"Where the normal rules don't apply": Cold-water swimming as a postmodern subculture of resistance

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Abstract

This dissertation ethnographically investigates the contemporary British phenomenon of cold-water swimming (CWS) as it manifests in London and Bristol, in relation to subcultural and Foucauldian theories of resistance. CWS is the practice of year-round, outdoor swimming in unheated water. The dissertation finds that engaging in CWS is felt by participants to be a means of resisting hegemonic impositions of power, which provides a brief experience of "freedom" from the perceived ills of modern life. In making this argument, this dissertation draws much-needed attention to the existence of adult subcultures of resistance, countering the youth-centred bias in subcultural studies (Leblanc 2001; Haenfler 2004; Patrick Williams 2007).

The dissertation suggests the concept of a "postmodern subculture of resistance" to understand CWS, combining Greener and Hollands' (2006) theorisation of a 'postmodern subculture' and Patrick Williams' (2009) 'subculture of resistance'. Motivation to regularly engage in CWS is found to emerge from a desire to resist to enforced docility of the body (Foucault 1975), a preference for wild and open spaces which are accessible to "un-docile" bodies, and the desire for self-governance, which cultivates of a collective identity in person and in the virtual world. Individual decisions to partake are suggested to be affected by body type, and people with bodies that this dissertation defines as 'deviant' (Urla and Terry 1995) appear particularly attracted to the practice. This dissertation challenges Haenfler's (2004: 408) claim that subcultures are always defined by an 'anti-structural sensibility', by demonstrating the omnipresence of power structures in CWS despite participants' attempts to self-govern. Such a finding is in line with Foucault's concept of resistance as itself an expression of power (Foucault cited in Feder 2011).

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Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Mhairi Gibson, whose calm nature has been incredibly stabilising throughout this process. Thank you also to my family and friends, who have heard me say the words 'cold-water swimming' more times than they probably thought possible over the last few months. Finally, I give thanks to the cold-water swimming community, the topic of this dissertation. Every cold-water swimmer I encountered during my research was so friendly and welcoming, and the community gave up so much time to help me via interviews, perceptive insights, literature recommendations, and so much more. Being a part of this group during the pandemic has kept me positive and inspired, and I truly hope that my dissertation does justice to their phenomenal spirit.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, this work is my own work. I have identified all material in this dissertation which is not my own work through appropriate referencing and acknowledgement. Where I have quoted or otherwise incorporated material which is the work of others, I have included the source in the references. Any views expressed in the dissertation, other than referenced material, are those of the author.

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1 Introduction

1.1   Resistance and British cold-water swimming practices

This dissertation moves away from the academic focus on cold-water swimming (CWS) as a practice which functions as a health intervention (Foley 2015, 2017; Foster 2020; Juster-Horsfield and Bell 2021). It examines CWS instead as a collective practice of resistance. Resistance is an equivocal term in the social sciences, with many varying definitions. This ambiguity has led to its criticism, including claims it can be used as a 'catch-all' for many social phenomena (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Yet, as Edith Turner demonstrates regarding the concept of communitas (2012), the potency of certain concepts is found in the fact that they can be located in so many facets of human life. This dissertation argues that 'resistance' is one such concept and, because of this, employs Modigliani and Rochat's (1995: 112) broad definition of resistance as a practice of 'questioning and objecting'.

The impetus to examine CWS as a practice of 'questioning and objecting' (*ibid.*) stemmed from an observation of its increasing popularity in Britain over the last two years. Participation in the practice, which entails year-round outdoor swimming in unheated water, is estimated to have increased three-fold between 2019 and 2020, taking the number of regular cold-water swimmers in the UK to over one million (Outdoor Swimmer 2021: 13). While data on CWS pertaining to the first half of 2021 is difficult to acquire due to Britain predominately being under lockdown, surveys suggest that most cold-water swimmers who were regular participants in 2020 intend to maintain their practice in 2021, when they are able to do so (*ibid.*). Something about CWS appears to resonate with people in contemporary Britain, and this dissertation aims to shed light on what this may be with a theoretical lens of resistance. CWS is explored as a collective, rather than individual practice, as it is often carried out with other people. Even if one swims alone, time is often spent with other people at the swim site before or after the swim. There can also be a strong

group identity associated with the practice (Foster 2020). This dissertation ethnographically studies the online manifestations of CWS communities in London and Bristol, bringing focus to the previously unstudied question of how CWS exists as a social group across diffuse locations.

The popularity of CWS in Britain is not unique to contemporary times. As early as the Roman period, and again from the late Middle Ages until the start of what Ayriss (2009) terms the 'swimming pool age' in the early 20th century, bathing and swimming in cold water have been perceived as having numerous health benefits (Deakin 1999; Ayriss 2009; Parr 2011). However in the early 20th century, there was a shift from swimming in natural locations to swimming in lidos and indoor pools (Ayriss 2009). The reasons for this change are not entirely clear, but they appear to be connected to health and safety concerns about natural water quality and the risk of drowning (*ibid.*, Parr 2011). Furthermore, scholars have observed a correlation between the emergence of central heating and a declining belief in the health benefits of cold water, as individuals began to associate health and wellbeing with comfort (*ibid.*, Foster 2020). This dissertation seeks to understand why swimming habits in Britain appear recently to be reversing, moving away from the warmer swimming pool and back outside.

1.2   *Cold-water swimming in anthropology and other social sciences*

While pool swimming has been frequently studied in the social sciences (for example, see Scott 2009, 2010, DeLuca 2013, McMahon and Penney 2013a, 2013b, Zehntner and McMahon 2014, and Ward 2017), there remains a dearth of academic literature on CWS. As aforementioned, most of the existing literature on CWS revolves around its positive effects on both mental and physical health (Foley 2015, 2017; Bottley 2019; Foster 2020; Juster-Horsfield and Bell 2021). The remaining literature focuses on the in-person, local sociality of

CWS communities (Gould et al. 2020; Foster 2020; Moles 2020). One exception can be found in the work of Throsby (2013, 2016), who documents the personal pleasure she derives from outdoor marathon swimming training, and does not view this pleasure as a mental health intervention. Instead, she locates it as an individualised momentary break for post-menopausal women from the patriarchal pressures of life in an older woman's body (2013, 2016).

What is missing from the current literature on CWS is an anthropological understanding of cold-water swimmers as a social group, that is not necessarily limited by physical location. Blommaert et al. (2010) argue that the contemporary social climate is defined by an 'online-offline nexus' where individuals exist as much online as they do in-person. By looking at CWS and its online presence in London and Bristol, this dissertation explores the extent to which CWS practices and values are shared across physical boundaries and between people who are not personally acquainted with one another.

Such an investigation will also suggest an academic definition of the practice, which is currently absent in the literature. Furthermore, this research hopes to shed light on the social context in which a desire to partake in CWS arises. Other than Throsby (2013, 2016), none of the existing literature on CWS frames participants' emotional responses to CWS in relation to their external social world. Taking seriously Mascia-Lees' (2016) assertion that emotional responses are embedded in social contexts, this dissertation looks to theories of resistance, or theories of 'questioning and objecting' (Modigliani and Rochat 1995: 112), to understand the commitment of many cold-water swimmers to regular practice. This dissertation's research question is therefore identified as follows:

> 'How can contemporary cold-water swimming in London and Bristol be understood in relation to theories of resistance?'

Three research aims are also articulated to provide specificity in answering this question:

(1) Outline an academic definition of the phenomena.

(2) Identify the main reasons that participants engage in regular CWS.

(3) Identify how experiences of CWS, and decisions to partake, are affected by individual demographic factors.

This dissertation will review the various ways that resistance has been theorised in relation to subcultural theory and power theory, given that 'resistance as subculture' and 'resistance as power' are two theoretical frameworks later employed in answering the research question. It is shown that together, these theories shed light on group and individual dynamics as they relate to resistance, particularly regarding the role of agency and power in resistance movements.

1.3   Resistance as subculture

The broad applicability, or ambiguity, of the term 'resistance' (Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Raby 2005) has resulted in various attempts to categorise forms of resistance into typologies (*ibid.*, Raby 2005). In this dissertation, and in line with Patrick Williams' work (2009), resistance is understood to be usefully analysed through the lens of subcultural studies, as well as through Foucault's theory of power (Foucault 1975), as reviewed in Section 1.4. This dissertation perceives pre-defined typologies of resistance (q.v. Hollander and Einwohner 2004 and Raby 2005), as overly simplistic. It considers qualities of resistance as existing on a continuum, in accordance with Patrick Williams (2009). Patrick Williams (*ibid.*) demonstrates how subcultural theories are a prescient approach for understanding resistance, as they highlight the 'multidimensionality' of resistance. He suggests that it is useful to see resistance in terms of three dimensions, 'passive – active, micro – macro, and overt – covert', which are on continuums rather than being binary opposites (2009: 23). These three dimensions are relevant to this study of CWS, reflected below in two subsections: 'intentionality', which investigates the 'passive-active' and 'overt-covert' continuums, and 'scale', which explores the 'micro-macro' continuum.

Intentionality

Less intentional – more 'covert' and 'passive' – forms of resistance are often understood as everyday acts (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Much of the work of early subcultural theorists, based at the Birmingham School for Contemporary Cultural Studies (the CCCS), focused on passive resistance (Clarke 1976a; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Jefferson 1976; Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979). Resistance was considered in terms of style and ritual (Hall and Jefferson 1976), and often framed as a working-class response to middle-class hegemonic power, in an approach influenced by structuralist and neo-Marxian theories (Patrick Williams 2009). For example, the subcultural group "skinheads" was theorised as subconsciously

resisting the decline of working-class culture which took place in 1970s Britain (Clarke 1976a). More 'active', and 'overt', forms of resistance, such as protests (Jasper 1997) or social movements (Rupp and Taylor 1987) have often been theorised by social movement scholars or historians rather than subcultural theorists (Patrick Williams 2009). However, as the following subsection on 'scale' highlights, the difference between passive subcultural forms of resistance and active social resistance is often more nuanced on closer inspection (*ibid.*); a nexus herein incorporated into an analysis of resistance in CWS.

The second point of contention pertaining to intentionality is the importance of the actor(s) themselves perceiving their actions as resistant (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Scott (1985) and Leblanc (1999) argue that seeing one's actions as resistant is the only prerequisite for an action being a form of resistance, whereas other scholars see this as either near-impossible to ascertain (Schaffer 1995; Weitz 2001), or irrelevant (Hebdige 1979; St. Martin and Gavey 1996). The stance of this dissertation is, again returning to Patrick Williams' (2009) idea of a continuum, that the lines between what is and is not intentional are far more blurred than the current academic debate suggests. With regards to CWS, intentionality is understood as something complex, influenced by feelings that can be, but are not always, fully formed into social or political ideologies, but are nevertheless always responsive to socio-political forces. This complexity necessitates the introduction of Foucauldian theory, as well as a deeper understanding of the concept of 'scale'.

Scale

Debates over the nature of scale in subcultural theories of resistance have often separated resistance (Patrick Williams 2009) into 'micro' individual forms, like the CCCS's analyses of stylistic choices (Clarke 1976a; Hall and Jefferson 1976; Jefferson 1976; Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979), and 'macro' larger scale group movements (Scott 1985; Rupp and Taylor

1987; Goldstone 1991; Jasper 1997). However, this dissertation looks to Tsitsos (1999), Schilt (2003), Leblanc (2001) and Haenfler (2004), who, through their ethnographies of specific subcultures, have highlighted that even in the case of micro-psychological resistance, there is always an element of a macro 'subcultural frame of reference' (Cohen cited in Patrick Williams 2009: 26). For example, Haenfler's (2004) ethnography of the "straight edge" subculture shows that for youths who participate in the movement, abstention from drugs and sex is firmly located in ideas of both 'self-realization' and 'social transformation' (*ibid.*: 409). This study complicates dichotomous separations of resistance into micro and macro forms, in accordance with Patrick Williams' (2009) notion of a continuum, showing that ideas of (micro) personal growth and (macro) social change are often interrelated.

Postmodern subcultural theorists have contributed much to understanding these complexities of scale in subcultures (Thornton 1995; Redhead 1998; Muggleton 2000; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003), by showing that in a postmodern world, members of subcultures can be momentarily connected by their shared passion for an issue or practice, but also unknown to each other in their everyday lives. This has been documented with regards to "rave" subcultures (Thornton 1995; Maffesoli 1996; Redhead 1998; Bennett 1999). This dissertation employs Greener and Hollands' (2006) conceptualisation of a 'postmodern subculture' to navigate the interplay between micro and macro forms of resistance, highlighting that subcultures can be physically diffuse and yet connected by shared practices and values. This concept has been productively employed by Lawson and Langdridge in their (2019: 574) investigation of the "puppy play" subculture, a subsect of BDSM whereby people take on the 'persona' of a dog or handler. This dissertation utilises the concept of a 'postmodern subculture' in a similar vein to these authors, who also invoke Foucauldian theory to understand the "pup" subculture.

1.4 Resistance as power

Power is a foundational concept in subcultural theory (Patrick Williams 2009: 21). However, it is often unproblematised. This dissertation argues that Foucauldian theory yields insights into how specific subcultural dynamics emerge, and allows for greater specificity in analyses of power dynamics. This dissertation employs Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and the docile body, examining how Foucault conceived that individuals could resist these impositions of power. This dissertation takes issue with some feminist critiques of Foucauldian docility (Bordo 1989, 1993; Bigwood 1991; Soper 1993), which suggest his docile body is 'too docile' (Oksala 2011). It appears that these critiques neglect the extensive, but underemployed (Barnett 2016), Foucauldian theory on resistance, which unpacks how individuals are in fact able to make use of their own subjectivity in resisting dominant forms of power (Taylor 2011; Oksala 2011). This dissertation finds those feminist theories of the body that have extended Foucault's theories of docility to be useful, as they emphasise the nature of the docile body in a post-industrial capitalist society, which has direct relevance for CWS as a resistant practice (Bartky 1988; Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1993; Urla and Terry 1995; Mascia-Lees 2016; Carvalho and Annaler 2017).

Disciplinary power

The concept of disciplinary power was coined by Foucault (1975) to refer to a form of power that he saw as emerging with the decline of sovereign power, from the seventeenth century onwards (Taylor 2011; Hoffman 2011). Disciplinary power is power interspersed throughout social institutions, rather than held exclusively by those at the top of the social hierarchy (Hoffman 2011), and Foucault argued that hierarchical surveillance, architectural construction, and bureaucratic notation and classification of behaviour were all facets of this form of power (Foucault cited in Rabinow 2020: 209). Later in Foucault's career, he researched the ways in which disciplinary power could be resisted. Yet, Foucault's ideas

about resistance are often neglected in literature that employs Foucauldian theory (Barnett 2016). Foucault's work does not only pertain to the imposition of disciplinary power; Foucault himself rejected the use of heavy, forceful words to describe the role of power in contemporary life (Foucault cited in Feder 2011: 63). He argued that power 'produces reality' and that individual subjectivity emerges from the existence of power, and therefore 'the very effort of resistance must be understood itself as an expression of power' (*ibid.*). Such an understanding of resistance will be employed when considering the case of CWS.

Sutton's (2020) ethnography of 'digital detoxers' in Northern California and Eisenstadt's (2016) ethnography of two anarchist communities in Bristol both exemplify Foucault's ideas about the relationship between power and resistance, highlighting situations where power remains omnipresent despite resistances to hegemonic power. Both papers highlight contradictions inherent in trying to find 'freedom' and resist 'mainstream' forms of governance. Foucault argued that resistance to disciplinary power manifests as people governing themselves in different ways to the mainstream forms of governance, rather than a total absence of governance. The reclamation of religious practices, such as wearing the veil in Islamic feminism, is one example of this (Vintges 2011: 109), which is explored by Mahmood in her paper on the Egyptian Islamic revival (Mahmood: 2001).

Docile bodies

Foucault argues that through disciplinary power, bodies are 'subjected and practiced' (Foucault cited in Rabinow 2020: 182). These bodies are 'docile' (Foucault 1975); not 'given' or naturalised, but rather formed in relation to 'cultural practices of power' (Oksala 2011: 87). One example of this is the body of the soldier which, through training, is slowly moulded into the ideal, in terms of posture, habits, and body shape (Foucault cited in Rabinow 2020: 179). This theory has been appropriated by feminist embodiment scholars to understand how

patriarchal power structures influence the ways in which women shape their bodies (Bartky 1988), and also more broadly to understand how power influences bodies in a post-industrial, capitalist society (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1993; Mascia-Lees 2016; Carvalho and Annaler 2017). Berlant (2011) and Cvetcovitch (2012), for example, explore the feelings invoked under capitalism and highlight that emotions, often assumed to be individualised and private, are often situated in response to socio-political climates. This resonates with the 'micro-macro' continuum of subcultural theories of resistance (Patrick Williams 2009), emphasising again that personal decisions are often entangled with the broader social climate.

Also central to Foucault's theory of docility, however, is the notion that bodies are 'never completely docile' (Oksala 2011: 93). This raises the question of how it is possible for bodies to be "un-docile" and resistant to disciplinary power. Foucault argues that the body is *both* acted upon and a source of 'resistance against … discourses and techniques' (*ibid.*) (emphasis mine). Ethnographies by Mahmood (2001), Lester (2005), and Boddy (1989) exemplify how embodied, individual practices can resist enforced docility. Urla and Terry's (1995) theory of 'deviant bodies' provides a different lens through which to look at embodied resistance to docility, showing that body types such as bodies of size[1], disabled bodies and bodies of colour can be inherently deviant as they do not ascribe to normative ideas of a body type in a post-industrial society – to be fit, young, white, and slim (Urla and Terry 1995). The idea of an interplay between bodies that are docile and bodies that are deviant is employed in this dissertation to understand the phenomena of CWS.

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[1] This term has been selected to avoid fatphobia and to take into account the ongoing debates over group definition in fat studies (q.v. Gailey 2014).

2 Methodology

2.1   Recruitment

Self-selection sampling was used to recruit interview participants for this dissertation (Sharma 2017), followed by convenience sampling (Taherdoost 2016). I posted in four CWS Facebook groups, seeking volunteers. I posted in two London-based groups (*The Serpentine Swimming Club* and *Kenwood Ladies Pond*), and two Bristol-based groups (*Clevedon Lake and Sea Swimmers (CLASS)* and *South West Seal Pups*). I chose to post in Facebook groups because as a pre-existing active insider in the community (Wheaton 1995), I knew the community largely congregates online through Facebook. I was unable to recruit participants in-person due to the Coronavirus pandemic, however this was methodologically advantageous. Recruiting via an open request for volunteers rather than personally recruiting people waterside meant participants were self-selecting instead of being chosen by me, resulting in a less biased selection (Sharma 2017).

However, I encountered a problem when, within the first day of posting in these groups, over 70 participants had volunteered. My research required in-depth, ethnographic interviews with each participant and as such, time constraints required me to cut down this group of volunteers, and edit the Facebook posts to say that the study was full. Again, to ensure that the selection of participants was unbiased I used convenience sampling (Taherdoost 2016), so met with the 20 people who were available earliest. One woman asked to bring her husband, also a cold-water swimmer, to the interview, so in total there were 21 interviewees. To establish trust and maintain positive relationships with group members, I ensured that unchosen volunteers understood the sampling method used and apologised for being unable to interview them.

2.2   Online ethnographic interviews

20 interviews were conducted over Zoom with 8 male and 13 female participants between the ages of 23 and 72, all of whom swim all-year round in outdoor, unheated water in either London or Bristol. Interviews lasted between 34 minutes and 129 minutes, with an average time of 94 minutes. The semi-structured, 'ethnographic', interview style (Boellstorff et al. 2012), was chosen to ensure that specific topics were covered (Bernard 2006: 210) but that the conversation could still be dynamic and collaborative between researcher and participant (Davies 1999: 95). This, in turn, worked to assuage the inherent power disparity between interviewer and interviewee by allowing a co-creation of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). I created an interview schedule of 11 questions (reproduced in Appendix A) which covered the following themes: (1) reasons for starting and continuing a CWS practice, (2) preferred type of swim sites and reasons for this, (3) the bodily experience of CWS and whether this had an impact on body image, and (4) perceptions about the demographics of cold-water swimmers. A short list of questions was chosen to 'productively slow the conversation' (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 96), allowing space for nuances and particularities to arise. These included pauses and prompts from me, the interviewer, to go deeper, such as 'What do you mean by that?'.

Interviews were used as the main form of data gathering in this dissertation because they provide direct insight into the meanings people ascribe to their own behaviour, and this is a foundational element of cultural understanding (Boellstorff et al. 2012). Furthermore, whilst some components of a society are obscured by what people say about it (a problem addressed below), people are often remarkably articulate about how their own social group functions (q.v. Mead 1928). To remove the voice of the participant, and exclusively read the culture like a symbolic text, is problematic as it arrogantly assumes the anthropologist knows "better" than participants themselves. This methodological supposition I ascribe to here

borrows from the assertion, highlighted by the ontological turn, that we must 'take others seriously' (Pickering 2016).

2.3   Online participant observation

Yet as Malinowski observed, there also exists a distinction between 'what people do and what they say they do' (Malinowski cited in Boellstorff et al. 2012), and interviews can be limited in this regard. In light of this drawback, whilst giving primacy to the interviews for reasons explained above, I also engaged in seven months of online participant observation with the aforementioned four Facebook groups, taking fieldnotes about my engagement with the groups (Boellstorff et al. 2020). As part of this, I also engaged with literature from books, blogs, and other websites when they were discussed by participants.

Online participant observation was chosen not only because of the restrictions on in-person meetings due to Covid-19 (Lems 2020), but also because I sought to understand how the CWS group extended across physical boundaries. I hoped to see how swimmers who were not personally acquainted interacted with each other. In selecting this method, I chose to actively engage with the complex 'transcontextual' field site that has arisen in anthropology in light of the development of virtual worlds (Blommaert et al. 2010). This physically diffuse field site was the focus of my research rather than a disadvantage due to the pandemic (Boellstorff et al. 2012). In line with the ethical guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (2012) I made sure that any participants, both interviewees and those whose posts or comments I analysed as part of my participant observation, received information forms, regarding the project and how their data would be used, and signed consent forms (see Appendix B), so that they could give their 'informed consent' (*ibid.*).

2.4 Data analysis

The data gathered consisted of interview transcriptions (see Appendix C) and fieldnotes from my participant observation. The method of data analysis was thematic coding, chosen to translate 'free flowing texts into nominal variables' (Bernard 2017: 459). I began with general themes which had emerged from the literature and formed the basis of my interview questions, and refined and changed these as I analysed the data (Willms et al. and Miles and Huberman cited in Bernard 2017: 460) and looked for patterns, similarities, and differences (Boellstorff et al. 2012). I then used Miles and Huberman's (1994) technique of 'memoing' to understand how themes were related to one another and to explain both similarities and discrepancies. These methods were chosen to help me establish the academic distance required to analyse a community in which I was already an active insider (Wheaton 1995), as academic distance can sometimes be compromised when doing anthropology 'at home' (Greenhouse 1985; Peirano 1998). All names of participants were anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

3 Discussion theme 1: Collectively resisting disciplinary power

3.1   Introduction to Discussion

This dissertation suggests the concept of a "postmodern subculture of resistance" to understand CWS, a phenomenon currently gaining popularity throughout the UK. The first discussion theme, 'Collectively resisting the disciplinary power', suggests that CWS makes participants feel they can resist impositions of disciplinary power on their body that they experience in everyday life, such as those stemming from the swimming pool, the office job, and the mainstream media. This theme highlights that participants across disparate locations have similar motivations for engaging in CWS, that centre around how CWS allows them to access a feeling of freedom. CWS is therefore consistent with Greener and Hollands' (2006) conceptualisation of a 'postmodern subculture' as one which centres around shared motivations, but not necessarily a shared physical location. Individual decisions to partake are also found to be affected by body type, and it is suggested that people with bodies defined by this dissertation as 'deviant' (Urla and Terry 1995) are particularly attracted to the practice.

The second discussion theme, 'Consequences of resisting disciplinary power', considers how swimmers' desires to resist disciplinary power result in a hierarchy of preferences regarding cold-water swim location. One important quality of swim sites at the top of this hierarchy is being unregulated or "wild", allowing swimmers to self-govern. This preference for self-governance evidences Foucault's argument that resistance to power tends not to result in a total absence of governance, rather an alternative form of governance to the mainstream (Foucault cited in Taylor 2011). These clear group preferences highlight the subcultural nature of CWS, in accordance with Holland and Einwonher's (2004) and Patrick

Williams' (2009) assertion that active choice is one defining feature of subcultures of resistance. These shared values and understandings of CWS as a practice that provides access to a feeling of "freedom" from the ills of modern life, combined with diffuse physical locations of participants, frame CWS as a "postmodern subculture of resistance". This study responds to Barnett's (2016) call for more ethnographies of resistance from a Foucauldian perspective and demonstrates the usefulness of Foucault's theory of resistance to subcultural studies more broadly insofar as it highlights the complexities of power relations in practices of resistance. This dissertation also brings a much-needed focus on adult subcultures of resistance, with the majority of participants (16 out of 21) being over the age of 50, countering the youth-centred bias in subcultural studies (q.v. Leblanc 2001; Haenfler 2004, 2006; Greener and Hollands 2006; Patrick Williams 2006, 2007, 2009).

3.2   Cold-water swimmers resist a docile body

One of the most frequent reasons for engaging in CWS cited by participants in this dissertation was that they rejected social pressures to have a docile body (Foucault 1975), and CWS provides a way to enact this resistance. The existence of shared values, such as this one, is considered a defining feature of both subcultures (Haenfler 2004) and postmodern subcultures (Greener and Hollands 2006). Ed referred to these shared values by saying,

> *'Cold-water swimming is a mark of a tribe in a very strong way. Stronger than anything I've ever done before. If you find anybody else who does it you're always dying to talk about it with them, because you know you care about the same things and think the same way.'*

Three common sites of pressure imposed on the body emphasised by interviewees were swimming pools, office jobs, and the mainstream media. Participants declared CWS as

being antithetical to all of this, a place where the body can be playful, free, and without judgement. Constructing a group identity founded on shared issues which respond to the hegemonic social order is typical of subcultures of resistance (Haenfler 2004; Patrick Williams 2009). However, this may have been missed in earlier studies of CWS due to the bias in subcultural studies towards youth culture (e.g. Patrick Williams 2007). The demographic spread of interlocutors in this dissertation suggests that CWS is weighted towards adult participants, particularly those over the age of 50, a finding supported in the literature (Pike 2012; Throsby 2013; Phoenix and Orr 2015). Thus, scholars may be surprised to find a subculture of resistance within this demographic.

17 participants described that they started CWS because they loved swimming but hated swimming pools. John said:

> *'I find swimming pools stifling. They're really hot, I hate the smell of chlorine, I don't like how you have to go into a room, and change, and use a locker… and I don't like the lane range that you get… they [pool swimmers] aren't willing to give way if you're faster, or if you're slow they're right behind you intimidating you to move out the way... I don't want to swim like that, I want to swim with the freedom.'*

Almost all interlocutors shared a strong dislike of the way that swimming pools force you to swim in a certain way. Some had faced negative experiences in the swimming pool that had forced them to stop pool swimming entirely, such as Jane's experience of having been sexually assaulted in a swimming pool. She attributed her experience in part to the architecture of the pool, which she felt forced her to swim in a particular lane, at a particular speed, close to other swimmers. Swimming pools have been variously theorised as sites of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault 1975; Scott 2009, 2010; Ward 2017) due to the way in which they enforce a particular 'docile body' (Foucault 1975. CWS participants noticeably subvert

this docility by collectively disliking swimming pools and choosing spaces where they can swim in what April called a '*playful'* way.

The second way in which CWS represents to participants a rejection of the 'docile body' (Foucault 1975) is that it is felt to be antithetical to an office job. In its inherent nature, being outdoors, exposed to the elements, and carried out year-round and in all temperatures, the activity is felt by interlocutors to be the opposite of working at a desk for 8 hours each day. That this was commonly referred to by interviewees is indicative of their demographic as predominately urban-based and middle-class, and it is important to note that this practice may only be felt to be a "resistance" by certain people in particular life circumstances.

Ronald and Sophie, a married couple, agreed on how much they resented that for them, '*working hard is sitting in this bloody chair in front of the computer all day'*. In contrast, being able to '*put your body under intentional stress'* by going CWS, was felt to be freeing – but only because they had the agency to choose to swim. They reflected that had either of them been forced to go CWS when at school, they would have '*hated*' it. The way Ronald and Sophie conceived of the significance of choice in their experience of CWS speaks to Foucault's concept of docility as stemming from disciplinary power (Foucault 1975; Rabinow 2020). It suggests that what the couple are resisting, rather than the act itself of having to work at a desk, or hypothetically going CWS when they were children, is the idea of being forced to use their bodies in a particular way. The choice to go CWS, when your work enforces sitting at a desk all day, thus becomes an act of resistance to disciplinary forces that act upon the body (Foucault 1975). CWS facilitates the formation of self in a space of non-judgement and non-prescription, where agency is maximised.

The final direction from which participants identified pressure on their bodily disposition was the mainstream media. Eda talked about how CWS was a space free from these pressures by saying,

> *'Seeing people that aren't represented in mass media, you know, people with mastectomies, and people in larger bodies, and slimmer bodies, and one boob bigger than the other, and no boobs – that's certainly been part of why I feel comfortable there [at Kenwood Ladies Pond], seeing that all bodies are different.'*

Eda went on to explain that she felt that the bodies most represented in '*mass media'* are those which are fit, young, and slim - a sentiment shared by other interlocutors. This is another example of participants feeling that CWS is oppositional to the disciplinary pressure they feel is acting upon their bodies (Foucault 1975). In their conceptualisation of a tripartite body, Lock and Scheper-Hughes (1993) extend Foucault's notion of docility into a concept of 'the body politic'. They argue that 'societies regularly reproduce and socialize the kinds of bodies that they need' (1993: 25). In a contemporary post-industrial society that is ever more health and body-conscious, the 'politically correct body for both sexes is the lean, strong, androgenous and physically "fit" form' (*ibid.*). This idea resonates with participants' experiences of pressure coming from mainstream media sources. Yet it is notable that this form of docility, the pressure to be lean, strong, and "fit", contrasts with the form of docility that Ronald and Sophie identified above, the pressure to sit still in an office chair for 8 hours each day. This juxtaposition supports what was suggested in the previous paragraph; the central element of the docile body (*ibid.*) that participants seem to react against is the feeling that they have little agential choice, rather than the specific experience.

Like John and April, 16 other interlocutors described swimming at CWS sites as an experience of bodily playfulness, or '*freedom'* from the docile body which they identified as

present in the pool swimmer, the office worker and the citizen subjected to mainstream media. It has been suggested that a central theme running through these various resistances to docility is the desire to feel that they have more choice (*ibid.*). Active agential choice is unpacked throughout this dissertation as a central shared value (Haenfler 2004; Hollander and Einwonher 2004; Greener and Hollands 2006) of CWS as a "postmodern subculture of resistance".

3.3   How CWS facilitates an "un-docile" body

This section addresses the way in which CWS participants resist the docile body that they collectively take issue with, through the embodied and transformative act of CWS itself. As Boddy (1989), Lester (2005) and Mahmood (2008) show in their ethnographies of female collective practices of resistance, group resistance to hegemonic social forces can be embodied in behaviour as well as articulated in shared values. For participants, the embodied experience of getting into cold water engenders a transformative shift in perception. Carol described the positive effects of her CWS practice by saying '*if I do not [cold-water] swim, I am medusa. But if I swim, then I am a fish'*. This is remarkably similar to the title of Throsby's (2013) paper about marathon swimmers who train outdoors, 'If I go in like a cranky sea lion, I come out a smiling dolphin'. Eda explained this transformation in perception further:

> *'As I'm walking around doing my daily business, I'm not thinking about any parts of my body usually unless I'm in pain… but it's instantaneous, as soon as I get in cold water I can feel my body… I can only concentrate on the present moment, there's no past, there's no future, it's just there.'*

Eda described the experience of CWS in relation to her usual lived experiences, of bodily disconnection and mental focus on the past and future. Ronald and Sophie spoke of similar

grievances. This normative way of being in contemporary post-industrial society is what Carvalho and Annaler (2017: 207) argue to be the hegemonic modern self, which can also be understood as the 'docile' body under capitalism (Foucault 1975; Mascia-Lees 2016). By engaging in this bodily practice, cold water swimmers are thus able to resist the hegemonic version of modern experience.

Lila described this by saying that through practicing CWS, you are giving yourself '*mental freedom to not actually conform completely'* which leads to a '*release'* when you enter the water. Alex similarly likened the perceptually transformative experience of immersing oneself in cold water to '*going through a portal'*. In highlighting the enmeshed nature of participants' personal reasons for partaking in CWS with the experiences of being a body under capitalism, this dissertation demonstrates how cold-water swimmers' experiences echo Berlant's (2011) and Cvetcovitch's (2012) theory that private emotions can reflect the social dynamics of a capitalist society. Further, this finding is also in accordance with Patrick Williams' (2009) theorisation of a continuum in resistant subcultures. It indicates that whilst CWS is a personal decision and therefore a 'micro' subculture of resistance, it is connected to 'macro' and 'active' forms of resistance. Personal desires for an immersive embodied experience are intimately connected to the social climate of post-industrial capitalism (Leblanc 1999; Haenfler 2004).

As a tool for transforming perception, CWS demonstrates that the body can at once be a 'a locus of resistance and freedom' (Oksala 2011: 93), an "un-docile body", and also a canvas for imposed docility. Employing Foucauldian theory in this way highlights that, contrary to the suppositions of various feminist anthropologists (Bordo 1989; Mascia-Lees 2016), Foucault's theory of the body does leave room for agency and choice as well as an understanding of how power acts upon the body. Much like Lester's (2005) analysis of the process by which

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women use bodily practices to transform their subjectivity in a Mexican convent (*ibid.*: 4), this research suggests that CWS can be a way for participants to navigate the tensions of contemporary urban life. CWS briefly allows the body to resist hegemonic pressures by embodying the "un-docile", via an ascetic practice of cold water immersion. Participants' descriptions of this experience support Greener and Holland's (2006: 5) concept of a postmodern subculture which is attached to a 'common set of practices and values' despite various geographical locations – Eda swims at Kenwood Ladies Pond on Hampstead Heath, Lila swims at Clevedon Marine Lake or various other sites in Somerset, and Alex swims exclusively at the Serpentine Swimming Club in Hyde Park. None of these people were personally acquainted, yet they defined CWS in a similar transformative way and contrasted it with their everyday experiences.

3.4   The impact of body type on participation

In conjunction with the transformative experience of the practice, the body types of cold-water swimmers also highlight an embodiment of the "un-docile" body. It was argued in Section 3.1 that the contemporary post-industrial manifestation of the docile body (Foucault 1975) is the lean, young, androgenous and physically "fit" body (Lock and Scheper Hughes 1993: 25). For this reason, bodies that resist this body type are theorised as 'deviant' by Urla and Terry (1995). These bodies deviate from culturally hegemonic ideas of the correct body type. Eda suggested in her quotation (see page 24) that at CWS sites, she observed a noticeable range of body types that deviate from the 'docile'. 15 interlocutors declared that that they perceived CWS to attract people with to bodies of size and bodies of age, particularly female post-menopausal bodies. Sarah summed this up by saying that at Clevedon Marine Lake, it was '*obvious' that* nobody *'judges you'* and it never seems to matter *'what your body size is'*. She explained how this experience is '*such a massive difference from going swimming in a swimming pool before, or being on a beach and feeling like you don't look quite right, you don't fit in'.*

Sarah's quotation highlights again that cold-water swimmers locate their experience in opposition to mainstream cultural life, which is a defining feature of subcultures of resistance (Haenfler 2004; Patrick Williams 2009). Clevedon Marine Lake, where your '*body size'* is unimportant, is articulated as a space outside of the normal world of swimming pools and beaches, where, Sarah implied, bodies are judged upon their conformity to social norms. In fact, bodies of size are perceived as advantageous for CWS. Lila said that '*being larger is actually a benefit'* and similarly, Sophie said '*some of the better swimmers I know are the larger ladies'*. Biologically essentialising statements such as these raise questions about whether subcultures of resistance actually reinforce mainstream values instead of subverting them (Haenfler 2004: 408).

Biologically reducing the CWS success of bodies of size to their physicality can be an implicit defence of culturally hegemonic fatphobia (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1993; Gailey 2014), in the same way that biologically essentialising female success can be an 'implicit defence of the patriarchy' (Ford and Brown cited in Throsby 2013: 10). On the other hand, in a culture where bodies of size are presented as 'deviant' (Urla and Terry 1995), 'hyper(in)visible' and inherently unhealthy' (Gailey 2014), a celebration of bodies of size could also simply be indicative of the way in which the subculture of CWS resists cultural norms. Moments of analytical uncertainty such as these reinforce the definition of CWS as a postmodern subculture, in which diffuse meanings can exist simultaneously amongst the group (Haenfler 2004). For example, Lila, who said that being a body of size was beneficial, identified as being '*a bit bigger myself'* and resolutely asserted that for her, the idea of having a biological advantage based on size was empowering. To others, as suggested in Sarah's quotation above, the value of CWS to deviant bodies, including bodies of size (Urla 1995; Gailey 2014), was that it served to normalise them. That is, it provides deviant bodies a place of non-judgement in contrast to the cultural mainstream where bodies of size are over-medicalised, over-analysed and thoroughly 'hyper(in)visible' (*ibid.*).

A final point to mention regarding the perceived "un-docility" of body types that engage in CWS is that, upon employing Urla and Terry's (1995) concept, it becomes clear that CWS is only perceived as accessible to some deviant body types. Urla and Terry (*ibid.*) theorize embodied deviance as those body types which are not young, physically fit, able-bodied, male, and white. April, the only participant who identified as a person of colour, described that she felt there was an inaccessibility of swimming (both CWS and pool swimming) to people of colour. In addition, April and Ellen, who identified as queer, highlighted the inaccessibility of CWS to queer bodies, and particularly transgender bodies. Only one participant, Sophie, mentioned that she felt CWS had the potential to be accessible to disabled persons, but she also said that to her knowledge, this potential had not been realised.

Such observations, which pertain to existing inequalities within the CWS subculture, highlight that not all deviant bodies (*ibid.*) feel welcomed by CWS. This serves to remind us of Foucault's notion of resistance, which he suggests is always still embedded in complex power dynamics (Foucault cited in Taylor 2011). This can be related to earlier concerns about subcultures of resistance serving to reproduce the cultural hegemony (Haenfler 2004). It is useful here to look to theories of postmodern subcultures which emphasise that diffuse meanings can exist within these groups (*ibid.*, Greener and Holland 2006). Indeed, as a postmodern subculture of resistance, CWS can simultaneously provide a resistance to the docile body through the embodied deviance of some "un-docile" bodies (namely older bodies and bodies of size), and be inaccessible to other 'deviant' body types, including transgender bodies, disabled bodies and bodies of colour.

4 Discussion theme 2: Consequences of resisting disciplinary power

4.1   Introduction to Discussion theme 2

The first discussion chapter has argued that a desire to resist bodily docility (Foucault 1975) is a shared value within the CWS subculture, and a significant reason for participants' engagement with regular practice. It has been suggested that this resistance is embodied in both the transformative practice of immersing oneself in cold water and in the types of 'deviant bodies' (Urla and Terry 1995) that the practice attracts. CWS has been shown to consist of collective values and practices of resistance, that have diffuse meanings and diverse geographical localities, situating the practice as a 'postmodern subculture of resistance' (Haenfler 2004; Greener and Hollands 2006). This second discussion chapter focuses on the consequences of cold-water swimmers' collective resistance to disciplinary power. It suggests that the desire to resist a docile body (Foucault 1975) results in a hierarchy of preferences regarding CWS locations, at the top of which are "wild" and unregulated sites. These sites allow swimmers to self-govern, a value found to be important to interlocutors. Such findings bring Foucault's conception of resistance (Foucault cited in Feder 2011) in conversation with Patrick Williams' (2009) notion of a 'subculture of resistance.' It also lends credence to Foucault's idea that alternative governance pervades in attempts to resist disciplinary power and governance, rather than genuine self-governance (Foucault cited in Taylor 2011).

4.2   A preference for wild, open spaces

The cold-water swimmers interviewed for this dissertation stressed that the spatial configurations of CWS sites were significant to them. They repeatedly emphasised being

drawn to sites that were wild, open, and unrestricted. Sarah attested to this by saying, '*I like being outdoors, I like that feeling of not having to focus on anything that's close to me, I like there not being edges*.' Similar sentiments were echoed by many interlocutors, who talked about the enjoyment they got from being able to swim without stopping or turning around, in a wide and open space. Figure 2 below shows the spatial configuration of Clevedon Marine Lake, which can be compared to Figure 3, an image of a popular swimming pool in Southwark, South-East London. Through comparing these two images, the unstructured, spacious nature of the Marine Lake becomes clear; when swimming, one can see the sea and the sky open out expansively, and can swim in any direction, at any speed. The enormity of the lake, which is the size of two football pitches (Discover Clevedon Website n.d.) provides ample room for swimmers to amble - or race - at their own chosen speed. Dina explained that her love for Clevedon Marine Lake arose in part because it allowed her to swim in a circular route, saying:

'*At the Marine Lake I don't turn around, I go round in laps. There are no lines under you telling you where your "lane" is, you're free to go wherever you want*.'

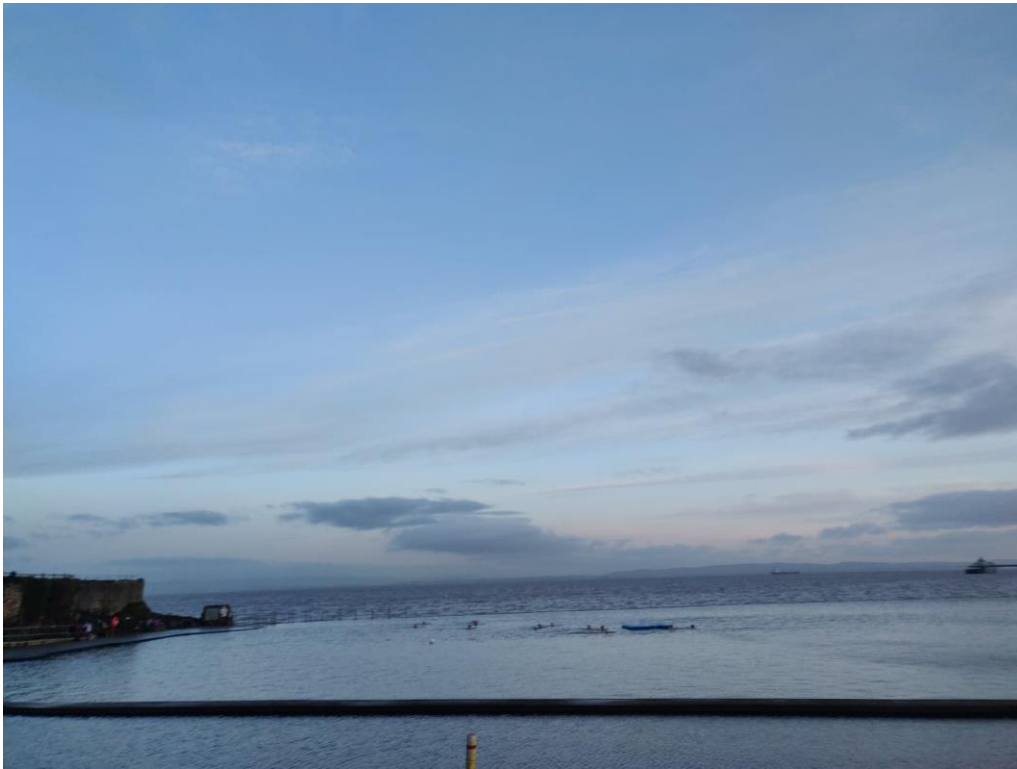**Figure 2.** A photograph of Clevedon Marine Lake at sunrise and high tide. The Marine Lake is vast and gives an expansive view of the sky, continuing straight onto the ocean like an "infinity" pool.
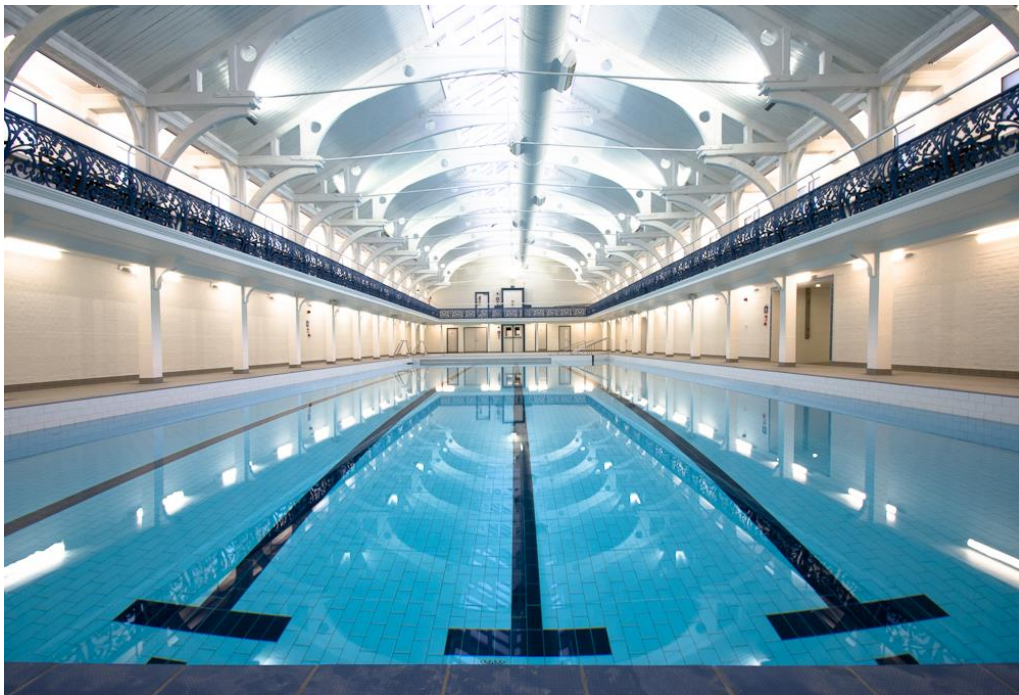**Source** author

Figure 3. A photograph of Southwark swimming pool in London, England, which demonstrates the regulated, rectangular formation of the indoor swimming pool
Source David Mackenzie

Participants' love of the open space of CWS sites is closely related to their attempts to resist the pressures to have a docile body. In Foucauldian theory, governmentality and disciplinary power often work to make bodies docile through space and architectural design (Foucault cited in Rabinow 2020 [1984]). In light of this, it would make sense that participants who react against pressures to have a docile body would also resist spaces like the swimming pool, which, through their architectural structure, are permeated by disciplinary power (Scott 2009, 2010; Ward 2017). The above quotation by Dina indicates the inextricable link between space and docility; it explains how the lack of lines and hierarchical division of lanes at Clevedon Marine lake allow her to swim freely. Together with nine other interlocutors, Ed also spoke about Clevedon Marine as providing him with a sense of '*freedom'* and '*infinity'*.

Interlocutors' expressed desire for '*freedom'* speaks to the point made in Section 3.1, that active choice is a defining feature of this subculture of resistance, both from a Foucauldian perspective (Taylor 2011) and in line with typologies of subcultures of resistance within subcultural theory (Holland and Einwonher 2004, Patrick Williams 2009). Participants perceive freedom in this context to be the ability to choose to swim in an unstructured way and in an unregulated, wild, open blue space. They contrast this with regulated pools, which impose disciplinary power upon swimmers through their architectural configurations (Hoffman 2011) and, in doing so, disempower participants. Thus, in this model, freedom can be understood as a deployment of agency and power, which is concurrent with the Foucauldian notion that 'the very effort of resistance must be understood itself as an expression of power' (Feder 2011: 63).

The thematic and coded analysis of 21 interviews conducted for this dissertation indicated that cold-water swimmers generally have a hierarchy of preferences for their CWS sites, represented below in Figure 4. Participants made statements like '*if needs be, if there's*

nowhere else to go [outdoors], I'll go to a lido' (Sophie). Sophie also said '*I couldn't do cold showers'*, to which her husband, Ronald, agreed. Cold showers were considered by interlocutors to be a version of CWS, as they facilitated cold-water exposure. Interlocutors generally felt that cold showers and indoor pools were the least desirable forms of CWS (unless you wanted to swim exclusively to train, in which case indoor pools were conceded to), because of the disciplinary power implicit in their restrictive and enclosed architectural dimensions (Foucault 1975; Hoffman 2011). However, during the national lockdowns caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, some participants slowly adopted a cold shower practice as they believed it was better than nothing– but only marginally, as it removed all of the qualities from CWS other than the cold-water shock.
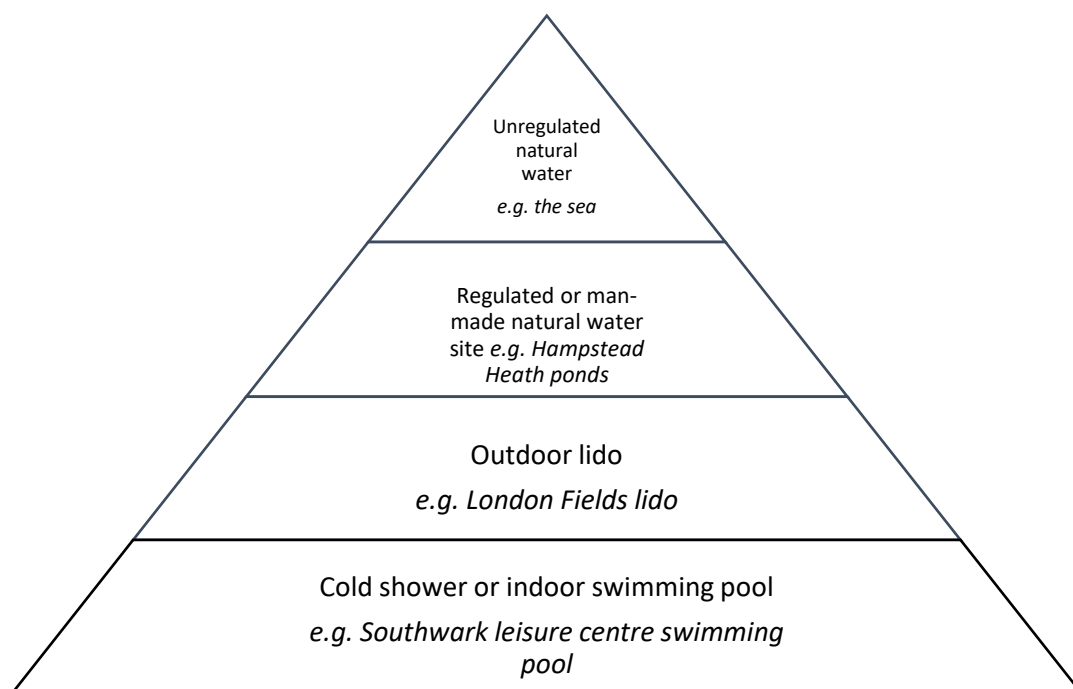
Figure 4. Pyramid showing hierarchy of preferences of swim location for cold water swimmers
Source author

4.3   Prioritising self-governance

Throughout this dissertation, power has been shown to be central and yet complex in its intersections with CWS as a subculture of resistance. Disciplinary power underpins pressures on the body to be docile, and architectural configurations that enforce that docility (Foucault 1975). However, Foucault emphasises that power is deployed in movements of resistance as well as being imposed upon individuals (Foucault cited in Feder 2011). In Foucauldian theory, resistance is not 'not being governed' but rather '[not being governed] *like that'* (Foucault cited in Taylor 2011: 179), which implies that in movements of resistance, and in practices which attempt to access "freedom", there is always some form of governance and power. However, what is possible in movements of resistance is for this form of power to be different to the mainstream form of hegemonic power. This idea of alternative governance and power in movements of resistance, rather than total absence of governance and power, is explored in this last subsection of the dissertation, suggesting that CWS is defined by a final shared value of self-governance. This application of Foucauldian theory to CWS also problematises the notion of postmodern subcultures as defined by an 'anti-structural subcultural sensibility' (Haefler 2004: 408). Through analysing CWS as a case study, it is suggested that even in postmodern subcultures, power structures continue to pervade. Despite anarchic sentiments, and viewing 'organised movements with suspicion' (*ibid.*), power hierarchies remain omnipresent - including in subcultural or self-governing communities.

The self-governing nature of CWS is encapsulated in the tagline for London's Serpentine Swimming Club, sent at the end of every club email, which reads: '*Serpentine Swimming Club since 1864 run for the Members by the Members with no Employees'.* A self-governing disposition is also evident in the description of Clevedon Marine Lake on its website: '*Clevedon Marine Lake is a community space run for the people by the people'* (Clevedon Marine Lake Website n.d.). The remarkably similar anarchic tone of these two quotations,

from geographically distant CWS sites in two different English cities, firmly situates CWS as a postmodern subculture (Greener and Hollands 2006). Despite their diffuse physical locations, there is a clear sense of shared values, and of rejecting external power and asserting agency to self-govern. This reaffirms a key argument of this dissertation; that, implicit in participants' shared goal of resisting disciplinary power is the ability to have agency over how power is wielded (Foucault 1975; Feder 2011). This is clear through many participants' frequent articulations of desiring '*freedom'*, and is alluded to in the 'founding book' of the CWS 'movement' (Kennedy 2010; Start 2013), *Waterlog* by Roger Deakin (1999). Deakin (*ibid.*: 115) declares that 'swimming without a roof over your head' is 'subversive', and is an activity that 'appeals to free spirits'.

Furthermore, the subculture has a centralised body for all CWS in the UK, the Outdoor Swimming Society (OSS) (Outdoor Swimming Society n.d.), which lists the 114 active CWS groups active across the UK, and has a 'patron statement' summing up the ideology of CWS, written by famous nature writer Roger MacFarlane. The OSS website also has a page on central literature, most notably Deakin's (1999) book referenced above. This centralised body speaks strongly to the paradox intrinsic to practices of resistance as identified by Foucault, that in resisting certain forms of governance and power, rather than not being governed at all, subjects are resisting being governed in one particular way (Foucault cited in Taylor 2011: 179). Eisenstadt's (2016) ethnography of two anarchist social centres in Bristol supports this analysis. He critiques the notion of 'non-domination-as-empowerment' by arguing that power remains omnipresent in two anarchist organisations that resist hegemonic power structures. Sutton's (2020) ethnography of a digital detox camp in California similarly shows how power disparities are enmeshed even in practices of resistance and self-governance. She highlights both the power-laden othering of Native American culture implicit in the camp's organisation, and the way that the camp attendees

kept in contact on Facebook, one of the very organisations they were trying to subvert, after the camp ended.

In the case of CWS it appears that in attempting to locate "freedom", participants swap the disciplinarity of the swimming pool for swimmer-governed organisations such as the OSS, which nonetheless remain power-laden. This finding does not nullify the search for freedom that is embedded in the desire to go CWS. Rather it shows that freedom for cold-water swimmers is a practice that constitutes an alternative form of governance rather than no governance at all (Foucault cited in Feder 2011). Crucially, the swimmers' form of governance is organised with participants' own agency, creating the feeling that the practice is "freeing" (*ibid.*). The application of Foucault's concept of resistance (Foucault cited in Feder 2011) to CWS problematises Haefler's (2004) presentation of postmodern subcultures as defined by a suspicion of structure and governance. Given this study, perhaps a more nuanced articulation of postmodern subcultures would take into account that postmodern subcultures simultaneously resist hegemonic governance while continuing to be embedded in power structures and some form of alternative governance. This would be in-keeping with their heterogeneous nature (*ibid.*).

5 Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated the contemporary phenomena of CWS in relation to theories of resistance, and shifted away from the pre-existing research on CWS as either a health intervention or a local practice (Foley 2015, 2017; Bottley 2019; Foster 2020; Gould et al. 2020; Moles 2020; Juster-Horsfield and Bell 2021). It has suggested that in London and Bristol, CWS can be defined as a "postmodern subculture of resistance", fusing Greener and Hollands' (2006) concept of a 'postmodern subculture' with Patrick Williams' (2009) concept of a 'subculture of resistance'. This definition was developed throughout two discussion chapters, reflecting the first research aim of this dissertation, to 'establish an academic definition of the phenomena'. The first discussion chapter (3.0) located participants' motivations to engage in CWS in terms of their desire to resist bodily docility (Foucault 1975), corresponding to the second research aim of this dissertation, to 'identify the main reasons participants engage in regular CWS'. It also posited that individual decisions to partake are affected by body type, corresponding to the final research aim, 'to identify how individual decisions to partake are affected by demographic factors'. The second discussion chapter (4.0) highlighted that participants' resistance to disciplinary power results in a hierarchy of preferences for cold-water swim locations. This chapter brought further clarity to the second research aim, suggesting that as well as desiring bodily freedom, participants are motivated by a desire for wild and open spaces and self-governance over swim sites. The dissertation has successfully responded to Barnett's (2016) call for more Foucauldian ethnographies of resistance, and highlighted the complementary nature of subcultural and Foucauldian theories pertaining to power relations in movements of resistance.

Section 3.1 argued that participants engage in cold-water swimming as they feel it is antithetical to impositions on their bodily demeanour that they experience in their daily lives,

and thus can be understood as an act of collective resistance (Haenfler 2004). It was argued that the resistant subcultural nature of CWS may have been neglected by earlier scholars of CWS due to the adult demographic of cold-water swimmers, and the bias towards youth subcultures in subcultural studies of resistance (Leblanc 2001; Haenfler 2004; Patrick Williams 2006, 2007). Section 3.2 suggested that the embodied practice of swimming in cold water transforms perception in a way that is inherently resistant to the hegemonic modern self in a capitalist, post-industrial society (Foucault 1975; Berlant 2011; Cvetcovitch 2012; Mascia-Lees 2016); embodying an "un-docile" body is an act of resistance. Section 3.3 argued that interlocutors perceive CWS to embody "un-docility" because they perceive it as a space that is particularly accessible to people with body types that this dissertation identifies as 'deviant' (Urla and Terry 1995), notably bodies of size and bodies of age. Section 3.3 succeeded in providing detail about how interlocutors perceived how certain individual factors – namely, body type and age – affected participation. However, in order to empirically validate such a claim, which is at present largely anecdotal, a larger study would be required. That study would need to reach 'theoretical saturation' (Gailey 2014: 164) to be generalisable. This would be an intriguing avenue for future research on CWS.

In section 4.1, the consequences of interlocutors' desires to resist disciplinary power were suggested to manifest as a desire for open and unregulated spaces. A hierarchy of preferences for CWS locations was presented to illustrate this. In section 4.2, the desire to resist disciplinary power was demonstrated to manifest in participants' desire for self-governance. However, this desire was argued to be paradoxical. Foucault's conceptualisation of resistance to disciplinary power was employed (Foucault cited in Feder 2011: 63) to highlight that 'the very effort of resistance' is an 'expression of power'. Section 4.2 reaffirmed an argument constructed throughout this dissertation, that the sense of "freedom" that participants' feel comes with CWS, emerges from the ability to have power over one's choices, and thus to make decisions about how one behaves and is governed.

Such a finding problematises Haenfler's (2004) presentation of postmodern subcultures as inherently resistant to governance. The case of CWS demonstrates that postmodern subcultures can be resistant to hegemonic forms of governance and yet imbued with their own forms of governance.

Within the CWS subculture in London and Bristol, it appears that people have stopped associating wellbeing with comfort (Parr 2011; Foster 2020). Rather, being "too comfortable" is seen as a malaise, and the exposure to cold and discomfort that comes with CWS seen as essential to feeling unencumbered. In the future, research may be able to determine whether the CWS subculture is 'transitory', a feature of many postmodern subcultures (*ibid.*: 394). The increase in popularity of CWS in Britain has been rapid (Outdoor Swimmer 2021) and the practice may fall from grace just as quickly, as the "straight edge" subculture did (Patrick Williams 2006). However, perhaps the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the public's outdoor sensibilities may be such that CWS remains an ever more popular pastime in cities like London and Bristol. I certainly hope that people continue finding a way to access the feeling of freedom that the interlocutors in this dissertation, and I myself, experience through CWS.

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APPENDIX A: Interview schedule

1 How did you get into cold-water swimming?

2 What does it feel like to enter cold water?

3 How long have you been cold-water swimming for?

4 Do you swim regularly, and if so, why?

5 Do you ever swim in a swimming pool, and why, or why not?

6 Do you ever swim in lidos?

7 Do you feel differently when you go into the water, or when you get out, in comparison to before? If so, how?

8 What do you think about when you're in the water?

9 Is there anything specific you always do before or after swimming?

10 Do you wear a wetsuit or not, and why?

11 How did you learn to cope with the cold?

APPENDIX B: Participant information sheet and consent form

![University of Bristol logo]

Participant Information Sheet

Project title:
An ethnographic study of the cold-water swimming (CWS) community

Invitation paragraph:
I, (author's name here), would like to invite you to take part in my research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, I would like you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please ask me questions if anything is unclear.

What is the purpose of the project?
I am conducting this research as part of my dissertation for a BA in Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol.

Why have I been invited to participate?
You have been invited to participate because we met either in-person at a CWS site, or online on a CWS forum, and you indicated to me that you would be interested in participating in my research. I am interviewing between 20 and 30 people for this project.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether you wish to participate in this project. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet with you before you participate and answer any questions you might have. If you agree to take part, I will then ask you to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time before your data has been anonymised, without giving a reason. However, once the information has been anonymised your data cannot be withdrawn. The cut-off date for withdrawal from this project (after which all data will be anonymised) is 10th February 2021.

What will happen to me if I take part and what will I have to do?
If you choose to take part, I will interview you over Zoom. The interview will last between 1 – 2 hours and will involve a style of interviewing called 'semi-structured interviewing'. This means that there are topics that I hope to cover with you, but I will ultimately be led by the direction of our conversation and by what you choose to tell me.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks involved in taking part in the project?
There are no foreseeable risks to this project.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
CWS has never before been studied in as a group practice in Anthropology, beyond any one individual swimming location. My study will bring an anthropological approach to the emerging study of CWS, focusing on understanding why people are choosing to do this particular thing at this particular time in the UK.

Will my participation in this project be kept confidential?
I will anonymise all names and revealing details about your identity. I will record our interviews with a digital voice recorder and make field notes in a personal notebook. All recorded data will be stored on encrypted media and all data will be deleted after use, by 10th June 2021.

What will happen to the results of the research project?
My research will form the body of my BA Anthropology and Archaeology dissertation. You will not be named in any research. I can send you a copy of my completed research project if you would like.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been reviewed by Professor Mhairi Gibson of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Bristol.

Further information and contact details
If you would like any more information or have any questions, please contact me at:

(Author's name)
Department of Anthropology and Archaeology
University of Bristol
*******@bristol.ac.uk
+44 **** *** ***

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology

(Author's name)

E-mail: *******@bristol.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM
An ethnographic study of the cold-water swimming (CWS) community

Brief Project Outline: This project is seeking to investigate the phenomena of contemporary CWS in London and Bristol.

Do I have to take part? – *No (participation is voluntary)*

Can I withdraw at any time? - *Yes, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. However, please note that once the data has been anonymised your data cannot be withdrawn. Therefore, the cut-off date for withdrawal for this study is 10th February.*

What do I have to do? – *If you choose to take part, I will interview you over Zoom.*

How will the findings be used? – *These findings will be used for my BA Anthropology and Archaeology dissertation.*

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential? – *Any names and revealing details will be anonymised in my project.*

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part? – *There are no foreseeable risks to this project.*

What will happen to the data collected? – *Any recorded data will be deleted after use and all data will be stored on encrypted media.*

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge

HAVE YOU:

- been given information explaining about the study?   YES/ NO
- had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?   YES/ NO

- received satisfactory answers to all questions you asked?   YES/ NO
- received enough information about the study for you to make a decision
  about your participation?   YES/ NO

DO YOU UNDERSTAND:

That you are free to withdraw from the study and free to withdraw your data prior to final consent
- at any time?   ☐
- without having to give a reason for withdrawing   ☐

I hereby fully and freely consent to my participation in this study

SIGNED_____   DATE_____

Name (printed): _____

If you have any concerns related to your participation in this study please direct them to the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee, via Liam McKervey, Research Governance and Ethics Officer (Tel: 0117 331 7472 email: Liam.McKervey@bristol.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: Example interview transcript

Transcription of interview with Sarah

Interviewer: So my first question is, how did you get into CWS, what's your story?

Sarah: I was running and I kept getting injured, and so one of the reasons [for starting CWS] was that I was trying to find something else that would keep my fitness up a bit where I wasn't going to get injuries. But also, recently I'd got a cochlear implant and I'd had real problems with my hearing for years before that and didn't have the confidence to do something in the water. And then after I'd had the implant, I was able to get a waterproof thing to wear over the ear in the water and so actually I'd be able to hear in the water as well.

Interviewer: How long ago was that?

Sarah: May 2016

Interviewer: And where was it that you started swimming?

Sarah: I started at trench lane at Mad Mike's, do you know that one?

Interviewer: Yeah

Sarah: And I really didn't like it, and I'd seen that CLASS [Clevedon Lake and Sea Swimmers] Facebook page, and they were all really welcoming and I went down there instead… and it was like right that's it I'm going to Clevedon now

Interviewer: What was it about Mad Mike's that didn't appeal to you?

Sarah: He was unwelcoming, it wasn't what I'd expected, and it just felt crazy having to pay [at Mad Mike's] when another place was free and people were so much more welcoming

Interviewer: what made you choose to do this instead of pool swimming?

Sarah: I'm not sure, I think I wanted to be properly outdoors. My parents met through canoeing, so I kind of grew up in cold water, in as much as I was falling into it quite a lot, not intentionally being in it. There was something that just made me think 'I think I'll like it'.

Interviewer: And when you swim, do you swim in suits or skins? [CWS talk for wetsuit or swimming costume]

Sarah: I swim in bikinis, I have my classic bikini, the purple one which has turned up on loads of artwork around the lake (laughing). So I'm the one with the purple bikini and the yellow hat. I did buy a wetsuit initially for the first winter 'cause I thought you needed one. But, I didn't like getting the wetsuit on and off, I found it wasn't enjoyable and it didn't even make me any warmer…

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Sarah: I don't know, because I'm absolutely queen of faffing. So I am happy to ... I don't want to just go and get straight in, swim, and then run away. I quite like being in the environment where I'm swimming and saying hi to people and having a good look around, and sometimes if I'm the earliest person there or if I'm meeting people I'm more than happy to just sit and wait rather than get in, and just soak it up a bit. So I don't want to swim in my bikini over a wetsuit just because it's easy, I think to be honest with the, the wetsuit, it made me feel fat because it was so difficult to get on and it makes you feel like you're too big. and I think that probably applies to everybody because they're just so difficult to get on, but that was something that I was trying to move away from and actually trying to feel better about my body, and it just drew too much attention to my physical body and I think that was part of what made me feel uncomfortable, actually.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Can you tell me a bit more about how cold-water swimming in your bikini makes you feel about your body?

Sarah: Yeah… yeah, it's made a really big difference to .. I was going to say sense of self... it's not quite that, but yeah, being confident and just feeling like I can be me, without judging myself, and I think because it was very quickly obvious that nobody judges you when you're sitting on the side of the lake at Clevedon, and it doesn't matter how far you're swimming, how well you're swimming, what you're wearing, what your body size is, and that was such a massive difference from going swimming in a swimming pool before, or... you know, being on a beach and feeling like you don't look quite right, you don't fit in, because you're not wearing the perfect swimming costume, and that's really helped me feel more comfortable in myself in general.

Interviewer: Has that stayed the same throughout your swimming journey over the last 5 years?

Sarah: I think for me, yeah. I think in person on the lakeside, yes. There's been a different feeling the last 18 months kind of online in swimming groups, where they've started to feel more judgemental. and I'm not sure where that stemmed from, I'm not sure whether that stemmed from the people who've been doing it for longer actually just being twitchy about the fact that suddenly its popular, which I do understand to a certain extent because sometimes you get there and it's like 'what are these people doing in my lake!' (laughing) and it's a bit awkward. But there does seem to be more of a feeling of people judging one another online recently, which is unfortunate. But it doesn't seem to translate into how people behave towards one another on lakeside. So, yeah, just kind of ignore posts which make me feel uncomfortable or just scroll on by type thing.

Interviewer: when you first joined 5 years ago did you straight away join the online forums? You said they were welcoming, was that because of their online presence or their in-person presence?

Sarah: I think online initially was what got me there. Cause I was asking a few questions, and there was a definite 'oh just tell us what time you want to come down and somebody will meet you' and that's what happened. So [name of swimmer] met me the first time, [name repeated], when I went down, and that just... I can't remember after that not meeting somebody there, essentially, it was just so easy to get into. And now I've definitely got my little knit group, because we all just swim at the same time normally each week so that's how it's worked out. But it's amazing how many people I recognise going down there now, you know, and how many people you've got to stop and say hi to which is really nice.

Interviewer: After you swum from the first May and it started getting colder - when did you decided that swimming through the winter was something that you wanted to do?

Sarah: I think it was just a, well I'm enjoying this and so I'm going to see how far can go. so I've wanted to go through the winter but I wasn't convinced whether id manage it or not, but I wanted to, and because I had such nice friendships with other people who'd just kept going and had been doing it for a few years, then it felt really manageable cause we were all just looking out for one another. yeah, so I think it was being with those other people who'd already been swimming at least one winter each, and it gave me the confidence thinking, well they think I can do it so I'll give it a go. yeah, and it just really kind of happened without me putting that much effort into it.

Interviewer: how do you find swimming in the winter compared to when its warmer?

Sarah: It's funny, it's kind of a really different creature to me, swimming in the winter and swimming in the summer. and I like both. just trying to think... I like it because each season is short, that's one of the things I like about it, that you're not doing the same thing all the time. so, when we had a really long summer last year and it was just warm for months and

months and months it did get to the point where it was like 'this is just too easy!'… you could just swim for as long as you wanted and there was no effort required, I actually got less fit because I couldn't be bothered to put any effort in because it was too easy. So I guess that means that there must be something in the kind of challenge about it that I like, and it's been a bit weird this year with not having any events cause I'm normally kind of booking in for an event or two, nothing major but just to have a target, kind of right keeping going, so in the summer ill sign up for something that's a bit longer to make sure that I actually put the time in and in the winter it'll be something that's a bit more of a winter challenge, to make sure that I actually swim hard rather than just getting in, shrieking and getting back out again.

Interviewer: What are the benefits for you, why do you keep doing it?

Sarah: It's all things, I think, there's a massive social aspect, definitely it's the most enjoyable thing that keeps me fit that I've done, and that is what I think keeps me going. So I think primarily I'd still be friends with the people I swim with now even if I didn't go swimming, I'd probably still see them. can't imagine that happening. but I think that initial feeling of like I want to do this for fitness because I can't go running anymore, that's still there, but like, i can go for long walks, but it's not so much fun. so yeah, i like the swimming because it makes me feel like my whole body's a bit stronger and a bit fitter, even if I'm not doing anything massive, and in the winter its interesting you kind of do less swimming but it feels like you're fitter because there's so much effort involved in actually managing to stay in the water and actually keep going.

Interviewer: In the winter, how long do you usually stay in the water for when it drops to around 4 or 5 like it is at the moment?

Sarah: ok, um, i write it down every time so I could give you an incredibly detailed analysis of how long I've stayed in at every temperature for the last five years (laughing) but, generally, I'll just grab my calendar... [goes off screen to grab calendar with swim times on it] so I've been swimming in three different places, like over the last month or so, so one of them is a friends garden whose got a pond, well pool, in it. And that's quite cold. So last week that was 3.8 degrees and I did 11 minutes, then on Saturday I went to Cromhall which I think was probably about 9 degrees and I didn't do much longer actually cause I was chatting to somebody so it was more of a social swim, so that was about 14 minutes, and then on Monday I was at Clevedon and that was 7 degrees and I did 17 minutes, and I think other than the really cold one I could have stayed in quite happily for each of them. but because of covid I'm not swimming so long this year because I get the feeling well, if you do get a bit silly with it then you don't want somebody to put themselves at risk by having to physically help you at all. I haven't needed anyone to physically help me before, but I'm just playing it safe a little bit.

Interviewer: That's really cool, you swim for a really long time!

Sarah: yeah, well I do seem to be a bit.. have you met [name of swimmer] down at the lake?

Interviewer: No…

Sarah: Well, she's the one who organises [revealing detail], they do winter events and she's the best cheerleader ever, she's amazing, she's so enthusiastic about other people's achievements, she's fab… and she has this theory about kind of brown fat and stuff, and about if you were in cold water as a kid you find it easier as an adult and I'd never really thought about being in cold water as a kid but as soon as I told my family that I was doing cold-water swimming they were all saying oh god yeah we could never get you out of the water when we went on holiday when we were kids like north wales, you'd be in the sea and nobody else would stay in as long. so there must be something there. enthusiasm in childhood which I'd forgotten and being able to stay in. I do wear neoprene gloves when it gets below 5 because I worry about nerve damage to my fingers and I'm a massage therapist, so I don't really want to risk that but other than that I do seem to be able to stay in quite well.

Interviewer: I wanted to ask you a bit more about the process of swimming when you go. how does it make your body feel when you get in, and what is the change from out to in?

Sarah: So, I guess there's a difference in the winter and the summer. So getting in, kind of physically just getting in when it's really cold, it's funny because other people talk about stinging sensations and all that sort of stuff but my mind doesn't really focus on that, my minds just, I just get really energized, so as soon as I get in the water then like I just have to move really really quickly. my stroke absolutely falls apart I just have to swim really quickly, for a few minutes (laughing) and then I stop and get my breath back and calm down and then I swim properly. So it's more I don't really have ay words to go with the sensations it just makes me want to move. I suppose the only thing is getting my face in I find difficult, so I have to decide consciously when I'm walking down the steps, whether I'm going to put my face in straight away or not, and if I don't make a decision at the top of the steps, then I know it's not going in. (laughing) so definitely that psychological talking myself into what I'm going to do. if I'm in training for something and I know I'm going to be wanting to get in and get on with it, then at the top of the steps I'll be kind of saying to myself almost out loud 'face in! off you go!' and then I can do it and then I can go in and do front crawl straight away in 1 degree and its fine but if I don't say it, then I'll be doing heads up breast stroke for sort of 300 metres and going I don't want to! (laughing) so for me it's really really psychological deciding what I'm going to do and then I can do it. emotionally, um… I don't know, I guess I'm not thinking of anything really. It's almost like what ppl talk about with sort of mindfulness and clearing the mind, I think it's just happening to me rather than deciding to do it. All of my energies are going into what I'm doing physically, and there's just not really a lot else going on. I think it's quite cathartic - if you're having a really shitty week, then it really does just wipe the slate, and that helps me. before I started swimming, I was taking St. John's wort on the advice of my doctor, for low mood, and after a few years of swimming, I realised that I didn't know why I was still taking it. And so, I haven't taken it for the last few years at all and I haven't had a problem, apart from more recently with being in lockdown and not being able to see people,

its kind of rearing its head a bit. but certainly the swimming had a massive effect on my mood in the long term, even if I hadn't been for a few weeks, and then in the summer it's a bit different because you don't have that kind of mad panic when you get in, physically, umm.. so I think it's more kind of in the summer I'm much more appreciative of the surroundings, so whatever it is , it's always going to be cold when you get in because it's always lower than your body temperature, so there's always a moment of 'brrr!' and that never goes away. but you can just immediately get into the having a chat, looking around, and I think that's why I'm actually lazier with my swimming in the summer cause ill just be lazing around chatting to the seagulls, and being really lazy, watching the fish and eels and stuff and not doing a lot. I guess you could say that in the summer I enjoy it whilst I'm swimming and in the winter, I enjoy it after I'm swimming (laughing).

Interviewer: When you're swimming in the winter, how do you feel about the surrounding nature?

Sarah: I like being outdoors, I like that feeling of not having to focus on anything that's close to me, that feeling of not being edges, and interestingly I've had a good few years... the main difference between the two for me is that (Clevedon and Cromhall) is that Clevedon feels so open, you've got that eternal pond kind of feeling to it, whereas Cromhall, as an old quarry, you're very much IN the water. I didn't like swimming in Cromhall for years... that feeling of being in and not having the openness even though it's a really big body of water, it gave me the willies, so, yeah, enjoying being able to see a distance for me makes a difference, and is like being in sea water. I like the floatyness, not having to put much effort in because you know the water holds you, so yeah I prefer that to being in rivers, where I haven't really had enough experience in rivers. I also quite like not being able to see through the water. (laughing) because there might be monsters, but I can't see them and its ok.

Interviewer: I found what you said about stopping taking St. John's Wort interesting… can you tell me a bit more about how the swimming helped you in that way, particularly what you said about it still helping even when you didn't swim for a while?

Sarah: I have thought about it a lot, and I find it difficult to establish whether it was to do with just swimming and the cold water, or being outside, or the friendships that come with it. so, from a scientific point of view it's very difficult to establish because there are too many variables so yeah, I'm not sure that it's just the cold water, but having said that because recently I've been going to my friends garden and I have found that I still feel good after that, so maybe it is more leaning towards it being the cold water for some reason. but if I had the knowledge that I would only ever be able to swim by myself, I might not want to go as much. I know that once a week I will definitely meet people I know when I'm swimming, and so even if I swim twice more in a week and I don't meet people, I still feel good because I know that I will be seeing people I know.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier about the distinction between when you swim in the summer for how it feels when you're swimming, and swimming in the winter for how it feels afterwards, could you tell me a bit more about that after feeling in the winter swimming?

Sarah: I've never been able to put my finger on exactly what I mean by it, but there's definitely a kind of fuelling the swimming in the winter, I'm kind of enduring the swimming in the inter, I'm kind of getting in and trying to do as much as I can, actually I tend to not to want to get out, and I know that I'm cold but I kind of don't want to get out, and so after the initial you know frenzied really needing to move feeling, I t hank that's why I've kind of started staying in longer, I get to the point where I'm kind of calming down, my breathing's fine, you know can swim properly and get a bit smoother, and then I'm like oh, well I don't want to get out now! ' and so that point I usually have a few minutes at the end of a properly cold swim where I have to talk myself into getting out of the water, almost as much as I have to talk myself into getting into it at the begging. but then afterwards, it's just kind of... first of all I'm just really really focused on getting changed and getting myself sorted, and then it's just feeling a bit daft and giggly and... it's not quite exhilarated but there's certainly joy that comes with it, even if it's not voiced. I think that's more when I'm with other people, and I think when I'm by myself there's kind like a quiet satisfaction and wanting to take it in, I suppose, and wanting to accept the feeling that you know, I'm feeling calm, and I'm feeling happy, an feeling settled, and so you know when I'm in my friends garden, even if I'm all dressed up and I can go home, I tend to you know just stand there and look round the garden for 5 ,minutes and just be calm and quiet and I think that's come from you know, not wanting to break that spell of feeling really calm.

Interviewer: And do you get that sense of calm whilst you're in the water as well?

Sarah: I can do sometimes. I think if I've been quite stressed out and I'm going swimming because I feel like I really 'need' to have a swim, then sometimes I'm not really forcing myself to calm down but I feel like I'm more conscious of the need for it and kind of urging it to happen. so I will be trying to be more calm in the water and sort of clear my thoughts and probably won't be focusing on swimming so much.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a bit more about that process?

Sarah: I think initially, i focus on my swimming and I really focus on my stroke and trying to be as smooth and effective as possible so that I'm pleased with my stroke (this is in order to clear her head) and then it becomes automatic and the calmness comes through that. sometimes when it's really cold ill count to just try and keep myself going. ill count in another language and then ill realise if I'm getting a bit too fuzzy and then I need to get out. but it's also, yeah a little bit cathartic and feeling in the zone emotionally. Yeah, you know if you're trying to count backwards from 100 in Swedish and you can't do it then you know you're too cold! (laughing)

Interviewer: I find that interesting how people can tell when they're too cold … other than counting backwards in a different language, what are the various signs that tell you when you need to get out?

Sarah: Normally my feet. I've learnt to listen to my feet. so, if I'm kind of pushing it a bit time wise in the water and inked I need to get out, it's because my feet are either starting to go completely dead or starting to hurt, and that's kind of the one thing that I can completely rely on and that's why I don't wear neoprene boots at all because it feels like I've taken that kind of trigger away from myself.

Interviewer: You mentioned something a little earlier I'd just like to go back to now if possible, could you tell me a bit more specifically about how swimming has helped you feel good about your body?

Sarah: I guess because when I started swimming... so I have 2 children, and I had a proper you know, post kids body, which was quite flabby and floppy and not something I was particularly pleased with, and I've never really been worried about weight, like a specific weight, but I just, yeah the kind of squishiness of things when they're not fit and haven't been being used, that I don't like, so I think I hadn't been confident in my body for quite a while, and I'd just been wearing big clothes and kind of hiding stuff, so when I was running beforehand I really liked the fact that I was feeling more toned and that gave me more confidence, in lots of situations, and then I stopped running and then I think, when you put a swimsuit on, there's nowhere to hide anything is there, and I think initially when I started swimming that was a concern, but because everybody is just around at the side of the lake with their swimmers on and just chatting, then suddenly you realise that I'm actually not worried about the fact that I'm stood here in a bikini, you know, with flabby bits all over the place, because nobody else is looking at it, and you realise, well, other people aren't thinking it's important, and I think that's, I don't think I consciously thought it but you realise in the background, well, nobody else seems to be giving a toss, so, actually maybe I'm making it into something bigger than it is. and then helps, and then gradually everything tones up a little bit anyway because you're swimming more so it all kind of feeds into it. It's almost like although you can see pretty much everything it's like we put some kind of blinker across ourselves and we don't see one another's bodies. It's funny because when you're fully clothed I think there's more judgement of those things. and you're more aware of it, even if you're not judging others, you can see it more somehow, cause of how society's working normally. but suddenly, when you're on the side of the lake, in various states of undress, it seems like nobody is actually clocking it, for want of a much better word! It's like that kind of part of your mind has just gone 'oh we don't need to worry about that' (being judged) and its just genuinely not really noticing it, and not really thinking about it. um, and I think also a funny thing that I've noticed from other people is that when I've met up with swimming friends outside of swimming sometimes and we'll all be going 'oh my god! that's what your hair looks like! I didn't realise you had long hair I thought you had short hair!' and we just hadn't noticed things before, or 'blimey, you've got a skirt on!' you're just so used to not looking at how people are physically that it's a strange shock when you go out with people in their normal clothes and you realise that they don't look anything like you thought they looked like! (laughing) It is strange talking about it with you, it's like you just get pure personality, you know the person that goes with the name, like my friend [name of friend], I just get [name of friend] at the lake, and I don't get any idea of what [name of friend] really looks like, or what size she is, or what her hairs like, it's just [name of friend]. and then I go out with her somewhere and it's like 'oooh, [name of friend]'s quite cool!' you know, she wears this really cool long kinda arty stuff, and oooh, she's quite slim, ooh I didn't think her

hair looked like that, you just get the pure distilled person when you're swimming with them, the other stuff just doesn't seem to be there!

Interviewer: And when you're swimming with your lake friends, what kind of things do you talk about? Are there common themes in the things you chat about?

Sarah: Absolutely inane bizarre off the wall stuff. (laughing) The most common themes are asking if somebody you know is training for something maybe asking about that, maybe common concerns about certain people we know swimming who might be pushing it a bit far and we're not sure that they're safe, things like that, so there are things that are just purely to do with the swimming. but then, I think there's something to do with after you've swum, that kind of slight manic nuttiness that goes on and everything comes out. and one of my friends, [name of friend], she doesn't always swim with us, but she says she really likes it because we always swim on a Monday morning and when she does she says I always get something to laugh about with other people during the week when I come and swim with you guys, because you just talk about such absolutely weird crap! (laughing) completely varied. There's nothing you would normally talk about, because you've already got rid of that kind of 3 hours of sitting in a pub chatting bit and got to the crazy stuff without the preamble. It's all part of that kind of getting rid of the clothes and the preconceptions type thing, and the normal boring small talk seems to have gone with it as well. It feels like friends I've got from swimming versus friends I've got from elsewhere, they feel like more genuine friends, it's like people I would never have met in a work situation or any other of my social circles, I would not have met these people, there's no reason we would have come across one another, um, and for some reason we've got really really good friendships, and we don't seem to have anything in common other than the fact that we like to swim in cold water. and it makes you realise that your normal connections aren't necessarily made because you particularly click with somebody, its more because they're convenient, and because this is the person that you don't dislike the least out of the people available to make connections with you know (laughing) that sounds like I'm being really horrible to friends who don't swim…

Interviewer: (also laughing) I understand! You were saying about your work friends because you mentioned earlier you were a massage therapist, do you think differently about cold-water swimming because of that or are they separate spheres for you?

Sarah: They're quite separate. Interestingly, there's been quite a number of people who I massage who they've asked me about swimming but don't make the jump to go themselves... I feel like my clients are less likely to go 'oh that's mad' when you say you swim in cold water they're actually more likely to be interested and ask what does it feel like why do you like it and that sort of thing , because I think they're more aware of their physical body than the rest of the population, 'cause they're seeking out physical therapy without being instructed to do so by a doctor and I think that suggests they have a greater awareness of how their body works.

Interviewer: This idea of awareness of your body and ideas about self-improvement made me curious, does any of that Wim Hof/ ice mile stuff resonate or appeal to you?

Sarah: I am interested in that kind of thing, but something that puts me off is the absolute carte blanche you will not wear neoprene for ice swimming and things like that. Because I think that I would be perfectly capable of doing ice miles, but I don't want to not wear neoprene gloves, because the one time I didn't, when it was 2 degrees, I didn't get the feeling back in the ends of my fingers for 2 weeks, and that really worried me, and kind of yes I enjoy this, but I quite like to have nerve endings, and it just seems a bit too macho to say, oh yes, you can swim cold water but you also HAVE to take massive risks with things like that. and it's like I don't mind taking the other inherent risks of just you know you might get very very cold and you might get hypothermia because that's a bit different, but something that you're actually not going to ever recover from and you might actually end up with long term nerve damage just because you're going 'oh I can't wear gloves just because its only swimmers and hats and goggles' that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. so I'd quite like to do some of the longer distance things, I've got a plan over the next few years now that my kids are older and I can spend a bit longer doing some training to find something that I would like as a challenge, but I'm not going to go down the line of doing the official ice miles because I'm never going to say I'm going to leave the gloves off when it's really really cold. I'm definitely happy to contemplate doing that stuff but it definitely would have to be on my terms rather than the, you know, whoever it was who thought up these ridiculous rules that you can't wear gloves otherwise it's not an ice mile. I think it just feels like there's that little bit of something that doesn't mesh with the rest of the cold-water swimming community where everything is very inclusive and accepting of people doing what they can do. and to just have an absolute cut off there 'well you just have to risk it'... it certainly doesn't make the water any warmer to wear gloves, it doesn't make it any less of a challenge, it just you know stops you risking damage, so, I've kind of shied away from that direction…

Interviewer: You described when you couldn't get sensation back in your fingers for a couple of weeks, is that the only hairy scary moment you've had with cold-water swimming or have there been others?

Sarah: No, I've normally been ok, I seem to be lucky in that I seem to be able to judge how long I should stay in for, and what I can manage. so I've not really had to be kind of helped in any way, with my swimming before, I'm trying to think... it's kind of a source of pride that other than once I've always managed to judge it right, I can always get dressed afterwards and my fingers will still work. I don't think I've ever felt that I was on the edge ... this was going to be the year that I pushed it a bit and wanted to see what I could do if took it a bit further rather than played it safe… but obviously that changed because of Covid.

Interviewer: Do you feel like any certain demographic is particularly keen on cold-water swimming?

Sarah: There's obviously loads more women… and I've always wondered whether it's because of different fat distributions in male and female bodies, is it just easier for women to do it, and therefore they continue going once they've given it a try, but then equally I've got male friends who swim, and who do way more swimming than me, and who don't seem to be having a problem with it, type thing. I don't know whether , I always think the difference between men and women in sport is that there seems to be more competitiveness in men

and it's not a very competitive thing to do (CWS) and so I wonder whether that could have a factor in it, cause I think the women I know who do cold-water swimming by and large do it because they want to do it because it's fun, because they enjoy it, you know, they get something out of it emotionally or physically and the men I know who do it do seem to be - not all of them, but they're more likely to be doing it as more of a, I'm training for something, or you know, a competition, or I want to get stronger, or I want to get faster, so there does seem to be a bit of a different focus but that not across the board.

Interviewer: That's interesting, what you said about competition, for you then, do you feel like there is a goal in that or is it purely for the moment or the experience?

Sarah: I guess yeah as I said something to keep me a bit fitter, cause I don't like feeling unfit, but I'm not very good at being competitive, so sometimes ill enter competitions but I don't desire to do better than other people sufficiently to put lots and lots of effort in so I'm always last.. and so that's kind of put me off competitions a bit, cause although it's fun to be last a few times and go oh I don't mind then after a while it's like you know it's not that fun to be last (laughing). and it's funny because in CWS being last means being in the water longer and so you're kind of doing more, but that doesn't seem to be recognised which is strange sometimes. It kind of contradicts because some events have a cut off time saying you have to do this distance in this time but it's like I don't normally do that distance in that time and I stay in the water for kind of twice as long as other people and you know when I'm swimming safely that's seen as quite, not cool, but it's an achievement, to an extent, to be able to stay in and be fine after. and if you go to an even slightly competitive situation it's the people who are out of the water quickest that are celebrated and its feels like a strange about turn on what normally happens in cold water. so that does put me off doing competitive stuff, so the challenges I was saying I'm trying to think up for the future will definitely just be something to challenge myself, rather than in competition with other people. I don't think I really know that many women swimmers who are doing much that might be considered competitive rather than a personal challenge.

Interviewer: My final question for you is, are there any habits you have or swimming routine? Do you do any similar things before or after you swim?

Sarah: I'm quite pernickety about how my bag is laid out so that would be my ritual thing… I have 3 different things, all folded in the same way, all in same part of my bag and those things… Cause the funny thing is I don't like having wet clothes on, the crazy thing about having a dry robe but I won't put it on when I'm wet unless the weather is really awful, I don't put it on until I'm dry, but it's kind of there as a just in case but I don't like to. but everything is always laid out properly in my own particular way and I'll put things on in a certain order. So yes, I definitely have my … rituals.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, that's everything… I really appreciate you making the time to do this interview!

Sarah: It's no problem, you can get back in touch if you have any more questions… will you send me a copy of your dissertation when you finish it? When's it due?

Interviewer: Of course, it's due in April, I will make sure I send it to you! Thank you again! Bye…

Sarah: Bye!