional. However, because these women are constantly under attack, it is our personal opinion that they are that much stronger than men, because men do not face as much scrutiny as female surfers do in competitions. In fact, men have it much easier compared to women. Having to endure such humiliation provided by male surfers is commonly a way for them to improve. If a man suffers from said humiliation and degradation they are more likely to fall apart without knowing what to say or do. However, men feel confident because they know that is simply not going to happen, mainly because male surfers hang out in “packs” to be perceived as imposing. This way, women will be even more unlikely to approach the sea. Sure, there are a handful of female surfers who don’t care at all about what men say. Nevertheless, they are only a few, as the majority prefers to remain silent while men unfairly possess the ocean.

Surfing is most commonly practiced by males, which is why surfing is found to be such a competitive sport and thus makes it harder for women to become accepted in the surf community. Male surfers prove themselves amongst other male surfers by insulting each other and resorting to violent brawls over surf territories. This is what is called surf Nazis [16]. Society finds this to be normal because boys are recognized to fight and be messy. However, when approaching a female surfer, men are not allowed to use the same tactics as they would with another male because society does not approve of it, which is why male surfers choose to humiliate women in order to assert their dominance. Men dislike the idea of not being able to act as they normally would when there are women present in the ocean. For a man that always shows an aggressive and violent attitude, it can be hard to act “normally”. Men need to relieve that tension in some way and the way they choose is to humiliate women in private rather than in public. Men assert their dominance through demeaning comments and crushing female surfers in competitions.

Gabbard [17] discusses that male surfers comment belligerent jokes to female surfers to make them feel intimidated. Kampion [18] recalls that in the 1960s, male surfers would insult her during warm up sessions with comments such as, “You are pretty good, but why do not you come back when your tits are bigger.” She went on to say that these comments made it difficult for her to focus. She said that these experiences angered her, but she would utilize her anger as a way to reinforce her performance.

These comments satisfied the men’s hunger for female oppression. By insulting a woman’s femininity, the men felt like they were in control and had dominance over the women. Although men are unlikely to admit it, they are afraid of losing against a woman. If we were to see both genders as equals, there would be no such

fear. However, most men see women as the weak gender and find it inconceivable for them to win against them in a direct competition. Not only will the male surfer feel bad about himself, but his peers will also proceed to humiliate him for losing against a woman. In order to avoid such a degrading situation, men tend to assault and offend their female competitors. While doing so, they manage to distract them from the competition and ensure victory and reputation. Nevertheless, if the male surfer still loses against a female competitor, he will most likely generate countless excuses explaining the reasons of his loss. No matter how evident it might be, the man is immensely unlikely to admit his defeat against a woman especially in a sport, which has always been dominated by men. Even when they have lost, they deliver a wide range of insults to the female competitor to make her feel that her victory is worthless and was a result of external circumstances which had nothing to do with surfing skills.

Furthermore, because surfing has always been predominantly male populated, it is common for females to feel awkward about approaching surfing as a sport. Wiatt [19] interviewed with a female surfer, Claire, and concluded that the reason women are intimidated is because of decades of male domination in the sport: "I don't see many chicks in the water. I guess maybe they are intimidated because of the past being so dominated by male surfers." Wiatt realizes that the reason there are not many female surfers in the ocean is because it is predominantly male dominated and male surfers can be quite aggressive in the ocean. The reason surfing is populated by men the most is because women are not introduced to surfing at a young age and thus it is not easily accepted on a cultural level. Another perspective in regards to why it is not culturally accepted for women to enter the surf world is because in some cultures and beliefs it is considered highly inappropriate for women to reveal their bodies, like wearing bathing suits, in public. These cultural perceptions regarding women and surfing have been around since the dawn of the sport. For that same reason, it will be no easy task to alter that misperception about female participation in the surfing world. For instance, in a culture where it has always been considered inappropriate for women to show their body in wetsuits or bikinis, it will be even more difficult for women to be a dominant part of this sport, and for the whole community to change their way of thinking. For these reasons, there are some places in the world in which men are bound to dominate surfing.

## **MEDIA AND THE SURFER GIRL IMAGE**

The media contributes to the discrimination of female surfers because it brainwashes women into believing that if they are not skinny, tan, and blonde they are not considered attractive and they will fail in the industry. This, of course, is untrue, but unfortunately, even today talented female surfers are not as popular as the "Roxy Girls" [20] because they do not fit the aesthetic image that surf brands such as Roxy, Billabong, and Rip Curl broadcast to its consumers. Women are being marginalized in the media because it broadcasts female surfers in small bikinis and instills that women be recognized for their killer bodies rather than their abilities to surf. Heywood and Dworkin [21] discuss that when female surfers are recognized for their appearance rather than their talents, society is reinforcing traditional gender roles giving aspiring female surfers the impression that "only appropriately feminine athletes draw the commercial benefits of that attention." This oppresses the female body by bruising a woman's femininity and because she does not want to be recognized as "less of a woman" she is more inclined to drop her pursuits of becoming as a professional female surfer. Female surfers are inappropriately represented in the media because the brand is trying to appeal to young girls. However, by displaying women on the cover of surf advertising with unattainable characteristics, for the most part by most female surfers, the media [22] is setting up expectations that young girls will feel reluctant to become a part of a sport with such a complex image. Unfortunately, this problem is not only present in surfing, but in every aspect of life in which media has an influence. The image of the woman is commonly materialized to the point of which they are not valuable if they don't have a certain type of body. The negative impact that this issue causes on women around the world is immense. Because women feel their body is not worthy of being shown to the public in a wetsuit or a bikini, they don't even want to go to the beach. All the marketing campaigns around the sport of surfing make women think that they need a perfect body to be surfers. Of course, this is far from being the truth, as female surfers don't even have to show their skin when competing.

Moreover, because female surfers are not easily accepted in the male dominated sport, many female surfers are forced to choose between being considered feminine or athletic. Female surfers are given close to impossible standards to meet in order to be considered both feminine and athletic; however, realistically, not

all female surfers can fit the Alana Blanchard image. Alana Blanchard [23] is comfortable with being known as an attractive surfer. "It's good to be recognized [as a woman], she says, "and it makes you feel good inside, that's what you are - a woman - so why try to hide it? I am not trying to hide that just because I surf." However, the reason that she promotes the idea of being both attractive and athletic is because she fits that image. The female surfers who do not fit that image are at a loss that could potentially ruin their career.

Southerden [24] discusses that if women do not follow the feminine role of being kind and pretty, their femininity could be questioned. "Perhaps by 'going hard", these women always risk their own heterosexuality being questioned under the normative male gaze of the heterosexual female body. In other words, society's opinion of a woman's femininity will change because society is not comfortable with the idea of female surfers and women, in general, standing up for themselves. Advertisement agencies are driven through aesthetics, which means that female surfers who do not fit the sexy surfer chick image are at a loss of recognition and are given fewer opportunities. Kim Mearig [25], surf world champion in 1983, speaks about her own personal experience regarding the 'Roxy Girl' image, "As a woman, we really had to prove ourselves in competition to get anything. Not only did you have to rip and win contests you had to look good. And now the girls are still the girls that are doing like the promotional trips and getting paid to go surfing. But you still notice they're all the Roxy Girls and they all look really good." Unfortunately, for the women who do not have these amazing bodies, it is much more difficult to receive sponsors because of their body type. As for these women who are attractive, they are portrayed as sex symbols and are oftentimes not taken seriously. This being said, it is clear that women have a disadvantage in this sport. If they are not attractive enough they will not receive enough sponsors, which will discourage them from continuing to compete. However if they are incredibly attractive, they will not be recognized by their surfing abilities, as they will only be recognized for having a nice body. This is definitely an issue, which draws women away from this sport; they do not want to get involved in an activity that will make them feel insecure about their body and exploit them every time they step on their board. Interestingly enough, this is not an issue with male surfers, as the audience and sponsor don't care that much about their physical appearance. As stated by Warshaw [26], men feel more confident when surfing for they are not seen with the same eyes as women. Even if they don't have a dream body they can be successful in surfing and earn a considerable amount of money via sponsors. When people go to see a men-only tournament they actually go to see the best surfer in the competition. This is not always the case when the tournament features female surfers, where the majority of the spectators are men looking for the hottest girl in the competition. Perhaps the clearest example of this problem is provided by the World Wrestling Entertainment. The WWE is probably one of the most well-known entertainment organizations in the world, hosting events throughout the year featuring both male and female superstars. However, the fights that you can see in both categories differ a lot. When there is a fight featuring male superstars, the audience actually watches and enjoys the wrestling experience. Nobody watches these fights for the superstars' bodies, but they watch it because they want their favorite wrestler to be the champion. The situation is flipped with WWE's divas. These female wrestlers are forced to show a significant amount of skin when fighting. This causes the audience to completely ignore the results of the fight. Although the sport itself is unrelated to surfing, this is a clear example of how women are completely materialized in most sports around the world. With this perspective, it is not hard to understand why most women prefer to pursue other dreams.

This is not to say that female surfers [27] do not use sexual appeal to their advantage. Female surfers who are aware of their attractiveness strategize so they can steal waves from other male surfers. For example, in the series of Wiatt's [19] interviews, he asks Alice, a female surfer, "Have you ever seen female surfers being hassled at your local break?" To which she replies, "No, they're all hot." This expresses how women use their appeal to remain protected from the surf Nazis. Women avoid getting hassled by the men but are unfortunately forced to objectify themselves to get a good surf. As for those women who decide to not give in to male oppression, they are usually considered to be 'lesbian feminists' because they are not interested in the 'compliments' that they are given. As stated in Stedman [28], feminists according to at least one contributor to Tracks [magazine], are 'lesbians and intellectuals' and ultimately 'irrelevant' to the debate because they're so out of touch with their womanhood. This assumption makes women feel like they are being manly by choosing to surf, thus intimidating them even further because of the stereotype that surfing is a male sport. Women

want to be perceived as equals to their male competitors but expect to still be recognized as sexy women. It is extremely unfortunate that women have to compromise their femininity in order to be taken seriously in a sport, because their validity as an athlete should not be recognized in accordance to their gender, rather it should focus on their talent. These women who have an attractive body and use it to their advantage are not helping the majority of the female community. By doing this, they are establishing a standard, which all female surfers should supposedly possess. By taking advantage of their looks to get benefits, they are forcing other women who don't possess this body to simply endure all the critics and insults provided by men.

Despite the obstacles, female surfers are altering the surf world for future generations of female surfers. Innovations are the reason for high populations of female surfers in the 20th century. Linda Benson [29], one of the first women to tackle big waves in Hawaii in the 1950s and 1960s, believes that the revival of the long board explains the new popularity of surfing among women. Long boards are extremely stable which makes it relatively easier to catch waves and to stand up. This is not the only form of technology that has risen. "Muslim Surfer Girl Part 2" [30] discusses how women in Bangladesh wear wetsuits that cover from head to toe to protect the body from the sun and to respect the Islamic belief that a woman must remain fully clothed at all times. In the case of Nasima, a Muslim female surfer, her now ex-husband, disapproved of her wearing the wetsuit because he perceived it as revealing, but she stood firm and decided to compromise by layering her tunic over her wetsuit. Nasima wore her suit and like the other girls wore her long tunic on top of it. Though he [Nasima's husband] tried to exert his disapproval with her slick, new, seafaring style, she didn't appear to be bothered one bit. It was obvious that she held some amount of power in that relationship. Nasima is an example of women breaking barriers even in conservative areas; she stood up for herself and did not allow for male oppression to affect her goals of surfing. The third article of innovative clothing was the creation of the female board shorts, which made it possible for a woman to surf comfortably both as a surfer and as a woman. If it were not for the female board shorts, women would not be able to perform the proper surf tricks because they would have to worry about other male surfers staring them down as eye-candy or that their bathing suit would come undone.

Females are claiming their place and redefining what it means to be a female surfer to fight against the objectivity in the surf world. Women are gaining more support from the media and society as a whole, for example, women are appearing more in sports magazines there are even magazines such as Women Surf Style Magazine, Surf Girl, and Jetty girl dedicated purely to female surfers. Female surfers are being displayed more so in films such as Blue Crush and these show the progress female surfers have made to become successful surfers. Euwer and Hudson [25] admit, "It's accepted more now we guess... back then we were looked upon as like a freak. Women's surfing is all of a sudden cool and it only took them twenty to thirty years to become cool. It is like, I have been doing this forever."

As it is seen, companies from all around the world are noticing the increasing amount of woman who is willing to participate in this sport. It is because of women like Nasima that people notice and realize that women deserve to be treated equally when practicing a sport. Because of these strong women who decide to break society's barriers, companies from all over the world are starting to notice their presence and are providing women with new benefits and products for them to surf more comfortably. It was no coincidence that someone decided to invent the female board shorts. The individual who created this innovative piece of clothing foresaw a promising market in the industry. They noticed that women too wanted to participate in this sport but were limited by some factors that kept them from surfing comfortably in the presence of men. It is guaranteed that products like this one will keep appearing in the coming years, as gender barriers are finally starting to fade. It can be proved relatively new change with a recent example that has been a huge surprise for most soccer fans. In the latest installment of the popular soccer game, FIFA female footballers have also been included. It's the very first time in the history of FIFA that they allow female footballers to appear in the game. Just like the person who invented the female board short, EA Sports has realized that women are becoming increasingly important and popular in sports. Women are finally starting to be seen as serious athletes instead of objects. Of course, there is still a long way to go, for not every single sport on the planet provides equal conditions for both genders.

Consequently, now that there are more women in the ocean the issues of "girl localism" comes to rising. Girl

Localism, according to Comer [31], is the protection of girlhood and maintaining respect in the male dominated sport of surfing. This varies from case to case, but most female surfers like the attention they receive from the other male surfers. Female surfers were given recognition and acceptance from male surfers for being some of the few women that surfed. Ashley admits that when seeing other girls surfing she would get jealous and a bit territorial, thinking, "Who's that? I am the girl here." Women enjoy the fact that there are more female surfers in the ocean today, but they also realize that being one of the few female surfers had its advantages. This causes some controversy among women surfers.

Since research regarding female engagement in activities and sports that have been traditionally identified as male-dominant, such as surfing, has been scarce, with this trend only changing in the past decade, when feminine appearances were examined in this research, it was acknowledged that women are able to individualize their appearance in order to get accommodated to a specific subculture. The woman's values largely define appearances, making the highly variable, whereas the divergent femininities in the context of the cultural surrounding also play a major role. For instance, Sisjord's study [32] showed that, within snowboarding, 'babes' use a feminine, womanly appearance to achieve inclusion and society acceptance. On the contrary, 'fast girls' self-identify as 'one of the boys' and match their appearances accordingly. A 'fast girl' enjoyed seamless inclusion within the culture of snowboarding but had to deal with potential judgment from the rest of the society [32]. Women's appearances within the context of male-dominated activities have an additional implication, as shown in the literature: how do the media represent women? Although this topic holds a critical position within the sports literature in general, it becomes even more important because of the masculine and usually 'borderline-lawful' character of the cultures surrounding alternative activities and sports such as snowboarding, surfing and skateboarding [33]. Within these cultures, we often find alternative attitudes and lifestyles, which usually intent to provoke, shock, and go against social norms [34]. When such cultures are represented and marketed, they often objectify women and girls sexually, with that objectification playing a central part in the whole theme [35]. Rinehart [36] has also depicted the current situation in the culture of action sports. With very few exclusions to the rule, women were generally now allowed to surf, leaving the waves strictly to men, until the 1950s. This is when Gidget appeared and led to the creation of a new era in female surfing. Gidget was the name of a fictional character, and also the title of series of films and novels, based on a young Californian girl; Kathy Kohner. Her adventure of breaking into the male-dominated area of surfing was recorded by her father, professor and Hollywood screenwriter Frederick Kohner [37]. Nevertheless, from political and feminist points of view, there was no consensus regarding the actual outcome of the high-pitched Hollywood novels and films, especially since women's stories in the 1950s tended to sell well [38]. Despite the controversy, the Gidget sensation managed to leave a mark, including the introduction of the beach culture, surfing, and an attractive lifestyle to millions of teenage girls [39]. The surfing culture started to gain more and more popularity and enjoyed increased representation from the media, as well as the fashion, music and entertainment industries. Gidget became a hero and role model for many young women of that time, and, as some might say, an advocate for girl power and women's liberation [38]. During the 1950s and 1960s, the political, structural and economic context allowed the surfing culture to prosper. Financial prosperity made it feasible to travel for surfing [13], however, as the surfing subculture gained mainstream status, women surfers were not necessarily benefited. As a subculture, surfing was used to be correlated with social irresponsibility, carefreeness, a nomadic lifestyle, and masculinity, but now it was promoted as an activity readily uptaken by anyone [40].

Women professional surfers had to overcome another obstacle, namely the hesitation of large surfing brands to become their sponsors. In fact, leading surfing brands even avoided creating wetsuits and associated gear for women, because they thought it would hurt their 'hardcore' surfing. What is more, girls that 'hang around' and actively participate in surfing activities 'hanging' around and partaking in the surfing scene, would be frowned upon by society, due to their seemingly 'low' standards [39]. The primary reason for this was that women and girls who were involved with surfing were thought as mere sexual objects that satisfied the male surfers' needs.

### **Comparison of Female Surfers in Turkey, in Europe and in United States of America**

When surfing arrived in the USA it spread incredibly fast. Not long after it was brought to California countless

people started practicing the sport, and women were no exception. Even so, it was still a sport dominated mainly by men. Women often struggled to be successful in this sport and opted for other activities. Nevertheless, the female population started increasing in the surfing community. Little by little, women were becoming an important part of the surfing community in the U.S. Companies [41] started to realize this and launched a wide range of products, services, and benefits in order to help women integrate into the world of surfing. Soon enough, the U.S.A. was offering surfing schools just for women and entire clothes brands designed just for female surfers. Nowadays, female surfers are widely accepted in the U.S. and are seen equally. For some reason, the U.S. didn't have too many troubles when accepting women in this sport.

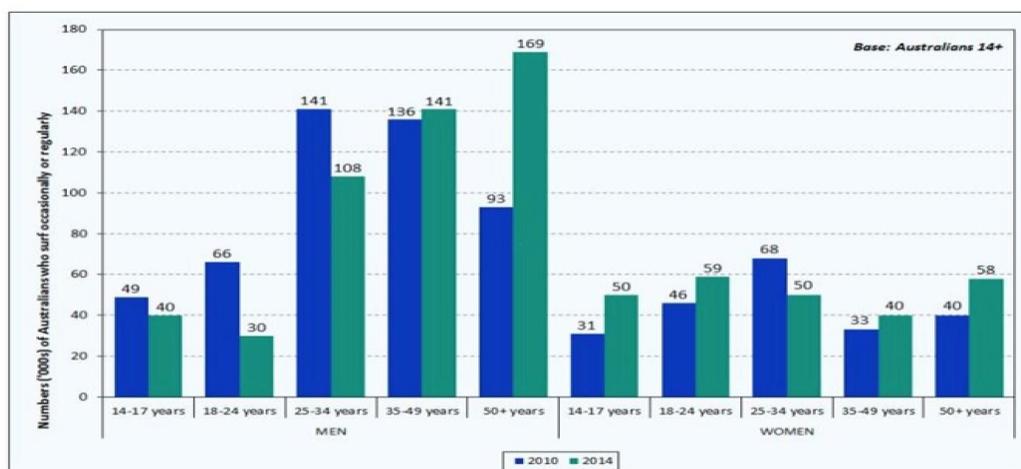
The situation was notably different in Europe; as certain European countries tend to be more conservative. As a result, women were kept from becoming professional surfers. With the passing of time women in Europe have also been accepted in the surfing community. Even so, you will see far more female surfers in the U.S. than in Europe, even now. This is because Europeans remained with that male chauvinism for a longer time and women took a modicum longer to be integrated into the world of surf.

All in all, both countries had to undergo a period of evolution and change in order for women to be accepted in the surfing community. The only difference between the U.S. and Europe was the speed at which women were accepted as equal surfers. Nowadays, hundreds of surfing tournaments are hosted both in the U.S. and in numerous countries throughout Europe. This is a circumstance, which was not seen some years ago.

The increasing popularity of feminism has also had an influence in women's being accepted as surfers in both the U.S. and Europe. Several years ago, feminism was seen as an outrageous ideology, which was worthy of social punishment. For that reason, women from the U.S. and Europe would not dare to start their career as surfers. Any kind of complaint would make them seem like criminals so they would avoid confrontation with men at all costs. This situation no longer exists in our world. In fact, feminism is an ideology, which is growing more and more each day. Consequently, women feel they have the right to surf with or without men. This idea of equality has encouraged thousands of women around the world to take a stand and start surfing regardless of what men could say or think.

Recently, Turkey has witnessed progress in surfing as well. Several people have traveled to various destinations across the country to engage in the sports activity of their interest. Alaçatı, which is located in Izmir-Cesme, has been an increasingly popular destination for surfers in Turkey. Worldwide, surfing destinations are primarily chosen based on their particular wind-wave and thermal conditions, as well as their local bathymetric data [42]. Alaçatı is postulated to possess extremely favorable geographic features for wind surfing [43, 44]. Buckley [45] noted that many individuals have the capacity and will to pay a price premium for extraordinary experiences in exotic, uncrowned locations. The aforementioned distinctive features grant Alaçatı a competitive advantage in the surfing tourism niche market. Such features include the fact that Alaçatı is a closed, safe cove, with favorable winds and shallow waters. Alaçatı's desirable geographical characteristics have led wind surfers all around the world to acknowledge it as the ideal destination for surfing. Infrastructure for the sport is provided by wind surfing schools that serve both local and foreign tourists. While Alaçatı is a favorite destination for many foreign and local wind surfing enthusiasts, its importance in the international scene is reinforced by the support of several prominent national and international organizations, including Wind Surf League, BauMax Surf Jump Show, Alaçatı Surf Festival, IFCA Surf World Championship, Pegasus Airlines PWA Wind Surf World Cup, Jim Beam Wind Surf World Championship, European Championship, Mistral Wind Surf World Championship, and Petrol Ofisi Olympic Wind Surf European Championship.

Research done in Australia by Roy Morgan [46]. Research showed that, in Australia, most surfers are still men. In fact, most surfers in Australia are men who are over fifty years old. They provide a chart, which evaluates the changes in surfing popularity between 2010 and 2014. As you can see, the amount of women who practice Surf, although smaller than the amount of male surfers, has increased in those four years.



Source: Roy Morgan; January–December 2010 ( $n=18,817$ ) and January–December 2014 ( $n=15,944$ ).

**Figure 1.** The amount of women surfers

In spite of the fact that the amount of male surfers is still considerably high in 2014, women have shown a drastic increase in just four years. If women's activity in Surf keeps growing at this rapid pace, they are expected to equal the amount of male surfers sometime soon. Just like Australia, the whole world has shown an overall increase in the amount of women surfers. Even more interesting about the chart is that there are far more young female surfers than there were in 2010. On the contrary, the amount of young male surfers has considerably decreased in those four years. This is a proof that our society is changing. Parents are teaching gender equality to their kids without even noticing. Those kids who are just learning how to surf won't have the concept of inequality in their minds because they are getting to surf among people of the opposite gender. Each new generation will have more young female surfers and less young male surfers until the numbers are similar. Only then will equality be reached in the surf world.

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of female surfers, through their complexity and personal character, conveyed potent messages to women of surfing. Several of these experiences were widely prevalent among the audience, while others were surprising and thought-provoking. Despite the barriers, surfing offered several benefits to women, contributing to their general life satisfaction, general wellbeing, and happiness. Women created and reshaped empowered, meaningful identities in a territory that continues to be male-dominated. They claimed this domain through boldness and toughness, underscoring their feminine nature and their support in ideals of beauty. This study shows that the experience of the woman surfer reflects her acceptance and equality. From the perspective of the third wave, the contemporary Surfer Girl is the apotheosis of a woman who believes she can have everything she wants [40]. The real question is, can she really?

Recently, more and more women are beginning to surf, and films like *Blue Crush* have influenced young females to become surfers. Though women have come a long way in the surf world, their efforts remain unfinished. Women may be recognized more now compared to the 1980s, but they are still not represented the way they should be. The women on the covers of female surf magazines are still stereotypical California girls or the "Roxy Girls". This is not to say that women who do not fit the stereotypical image of an attractive surfer are not represented in the media, but that they are not represented as much as those female surfers who do fit the stereotypical image. Women are still not viewed as a male's equal, but they are tolerated for being courageous enough to surf, and that within itself is progress. Women are becoming altogether more accepted in the surf world and through more efforts of acceptance, they will soon be viewed as equals in the sport of surfing and the sports industry altogether. Therefore, this research can do more than simply influence the nature of sports

for women; it will also raise awareness about how lifestyle marketing impacts female surfers and, according to Heywood [47] empower girls to acknowledge their position in the culture, how it shapes their lives, and what capacity they may have to stand against it. Women surfers have to make individual choices. They can either accept being victimized by commercialization and their portrayal as objects of sex, or they can actively participate in the process of diverting more attention towards their professional athletic abilities. Choosing the latter will empower women to catch the wave of gender equality in surfing sports.

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