An ethnographic study of Resurface - A wellbeing intervention for university students

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of students with poor mental health undertaking a peer support activity course named Resurface; a wellbeing intervention based at Bournemouth University. Resurface involves weekly immersion within two lifestyle activities, surfing, and yoga, which together share a historic cultural relationship, and are witnessing a growing demand in modern society as shared practises in wellbeing experiences, retreats, and interventions. The aim of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between student experiences of the intervention and their wellbeing undertaking an interpretive philosophy, where my relationship with the students was explored subjectively. An ethnographic approach was adopted, involving in-depth individual interviews with sixteen students and overt observation of a cohort of 32 students participating in the course over a full academic year. The use of a research diary was incorporated to record a written document of my own thoughts and feelings, allowing autoethnographic, co-created data to be included. Data collection commenced in October 2018 and ended in June 2019 upon completion of the course and subsequent academic year; as a result, the students' experience of university life was captured alongside their experiences of the intervention, allowing the full context of their lived experiences to be explored.

The key findings include the early experiences of the students' journey, involving the motivations and apprehensions concerning these experiences, such as the allure of surfing and yoga, and the students' hope for a fresh start; conversely, the fear of the unknown inhibiting their engagement and progression. This study adds to the emerging literature on surfing and nature-based activity, by showing how benefits to subjective wellbeing are grounded in the students' embodied lived experiences of 'blue space'. Surfing helped alter the students' perspectives of their own mental health, and encouraged a sense of wellbeing, adventure, and vitality, and improved their self-confidence and self-worth. The important link between resilience, surfing, and wellbeing was identified, and surfing's innate facilitation of a 'flow state', increasing the evidence base on surfing and respite from mental distress. The findings add to the emerging knowledge on surfing's mood-enhancing capacity, and the link between surfing and reduced symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression.

The parallel yoga experiences connect mixed emotions and feelings during yoga with self-regulatory behaviours, reflecting the journey endured by the students, having confronted interpersonal feelings and memories. This raised a problematic issue regarding short-term yoga participation and mental health, where self-judgment and over-thinking were not always dealt with effectively. Equally, the findings highlight the experiences of slowing down and relaxing during yoga, and dominant outcomes of reduced

stress and anxiety, which finds support in most prominent yoga and wellbeing research. Like surfing, yoga encouraged a 'flow state', yet was a subjective, malleable experience, reflecting the students' individualisms. This study shows that by combining surfing and yoga, Resurface provides a synergising, long-term intervention which builds a bridge between leisure activity participation and intervention for students with poor mental health, as an appealing holistic alternative.

The most poignant experiences are revealed through a deeper understanding of the interconnected, cohesive contributory theme. These include the experiences of peer support and belonging, shifting students from exclusion to inclusion, and encouraging a feeling of safety, a non-judgmental culture, deeper conversation, and camaraderie. This linked to a detailed understanding of Resurface as a 'third place', evolving the social surroundings separate from the students two usual social environments, and one that allowed the students to explore new identities, and embark upon novel adventures in a structured community. These findings highlight the students desire to escape from their first and second 'places' and seek respite from an often toxic university world, delving deeper into self-image, self-esteem, and social roles as Resurface members, surfers, and yogis. This study provided a series of linked themes exploring the culture of the student social world, and in doing so, develops a deeper understanding of the participants experiences, contributing towards the body of knowledge on the unique social world of Resurface.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Research Context

This study examines the experiences of students undertaking a peer support activity course named Resurface; a wellbeing intervention for students based at Bournemouth University, located on the South coast of England. Resurface involves weekly immersion within two lifestyle activities, surfing, and yoga. The intervention was delivered parallel to the university's academic schedule from September 2018 to June 2019, with breaks correlating with gaps in the academic year, such as festive holidays and exams. There were 26 formal sessions delivered during this period, which involved 12 surfing lessons and 14 yoga classes, as part of an initiative to improve students' wellbeing and facilitate peer support, while living and studying at university.

Access onto the intervention involved a referral via the National Health Service (NHS) wellbeing team at the university, who managed the psychological risks and were in contact with each student throughout the duration of the course. The students typically displayed milder symptoms of poor mental health and wellbeing, instead of more severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or severe major depression. The activities were delivered by teachers and instructors that had no previous mental health training; however, there was the provision of an additional programme support lead that was a psychotherapist, and further assistance from an experienced mental health support worker, both available to support anyone who struggled with confidence or anxiety.

Data collection commenced in October 2018, ending in June 2019, on completion of the intervention and consequent academic year. Accordingly, the students' experiences of university life were captured alongside their experiences of the intervention, allowing the full context of their lived experiences to be explored. An ethnographic approach was adopted, involving in-depth individual interviews with sixteen students and overt observation of a cohort of 32 students participating in the course over a full academic year. The use of a research diary was incorporated to record a written document of my own thoughts and feelings throughout the duration of the intervention and declare my own opinions about the research; this helped me stay connected with the writing process and reflect on the research.

The context of the surf-yoga unification is important: together these activities share a historic and cultural relationship, reflecting a demand in modern society as combined practises in wellbeing experiences, retreats, and interventions (Muggleton 1998; Wheaton 2013). Despite cultural association, uptake of wellness intervention, and the subsequent research into these therapeutic activities individually (e.g., Little 2007; Khalsa et al., 2011; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Caddick et al., 2015; Snelling 2015), research has not been conducted to explore the experiences, or indeed efficacy, of surfing and yoga combined for wellbeing intervention. With sparce exploration into Higher Education (HE), activity-based wellbeing interventions, this study provides a better understanding of the experiences of a surf-yoga intervention from the students' own point of view, conforming to the interpretive philosophy it led.

The challenge of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences participating in a peer support intervention entails and the meaning it has for the participants, so that a more informed discussion of how student wellbeing and lifestyle activity intervention could be developed. Therefore, this study's interpretive lens guided my need to understand, and interpret the students' social reality (Matthews 2003) and comprehend phenomena through the meanings assigned to them (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991). A deeper understanding of these components will help determine if, how, and why, participating in an intervention of this nature might offer an alternative therapeutic tool in the HE sectors, which could help manage the currently over-stretched mental health services.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand richer and deeper relationships between students' wellbeing and their experiences of the Resurface intervention; to advance this understanding, the following questions have been identified:

Research Question 1: Does the Resurface intervention cause any noticeable impacts on the students' wellbeing and lives?

Research Question 2: To critically evaluate the extent to which cohesive contributory factors or influences, those not directly associated with surfing or yoga, affect the overall intervention experience?

Research Question 3: To critically assess the social group dynamic experienced in relation to peer support, and the reported impact of this dynamic?

Research Question 4: To critically explore the extent to which surfing and yoga as shared activities in intervention, are reported to be valuable tools for wellbeing promotion?

Research Question 5: To examine how the sample populace experience perceived mental health stigma through participation in an intervention of this kind?

The overall aim of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between student experiences of the intervention and their wellbeing. The outcomes of this research will contribute towards a better knowledge of the surf and yoga intervention experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the culture of one significant social world; that of university students experiencing mental health and wellbeing difficulties.

The Researcher

Brewer (2000) tells us that a researcher's interests shape research and must not be overlooked. My interest in this subject reflects my own personal experiences and circumstances, and particular inclination towards surfing and yoga, which has helped shape the lines of enquiry pursued in the data collection. During this section, I aim to illuminate my experiences and the journey which led to the formation of the Resurface intervention, and my own involvement with it.

My background as an alumnus of Bournemouth University provides an insight into existing student experiences and an understanding of the academic and sociocultural challenges faced at university. My interest of wellbeing intervention stems from my role as ResLifeBU Officer at Bournemouth University. ResLifeBU is a programme which welcomes, supports and develops students through their first year at university, through organising a broad range of social activities, and providing welfare support for students struggling to settle in. Over time, I became captivated by the personal journey students undertook when transitioning into university and recognised their overall lack of resilience. It was often the case that for the first-time students experienced existential loneliness, due to a dislodgment from their familiar worlds. I quickly became interested in the obstacles faced and how this influenced their wellbeing, and gained a curiosity of peer support intervention, facilitated through lifestyle activities. I sought to encourage students to manage their own wellbeing

through connecting with others facing similar social, emotional, and psychological distress, and recognised the necessity of an inviting platform to achieve this.

My interest in surfing stems from five years participation and further experiences as a freelance surf instructor. As an insider, I've become absorbed in the personal journey surfers undertake, and over the years observed improvements in my own and others wellbeing. Personally, I've developed a deeper connection with nature and disconnect from the stress with which the land often represents. Surfing helps me to remain present and forms a part of my identity: time spent in the ocean has increase my sense of vitality and life satisfaction. Like many surfers exploring surfing's sub-cultures, I was led in the direction of yoga, finding that it helped me to slow down, as I discovered peace and relaxation amidst a busy work-life schedule. Yoga has transformed the way in which I experience stress and improved my routine, and regular practise has enabled me to feel more connected with my body, gaining flexibility and experiencing less aches and pains, an outcome aiding my surfing progression.

With growing student demand for new and adventurous activities, my positive wellbeing experiences in surfing and yoga, and my job role at Bournemouth University, both activities were integrated within the 'ResLifeBU' student activity programme I was tasked to deliver. However, with 'ResLife' broadly focussed on student integration, I recognised a lack of tailored intervention in place for students with more serious mental health difficulties, in the way of peer support provision. In the spring of 2018, with the university's permission, I bought together my interests and knowledge to implement a more comprehensive, experimental 6-week surf and yoga intervention for a handful of students referred by the university's wellbeing team. Utilising the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales* to gain quantitative data, the outcomes were encouraging, yet lacked a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of surfing and yoga intervention, from a more qualitative perspective.

With the support of an external community team, and separate from my work at the university, I went on to help shape a non-profit organisation named Resurface. Resurface intended to integrate surfing and yoga into a comprehensive and holistic, long-term intervention, working closely with the university's wellbeing team. Exploring Resurface's first official intervention for the students in this study, I took a step-back as a facilitator and coach, to participate alongside the new members, as a participant-researcher. This has provided me with ample opportunities for observation in an overt participant role, while the instructors took the lead in delivering the programme with the support of an experienced psychotherapist. Today, Resurface is an established non-profit

organisation, delivering weekly clubs for 18–30-year-olds, and 12-week 'Local Retreats' for those 30 years and over, providing lifestyle activity intervention for both students and the wider community. Resurface work with local stakeholders such as mental health charity, Dorset Mind, specialist psychiatric unit, Pebble Lodge, fostering agency, Blue Sky, Dorset NHS Foundation, several educational establishments including Bournemouth University, and numerous practitioners.

Relevance of Research Topic

According to Williams (2003), research is judged on its applicability to real-world concerns, generating information that has relevance beyond confined circumstances. Indeed, Brewer (2000) argues that relevance is a central benchmark by which to judge data in the current post-modern world of ethnography, which sees a challenge to putative thought. The following section describes three dominant subjects of relevance; the student wellbeing scene; peer support and mental health stigma; and surfing and yoga, from convention to intervention; themes which shaped the foundations of exploration.

The Student Wellbeing Scene

The relevance of this study lies in the observation that the majority, if not all British universities are dealing with increasing student welfare issues, with waiting lists for campus counsellors on the rise and a lack of counsellors and intervention substructure in place to deal with the epidemic (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2011; YouGov, 2016; Thorley 2017). UKAS (2021) statistics uncovered a record percentage of young people going to University across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with an increase in the proportion of young people placed from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2021, data had shown an overall increase in the number of placed UK 18-year-olds to 32.6%, with 86% of those who applied to university having been accepted, the highest on record (UKAS 2021). These momentous entry rates for 18-year-olds show that young people are becoming progressively attracted to full-time, undergraduate education. Among this population, 83% are aged from 16 to 24 years old, a phase that is particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, with 75% of mental health problems being established by the age of 25 (Kessler et al., 2005; Reavley & Jorm 2010). This rise in student numbers has ultimately involved an increased demand on student support services; for instance, the Institute for Public Policy Research's survey revealed 95% of HEI's reporting an upsurge in referrals which has overwhelmed its services (Thorley 2017).

In 2016, a poll produced by YouGov sampled 1061 students and found that over a quarter (27%) reported having a mental health issue of one type or another, with depression and anxiety the most common reported issues (74%) (YouGov 2016). It was found that of this sample, one in five (18%) had encountered university mental health services, and 89% visited a counsellor, with 21% reporting this as unhelpful. This means that for many HEI's, the resource for counselling services is over-stretched, inaccessible, and at times, ineffective; and the need for alternative preventative measures has become a necessity. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines recommends early, proactive intervention whenever possible, as if symptoms of depression or anxiety are left untreated, symptoms worsen (NICE 2009); plainly stated, consequences can result in suicide or self-harm.

Through acknowledgment of these concerns there has been a noticeable culture change in the HE sectors. In 2018, the universities minister backed a new Mental Health Charter lead by the charity *Student Minds*. This promised new standards that institutions had to abide by on the level of wellbeing provision for students, calling for an increase in the number of counsellors and wellbeing advisors (Busby 2018). That said, for Ryan (2005a), university welfare provision cannot be limited to reactive crisis management; with the growing number of students reporting mental health issues, the demand for counsellors and advisors far outweighs resources. A report by the Kings Fund found that recognition of preventive initiatives for poor mental health would help substantially reduce the cost of mental health services and demand for counsellors (McCrone et al., 2008). Therefore, universities must look elsewhere to alternative means of proactive intervention to control the increasing numbers of welfare issues. As the student environment is one with research and development as a fundamental driver, this study provides opportunities to develop and assess new possibilities to explore student wellbeing intervention, which may have been difficult to achieve elsewhere.

Peer Support and Mental Health Stigma

The social setting of HEI's is a unique environment where study, leisure, housing, social life, counselling, and medical care, are all delivered in a single setting. This can be a particularly challenging environment for students with mental health problems and is often the case that they are excluded from peers and victims of derision. Moore et al., (2018) found that grouping those going through similar experiences creates a safe and inclusive social environment where individuals can develop their social skills without feeling stigmatised. This is important, as Bathje et al., (2011) argue, students find it more difficult to attend support services associated with mental health, as the

stigma attached can create a barrier, an outcome of perceived prejudice. However, peer support groups have been found to ease transition into therapeutic settings and act as appealing alternatives to one-to-one counselling (Cherney et al., 2015), helping students to avoid the stigma associated with counselling, a concern amid HE sectors (Conley 2017).

Peer support is a topical discussion in the field of wellbeing (Mead et al., 2001; Page et al., 2018), and of particular interest in the context of social support, networks, and cohesion, provided by group activity. This is because group activity is known to significantly improve psychological wellbeing (Marmot et al., 1999; Crone et al., 2005; Bennett et al., 2006). Specifically, Berkman et al., (2000) found that social group involvement provides a sense of value, belonging and connection. Relevance lies in the foundation of Resurface as a model of peer support, and this study aims to discover how and why peer support might help reduce negative emotions associated with mental health stigma. Understanding how these students perceive such stigma in this setting will help provide an insider's view of the way HEI's handle current student welfare integration. This will help wellbeing services develop new approaches to reduce stigma as a barrier to leisure activity participation and progress innovative, holistic approaches for wellbeing intervention.

Surf and Yoga: From Convention to Intervention

Resurface emulates a historic relationship in modern culture among surfers and yogis living in coastal locations embracing alternative lifestyles (Muggleton 1998; Wheaton 2013), an amalgamation which has become progressively more popular for wellbeing intervention. This social group emerged during the late 60's idealistic movement of '*Soul Surfing'*; a spiritualistic lifestyle where surfing and yoga unified, along with communal living, vegetarianism, and nature (Kidman 2008). Over time, this amalgamation advanced, revealing numerous complimentary characteristics. Physical parallels were identified such as increased flexibility, stamina, hip and core stability, strength, balance and breathing (Berkum 2015; Surf Maroc 2018). Psychological equivalents were acknowledged such as present moment centeredness, mental focus, patience, reduced stress/anxiety, and a heightened mind-body connection (Cramer et al., 2016; Dunbar et al., 2017; Surf Maroc 2018). Nowadays, surf shops sell yoga videos and clothing, and pro-surfers practice yoga as part of their conditioning routine; additionally, there has been a global rise in the number of surf-yoga retreats promising enhanced wellness and vitality (The Outsider 2018).

Despite popularity and emergence of research into individual ST or YT interventions, there is a research gap in understanding combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy; this has left the

therapeutic, wellbeing relationship between surfing and yoga unclear. With research displaying participation levels in leisure activity lower for those with poor mental health (DoH 2016), and leisure activity demonstrated as an essential component for wellbeing (Milena et al., 2000; Penedo & Dahn 2005; Iwasaki et al., 2014), Resurface positions a bridge between leisure activity participation and intervention for students with poor mental health. Therefore, by considering the cultural context of surfing and yoga, the modern-day uptake of surf and yoga intervention, the formation of Resurface, and the lack of research in this field of study, the relevance of this study involves direct application of real-world concerns (Williams 2003).

Summary

This study did not intend to be applied ethnography, described by Hammersley (1992) as relevant and applicable research beyond that of the research community, yet as concern in the wider educational and social context emerged, my sense of responsibility to understand the students' perspective on wellbeing intervention grew. The relevance of this research lies in the observation that the mental health and wellbeing of the student population is an increasingly crucial issue in the HE sectors, and an area of concern to student welfare practitioners and those tasked with implementing successive healthy lifestyle initiatives. For that reason, relevance is found in that together surfing and yoga, as a form of peer-support intervention, could make a positive contribution towards addressing some of these issues. A better understanding of these experiences will allow occupational therapist, practitioner's, student welfare advisers, counselling services, government departments and other stakeholders, to gain better knowledge and cater to the needs of both students and the wider society, experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This study adopts an ethnographic style of research, renowned by its aim to comprehend the social meanings and actions of those in a given field (Brewer 2000). In this case, it is the exploration of the world of the student as a lifestyle activity participant facing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing. As this is an inductive study, the bulk of the literature will be offered in the main findings (Chapters 3-7), as the emergent themes dictate the literature. For that reason, this section sets the scene by offering an overview of the phenomenon of students' mental health and wellbeing and how this is being addressed in the HE sectors. This is followed by a summary of individual surf and yoga intervention research, deploying a battery of resources to better understand the therapeutic efficacy of both. How this literature is relevant to my study is indicated in the following pages, by helping the reader to understand the research approach.

Mental Health and the HE Sector

A recent report by the University and College Counselling Association (BACP 2019) highlighted increased levels of stress and psychological health difficulties in UK universities and a rising demand for counselling services, with services facing unprecedented challenges, and research indicating a global concern (Stallman 2012; Macaskill 2013). The *Unite Students* insight report (2016) shed light on the drop in wellbeing levels among UK undergraduates, finding two-thirds of students having reported a reduction in wellbeing after going to university due to issues such as tiredness, lack of energy, and stress; a further one-third of this sample reported feeling depressed, isolated, or lonely. Likewise, Cooke et al., (2006) explored the wellbeing impact of the HE environment on 1st year students in Britain, painting a picture of the mental health crisis we see today. Cooke uncovered that psychiatric morbidity scores increased once students began their studies, with escalations in anxiety which fluctuated over the year and became distinctly more prominent, failing to return to pre-university levels. Similarly, Andrews and Wilding (2004) used the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale surfacing similar conclusions; they evaluated a group of UK students pre-university and again mid-way through their second year. By the final assessment, 9% of once symptom-free students had developed depression, and 20% were experiencing

considerable anxiety by clinical standards. These findings suggest the university environment is an influencer of the wellbeing difficulties we see today and rising mental health related issues reported.

With current headlines such as '*One in three freshers show symptoms of mental health disorder*' and '*UK universities act to tackle student mental health crisis*' making news (see Chaffin 2018 or Lacchia 2018), the emphasis on student mental health in the UK higher education sectors are prevalent and concerning. Today, students are at a greater risk of facing psychological challenges at university and there is a mounting need for additional support services such as Resurface: this is demonstrated by a 25% increase in demand for student counselling (Institute of Public Policy Research 2017). Past research into student mental health has concentrated on the comparisons between students and the general population (e.g., Cooke et al., 2006); it was found that in general, students fare worse than the general population on measures of psychological health (Roberts & Zelenyanski 2002; BACP 2019; Roberts et al., 1999; Stewart-Brown et al., 2000).

Grant (2002) suggests that academic, relationship and monetary worries are the major sources of stress, with research signifying a relationship between these triggers and student's mental health (Tyrell 1992; Roberts & Zelenyanski 2002; Andrews & Wilding 2004; Monk 2004). As more young people enter higher education, they face greater academic pressure to achieve, where degrees are becoming more popular; with this expansion, there has been a concern that the wellbeing support in place to cope with the additional welfare needs would not develop at an equivalent pace (YouGov 2016) Indeed, with the record number of young people going to university across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, universities are finding it difficult to determine how to support students with their multifaceted, expanding, and ever-changing needs (UKAS 2021). Changes in areas such as student funding and widening participation in the HE sectors are feasible explanations for this rise in student distress, with known links between anxiety and depression (Andrews & Wilding 2004; Cooke et al., 2006; YouGov 2016).

The types of issues reported by students are varied; they incorporate long-term mental health problems, academic-related issues, and there has been an influx of situational crises such as relationships, adjustment to campus life, repression of privacy, social media, existential crises, loneliness, and debt (BACP 2019). With this, determining whether a student has a mental illness, or is experiencing a form of mental or emotional distress has become difficult, resulting in confusion around knowing how to offer support. The primacy for clinical services is to determine the prevalence of major mental illness; this is because wider notions of mental illness (*e.g., mental, or emotional distress)* might have more applicability for those involved in HE counselling services

(Connell et al., 2007). Indeed, understanding mental illness and mental distress is a critical starting point in determining exactly what a student might need in terms of wellbeing support.

To clarify, mental illnesses, or mental health disorders, are ailments that cause serious disorder in a person's behaviour, mood, or rationality, and can be caused by both cognitive chemical imbalances and situational factors such as stress, abuse, and traumatic events (WHO 2001; WHO 2018). Such ailments comprise predominant disorders such as depression, anxiety, dementia, and substance use disorders, as well as less common, yet severe illnesses, such as schizophrenia, autism, and bipolar disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Conversely, mental distress is used to describe a person's life with an array of symptoms and experiences of which are generally held to be concerning, perplexing or out of the ordinary; these symptoms are far more common, such as stress, loneliness, and social anxiety, yet can also be debilitating disorders (Fuller et al., 2000). It is crucial to differentiate the two, and their similarities, to understand how to treat individual's conditions and personal circumstances.

Another important differentiation in the context of this study is how and why wellbeing differs to mental health. Mental health incorporates corresponding attributes which define a positive or negative state of psychological wellbeing (WHO 2018), whereas wellbeing includes numerous affective and cognitive mechanisms which incorporate happiness. For instance, hedonic wellbeing comprises enjoyment and pleasure; eudemonic wellbeing includes purpose, meaning, and fulfilment; self-actualization associates with accomplishments and optimism; and wisdom and resilience involves the capacity to cope and have healthy relationships (Seligman 2010). Psychological wellbeing also comprises emotional health, which involves a person's reactions to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; and social health, concerning a person's ability to form interpersonal relationships and adjust comfortably to social situations (WHO 2018).

Improving these indicators of wellbeing is a fundamental objective for those facing problems with their mental health; crucially, it is important to understand that when a person experiences a form of distress, this can be very normal, and needs to be treated in such a way, for instance, avoiding the use of medication as a first response. Instead, YouGov (2016) suggest cultivating a holistic wellbeing approach through lifestyle changes (*e.g., diet, exercise, sleep, routine, social connections, stress management*); as Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) explain, distress only becomes an illness when continued symptoms affect a person's ability to function. Certainly, be it a severe mental illness or milder forms of distress, one thing that should remain a practitioner's focus, is motivating individuals to take control of their own wellbeing through lifestyle change.

Despite an emerging knowledge of the positive approaches to progressing wellbeing, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2011) highlight a major hurdle in achieving successive intervention, which is that psychiatrists struggle in reaching a consensus as to what is or is not a mental disorder. This forms clear complications with the planning and provision of care, resulting in a need for HE services to concentrate its resources on those who are in some sense, mentally unwell. This leads to the unstructured nature of the concept of mental disorder, with an assortment of terms used; specifically, mental illness, mental health problems, mental health difficulties, and mental health issues. A major barrier to receiving professional help is the stigma surrounding these terms, where it is difficult for students to evade prejudice as they are labelled from the offset with the preconceptions of what 'mental health' means, and how seeking support might define them.

The Association for University and College Counselling (2010) found that when diagnosed 'mentally ill', the stigma attached can be as disabling as the problem itself. Another major issue is that people are often diagnosed 'mentally ill' when they are experiencing a more common form of distress. Grant (2003) believed that the need to evade stigma can cause a person to avoid seeking help from fear of being associated with undesirable stereotypes. In addition, it is common for students facing mental health issues to avoid talking to other students or staff about their experiences, as they fear being thought less of and worry their opportunities to succeed might be adversely affected (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2011). Examples of these worries include unfair treatment, prejudice from staff, and institutional discrimination, all of which create barriers to mental health and wellbeing support (ECU 2014; HEPI 2017).

A report by Student Minds (2017) found a lack of awareness and availability in receiving institutional mental health support and determined that most students' do not feel they are encouraged to disclose their difficulties. However, in recent times, a great deal more students are declaring a mental health condition than ever before; in 2015/16, over 15,000 UK-domiciled first-year students disclosed a mental health condition, nearly five times the amount in 2006/07 (Thorley 2017). This indicates that the fear of negative stereotypes and stigma surrounding mental health is reducing; conversely, Dufour (2016) suggests that there is a long way to go before this is fully eradicated in universities and throughout the wider society.

While there is evidence that students' general wellbeing levels have dropped within the HE sectors, Neves and Hillman (2017) argue that there is a lack of robust data on levels of mental illness among the student population, and a lack of clarity concerning the differences between mental distress and mental illnesses. With the rising levels of student distress and the fear of stigma attached to mental

health and wellbeing support services, it is not always appropriate or possible to offer counselling, and many students require care in the way of alternative health intervention. Dufour (2016) discussed the multi-faced role of assessment for counselling in higher education:

> "*It is important to ascertain if there is anything that can be put in place to help the student practically through signposting them to other support services; as when a student is struggling, this can be a complex issue requiring several different sources of help* (p.71)."

Indeed, with the increase issues raised and complexity of student wellbeing and support, more is required to be done in the way of alternate forms of holistic intervention. These conclusions indicate that the university environment is negatively impacting students' wellbeing, and highlights the need for proactive, preventative interventions in the HE sectors, to assist its currently over-stretched and primarily, reactive support systems in place.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support in the HE Sector

Reavley and Jorm (2010) found that a host of mental health and wellbeing interventions have been implemented in schools, yet HEI's have received less attention. Examples of support services in the HE sectors typically involve external providers, such as counselling providers offering face-to-face *Cognitive Behavioural Therapies* (CBT) (BACP 2019). Other examples include the Samaritans, a telephone helpline providing emotional support; Student Minds, a national organisation implementing campaigns to change perceptions of mental health in universities (WHO 2018); several skill based training programmes such as cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, and conflict resolution (Moss 2003; Pool and Qualter 2012); and technology-delivered interventions such as mindfulness and CBT apps (Conley et al., 2016). Locally, near to where this study took place, the 'Retreat' is a destination where individuals can self-refer without appointment and are supported by mental health professionals in a safe and welcoming environment.

Reavley and Jorm (2010) reviewed interventions such as CBT, online support, and group support in HEI's, and concluded that there was a lack of intervention available for prevention of anxiety and depression which focused on wellbeing promotion; in particular, interventions adopting a more holistic approach. In its place, most interventions responded to acute mental health crisis, or in a response to self-referral; this meaning that clinical symptoms would have to be acutely present for treatment, defeating the purpose of early, preventative intervention. This raises an alarm, as it is

well-known that on-going depression, left untreated, can have debilitating impacts on interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive functioning, and subsequent obstruction of academic success (Brimaher et al., 2007; BMA 2016).

By summarising data from randomised controlled trials to understand the impacts of wellbeing support at universities, Winzer et al., (2018) underline some of the crucial issues with crisis point intervention management. The findings demonstrate that although traditional interventions, such as CBT, result in sustained reduction of negative mental health symptoms, they were not consistent, or practical, due to the lack of availability of individual practitioners, to deliver these individual interventions. This suggests that not only do these models of intervention capture a small division of students in a reactive system, but they lack the appropriate resource to deal with the mounting issues, or indeed, a focussed approach to wellbeing promotion (Givens & Tjia 2002; Castillo & Schwartz 2013).

Hewitt (2019) discussed that HEI's must commit to proactively enhancing students' wellbeing, particularly those at risk, alongside supporting those with more severe symptoms of poor mental health. As Eriksson et al., (2018) argue, this is because amelioration of symptoms is not what defines positive mental health, instead, it includes having a well-rounded wellbeing, and good quality of life. However, it is difficult to ascertain what a good quality of life entails, and how wellbeing fits into the puzzle of a person's well-rounded, physical, and mental health. Therefore, while attempting to implement wellbeing intervention, service providers must first understand what effects a positive wellbeing. This can be particularly difficult as wellbeing is so poorly conceptualised, with a multitude of academics having researched what wellbeing means with several measures, resulting in infinitely variable interpretations (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman et al., 1999; Keyes et al., 2002; Stratham & Chase 2010; Seligman 2011).

Definitions of wellbeing are generally routed in two primary approaches; the hedonic tradition, underlined by constructs of life satisfaction, happiness, pleasure attainment, and pain avoidance (e.g., Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984; Kahneman et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Coyne 2013; Disabato et al., 2016;); and the eudemonic tradition, accentuated by constructs of subjective experience, including flourishing in life, positive psychological functioning, and human development (e.g., Rogers 1961; Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Waterman, 1993; Coyne 2013; Disabato et al., 2016). With these varying concepts, how wellbeing should be defined, or even spelt, remains largely unresolved, and this has blurred and overly broadened the definitions of 'wellbeing' (Forgeard et al., 2011, p. 81). Mayoh and Jones (2014) suggest that many academics fail to

understand wellbeing with any real depth, and eminent research cannot be theorised consistently, generating research that is desensitised and inconclusive. This has caused complications in knowing how to best support students through mental health and 'wellbeing' intervention.

Despite confusion, today, broader methods of wellbeing promotion have been identified and utilised in the professional health services. For instance, the Capital and Wellbeing Project suggests five steps to maintain a well-rounded wellbeing, which are promoted throughout the NHS sector (2008) and within the wellbeing team at the university where this study's participants were referred. These steps include being mindful, by taking notice and practising present centeredness; learning, through trying new things; giving, by helping others; being active, through sport and daily movement; and connecting with others (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project 2008). While these steps have been promoted broadly throughout the health sector, wellbeing is a multifaceted notion, and these are based on an acute understanding of wellbeing, dismissing wider notions of what wellbeing accurately means, and how it can be enhanced.

According to Marmot (1999), connecting through a healthy and positive social community and support network is one of the most crucial components enabling a healthy state of wellbeing; this is because it can help avert loneliness, a substantial influencer of mental health problems we see today among the student community (YouGov 2016). Barrable et al., (2018) have said that if HE services were to focus on building student support networks, it would ultimately decrease drop-out rates, increase attendance, improve academic attainment, and enhance students' mental health and wellbeing. However, in most instances, students are encouraged to practise these steps, with little in the way of palpable intervention which make it possible. One encouraging initiative emerging across the HE sectors, which attempts to tackle this problem, are 'Residential Life' programmes, often termed 'ResLife'.

ResLife: A Holistic HE Wellbeing Support Service

ResLife, short for Residential Life, is a student wellbeing support service, typically provided in student halls of residence. ResLife differs across institutions in terms of structure and focus: formerly, ResLife programmes involved a team of Resident Assistants (RAs) who served as first-aid responders for students with alcohol, other drug, mental health, and academic problems (Blimling 2003). RA's helped talk and listen to students, signposting them to the appropriate health services in the university (Blimling 2003; Elleven et al., 2001; Sharkin et al., 2003). While evidence

shows the positive influence a first aid responder can have for students with mental health issues (McLeon 1985), research is outdated and inconclusive, and does not portray the ResLife programmes that function today, with a broader focus on social integration. It was found that prior ResLife programmes emulated a more reactive support system, often for students at crisis point, or for those experiencing acute difficulties when transitioning into university (Marmot 1999).

Today, residence halls have been acknowledged as places for intentionally designed social experiences, and in recent years, providers set out to achieve social engagement and leisure activity intervention for poor mental health prevention (Thombs et al., 2014). This came as a response to the known link between social interaction and mental wellbeing (Marmot 1999; Cacioppo et al., 2006). For instance, the UK based Whitehall study explored the social gradient of public health and discovered that those without good social support were five times more likely to suffer with a form of mental illness that those with (Marmot 1999). Indeed, there is much evidence displaying the association between social support and sustained participation in physical activity and active recreation, activity which is distinguished by its mental health promoting proficiencies (Jobling et al., 2001; Bennett et al., 2006; Crone et al., 2005; Kwak et al., 2006; McNeill et al., 2006; Hui & Rubenstien 2006).

Acknowledging the importance of building social communities as a primary objective towards the prevention of mental health problems evolving, ResLife programmes advanced into more proactive initiatives for holistic wellbeing provision (Marmot 1999). Today, these initiatives often enable easy access for students to practise Foresight's (2008) five 'steps to wellbeing'. For instance, ResLife focuses on community content and social interaction by hosting diverse social activities (Blimling 2003). However, while ResLife proves successful in building social networks and preventing loneliness for the broader student community (Reavley & Jorm 2010), more research is needed to understand the impacts of ResLife on students with lower clinical levels of symptoms. That is, there is limited evidence displaying ResLife initiatives as effective in preventing, or intervening, early with mental health problems in higher education students (Reavley & Jorm 2010). This, among several operational and efficacy limitations, became apparent in my role as 'ResLifeBU Officer' at Bournemouth University.

During my role, I noticed that *ResLifeBU* rarely involved students experiencing symptoms of poor mental and wellbeing with suitable consideration. For instance, students referred were typically offered a broad range of dissimilar events to participate in. However, in many instances, these students required additional structural and emotional support to safeguard their attendance and

engagement. Specifically, interchanging, and non-consistent activities, quickly reflected sporadic participation, and neglected the opportunity for these students to experience an on-going peer support community. This frequently resulted in non-attendance due to issues such as disinterest, peer avoidance, or mental health problems inhibiting engagement, such as social anxiety. This lack of tailored and integrated activity made it difficult for these students to build long-lasting connections, and benefit from a health promoting, peer supported community.

According to Wilcox et al., (2005), sociological research of first-year students' perceptions of the procedures involved developing their social lives at university is scarce; hence, there is little foundation for researchers to draw on when exploring the efficacy of ResLife programmes. This is disconcerting, because while ResLife activities function well for the wider student population, the benefits for students with acute symptoms of mental health problems are unclear, and there is a lack of alternative pathways into social integration intervention. This is often coupled with counselling services involving lengthy waiting lists, and an absence of consistent or dedicated focus on students' wellbeing through holistic intervention. As a result, student support services are structured in a way that they'd be unlikely to provide sufficient provision for the high volume of students requiring it.

Overall, these conclusions argue that students with lower levels of clinical symptoms require a more substantial and steered involvement than what 'ResLife' programmes provide, towards socially integrative activity programmes, such as the Resurface intervention, where peer support is the foundation of its function. As Bernardon et al., (2011) ascertains, for university students living away from home, social support from peers is often more important than the support provided by family; this is because those who report higher levels of perceived social support, also report lower levels of loneliness. As Ramsay et al., (2007) discovered, individuals perceiving a supportive environment can significantly reduce the psychological impact of stressful events, occurrences that the university environment often incubate. Indeed, the literature suggests that there is a need for implementing alternative wellbeing provision in the way of peer support intervention.

Peer Support and HE Wellbeing Intervention

Gartner and Reissman (1982) describe peer support as an emotional support reciprocally provided between people sharing similar experiences, and a way of normalising, and legitimising, mental health related experiences. Davidson et al., (2006) said that peer support is *'based on the belief that people who have faced, endured, and overcome adversity can offer support, encouragement, hope,*

and mentorship, to others facing similar situations' (p. 443). Mead et al., (2001) suggest this is much easier between peers than it is between that of a counsellor, as people habitually find connection with others that feel like them. This experience allows members of peer communities to reflect on their behaviours; for instance, Forchuk et al., (1998) said that traditional therapeutic relationships are different from peer relationships in that, "*peer relationships have more of a mutual, reflective nature, and include friendship, and an equal power base*" (p.202).

For this review, I concentrate on peer support that takes place among a group, instead of separately, where individuals engage in self-help (see Deegan 1995 or Copeland 1997). Group peer support involves three or more people coming together to support each other as they share their lived experiences; for example, groups can sometimes allocate several official roles and run structured activities (O'Hagan et al., 2010), such as the Resurface intervention, delivering surfing and yoga, hosted by facilitators and instructors. O'Hagan explains that group peer support is an important experience which allows people to feel comfortable discussing difficult and personal issues. For instance, the group of students in this study are of similar ages, all who have experienced comparable forms or mental health problems.

According to O'Hagan et al., (2010), peers in this instance will experience relief by feeling like they are not the only one feeling the way they do. This is a comforting experience, and for many students, a necessity, as they often struggle internally without discussing their problems with others. Davidson et al., (2006) explains that this mutual experience, in knowing that someone has been through a comparable problem, can help peers feel empathy, liberate their experience, and build trust. As a result, Dennis (2003) argues that peer support groups improve people's lives and hold the capacity to reduce the use of formal mental health, medical, and social services. Applied to the HE sectors, this is particularly important due to the lack of resources and increased demand for wellbeing services (Reavley & Jorm 2010), thereby offering an effective addition or alternative to the support offered by mental health clinicians.

Another important component of peer support is the role of peer workers (Dennis 2003; Davidson et al., 2006). Peer workers are typically people with personal experience of comparable issues, who are trained and employed to work in a formalised role (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). In this instance, it is important that the 'peer' aspect of the role is not lost (Mancini & Lawson 2009); this can be difficult, as sometimes the empathy of the peer relationship becomes an "*asymmetrical, if not one-directional- relationship, with at least one designated service/support provider and one designated service/support recipient*" (Davidson et al., 2006, p.444). For some advocates, these relationships

lack "*the reciprocity that is core to mutual support*" (Davidson et al., 2006, p.446); however, research in this area is in its infancy and investigation is needed to understand the impact of unequal roles among peer support groups. As Mead and MacNeil (2004) alleged, "*maintaining the non-professional vantage point is crucial in helping people rebuild their sense of community*" (p.4).

In this study, peer worker roles are less applicable; instead, course facilitators in the way of coaches and professionals were used. In this instance, similar challenges can arise to that of peer workers, in that the '*peerness'* of the relationship can be lost (Giblin 1989 in Dennis 2003); this is because the facilitator could be seen as outsider. Therefore, the roles identified in Resurface are better defined as 'support group facilitators', in that they help provide a safe space to develop and support conversation, encourage participants, support those less confident, manage volunteers, and complete any necessary paperwork (MHA 2016). Support group facilitators guide the group in a healthy and focused conversation, or activity, and help participants address problems for which the group is designed (Parmenter et al., 2015; Delisle et al., 2016). Typically, participants look to them as leaders and as a model of appropriate behaviour; these roles aim to display effective interpersonal interaction and relational connections (MHA 2016). A major limitation of these roles is that in the instance of a peer support group, participants may become reliant on a facilitator, which often defeats the aim of enabling 'peer' support to transpire.

To overcome these challenges, the Resurface intervention does not operate as a therapy session, where, as Parmenter et al., (2015) explain, there are agendas to abide by. Instead, the focus remains on the health promoting activities (surfing and yoga) for wellbeing promotion, allowing the peer support nature of the group to form naturally. In this example, the facilitator is also a participant, and as such, upholds a degree of mutuality (MHA 2016). Therefore, if a facilitator holds a formal license or credential, they will continue to participate in the group as a peer, rather than a clinician (Petrova et al., 2010; Delisle et al., 2016). Researchers and advocates believe that "*little systematic research or empirical evidence is available about the effects of such programs or their intended outcomes*" (Rogers et al., 2007, p.786). Hence, it will be interesting to understand how this relationship unfolds; as Davidson et al., (2006) suggests, future research might shed light on the nature of peer support group facilitation.

Today, many universities implement a form of peer support into their services to improve student integration into university life as a more generalised support (*e.g., ResLife programmes*). An example of a peer support structure is found at Manchester University (UK), who implemented the *'Mummies and Daddies'* scheme, an internal peer support network which offers social support for

students in their first year of medical school (University of Manchester 2016). In this case, support is delivered by 'peer mentors' in above years, with the role of offering support and social activities, like the previously defined 'ResLife' programmes. However, while these types of peer mentorship services are valuable, they are not delivered as a means of mental health intervention; therefore, there is a lack of literature regarding the impact of peer support groups that specifically focus on students' mental health and wellbeing. As such, there are currently no guidelines on how to facilitate peer support groups in the most effective way among the HE sectors, particularly for those showing symptoms of poor mental health.

The closest research identified was carried out by Byrom (2017), who explored peer support and pre-existing mental health diagnosis among undergraduate students. Byrom found that peer support was equally as useful as counselling, and considerably better than no treatment. However, Byrom focussed on students with more severe diagnosis of mental illness, making it difficult to apply to the wider student population experiencing mental distress. Another discrepancy with Byrom's study was that, while he used a larger sample size across eight UK universities, only 34% of participants completed the study, and of that, only 69% of those completed the full programme. Nevertheless, those that did complete the study said they had felt it had enhanced their aptitude to look after their own mental health and wellbeing. This contrasts Twomney (1991), who explored psychological wellbeing in peer mentor programmes undertaking the only reported planned intervention. Twomney found that peer support formed no noteworthy differences in negative affect scores; however, this research was outdated and the sample size small, and divergence could be the result of the different outcome measures used.

Overall, there appears an inconclusive dearth of literature exploring HE peer support interventions that focuses on students with poor mental health. A recent systematic review by Page et al., (2018), exploring the impact of peer support on students' mental wellbeing, concluded that there is no dependable evidence that peer support improves mental wellbeing. Page recommends that universities should better document their peer support activities and compare the results to provide an evidence-base for effective intervention. This is particularly important, as Pfeiffer et al., (2011) explain, if peer support interventions were to be engaged with consistently, this could have a significant impact on student's ability to cope with mental health related problems. Further, there is little literature speaking to the way in which advocacy interventions such as Resurface might function as a form of peer support, by constructing new meanings for personal experience and providing social support. Resurface attempts to overcome some of these limitations by utilising peer

support in in a HE environment, providing a schedule of surfing and yoga, activities considered valuable for therapeutic intervention.

Surf Therapy

Snelling (2015) first termed Surf Therapy (ST) as it was gaining global acknowledgment as a promising method of mental health rehabilitation, with interventions popularity increasing for those with diverse mental health problems (Morgan 2010; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Stuhl and Porter's 2015; Caddick et al., 2015; Lopes et al., 2018). The International Surf Therapy Organisation (ISTO 2019) defines Surf Therapy (ST) as a combination of the therapeutic elements of the ocean, with the adventurous nature of surfing, and the aim to impact the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals worldwide. Over the past decade there have been varied surfing interventions emerging across locations including Portugal (Matos et al., 2017; Lopes et al 2018), South Africa (Snelling 2015), England (Godfrey et al., 2015), Australia (Morgan 2010) and America (Rogers et al., 2014; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Caddick et al 2015; Clapham et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2018). Despite its popularity, research is yet to be formally conceptualised and there is a lack of evidence supporting ST as a means of symptom amelioration for individuals with poor mental health. However, surfing has been found to improve a person's broader health and wellbeing (Clapham et al., 2014; Caddick et al., 2015; Snelling 2015).

At the surface, the health benefits of surfing are somewhat expected; for instance, surfing's capacity echoes research exploring that of physical activity and mental health promotion (Reed & Buck 2009; Mead et al., 2009; Biddle et al., 2010), where academics have investigated surfing for similar physiological and psychological features. Researchers propose surfing as a high intensity and aerobic activity that can impact and develop cardiovascular capability and health (Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop 2005; Bravo et al., 2016). Surfing is also known for its physiological benefits, such as improving core strength and balance (Delaney & Madigan 2009; Armitano 2013; Clapham et al., 2014), as well as improving and maintaining psychological health (Delaney & Madigan 2009). Additionally, physical exercise, such as surfing, has been found to improve individuals sleep, reduce stress symptoms, and pump blood to the brain, helping a person think more clearly (Reed & Buck 2009; Biddle et al., 2010).

With physical exercise found to enhance quality of life (Brenes et al., 2007), alleviate psychiatric and social disability (Richardson et al., 2005), and reduce depressive symptoms (Tsang et al., 2008),

physical activities such as surfing have been widely prescribed for people with varied mental health problems (Reed & Buck 2009). However, it was not until the past decade that surfing was discovered as a beneficial means of therapy, used specifically for mental health rehabilitation and intervention. This discovery followed a deeper understanding and recognition of surfing's close contact with the natural environment (Depledge and Bird 2009), inspiring a sense of awe (Shiota et al., 2007), stimulating mindfulness (Snelling 2015) and encouraging camaraderie and social cohesion (Caddick et al 2015). Specifically, the outdoor, adventurous nature of surfing differentiates from many other sports, highlighting the foundations of surfing's therapeutic capacity. Therefore, it important to understand how and why sport programmes differentiate, to understand surfing's place in sporting activity today.

Snelling (2015) describes three major categories of sport programmes with which most sports situate: outdoor adventure programmes, organised sport programmes, and physical fitness programmes. Outdoor adventure programmes are based on the understanding that direct involvement in nature causes experiential learning and behavioural changes. Organised sport programmes focus on a more competitive element of activity where progressive outcomes are developed through positive interactions with coaches and participants. Physical fitness programmes have a specific application of some form of resistance or aerobic training, where outcomes are provided through the pure benefits of exercise (Lubans et al., 2012). All three are said to be emotionally valuable for vulnerable adolescents and children, especially when directed towards life-skill growth (West & Crompton 2001), a topic of interest for those tasked with refining student wellbeing in the HE sectors.

Surfing is closest in description to an outdoor adventure programme, like kayaking, climbing, hiking, skiing, and mountain biking. The effectiveness of outdoor adventure therapy is embedded in the concept of disequilibrium, where participants engage in novel situations and entirely new experiences that entail new ways of thinking and acting (Ewert et al., 2001). These new experiences and novel situations are credited to the impact of a natural setting. This immersion is said lead to physiological and psychological impacts which increase the benefits of physical activity, making nature-based activities therapeutic by environment (Pretty et al., 2005; Pretty & Barton 2010; Coon et al., 2011; Mitchell 2013). Certainly, if involvement with the natural environment is a central component which differentiates surfing from many alternate sports, it is important to understand its innate efficacy.

Nature-based activity is closely associated with philosophies of occupational therapy and science, by taking part in meaningful activities while immersed in nature as part of a therapeutic practice, and for a desired result (American Occupational Therapy Association 2008; Stoller et al., 2012). This is supported by research revealing how numerous kinds of nature experiences relate to mental health benefits in ways such as cognitive, affective, and behavioural changes (Barton et al., 2007; Bowler et al., 2010; Hartig et al., 2014; Berg et al., 2015; Ives et al., 2017; White et al 2017). For example, controlled laboratory studies have revealed beneficial psychological and physiological impacts of nature images and sounds (Ulrich et al., 1991), and longitudinal investigation uncovered that the psychological wellbeing of a population can be partially linked to its proximity to blue space (*e.g., aquatic & marine environments*).

Similarly, several researchers have discovered the benefits of nature by contrasting group change across cognitive and physiological dimensions for those who walked in natural, versus urban environments; it was found that interacting with nature enabled a mood-enhancing, clinical supplement (Hartig et al., 2003; Berman et al., 2012; Aspinall et al., 2015). For instance, in a study by Hug et al., (2009), the positive impact of nature is examined through comparing indoor and outdoor exercise environments. They found that walking outdoors was more restorative than indoors, as moods were positively affected. Specifically, indoor walking associated with a heightened sense of frustration, anxiety, irritation, and sadness, whereas being outdoors associated with positive moods such as feeling happy, elated, and joyful (Ibid 2009).

This is important because positive moods have been accepted as direct influences of progressive mental health (Yeung 1996), and presence in nature is known to replenish exhausted cognitive attention and instil a heightened sense of vivacity (Hartig & Staats 2006; Cervinka et al 2011), an inherently positive mood experience (Van Den Berg et al., 2016). Additionally, in the context of this study, there is a growing disconnect with nature and the outdoor environment among younger generations (Turner et al., 2004; Louv 2005), a likely response to the increased connectedness with digital media over the past decade (Mayer et al., 2009). More than ever, young people are losing touch with nature and falling into the digital trap, such as the students in this study, experiencing the challenging, digital-lifestyle phenomenon of today.

Contrary to ‘green spaces’, where nature comprises of collective phenomenon such as plants, landscapes, and animals (Hartig & Staats 2006); surfing involves a coastal setting, an area in nature which can be very different. Kelly (2008) proposes the coast as a significant natural landscape and a place for positive engagement; from an evolutionary outlook, it makes sense that water is

attractive, yet little is known of its psychological impact. Despite this, several researchers have discovered that simply viewing water will decrease stress, increase attention capacity, enhance moods, and improve wellbeing (Cooper-Marcus & Barnes, 1999; Ulrich, 2002; White et al., 2010; Wheeler et al., 2012). As Ulrich (2002) ascertains, activities such as surfing have the capability to inspire a positive psychological experience in most. Conversely, for some people, the water can be frightening, and navigating the ocean as a novice surfer, alarming. Therefore, some surfers may experience a host of negative moods and emotions, harming the positive influence of surfing's nature-based, therapeutic value (Godfrey et al., 2015).

Academics in this field refer to this aquatic environment as 'blue space' (Gascon et al 2017; Britton et al., 2018), and mental health intervention in such spaces as 'blue care' (e.g., White et al., 2010; White et al., 2020) and propose that people generally favour the presence of water over urban, green settings. Specifically, Godfrey et al., (2015) states that when subjected to the sea and its energizing environment, it promotes resilience, a sense of self-concept, and a sense of inclusion (Silva-Villanueva 2019). Likewise, Wheeler et al., (2012) suggests that those who live in coastal communities have healthier lives than those who live further inland. Indeed, while ocean-anxiety may, at times, be a debilitating and counterproductive tool for wellbeing promotion for some individuals, for many, surfing has the potential to inspire a positive sense of wellbeing and seemingly outshine the positive influences of green spaces.

Past blue space literature has encouraged the theoretical concept of the 'blue gym', a term coined by Depledge and Bird (2009). The 'blue gym' expresses the idea of being active in 'blue space' environments, yielding the benefits of physical activity with a heightened sense of vitality through immersion in the sea. This notion was advanced by the National Health Service (NHS), building on previous research by Mejia (2010) on the 'green gym'. These findings suggest that blue gyms associated with feelings of contentment and encouraged exercise and overall health and wellbeing. Further, it was acknowledged that those who exercised in blue spaces are supplemented by vitamin D, a chemical reaction which supports the immune system (Depledge & Bird 2009). This is important because surfing lessons typically last one and a half hours (Snelling 2015), and these durations involve consuming and profiting from the blue gym experience for extended periods of time.

Another connection made between Depledge and Birds' concept of the blue gym, is surfing's association with what Shiota et al., (2007) termed awe experience, defined as "*an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that overwhelms current mental structures, yet facilitates*

attempts at accommodation" (p. 944). For those that surf, like those who kayak, fish, dive, or sea-swim, they are exposed to the wildness and immensity of natural phenomenon such as sunrise, sunsets, dramatic coastlines, wild sea life, and the ocean. Interactions with these transitional stimuli have been found to magnify a person's natural frame of reference in manifold dimensions. Shoita et al., (2007) explained this to be a central component of the experience of awe, an inherently positive experience.

This is important because past research into ST involves participants who would not typically experience coastal environments (Cavanaugh and Rademacher 2014; Clapham et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Armitano et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017); therefore, an experience of awe would be a rarity throughout their lifetime. Likewise, for the students in this study, many having relocated from in-land to the coast, blue spaces and awe experiences were not regular occurrences. This means that they would not have likely encountered natural phenomenon such as the ocean, sunrises and sunsets, or a dramatic cliff face, in the same way, or with equal regularity to those who surf or live by the coast. Therefore, it would be interesting to gain a deeper insight of these awe experiences in blue spaces through surfing, to understand its influence on the wider ST experiences for the students in this study.

Although early research into nature-based activity, awe experience, and blue spaces, have demonstrated the coastal environment as a positive wellbeing experience, there has been little investigation exploring these environments in relation to amelioration from symptoms of poor mental health (White et al., 2010). Additionally, while past studies have a mounting evidence-base supporting exposure in nature and short-term efficacy, what is less known is whether these affective changes play a pivotal role in promoting longer-term wellbeing. Upon reviewing the literature, more research is needed which investigates the subjective nature of how and why the coastal setting impacts mental health and wellbeing in a surfing context, as we know that people will experience coastal environments with opposing perspectives.

Another factor telling of surfing's inherently therapeutic capacity, is its association with the rush and adrenaline surge that comes when riding a wave and being in the ever-changing aquatic environment (Diehm & Armatas 2004). Brewer et al., (2013) explains how the exhilaration of surfing and the sea generates a neurochemical response spiking the body with endorphins and dopamine; this rush of chemicals has been found to be beneficial as a treatment of anxiety, stress, and depression, problems often attributed as primary contributors for mental health problems among students (UKAS 2021). This exhilarating experience could be particularly beneficial for students

experiencing heightened stress while studying and living at university, as a means of respite from negative emotions and pressure (Hunt & Eisenberg 2010; Caddick et al., 2015; BACP 2019).

Moriarity and Gallagher (2001) offer credence to this theory, describing fear in surfing and the psychological implications, suggesting that a prescription of fear can be soothing to the human psyche. For example, when the brain senses risk, the body sends out norepinephrine, a chemical like adrenaline; once the risk has subsided, the body will send out dopamine to the brain to applaud its survival, a positive psychological experience (*Ibid* p.66). This is a predominantly valuable psychological experience for students confronting poor mental health and distress. For instance, students often spend time worrying about future assignments and deadlines, or impending career pathways (YouGov 2016); this is frequently adjoined with distress fuelled by disputes with housemates, alcohol consumption, and poor sleep. Perhaps counteracting these negative experiences, surfing's enablement of respite positions a particularly welcomed and necessary experience for university students.

The Royal National Lifeboat Institute (2018) explains how powerful aquatic environments inspire an outlook that is positively embraced by those that partake in such sport. Specifically, surfers' have described their high-intensity experiences as transformative, through constructing fresh perspectives, encouraged by bravery and resilience (Brymer & Oades 2009). Brymer and Oades describe this as "*balancing the natural state of fear, with knowledge based on personal capabilities and technical expertise*" (p. 123). Applied to this study, a prescription of fear could help students to build their resilience as they learn to adjust to the oceans challenging environments, while confronting these high-risk situations. This could be particularly beneficial in that resilience is known to act as a defence mechanism for those with mental health problems (Silva-Villanueva 2019). Certainly, resilience has been found to help people reduce anxiety, boost self-esteem, improve problem-solving skills, and cope in the face of adversity (Hartley-Brewer 2001; Sandester & Kennair 2011; McPherson et al., 2013).

Another encouraging outcome of ST is the sense of social inclusion and safety which often transpires, particularly for those groups who typically experience stigma and exclusion (e.g., Morgan 2010; Rogers et al., 2014; Caddick et al., 2015; Godfrey et al., 2015; Snelling 2015; Matos et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2018; Lopes et al., 2018; Clapham et al., 2018). For example, Matos et al., (2017) explored surfing, social integration, and mental health among 48 youth aged 10-16 in foster care institutions. Matos found that surfing positively affected interpersonal relationships and social competencies, and that group integration was a major factor in the participant's sense of

inclusion. This corresponds with diverse ST literature (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Snelling 2015; Moore et al., 2018), highlighting an absence of peer-exclusion and improved emotional and social competencies through surfing.

Caddick et al., (2015) further highlights the links between surfing and social inclusion, exploring ST for combat veteran's participating in a 6-week programme**.** Caddick discovered that after returning to normal civilian life, the veterans' social world contracted leaving them exposed and fenced off from society, escalating their emotional suffering. Positively, Caddick et al., (2015) found that the veterans social isolation subsided as the intervention progressed, with dialogical components of their collective stories reshaping their experience of wellbeing. This is important, because it is not uncommon for students to experience similar dislodgement and exclusion from society as they transition into university, and this has even been found to be as debilitating as a mental illness (Association for University & College Counselling 2010).

Caddick (2015) explains that this reduced social isolation was a response to a newfound sense of camaraderie, or as Simmel (1971) terms, sociability. For example, the veterans normalised and legitimised their suffering as they labelled themselves as a 'band of brothers' (Caddick et al., 2015). Caddick believed this was only possible due to 'black humour', which Hockey (1986) describes as a veteran's way of making light of struggles, recorded in a field note by Caddick:

> *This afternoon I was standing on the beach with the guys waiting to go surfing. With our boards, we formed a half-circle round the instructor who was about to lead us through some warm-up drills. 'Any injuries I should know about?' the instructor called out before we began. 'Yeah', replied one of the guys, 'injured minds!' sending everybody into fits of laughter. Shortly afterwards the guys laughed and joked their way toward the waters' edge, ready for surfing and in high spirits*. (p.293)

Black humour bonded the veterans and helped them make light of their difficult situations. By feeling understood, and not having to explain themselves, the veterans fostered a personified relationship. Specifically, they described a boundary between civilians and themselves, explaining how others "*just didn't get it*" (p.291); this embodied a deeper connection, such as what Shotter (1993) termed as knowing of the third kind. Following Shotter, Burkitt (1999) describes these experiences as the commonalities of feeling and meaning in how people relate as a sort of instinctual knowledge from within, as they share not only experiences, but each other's problems. This is important, because students often report feeling little opportunity to bond with other students going

through similar mental health issues (Student Minds 2017). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore social inclusion, camaraderie, and sociability, in relation to the experiences and efficacy of peer support in surfing.

This discussion highlights several core outcomes amid prominent ST literature. It explores surfing's impacts for those with developmental disorders (Rademacher 2014; Armitano et al., 2015; Cavanaugh et al., 2017), and individuals struggling with their mental health and wellbeing (Clapham et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015). Those who surf seemingly benefit from increased self-confidence, social competencies, physical activity (Clapham et al., 2014; Armitano et al., 2015), social inclusion (Cavanaugh and Rademacher 2014), and immersion in a health promoting coastal environment (American Occupational Therapy Association 2008; Stoller et al., 2012). Past research has adopted methods of questionnaires, interviews, outcome measures, and observations from participants, carers, and facilitators. It is promising to find that surfing can influence diverse groups struggling with varied mental distress, illnesses, and diseases. Specifically, there have been interventions focusing on surfing for addiction disorders (Dicken 2015), children suffering with poor mental health (Godfey et al., 2015), and war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (Rogers et al., 2010) or combat-related poly-trauma (Fleischmann et al., 2011).

Although surfing has become an accessible and renowned therapeutic activity (Lopes et al 2018), there are several limitations. For instance, surfing intervention remains a generally under-researched field of investigation (Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Nerothin 2017), with little in the way of qualitative studies using meaningful concepts of wellbeing to determine inherently subjective experiences. Furthermore, existing research concentrates on the impact of surfing on children and adolescents, yet no research has explored surfing for university students. Additionally, something that would strengthen evaluations is exploration into the continuation phase of ST interventions. For example, Godfey et al., (2015) reported that after one ST course was complete, 70% of participants integrated into a follow-up club, yet explains that the bulk of ST studies explore a narrow 6–8-week period. If future studies were to be carried out over longer durations, it would offer an important insight into the enduring impacts and efficacy of surfing and mental health and wellbeing, instead of basing surfing on outcomes of short-term symptoms amelioration.

Understanding ST efficacy is particularly important because surfing poses a cost-effective method of rehabilitation, which can be easily expanded throughout the HE sectors. However, if coastal HEI's were to deem surfing as a valuable intervention tool, a major drawback with expansion will be surfing's seasonality, and its reliance on suitable weather, and consistent swells. Specifically,

inconsistent surf conditions make researching the longer-term impacts difficult. In the case of this study, the Resurface intervention overcomes surfing's seasonality by delivering yoga, with the aim to sustain the benefits of peer-support and sociability. Currently, no ST research has explored the combined experiences of surfing and yoga intervention, despite its growing popularity.

Yoga Therapy

Yoga is a 3,500-year-old ancient meditative practise which is recognised in the Western world as a holistic method of health promotion. Originating from India, yoga has one core intention, to alleviate suffering and promote optimum physical and mental health (Cope 1999; Feuerstein 2011). Over the past decade, people have been turning to yoga for self-healing aimed at varied health conditions and today, there is an abundance of research showing the efficacy of yoga for several conditions. Specifically, positive impacts have been identified for those with multiple sclerosis (Oken et al., 2004), asthma (Freitas et al., 2013), irritable bowel syndrome (Taneja et al., 2004), lymphoma (Cohen et al., 2004), hypertension (Chu et al., 2016), drug addiction (Shaffer et al., 1997), osteoarthritis (Garfinkel et al., 1994) and poor mental health and wellbeing (Duan-Porter et al., 2016; Khalsa et al., 2011).

Because participation in mind-body health practises have been increasing, it has become important for health professionals to be informed of the nature of practices such as yoga, and its efficacy for wellbeing promotion. Indeed, responding to widespread stipulation and yoga's mounting popularity, an emergence of academics have explored yoga with a focus on mental health and psychological wellbeing, termed Yoga Therapy (YT) (Khalsa et al., 2011). However, unlike ST, there has been a growing focus on the student population among researchers in this field (e.g., Malathi & Damodaran 1999; Kauts et al., 2009), an outcome of the increased levels of mental health related problems among students (YouGov 2016) and accessibility of yoga interventions.

According to Little (2007), the focus on yoga as an alternative therapy is a consequence of the adverse effects, or ineffectiveness, of medications for the treatment of mental health related issues, pushing researchers and practitioners into pursuing non-pharmacological and non-invasive health management tools. Such research has produced a myriad of aspects of psychological health proliferated over the years and today, the existing literature suggests that yoga can improve symptoms of stress, depression, anxiety, and various other psychological problems (e.g. Kuntsevich et al., 2010; Field 2011; Balasubramaniam et al., 2012; Li & Goldsmith 2012) as well as promote wellbeing, life satisfaction, and happiness (Woodyard 2011). Positively, diverse practises of yoga

have been categorised by the National Institutes of Health as a means of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) (Williams et al., 2003).

Yoga's progressing evidence base has made it a highly regarded wellbeing tool for psychotherapists to prescribe (Novotney 2009), especially aimed at individuals suffering with anxiety disorders (Duan-Porter et al., 2016). However, while yoga appears to be an effective means of holistic wellbeing promotion, practitioners point to the absence of replicable scientific research, quantified by statistical variation in studies (Barne et al., 2008; Bussing et al., 2012; Blore et al., 2015). Furthermore, because yoga is a mind and body practise, it is integrally subjective, and it has become unclear how to obtain statistical and reproducible outcomes of health. This makes it a principally difficult task to compare studies and conclude factual validities. Furthermore, the studio environment, teacher experience, and style of yoga delivered, vastly impacts the perception and experience of a yoga practise (Khalsa 2004), meaning it can be difficult to relate parallel studies.

Past research highlights that consistent yoga practise has been found to promote strength, patience, and flexibility, as well as encourage characteristics of openness and self-control, resulting in a sense of serenity and enriched wellbeing (Collins 1998; McCall 2007). Continual practise is said to lead to positive outcomes such as a transformation in life perspective, heightened self-awareness, and outcomes of longevity including a sense of vitality to live life fully, and with sincere appreciation (Desikachar et al., 2005; Arora & Bhattacharjee 2008). Several studies have concluded yoga as more than a physical practise (Woodyard 2011), instead, it is deemed a mind-body remedy that brings together a person's physical and mental mechanisms to improve a variety of aspects of health, which enhance a person's overall quality of life.

While the International Association of Yoga Therapists (2012) describes YT as a method of applying its teachings and practise to empower a person towards enhanced health and wellbeing, Brown and Gebard (2005) argue that yoga can be a problematic activity for those with poor mental health. This is because yoga involves time consumed by the mind, and it is often the case that the mind wonders. McCall (2007) refers to this mind wondering as the 'monkey mind', a state which habitually leads to negative emotions that are not always dealt with effectively. This means that as a holistic method of treatment, yoga's capability as a progressive wellbeing tool is greatly impacted by an individual's state of mind at any given moment (Khalsa 2004). Applied to this study, where vulnerable students are concerned, it will be interesting to gain an insight into yoga and the 'monkey mind' experiences, particularly for students with poor mental health.

Another important consideration are the arrangements of YT interventions, as they are predominantly, and inherently, dissimilar to surfing interventions. Specifically, ST programmes deliver similar course designs and settings, while yoga interventions have complex, diverse intentions, and indeed settings, which make reviewing the literature and outcomes in health intervention convoluted. For instance, yoga often incorporates a multitude of styles of practise that have been applied over varied durations and in differing environments, with opposing intentions dependant on the style of yoga used, and teachings adopted. Consequently, for this study, it is important to understand these variations in yogic styles and diverse teachings, to comprehend how yoga has advanced in recent years, and distinguish the style and approach adopted in the Resurface intervention.

Current literature categorises four main yoga components that relieve distress and improve mental wellbeing; these include (1) postures and movement, (2) breathing, (3) relaxation and (4) meditation (Streeter et al., 2012; Manincor et al., 2015); those used in most western practises. Specifically, Gard et al., (2014) explored mechanisms of yoga for psychological health and proposed a framework in which yoga aids psychological benefits, finding that the combination of these four practises cover the majority of modern yoga, echoing several researchers who argue that most research into yoga emphasises these core rudiments (Li & Goldsmith 2012; Field 2011). While there is a myriad of alternate styles, and philosophical yogic teachings (*e.g., Njana, Karma, Bhakti, Raja yoga*) (Lasater 1998; Williams et al., 2003; Maehle 2006), these will not be discussed in this review. Instead, this review focusses on the yoga style used during Resurface, the westernised, postures and breathing practices, of Hatha yoga (Collins 1998).

Hatha yoga is traditionally assumed as an overarching branch of yoga styles *(e.g., Yin, Vinyasa, Power, Bikram)* (Lasater 1998; Williams et al., 2003; Maehle 2006); however, over the past decade, varied descriptions have formed (Woodyard 2011). Today, the westernised aims of Hatha are to enhance the ability of the physical body by utilising a sequence of postures, movements, and breathing methods, to energise and balance the body and mind (Woodyard 2011). Hatha is regularly labelled as a basic, slow-paced, and gentle practise, instead of an overarching branch of yoga philosophy (Williams et al., 2003). Because researchers and teachers have obscured Hatha yoga through diverse interpretations, it has been found to have inconsistent meanings contingent on teachings and styles (Woodyard 2011). This means that the outcomes of yoga interventions that have been broadly applied by health practitioners must be explored with the notion that yoga will have different meanings, depending on the type of practise assumed, and teaching delivered (Feuerstein 2011); fundamentally, this limits research cogency. For credibility and clarity, this study

assumes Hatha yoga by its central components of movement, postures, relaxation and breathing (Collins 1998); reflecting the Resurface intervention.

The first and perhaps most pertinent outcomes of these Hatha yoga rudiments is the capability to reduce stress and stress related diseases; for example, mindfulness grounded practises such as asana and breathing have been found to have an explicit impact on stress reduction (West et al., 2004; Michalsen et al., 2005; Granath et al., 2006; Rao et al., 2008). This is particularly relevant in that stress is a prolific influencer of mental health ailments such as anxiety and depression (The Physiological Society 2017), especially among the student population (Fuller et al., 2000; Granath et al., 2006; YouGov 2016). Li and Goldsmith (2012) explain that when a person feels stress, the body is moved to produce stress hormones triggering a 'flight, fright or fight' reaction, which stimulates the immune system to respond to dangerous situations.

This response can be advantageous as a source of positive pressure in tense situations; however, if stress becomes too much, or activated repeatedly, a person could feel in an eternal state of 'fight, fright, or flight', with mounting pressure instigating feelings of being overwhelmed or unable to cope. This is common for students negotiating the intense pressure to complete assignments, where stress frequently becomes insurmountable (Student Minds 2017). Over extended durations, these emotions can negatively impact students' physical and mental health, known as chronic stress (Streeter et al., 2012). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO 2007), this emotional exhaustion can cause burnout, labelled 'Exhaustion Syndrome', which coincides with depression and anxiety (National Board of Health & Welfare 2003; Soares 2007; Glise et al., 2012).

Counteracting this, Woodyard (2011) explains that yoga yields a physiological sequence in the body reducing the stress response. Likewise, multiple researchers (Khalsa 2004; Telles et al., 2011; Li & Goldsmith 2012; Thirthalli et al., 2013) discovered that through movements, postures, mindfulness, and breathing, yoga produces a physiological state contrary to that of the 'flight, fright, or fight'. According to Telles et al., (2011), these components disrupt the stress response, and Khalsa (2004) specifies that a primary reason for this is that yoga stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, reducing cortisol. This is important because increased cortisol impacts acute and chronic stress (Miller et al., 2005; Raison & Miller 2003), and raised levels increase blood sugar and reduce the immune system's efficiency, resulting in high levels of stress (Vedamurthachar et al., 2006; Yadav et al., 2012). Khalsa (2004) explains that if there is no physical release of cortisol (i.e., fight, fright, or flight), cortisol builds up in the blood, causing a host of problems for the mind and body. However, through yoga, research suggest that students can calm their sympathetic nervous system,

reduce cortisol, fight illness, and manage their emotions more effectively (Thirthalli et al., 2013). Theoretically, the more yoga is practised, the less likely students will experience emotional burnout, or exhaustion syndrome.

Another core yogic component reducing stress is breathing exercises, known as 'pranayama'. Pranayama influences the autonomic nervous system through the limbic areas of the brain, inducing a state of relaxation (Brown & Gerbarg 2005; Field 2011). Thirthalli et al., (2013) explain how even a few deep breaths engages the vagus nerve, sending a signal to the nervous system to slow the heart rate and reduce cortisol. During yoga, individuals will repeatedly practise deep, conscious breathing, stimulating the vagus nerve for extended durations. Studies have suggested that this can develop autonomic flexibility, guiding participants to advance efficiently out of the sympathetic stress response, and towards parasympathetic relaxation (Telles et al., 2011; Cheema et al., 2013). For Kinser et al., (2012), '*such technique learned in yoga can help an individual change their perceptions and appraisal of a stressor, altering his or her affective and psychological reactions to the situation'* (p.8). Applied to the student population, this could mean that under intense stress, pranayama can help them to respond more efficiently, by reducing their negative stress response, and effectively managing cortisol levels.

Kauts et al., (2009) explain that pranayama is particularly beneficial for the prevention of mental health problems, as well as greater academic success. For instance, in a study by Kauts et al., (2009), while partaking in yoga, students at a high school were measured on their academic performance in relation to stress. It was found that the yoga group practising conscious breathing performed significantly better than those that did not; a core component of this success was the student's improved concentration and peacefulness. Likewise, Malathi and Damodaran (1999) explored yoga participation among medical students prior to their exams, finding that yoga expanded their concentration and attentiveness, and decreased the number of failures compared with the control group. Nonetheless, Kinser et al., (2012) argue that more research is needed that involves better statistical and reproducible outcomes of success.

If stress is a response to a threat, anxiety is a reaction to the stress, and increased anxiety has become a feature of modern lifestyle, particularly among students (Hidaka 2012). This is important because improvements in anxiety and anxiety disorder are also dominant outcomes of yoga (Berger & Owen 2016). Specifically, Streeter et al., (2012) and Streeter et al., (2010) discovered that yoga enhances autonomic balance by growing the brains major inhibitory neurotransmitter. Likewise, several comparable studies found similar links between yoga and reduced anxiety (e.g., Ray et al., 2001;

Netz & Lidor 2003; Smith et al., 2007; Berger & Owen 2016). For instance, Berger and Owen (2016) explored the effects of yoga, along with swimming, fencing, and body conditioning. It was shown that the yoga group recorded the most significant short-term reduction in anxiety. Primarily, it was discovered that self-soothing practices of mindfulness, relaxation, movement, and postures, helped reduce fear, a principal component of anxiety.

Duan-Porter et al., (2016) found yoga helped rationalise anxiety by supporting the recognition of thoughts and feelings that have led to anxiety, to enact positive self-soothing methods. Indeed, a dominant factor of yoga's success is mindfulness, as it is known to directly correlate with positive mental health (Hofmann et al., 2010). Past research has shown that mindfulness can help with social anxiety disorder (Goldin & Gross 2010), depression (Kumar et al., 2008), depressive relapse (Ma & Teasdale 2004), anger (Speca et al., 2000), attention deficit disorder (Zylowska et al., 2008), as well as anxiety and depression (Hofmann et al 2010). As Kabat-Zinn (1990) describe, the underlying principle of mindfulness is to live in the present, offering a remedy to the stressors or cognitively based projections, manifested by guilt, fear, or anxiety. Yoga is often described as a method of 'mindfulness in motion' (Kabat-Zinn 1990; Salmon et al 2010), where movement is a recognised way of capturing present-moment attention. Salmon et al., (2010) explains that even something simple such as tying a shoelace will centre a person's attention.

Meditation in motion, or mindfulness through movement, associates with comparable ST literature discussing a 'flow state' (Csíkszentmihályi 1990), an experience of complete immersion in an activity. Csíkszentmihályi suggests that people are happiest in a state of attention and captivation with an activity. Certainly, yoga stimulates mindfulness through movement, or a 'flow state', by its diverse challenges and boundless asanas (Salmon et al., 2010). This experience of present centeredness can be particularly beneficial for individuals who struggle with anxiety or depression, often consumed by negative thoughts and emotions of the past or future (Edwards et al., 2014). For instance, yogis' look to sustain their attention and allow their thoughts and emotions to 'be', offering an opportunity for a mind-body connection. By directing attention to how the body feels in a posture and focussing the mind on the sensation of the breath, yoga anchors a person's attention in the present moment, with little opportunity to let worries and fears supersede.

This experience of mindfulness is often amplified by yogic teachings to observe, identify, and accept thoughts feelings and emotions, instead of reacting to them (Desikachar et al., 2005). Yogis are trained to be the watcher of their own thoughts, and to welcome, understand, and name the emotion they are facing, identifying them as allies to relate to. This form of mindfulness is known

as emotional, or self-regulation (Gross 2007). Self-regulation allows the management of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, while emotional regulation impacts which emotions arise, and how they are experienced and understood (Gross 2007). Lutz et al., (2008) suggest that emotional and self-regulation can result in "*improvement in the capacity to disengage from aversive emotional stimuli, enabling greater emotional flexibility*" (p. 4). For instance, Lavey et al., (2005) assessed peoples' emotional states post-yoga, finding substantial improvements in negative emotions including anxiety, depression, sadness, anger, apathy, confusion, and bewilderment. This suggests that through yoga, the students in this study, confronting intense emotions, might better understand, recognise, and accept these, resulting in an improved psychological state.

Another important component in yoga is the influence of music. It is often said that music can play a positive role in the way a person feels, by improving their moods and behaviours, and reducing stress (Bronnimann et al., 2013; Kwong 2016). A study by Levitin (2006) shows how the brain processes auditory information while listening to music: it demonstrates the brain displaying activity in areas such as the hypothalamus, responsible for maintaining stress hormones, and the hippocampus, crucial for emotion regulation. Similarly, Blood and Zatorre (2001) conducted a PET scan to understand music triggers, demonstrating how the same neural procedures that oversee the brain's ability to produce feelings of euphoria, usually associated with food, drugs, and sex, are also activated by music. This suggest that the brain can convert music into stimulation of neural elements that are typically associated with emotion, attention, and feelings. The type of music played in Hatha yoga is slow and peaceful, with the use of sounds such as gongs, gentle singing, and quiet harmony. Kwong (2016) found that pleasant and soothing sounds can improve psychological and emotional health by reducing levels of cortisol and improving moods. This is important as negative moods and high levels of stress can disrupt the human psyche. These findings suggests that music during yoga is not a marginal experience, but an essential therapeutic component. According to Barton (2018), students lack engagement with calming music for the mind, therefore, it will be interesting to understand the position of music equated with the wider yoga experiences.

A final important yogic factor identified for this study was the physicality involved. Kabat-Zinn (1990) was cautious to accentuate mindfulness in yoga, clearly distinguishing it from "*physical fitness dressed up in spiritual clothing*," (p. 87), however, yoga is undoubtedly a form of physical activity. Though, yoga differentiates from conventional physical activity in its ability to lower muscle tension, reduce pain, and promote muscular relaxation (Balaji et al., 2012). Moreover, yoga has been found to restore posture, improve sleep, increase flexibility, and prevent injury and fatigue (Manoj et al., 2013). This is often deemed a progressive mental health and wellbeing experience

(Sainsbury & Gibson 1954; Vallath 2010). Indeed, in contrast to conventional exercise, asanas are isometric, meaning they bring steadiness and lightness to the body, and optimise tissue functioning. This can result in reconditioning the body, correcting posture, and reducing pain (Kambalekar 1969). Balaji et al., (2012) explains that subjectively, this experience could be perceived as a positive sense of wellbeing, by helping participants to feel better in their bodies, experiencing positivity and energy, as opposed to neglect, pain, or injury.

Manoj et al., (2013) found that, during yoga activity, by focusing on forming and holding postures while concentrating on breath, a neurobiological shift moves from a state of stimulation and tension, into one of calm and relaxation. This is because specific patterns of the nerves and chemical makeup of the body's fluids activate a relaxation response. According to Manoj et al., (2013), not only will yoga strengthen and elongate muscles, and improve flexibility and balance, but this biological shift has been said to advance the digestive system for better use of nutrients and removes toxins from the body. Consequently, when a person practises asana (movement), coupled with savasana (relaxation), they can reduce tension, and develop bodily function. This experience is said to release emotions of stress and anxiety, an inherently positive psychological and physiological experience (Manoj et al., 2013).

Overall, this discussion highlights the primary therapeutic components of Hatha yoga, the style adopted by Resurface, and focuses on the outcomes and experiences for those with symptoms of poor mental health and wellbeing (Khalsa et al., 2011). Most applicably, yoga aids in a reduction in perceived stress (Khalsa 2004; Li & Goldsmith 2012), and anxiety and depression (Kuntsevich et al., 2010; Field 2011), as well as an improved sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction (McCall 2007; Woodyard 2011). Moreover, research has shown that yoga can reduce pain, increase flexibility, balance, and muscular strength (Balaji et al., 2012; Manoj et al., 2013), improve moods and behaviours (Lavey et al., 2005), offer emotional respite (Gross, 2007), improve cardiovascular and circulatory health (Manoj et al., 2013) and enhance respiration, energy, and vitality (Desikachar et al., 2005; Arora & Bhattacharjee 2008). Markedly, Li and Goldsmith (2012) explain that yoga, like most of the behavioural medicine, requires obedience and consistent practise for sustained efficacy. Wide ranging research shows negligible negative side effects of yoga, perhaps a reflection of research being written by those supportive of its practise, somewhat limiting research validity.

Regardless, with the shortage of mental health counsellors in relation to demand, yoga poses an advantageous wellbeing intervention which can lower the cost of therapy. Additionally, Grensman et al., (2018) suggests that yoga interventions can help tackle widespread health service issues, such

as extended patient wait times. Despite this, the very nature of yoga makes it a stubborn topic of objective evidence-based outcome; for instance, practitioners point to the absence of replicable scientific research quantified by statistical analysis (Barne et al., 2008; Bussing et al., 2012; Blore et al., 2015). Similarly, the cohesive mind-body characteristic of yoga may have obstructed the efforts made to determine measurable, statistical, and reproducible outcomes of health. In addition, there appears a lack of consistent teaching practise, styles, and methods of yoga, which sway the applicability of research. Specifically, in published research, samples are typically small, subjective, and nonrandomised, with short durations and confusing variables (Bussing et al., 2012; Campbell 2002). Nevertheless, this study focuses on the perceived effects, and students' subjective experiences of yoga participation.

For Lipton (2008), to improve efforts, researchers must enhance the quality of their research design, with larger samples, longer test periods, and endeavour to categorise, or regulate, the teaching methods used. Likewise, Pilkington et al., (2005) reviewed yoga for depression, finding that less than 10% of studies met research standards, where the settings, sample sizes, teaching styles, and quality of research designs, were dissatisfactory. Varambally and Gangadhar (2016) suggest that yoga for mental health promotion/intervention warrants more attention, particularly as health services are becoming outwardly more multidisciplinary. Therefore, whether yoga should be used as a stand-alone intervention for mental illnesses, as if a competitor to drugs is at best, questionable, and problematic; yet as adjuvant or parallel to other therapies, or as a tool for wellbeing promotion aimed at milder symptoms of distress, yoga appears an encouraging therapeutic activity.

It was not the intention of this review the extant literature surrounding yoga, mental health, and wellbeing, or to evaluate statistical outcomes of success; a comprehensive investigation of published studies by Khalsa (2004), and reviews by Innes and Vincent (2006), Innes et al., (2005), and Raub (2002) achieve this exceptionally. Instead, the aim was to explore the dominant outcomes and experiences of yoga for mental health and wellbeing, to better understand yoga as a tool for practitioners in the field of health and wellbeing. Post-analysis, the findings from this study will guide the direction and depth in which the specific outcomes of yoga are explored in relation to the broader research aims; this will allow the inductive nature of the study to lead the way.

Identifying Gaps in Literature

Despite the wealth of research surrounding wellbeing intervention among the HE sectors, and the emergence of studies exploring surfing and yoga for wellbeing, several gaps in the literature have been identified:

- ST is under-researched, with little evidence-base and studies that often involve small sample sizes. Moreover, the longer-term impacts are not clearly identified, because research is typically conducted parallel with 6-8 weeklong interventions. Additionally, numerous ST studies use questionnaires and/or interviews that look at participant experiences retrospectively, or only capture a snapshot of the experience, rather than tracking changes over time. For YT, the quality of research design must be improved, with longer test periods and better categorisation of teaching methods. Furthermore, there is a dearth of qualitative studies exploring the hatha style of yoga as a means of wellbeing promotion through participation in a university intervention; and fewer ethnographic studies still, particularly those of an inductive nature. Additionally, there is a lack of research exploring the peripheral wellbeing influences in yoga such as social belonging, contradictory of ST research. Most profoundly, no ST or YT research exists having conducted ethnography into the process of adaptation (Taylor 1994; Potter 1996; Brewer 2000) by following the same sample of students over an academic year, or to facilitate an understanding of the dynamics of a surf and yoga intervention, such as Resurface.

- While evidence supports surfing and yoga as positive contributors towards improving symptoms of poor mental health and wellbeing independently, a considerable research gap exists aimed at how these activities are experienced together. Specifically, no academic research has explored the impacts of surfing and yoga combined as part of a therapeutic intervention for any demographic, despite this amalgamation expanding among global communities, and having been regularly adopted by ST organisations to reduce surfing's seasonality and supplement intervention offerings. Following a rejuvenation of the practise of shared surf-yoga intervention in holistic therapy, there is a gap in providing new evidence to help facilitators, policy makers and future ST-YT research, to better comprehend how and why such a unity might harmonise, and whether they should be encouraged as a therapeutic amalgamation.

- Where physical activity contributes to quality of life, and with prolific research acknowledging the impact of physical activity on mental health and wellbeing, few qualitative studies exist having explored the experiences of surfing or yoga as progressive wellbeing activities for

university students; even less so aimed at those with poor mental health. A gap exists in that the mental health and wellbeing of university students are prominently dissimilar to that of wider society; for example, the daily stressor a student encounters varies from that of someone in full-time employment or a child. Therefore, the experiences of surfing and yoga will be explored from an alternate angle, that of the world of a student navigating poor mental health and wellbeing, while participating in a surfing and yoga, lifestyle activity intervention.

- Individually, ST and YT studies lean towards a positivist approach using questionnaire-based methods, usually with the aim to evidence amelioration of specified mental health symptoms, such as anxiety or depression. However, there are limited qualitative studies that focus on outcomes of wellbeing and quality of life, or self-perceptions of wellbeing. Therefore, the available research lacks explicit exploration into the individual's experiences. Instead, this study will help increase the knowledge on surf and yoga from an experiential angle, as well as provide an understanding of the cohesive contributory factors such as student life and peer support. Satisfying this gap will offer a longer termed, more comprehensive view of a ST and YT intervention, contrasting prior acute, selective outcomes of mental health symptom amelioration.

- Sociability is an integral component of the experience that participating in an intervention or sporting club entails; for example, in the broader context of society, Oldenburg (1989) highlights the positive benefits ensuing from belonging to a community, particularly of likeminded individuals. However, despite implementation of several wellbeing interventions across the HE sectors, there is little research exploring the experiences of peer support for wellbeing promotion or prevention, or indeed peer support as a part of an intervention such as Resurface. Instead, most similar interventions concentrate on peer support for student integration. Additionally, there is a dearth of research that closely examines the role that sport as an arena for individual fulfilment and social cohesion. Therefore, a gap exists exploring the experience of peer support as a part of an activity intervention for students with poor mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, current research is inconclusive in answering whether such an experience is effective in improving wellbeing, and there is a lack of guidelines on how such a provision should be delivered.

- Mental Health issues among the HE sector are on the rise, with universities finding it difficult to determine how to support students with their multifaceted and changing needs (BACP 2019). As mental health is a complex experience, and with the influx of students reporting issues such

as stress and loneliness, when it comes to wellbeing provision and the nature of support required, student's issues are becoming more diverse. A gap exists in that the research of students' wellbeing support required is frequently shifting, and the existing understanding of perceptions of intervention are difficult to keep up to date, a reflection of the ever-changing mental health climate. Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative research exploring HE wellbeing intervention, and research into current models typically explore more acute, reactive systems of mental health crisis, as opposed to working actively with students towards mental health prevention and wellbeing promotion.

It could not be the aim in this inductive study to fill the gaps in the literature on the experience of participating in an intervention of this kind, as I did not know what topics would arise from the data analysis. However, the research findings are plainly situated in the context of mental health and wellbeing, surfing, yoga, and peer support intervention. Moreover, the findings are contextualised within contemporary British Higher Education, raising questions of relevance to staff and students. As Hammersley (1992) states, the role of ethnography in policy change is often diluted, and the role of the researcher to communicate their findings is not always achieved (Williams 2003). However, this will not be the case in this study, because of the current funding climate, there is a necessity for this research, where more students seek wellbeing provision and HE health services are unable to meet current demand. Therefore, the findings will be used to inform sport and leisure policy, academic policy, and HE student mental health policy and practice in the context of sport, exercise, and peer support, highlighting the potential role that surfing and yoga can achieve as a combined wellbeing intervention.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

There is clear consensus in the literature that a growing number of students experience mental health and wellbeing difficulties at university, and this study explores the role of surfing and yoga in wellbeing among students facing such challenges. The selection of a university setting is apposite due to my interest in an individual case bound by demographical and situational prerequisite (Stake 1995), my personal involvement in the HE setting, and ability to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2002). By selecting Bournemouth University, this study will be able to epitomise several universities in the UK, though no claim for the generalisation of findings is made. Several methods have been used to help access and interpret the students' intervention experiences, observe their behaviour, and actively participate in the field alongside them. This chapter will present and justify the approach that informs the research, as well as the individual methods; it will discuss the analysis techniques used and will put forward the limitations of the research.

Research Paradigm and Philosophical Assumptions

This study is underpinned by an interpretive philosophy, guided by my need to understand, and interpret the students' own social reality (Matthews 2003), and comprehend phenomena through the emic meanings assigned to them by participants (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991), rather than seek a realist account of their experiences. This was appropriate, as the assumption that informs this research is that human behaviour cannot be studied following the realist objective approach of the natural sciences, as different people experience things in different ways. Specifically, I valued that each student would have their own opinions and motivations, and I wanted to explore those subjective experiences from the student's narratives from an emic perspective, to understand how taking part in Resurface impacted their lives in a deeper more meaningful way. To gain such an emic perspective it was, as with most ethnographic work, important to immerse myself in the participant's worlds and uncover hidden meanings and motivations. This was something the positivist, scientific approach could not achieve; therefore, I undertook my research with the standpoint that there were no facts or objective reality, only subjective (or intersubjective) interpretations. Consequently, through the research I am more concerned with how the students create meaning through their experiences and interpretations.

By embracing an interpretive approach and rejecting the more scientific, positivist stance, the study of this particular social world is interpreted subjectively, supporting Lincoln and Guba (1985), affirming that the qualitative standpoint does not support social reality as '*single, tangible or fragmentable'* (p.37). As Klein and Myers (1999) explain, our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions, and my interpretative approach provided thick description of context, and a narrative form of understanding, based upon the student's own beliefs and desires (Bevir 2006). As Tashkkori (2009) explain, this permits the researcher and participant to work together towards conducting the research, through interaction and cooperation between the '*knower and the known'* (p.90).

Subsequently, my approach involves a dynamic understanding of reality, rather than the mere recognition that my perspective of the student's reality was subjective: as Sandberg (2005) posits, '*agreed meaning constitutes the intersubjective reality'* (p.47-48). This co-creation produced an experience of connection, for example, there was an agreement between my own interpretations, and the meanings given in lived experience by the students; this agreement progressively achieved an iterative research process. Therefore, while this study aimed to understand the nature of Resurface through mutual understanding and discovery, I did not dismiss the interventions functions. Instead, I argued that what gave it its meaning was the mutual understanding built between the students and myself, as well as the importance of context, viewing the world grey, not black and white.

By adopting this approach, I was able to understand the intricacies of Resurface by accepting knowledge as constructed, and the researcher inseparable from the participants', in that they are inherently involved. Thus, the students and I co-constructed the understanding of their experiences, instead of testing a theory, as positivist research would. This is particularly important as Weed (2005) discusses, the advance of social science knowledge has shaped countless studies lacking any consideration into how the body of knowledge could be constructed. By adopting this approach, this study strives to make an additional contribution towards the experiences of lifestyle activity intervention and wellbeing among students, thus contributing towards filling the gap in knowledge around combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy. As Braun and Clarke (2016) explain, by adopting a constructionist approach, individuals can produce meaning about the experiences that have been fashioned and reproduced socially. Hence, this approach will identify ways of reproducing the benefits of surf and yoga intervention as a social reality. Despite the lack of objectivity involved with this interpretive methodology, this enabled me to identify the multiple realities constructed by the individuals, to understand them better.

Adopting a Qualitative Approach

In research, a multitude of approaches can be adopted, a challenge facing researchers from the outset of investigation, a choice which determines their course and a reflection of their own subjectivity, philosophy, and predilections (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Spindler 1982; Brewer 2000). As such, qualitative research echoes researcher preference, and according to Hammersley (1992) and Mason (2002), among others, qualitative research is not adversative to quantitative research, but instead complement each other, and answer different questions. This section will not aim to repeat the well-documented distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research, instead, it will highlight a rationale for my selection of the qualitative approach. For instance, in this study, it was important to understand the role of surfing and yoga as a means of wellbeing promotion grounded from the participant's perspective, and to focus on the narrative to accurately portray the students' experiences.

Generally, my personal connection with surfing and yoga emphasises central epistemological questions, questions which I believe only possible to answer authentically through qualitative research. This is because the qualitative approach offers a way to create an in-depth study of the individual, subjective experiences, and identify the common patterns shared by this cohort of students. By bringing together the collective stories, I was able to open a window onto how the stories align with the data, stories which rely upon the students' opinions and descriptions of their involvement. Furthermore, as the research was conducted through an interpretive lens, an insight into the subjective reality is accessed through the students' narrative, enabling the audience to better understand how taking part in the intervention impacted their lives (Mason 2002).

The students' experiences were a journey whose destination was unknown at the outset; similarly, I did not know what themes would develop from the study, therefore, an initial inductive approach allowed me to capture the emic, or the insider's view of these experiences. According to Brewer (2000) and Brown (2008), qualitative researchers enter the research process with curiosity and without imposing theory on informants; and for inductive researchers, they initially uncover their own assumptions and suspend any preconceptions (Wilson 1977). This is much like the phenomenological approach known as "bracketing" (Gearing 2004). Therefore, to free suppositions, before beginning this study, I wrote a statement of subjectivity, underpinning who I am in relation to the study, including my history, viewpoint, and professional experiences. This helped better comprehend how my experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, might have affected the research (Peshkin 1988; Pillow 2003). This statement was prepared as I knew that inductive ethnographers often begin research with a '*conscious attitude of*

almost complete ignorance' (Spradley 1979, p.4), yet in my case, I viewed surfing and yoga as progressive wellbeing tools, a consequence of past knowledge and experiences.

Despite past involvement, I was less aware of how these activities might be experienced for students with symptoms of poor mental health, or for students who were new to the activities, never having had participated in a wellbeing intervention of this kind. This meant that as a researcher, I was uninformed of the primary nature of the investigation, subsequently, from the offset I maintained an attitude of partial ignorance. Moreover, to carry out research inductively, and to reduce my influence on the data during the fieldwork stage, such as pre-defined notions, I avoided reading the literature. When the time came to conduct the literature review, it was used more of a guided framework, not intensive of all areas, yet dependent on the data. By adopting this inductive, qualitative approach, this study sets out with a predetermined problem in mind, with the primary aim to discover what is important, focusing on the insiders' perspective.

In qualitative research, it is common for exploration to last over longer periods of contact (Potter 1996). For this study, from the beginning, it was decided that investigation would take place over a full academic year. This was helpful as the intervention journey was a difficult experience to capture, with processes such as peer support and social cohesion, which could only transpire if given time. This also provided the opportunity to gain an in-depth insight and rapport with the participants, as Potter (1996) suggests, an experience which requires time to develop. Likewise, Mason (2002) describes this fieldwork phase as a particularly difficult time for the researcher, in that it can consume intellectual, physical, and emotional resource. Certainly, throughout the duration of the fieldwork, I found my own energy exhausted sustaining constant rapport with participants, a reflection of depleting personal resource. However, I found this diminution a worthy expense to succeed a qualitative approach, a method with which I found to be the only realistic way to answer my research questions. For example, a qualitative methodology enabled me to enter inside the intervention and analytically document the detailed experiences of the activities, and the student groups' social world.

Overall, a qualitative approach enabled a first-hand discovery of the students' personal lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it, and the meaning attached to these experiences (Schwandt 1994). Once achieved, this opened a window onto their emotional worlds, an experience that quantitative research could never accomplish. This enabled a certain depth and richness in my research (Mason 2002), allowing me to delicately explore important topics, opening a wider avenue of research (Potter 1996). Having read around the methodological debate among researchers on the challenge posed by postmodernist thought on the collection and interpretation of data (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Seale

1999), I recognised my draw toward an interpretive, inductive, and characteristically qualitative approach. My propensity to question conventional knowledge was the only way I felt I could truly represent the students' social world, qualities best reflected by a qualitative approach, where reflexivity and doubt are demanded. Therefore, this study argues that only qualitative research can capture the true meanings of social processes and human activity, which would remain hidden by other quantitative methods.

Conducting Ethnography

As an account of a group, culture, or community that is regularly used synonymously with qualitative research, ethnography derived naturally (Hammersley 1990). Indeed, after exploring varied methodological practises and immersing in the literature, ethnography modelled the most appropriate method which would allow me to capture the experiences and perceptions of the students and gain deeper access over a prolonged duration. This is important, as Holloway and Wheeler (2010) explain, ethnography is a method where a specific aspect of the world is observed by adopting selective interpretations and observations. This complied with my interpretative approach that there is not one single objective reality, but several realities. Emblematic of ethnographic methods, by utilising participant observation and extensive interviewing over one academic year, I was able to gain a rare insight into the students' social world (Spindler 1982; Hammersley 1992; Fielding 1993), and triangulate data for trustworthiness and credibility across multiple realities. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) argue that ethnographers use culture as a lens of interpretation and focus on cultural members, phenomena, and problems. In this study, ethnography offers a reflection of a student group under study, exploring a detailed slice of their lives (Taylor 2002), typically referred as 'thick description' (Geertz 1973).

By adopting ethnography, the setting is natural, a genuine representation of the study of social life, a real, spontaneous, and authentic setting (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Wilson 1977; Brewer 2000). For this ethnography, the aim was for the students to feel relaxed during interviews, and while being observed. This fashioned a difficult task, as Derrida (1976) suggests, the sheer existence of a spectator can be seen a violation, and Fielding (1993), who says that such intrusion can tarnish the natural behaviour of those observed. This requirement is met as I was a participant-observer; therefore, my presence was less unsettling, in that I would be present whether I was to observe or not. This developed spontaneity: specifically, by exploring the students' experiences among them as part of the group, be it at the surf school, yoga studio, or while travelling to sessions, much of the data was collected outside

of the interview situation and through voluntary conversations and unforeseen observations. This enabled authentic and quality data to reveal it-self: this is imperative, as a central aim of ethnographic practise is to better understand another way of life through focusing on ordinary, everyday behaviour (Holloway & Wheeler 2010).

By adopting an ethnographic approach, I can offer an in-depth study of a culture that includes behaviour, interactions, and language of the students' social group (Hammersley 1992). For example, a fundamental characteristic of ethnography is that it requires the researcher to think from the perspective of the participants' being studied, gaining an insider's view. This was important so that I could present data from the emic perspective (Spradley 1979), to explain the students' behaviour and combine the view of the insider (the emic) with the outside (the etic), to describe their social setting (Fetterman 1998). Therefore, ethnography rejects the belief that the researchers view is superior, instead, the insiders view is understood as equal importance, or in many instances, more valuable (Bourgeois 2002).

By adopting a multifaceted research approach (Clifford 1986; Silk 2005), this study involves a connection with sociology and social psychology (Hammersley 1992; Holloway & Todres 2003). For example, ethnography is an instrument of anthropology (Spindler 1982), meaning the study of people (Bohannan 1969; Holloway & Wheeler 2010). The aim of anthropology is to define and explain social behaviour and the perspectives of cultural members (Wilcox 1982), with the embedded principle of exploring behaviour in a natural setting (Spradley 1979). Centrally, culture is used as a classifying concept of anthropology (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952), which is why adopting ethnography was an attractive choice. While this study does not strictly explore culture, as it is more interested in the students' experiences, there is an inherent student culture, and distinct surf and yoga culture, emulating the intervention (Berkum 2015; The Outsider 2018). Therefore, this study was able to focus on these cultural patterns as they progressed, with a focus on the cultural origin on the students' behaviour (Wolcott 1982). Having observed my own and others experiences of the surf and yoga culture, and witnessing the often emotionally damaging student culture, I wanted to understand these cultural experiences in relation to the Resurface intervention experience.

Throughout this study, to highlight the sometimes-conflicting distinction between the etic (my) and the emic (the students') point of view, I interpret behavioural patterns witnessed by myself, or described by students, through a blend of my own judgement, theoretical and empirical research, and the students' personal views. This method helped comprise the perspective of the experiencing person (Becker 1992), succeeding a phenomenological approach to my research. For Fetterman (1982, 1998), this phenomenological outlook is essential for ethnographers looking to achieve authenticity. Additionally,

as ethnography involves a certain obligation to capture the emic perspective, ethnographers typically associate with an inductive approach to research, allowing the findings to guide the investigation, with discovery being the central aim for the researcher (Geertz 1973). An inductive approach allowed me to focus on thick description, which opened a window onto the patterns of cultural and social relationships. Therefore, by using ethnographic practise, this study describes the diverse experience of a unique intervention. By observing and studying the life of a cross-culture amalgamation, it will analyse, compare, and examine the relationship of individuals to the group, the activities, and to each other.

Anthropology: Making the Familiar Strange

The roots of ethnography stem from social anthropology, by searching for cultural patterns and guidelines exploring the way of life of a group (Malinowski 1922); this, a defining notion of what culture means, and the learnt behaviour that is socially fashioned and transferred. Clifford (1986) explains that anthropology can involve alien cultures, and sociology, of which sometimes involves studying at home. For Van Maanen (1988), a setting of home can result in the culture of interest being partially known at the outset of investigation; therefore, there is no alien tongue to master. That is true for this study, as the context is 'home' for the researcher, as both researcher and participant are at the same university and are students. Equally, the researcher is at home among the environment of surfing and yoga participation. However, Burgess (1984) explains that field researchers working among their natural setting share familiarity with the situation studied, which can act as a barrier. Specifically, Spindler (1982) says that a problem encountered when conducting anthropology at home is making the familiar strange, as it can be challenging to reach an outsider's perspective on a familiar cultural setting (Wolcott 1982; Weil 1987). Certainly, because surfing and yoga are accustomed territories, they act as my socio-cultural context and primary socialisation (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987). This means that I do not benefit from distance or onset understanding of the outsider, who can habitually perceive research angles lost to the insider (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Triandis 1979; Spradley 1980).

Nevertheless, my primary aim is not to study surf and yoga culture, but the students' experiences undertaking new activities unknown to them. Consequently, from an alternate angle, I find I am an outsider in substitute ways; for example, the student group are all younger undergraduates, experiencing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, this is a foreign experience, for example, I am unaware of the experiences of their mental health problems, at least to the same degree, such as depression, social anxiety, and loneliness. Further, the typical 'student' experiences are continually adapting, a reflection of an ever-changing society. This means that while my past undergraduate

experiences offer a form of instruction, I am shut off from a more current insight, and therefore an outsider. Likewise, as these students, for the most part, have not been involved with surfing or yoga, their own interpretation is both new to them and me. Hence, attempting to accurately portray the setting from their perspective was a challenge from a multitude of angles. As most anthropologists (e.g., Barley 1983) note, it is much simpler to describe the exotic, giving this study a distinct advantage from one angle, but disadvantage from another.

Spradley (1979) explains that ethnography offers a unique way to observe the intricacy of our own society. For me, throughout the fieldwork, a mirror of student life, surfing, and yoga cultures were held up. As a result, I entered a student world as a cultural stranger (Ball 1983) and did not share equal experiences or perceptions. Nevertheless, this offset student group shared a form of norms and rules of the broader student culture (Cope & Kalantzis 1997); in this case, it was that of a student life, experiences, and knowledge, which I held in abundance. Conversely, this diverse and specified group shared few, if any, surf, or yoga cultural norms, which posed a challenge of multicultural wilderness for them, and blurred the lines of investigation (Fetterman 1998). Overall, this anthological research involved negotiating a relationship with varied students from diverse backgrounds, learning to understand wellbeing intervention from a multicultural perspective, and from an emic point of view.

Choice of Setting and Sample

All ethnography involves a form of case study research (Brewer 2000), and the case in this study is the coastal setting of Bournemouth University, located in the South of England. This university has been selected for its capacity to represent the experience of students in Higher Education, a growing number who face difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing (YouGov 2016). As deliberated, the university environment can act as an incubator for mental distress such as stress, loneliness, and anxiety, making the outcomes from this study inherently important for those tasked with delivering successive health intervention in the HE sectors. A setting is also understood as a context in which phenomena transpire (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995) and can be studied from multiple angles (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Applicably, another setting selected is the Resurface intervention, which I have direct access and involvement with. Resurface has been chosen due to its collaboration with Bournemouth universities' student wellbeing team, a setting I have direct relationship with as part of my work at Bournemouth University. Being my area of work, as well as my area of research, makes the setting inherently interesting, convenient, and adaptable. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), this is an important setting standard which helps take full advantage of the opportunities for data collection.

Further, for Spradley (1980), criteria in a researcher's choice of setting must encompass simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, and must be permissible; these components are fulfilled by my positioning in the research setting.

Due to the sensitive nature of referral, the recruitment criteria to be eligible for the intervention were based on approval from qualified counsellors, who invited students with milder systems of poor mental health to take part, leaving the judgment of the initial participatory criteria down to a professional. Once referred, the Resurface intervention enrolment involved a 30-minute welcome consultation between the lead facilitator and each potential new member. This was to provide an overview of the course and expectations, support available, and discuss each individual student's intentions. Here, together with the lead-facilitator, I would help welcome students, and at the end of each meeting, I was given the opportunity to recruit participants to the study by presenting my topic of research. At this time, I would describe what would be required of them and asked if the students would like to participate in the study, in conjunction with the intervention. It was made explicitly clear to all referees' that their participation in the research was not compulsory and would not impact intervention admission.

Each student referred to Resurface (a total of 32), agreed to participate in the research, enabling the opportunity to interact with everyone on a weekly term-time basis. Of these, 22 were female, reflecting the gender imbalance of the student counselling services, and perhaps the appeal of the activities. As Daymon and Holloway (2002) explain, the sample in qualitative research is usually small, as the attention is drawn to profound exploration and in-depth insight. Consequently, ethnographers often adopt purposive sampling, as is the case with this study, by selecting an exact location and specified group (Daymon & Holloway 2002; Williams 2003; Cresswell & Clark 2011). Therefore, to ensure the participatory group size was large enough to allow an unfolding of new and richly textured understanding of the phenomenon under study, yet small enough that deep case-orientated analysis could transpire, I aimed to recruit 16 of the 32 students to contribute through detailed interviews, occurring twice over the duration of the study.

This concentrated, non-probability, and subjective means of reducing the group size was due to recognition from early participant observations and discussions, that several students provided a higher quality and quantity of information-rich data. Following recommendation by Cresswell and Clark (2011), I knew that to reach the richest source of data to ensure qualitative depth, I needed to concentrate my interviews on individuals that were especially open to discuss their experience of the phenomenon of interest. However, I was mindful that those open to discussions could potentially dismiss quieter individuals with withdrawn behaviours, or social anxiety. Certainly, a drawback of purposive sampling

is that it is prone to bias, because researchers make subjective assumptions when selecting participants. However, Palinkas et al. (2015) explain that researcher bias is only a real threat to credibility when the researcher's judgements are poorly considered, or when they have not been based on clear criteria. For this study, the criteria for interview were also based on selecting individuals that displayed a broad range of symptoms, backgrounds, and demographics. Therefore, I ensured a range of variation, and selected a handful of students who were withdrawn, timid, and not as outwardly open to discussion.

For Wolcott (2001), the character and basic background of the participants are an essential to help the reader feel comfortable with the scene and familiarise with the main study participants. The following table reveals a profile of each interviewee, and offers an insight into their personal situations (*pseudonyms are used so that students cannot be identified*):

Carl	Accounting & finance student, Male, 21 Black British	Has surfed a few times, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing anxiety, panic attacks and low moods, which begun while studying at university.
Linda	Adult nursing student, Female, 20 White British	Never surfer, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing anxiety and low moods which begun when she was 15, which has been exacerbated at university.
Bryony	Law student, Female, 23 White British	Surfed once, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing depression and low moods, which begun while studying at university.
Owen	Psychology student, Male 21 White British	Never surfed and is terrified of the sea but wants to overcome this; never practised yoga.	Has experienced isolation resulting in loneliness and low moods, which begun while studying at university.
Rob	Game Design student, Male, 19 White British	Never surfed, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing social anxiety for several years and struggles to go to lectures or seminars; it was a huge step for him to join Resurface; wants to make a life change.
Billy	Law & politics	Never surfer,	Has been experiencing PTSD from a traumatic

	student, Male, 18 White British	never practised yoga.	past event and experiences on-going anxiety which has been exacerbated at university.
Tess	Archaeology student, Female, 20 White British	Surfed for a few years, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing anxiety and depression 'on and off' for a few years, started long before university.
Demi	Marketing & communications student, Female, 20 White British	Never surfed, practised yoga several times.	Has been experiencing difficulties caring for a family member and needed a break, was experiencing high levels of stress which was impacting her university / academic life.
Jack	Game design student, Male, 19 White British	Never surfed, never practised yoga.	Has struggled with bouts of depression and anxiety several years before university, however, university exacerbated the problem.
Josh	Film student, Male, 21 White British	Surfed a few times, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing anxiety and depression on and off for 5 years prior to the course.
Sajiv	Adult nursing student, Female, 22 Asian British	Never surfed, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing anxiety, depression, and loneliness on and off for a few years, whilst at university.
Adam	Hospitality management student, Male, 22 White British	Never surfed, never practised yoga.	Has been experiencing depression and has been self-harming, this developed several years prior to the intervention.
Elisa	Business studies student, Female, 18 White British	Never surfed, practised yoga a few times.	Has been experiencing depression from the age of 14, university exacerbated the problem.
Chloe	Tourism management	Surfed a few times, practised	Has been experiencing panic attacks, anxiety, and depression, which developed 4 years prior

	student, Female, 19 White British	yoga a few times.	to the course.
Emily	Environmental science student, Female, 22 Black British	Never surfed or practise yoga.	Has been experiencing a high degree of social anxiety and struggled with being a part of any group size larger than two.
Mitch	Business studies student, Male, 22 White British	Never surfed or practised yoga.	Has been experiencing depression and anxiety on and off since starting at university 2 years prior to the intervention.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Personality is important to comprehend to understand the subjective experience of life events, such as the wellbeing of students in their formative years of life (Berry 1994). Specifically, it is recognised that a different sample of interviewees would have shaped different outcomes. In this study, I became immersed among these students' social world and was able to collect rich data, as an accepted insider. Additionally, given I was 26 years old, a part-time, postgraduate student, and alumni of Bournemouth University, social group acceptance transpired naturally. Likewise, my job role involved working closely with students of varied ages delivering events and supporting their wellbeing daily; this gave me the capability to better comprehend social and sub-cultural norms, language, and experiences. Subsequently, the intervention enabled an exploration of the structures and interactions within a cultural context and allowed me to explore the meanings that these students gave to their cultural environment (Holloway & Todres 2003).

Timing of Primary Data Collection

The intervention was delivered parallel to the university academic timetable from September 2018 through to June 2019, with pauses in the programme correlating with gaps in the academic year. There were 26 formal sessions delivered during this period, displayed below:

Course Duration (*Academic Year*)	**Number of Activities (*Inc. Programme Breaks*)**
End of September – Middle of December (2018)	Surfing (4) & Yoga (5)
Middle of December– End of January (2019)	*(Christmas & Exam Programme Break)*
February – March (2019)	Surfing (4) & Yoga (5)
April (2019)	*(Easter Programme Break)*
May – June (2019)	Surfing (4) & Yoga (4)

Table 2: Course Duration & Activity Scheduling

My personal experiences and knowledge of university life helped distinguish HEI's temporal environments, varying by month, and reflecting academic life including exams, coursework, and reading breaks. This is coupled with the ever-changing experiences of student life, such as adapting to a new living and working environment, friends, relationships, and financial inferences (e.g., student loans), manifesting a chaotic work-life balance for the participants in this study. Consequently, the timing of research considers the institutional calendar, which changes over a prolonged duration of an academic year. Specifically, I have witnessed students facing predominantly intense emotional experiences during their first six weeks of term, peaking before their first assignment deadlines, as they attempt to adapt to a new sociocultural and academic environment. Therefore, a degree of opportunistic data collection was required to capture the students' experiences in real time and achieve a true account; hence, much of my participant observations were not planned, but instead, dependant on situational circumstance.

Because this study began towards the end of September, soon after students arrived at university, and with the first session in early October, there was enough time to recruit the research participants, and finalise administrative duties. Subsequently, I began the collection of the primary data in early December. Had I started later than this, cross-recollections of the first stages of university life, and the intervention, would have been backdated and potentially inauthentic. The intervention begun early in the academic year in response to the peak UK surfing season, typically ending in mid-November for beginners due to rough, cold, and inaccessible seas. Certainly, it was the case that by the second round

of interviews, the students had habitually forgotten their earlier emotional state, supporting my timing of primary data collection.

The second interviews occurred shortly after completion of the intervention in June, allowing the full context of their lived experiences to be explored. This was a time where for most students, adjustment to academic and sociocultural life had been grasped; displayed by the data collection timeline:

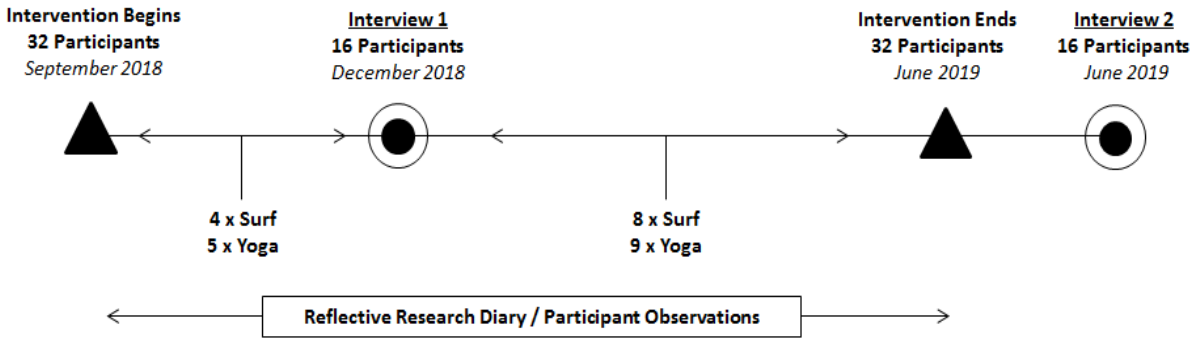

Figure 1: Data Collection Timeline

Had I completed the second interviews any earlier, I would have had an incomplete catchment of the students' full involvement, and their reflections on the experiences. Throughout the duration of the study, participant observation took place on a weekly basis both at the sessions, and through impromptu encounters, such as on and off campus meetings, and social media messaging. As a result, any occurrence which happened in the interviewees' life could be accessed both in, and outside the interview situation.

Research Methods

The processes involved with this ethnographic study uses a multitude of methods, allowing for an advantageous standpoint for complex data collection (Mason 2002). Adopting collective research tools provided rigour and an in-depth understanding of the more meticulous student experiences. This study involved two rounds of one-to-one interviews with 16 interviewees, and participant observation of 32 students. In addition, a diary of my own personal reflections was formed, allowing me to document emerging themes as they occurred, and record my methodological notes and own attitudes and interpretations, all of which form a part of the data (Fetterman 1998). As Fetterman (1998) explains, data of different kinds can be examined and compared systematically, helping test the quality of

findings. For Seale (1999), this methodological process ensures ethnographic validity and broadens the perception of the situation. Moreover, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explain that the reliability of outcomes are enhanced, in that different kinds of data could lead to the same conclusions, supporting dependability. The different types of data collected throughout this thesis are referred to as the interviews, opportunistic conversations, group discussion, observation, and social media correspondence, as well as my research diary and the literature, discussed in the following sections.

Participant observation

Participant observation has been a crucial process as it has provided access not only to the social context of the student group, but also the ways in which they act and interact (Corbin and Strauss 2008). As Jorgenson (1989) said, "*participant observation provides direct experiential and observational access to the insiders' world of meaning*" (p.15). Naturally, this process allowed me to spend time among the students' social world and reflect on the outcomes of that participation (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Mason 2002; O'Reilly 2005). For Fetterman (1998), observation it-self is subjective by nature, and should not be used as a separate research tool, but adjuvant to other tools. Certainly, for this study, I found that the in-depth interviewing and conversations with the students' proved imperative. Specifically, sustained observation produced a thorough knowledge of the group and culture and was found to be far less unsettling and obtrusive than the interviews (Holloway & Wheeler 2010). It was also regularly the case that the emic view differed from etic opinions and interpretations.

My own participation involved immersion in the intervention and as a part of the group. Accordingly, my involvement was 'complete', a notion which refers to the uppermost level of immersion, which regularly occurs when ethnographers research a situation they are wholly participating in (Spradley 1980). This helped remove complications of socialisation, acceptance, or confusion (Brewer 2000); therefore, I was immersed in the intervention setting without disturbance or imposition, and a participating member of the group. Here I could utilise in-depth observations on a weekly basis (Mason 2002), and study the individuals' social behaviour, with subjective access to the students' social lives and experiences. Moreover, I was an overt participant observer, in that all those involved (*e.g., students, university staff, and instructors*) knew about my research, therefore, there was no requirement to hide my researcher identity.

A particular interest of this research involved the subtle features of the group's behaviour, which once uncovered, open a window onto the meanings that were not directly noticeable. There are several

advantages of this method; for example, my observation allowed the data collection to portray a natural setting, instead of an artificial one, such as the interviews provide. Therefore, it was possible to experience behaviours first-hand, and importantly, those not always apparent to the participant; Gratton and Jones (2004) describe this as "true behaviour". As a result, behaviour could be uncovered that the students might not have been willing to disclose. Additionally, there was a degree of directedness being able to record the intervention phenomenon as it took place. However, there were noticeable limitations, specifically, the chance of misunderstanding the intervention phenomenon. Therefore, I was mindful of the consequences my own observations had on the students, where their behaviour may have altered to such an extent that it undermined the research. Conversely, in the context of this study, this was not the case, as my prolonged engagement, immersion in the setting, and personal situation, allowed me to naturally situate as an accepted insider.

Given the longer duration for data collection (Daymon & Holloway 2002), the planning phase demanded a considerable amount of time. To give myself the best opportunity to experience the atmosphere of the scene and to document observable patterns (Schatzman & Strauss 1973), I decided that observation would occur on a weekly basis (on each Wednesday session), from the start of the intervention. However, there were unanticipated encounters where I could observe the students in their university setting, an advantage of my job role and proximity to student life. I was also able to observe in numerous situations, taking advantage of the naturally arising discussions (O'Reilly 2005): specifically, at the surf school, on the beach, in the sea, during yoga sessions, in changing rooms, or while travelling to sessions. On occasion, Resurface hosted social gatherings and coastal walks, where the students participated in picnics and BBQ's, providing an opportune moment to observe interaction patterns and topics of conversation. Here, I witnessed the participation patterns, proxemics, and individual group behaviours, and could reflect on these afterwards.

Because this is an inductive study, I have made no prediction of the topics relevance; as a result, everything is noted down, leaving the recorded data open for interpretation, based upon a prefigured research problem (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). Therefore, my own participation provided the opportunity to collect in-depth data of the social groups' intervention culture. Throughout this study, the observations advanced from descriptive surveillance, by looking and listening in a meaningful way (McKechnie 2008), through to the use of general questions, that naturally arose. Over time, observations became progressively more selective, with a specific and focussed theme of questioning (LeCompte & Preissle 1993). For example, if I recognised a reoccurring or important theme during interview, I would probe further to explore this theme, asking open ended questions at opportune moments during observation. It was only by constructing descriptive observations that allowed for a heightened

awareness in the field (LeCompte & Preissle 1993). This instinctive approach, by noting down anything which seemed relevant to me as it occurred (Schatzman & Strauss 1973; Spradley 1980), helped shaped the emergent themes (Potter 1996). As a result, data collection became less time-consuming as the field research proceeded. However, a challenge of this was to confirm patterns and validate interview data among observations; therefore, interaction patterns emerged from both interviews and observation.

An example of an opportunistic conversation (O'Reilly 2005) transpired when facing Carl, who post-yoga, explained that his panic attacks had been much easier to manage now that he had new breathing techniques to rely on. In this instance, I adopted the skill of conversation management (Peshkin 1982), listening carefully and asking sensitive follow-up questions, to better understand how and why yoga had helped him achieve this. Gaining spur of the moment insights such as these proved beneficial and also allowed me to gain important observational data from the participants who did not partake in the interviews; however, such instances were not easy to encounter. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explain that ethnographers must resist the desire to see, hear, and participate in everything that goes on, particularly situations that they would not normally be involved. This was important as I understood the challenge presented when encounters become manifestly desirable. While this was difficult to avoid, I decided not to overindulge in every social situation, so that I were not to exaggerate my researcher identity and violate the scene (Derrida 1976) or appear too obtrusive. Instead, I drew my attention to 'explicit awareness' (Spradley 1980) and group immersion, allowing the data to reveal it-self naturally.

Often, I would remember an event or conversation later that same day and made a point of recording this as soon as possible, to avoid memory loss, or misinterpretation (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). On occasion, I would not have access to my diary, so instead used the notes on my phone to document observations as and when they occurred. In rare instances, I would record voice notes to recount later in the day. A major challenge was that I could not recall observations in their totality; for example, much of the impromptu encounters happened on the beach, in the ocean, or at a time when I did not have direct access to my phone or diary. In these instances, I would record such data later that day. I would regularly listen to voice notes, or read back my own records in the evening, and often found myself surprised that what I had earlier recorded had been forgotten. This reinforced an unstructured approach to opportunistic recording, allowing the data to be less rigid, and spontaneous behaviours to reveal themselves naturally (Spradley 1979). Nevertheless, this approach had limitations, as the lack of a more structure and systematic recording method meant that the variables were less controlled, making it difficult for another researcher to repeat this study. Also, this increased the chance of my own bias, as the observations weighted heavily on my observational skills, which could have led to disregarding important data (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995).

According to Geert (1973), the task of an ethnographer is not only that of observation, but self-examination and thought, as the subjective nature of the task requires a high demand of the researcher. Certainly, in my own experience, I found the social time outside of work consumed by reviewing field notes and documenting emergent themes. However, a critical aspect of this study was the ability to examine how the group in the intervention setting went about their experiences naturally and authentically, and how they acted and interacted with other students, and related to the spaces and environment. Therefore, observation proved imperative, and while the interviews were essential, observation was the best, and only way, to distinguish between what the students said, with what they did, without relying on their memories.

The Ethnographic Interview

For this study, it was important to access the students' authentic experiences in their own words and at their own pace, as Brewer (2000) explains, interviews are the greatest means of doing so with the least interference of interpretation. As a result, one-to-one interviews were used allowing for deeper exploration into the topics which could not always be bought to light through opportunistic conversation, or at least to the same degree, such as mental health stigma, or the students' experience of their new social group. Further, this study involved the use of unstructured interviews, a common ethnographic method (O'Reilly 2005) permitting the voice of the participants to take the lead and reducing the influence of the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). The very nature of the unstructured interview process enabled flexibility and researcher freedom (Mason 2002), permitting a deeper understanding of the challenges surrounding the students' personal lives and the intervention. Each individual interview was distinctly unique from one another, and while there were some likenesses found in comparable topics, it was interesting to delve into the individuals' own thoughts and perceptions, from varied angles.

Throughout the interviews, I ensured a responsive reaction to diverse situations (Potter 1996), and reassured each interviewee that confidentiality remained paramount, and that anonymity was guaranteed (Brown 2008). The duration of the interviews did not exceed 90 minutes, however, each interview typically lasted 60 minutes, which I felt were a comfortable time that did not exhaust the interviewees or myself. The interviews took place in a pre-booked secure room on the university campus, a location that was accessible and familiar, and felt natural for the students and me, as we both spent considerable time on campus. To record the interviews, I used a minimal and inconspicuous hand-held recording device as my primary tool and backed this up with my phone, which could also record

with reduced quality, in case the primary device malfunctioned. Each student's initial awkwardness of speaking on audio quickly stopped after the first few minutes, and from that point, they ignored its existence entirely. Although not a primary aim, the interviewees were comfortable discussing more personal mental health related experiences. Therefore, wherever possible, I would reassure the interviewees that their confidentiality was paramount and certain, so not to worry them that what they had shared would be known to others. In doing so, I fulfilled the ethical responsibility of the researcher to safeguard anonymity (Mason 2002).

Spradley (1979) recommends that it is vital from the outset to get interviewees talking to help them feel comfortable, as a sort of distraction from the situation it-self. This occurred naturally, as the students and I knew each other well from the intervention and had developed a rapport. This is important as this connection enhanced the quality of data, and our rapport encouraged a mutual comfort, and conversational ease (Capella 1990). While Weiss (1968) disputes that rapport effects response bias as it causes respondents to ingratiate themselves to interviewers and encourages misleading responses, Holbrook et al., (2003) reason that rapport moderates bias by motivating respondents to participate more genuinely and offer attentive, honest responses. Echoing Holbrook, the interviews were a daunting and unfamiliar experience, therefore, respondents looked to me for a sense of comfort, and I felt this improved data quality, as it allowed the students to answer honestly and openly, and to understand information and remember accurately (Ghosh et al., 2013).

To build a sense of ease during interview, I utilised my interpersonal skills by maintaining eye contact, listening carefully, asking follow-up questions, using relaxed mannerisms, and ensuring my body language was calm and collected (Brewer 2000). Moreover, I made the decision not to make notes during the interviews, as I did not want to distract the interviewee, yet wanted to express a genuine interest. Similarly, I did not want to deter myself from hearing what a student might lead on to say if I were to be absorbed by my own note making. This proved effective, as the feedback from several interviewees was that they felt comfortable throughout and thanked me for the 'enjoyable' experience. For those that did not share feedback off their own accord, I felt assured that they did not feel uncomfortable, as I was used to speaking with them on a weekly basis and trusted that I would notice a distinct behavioural difference, reflecting any uneasiness.

It is important to note my gender, as Warren and Hackney (2000) express, the researcher being a man or woman inevitably shapes the interviewees experience. Specifically, Ellis and Flaherty (1992) argue that women have a deeper access into emotional experiences, and better communication and sociability. That might have been true in this study where the female students may have felt more comfortable

disclosing details of their lives with another woman. Furthermore, as the interviews required openness and discussions around inner thoughts and emotions, the same may have been true for the men in this study (Willams & Heikes 1993), in that a woman interviewer might have been able to delve deeper into the male student's emotional worlds. This is evidenced by the perceived differences to which a man feels comfortable to share emotions, compared with woman, particularly those associated with wellbeing (Ogrodniczuk et al., 2016). However, I believe the personal rapport with each interviewee overshadowed the potential gender challenges and did not feel like barriers based on my own experiences; still, it is difficult to know for certain. Equally, it is possible that my gender worked with me in the interviews and conversations with the male interviewees, who may have confided more because I am a man.

The Interview Questions

The interview questions were essential so that I would ask enough that the conversation did not come to an end so soon that the data was not rich and oriented. Therefore, I had to maintain a thorough conversation with each interviewee. To achieve this, it was important that the way I structured each question opened a wide enough avenue to explore important topics, and helped each interviewee open up comfortably. Accordingly, I adopted the use of Spradley's (1979) varied questioning, from open ended descriptive questions to precise questioning on important topics. This ensured a broad topic was covered and that the interviewees guided the content (Spradley 1979; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). For example, I began with what Spradley describes as grand tour questions, opening the interview by asking descriptive, broad questions:

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
- Could you describe to me why you initially joined Resurface, and what motivated you?
- How would you describe the programme to your friends?

This was often followed by mini-tour questions, which were encouraged by responses to the grand tour questions, addressing smaller elements of experience:

- You said that you joined because you needed an escape, what do you mean by this, and did the course provide this for you?
- You mentioned it felt safe, what does a safe place mean to you?

I also adopted the use of example questions, which were used to collect data on precise topics raised by asking the students to provide their own example; and experience questions, which were open-ended, and used after asking several grand, and mini tour questions:

- Have you got an example of a situation that you felt most in the moment?
- What was it like when you first went surfing?
- What were your first impressions of yoga?

A diverse range of questions were developed, and each interview took a different path which required me to think on my feet (Mason 2002): this meant that it was unpredictable, opportunistic, and demanding. Indeed, this unpredictability proved profoundly interesting, as I did not know what was going to reveal it-self at any given moment.

Once the second interviews came around at the end of the intervention, my approach became more precise, as I intended to explore the topics which arose from the first interviews, and my own observations. For example, understanding the students' routines and motivations, or experiences of camaraderie, mental health stigma, and notions of wellbeing. This allowed me to delve deeply into understanding real life experiences, and gauge true meanings. However, major challenges of this were not to code too prematurely and take control in the interviews, as this might have hindered the honesty of the interviewee; therefore, I continued to ask grand tour questions and made sure that the interviewees guided the topics. I felt assured that I had achieved this, as several new topics arose in the second interviews, which had not transpired earlier. Once all the interviews had been completed, I transcribed each one; this was a time-consuming and sometimes tedious task, which could take up to 3 hours per interview. While demanding, this was inherently rewarding, as I was able to revisit important topics, and better interpret their meaning from the interviewees' own voice.

The Research Diary

Broadly, for qualitative research, a reflexive account of the processes involved is primary (Davies 1999), as the researcher is the central investigative tool (Brewer 2000); this means that interpretations of the data will be fashioned by individual partiality (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). For me, reflexivity is especially important, as I am integrally aware of the social world of study, collected through student life, and my own knowledge and experiences of surfing and yoga. As a result, a research

diary was integral, as I could document my weekly, and often daily reflections, and was able to focus my research activities to ensure a comprehensive analysis (Peshkin 1982; Hammersley 1983). Specifically, I would record my own reflections on subject matters such as my rapport with the students, ethical considerations, appropriateness of methods, and my own interpretations. By enabling a self-reflexive account, the data pushed me to consider how I impacted on the study, and vice-versa, the impacts the research had on me, such as my own personal development. For example, I learned to challenge my own preconceptions of student wellbeing experiences, grasping the often negative impact university entailed from an insider's perspective, one that I had not encountered as part of my own academic journey. This is a strategy like the phenomenological idea of "bracketing", allowing my own preconceptions to be identified, rather than ignored (Wall et al., 2004).

The research diary was an A5 lined notebook, and each time a session was complete, a new entry was made. For Mauthner and Doucet (2003), this reflective practise requires the creation of dedicated times, spaces, and contexts; indeed, each entry was carried out as soon as practically possible following each session (usually while sat in the yoga studio or surf school), and every new entry began on a new page. By keeping a diary, I was able to understand a variety of influences which would impact my own interpretations and was then able to identify and understand what these influences were. Furthermore, I identified my researcher bias and did not let my interpretations cognitively deviate over days, which improved ethical and methodological rigour. My own reflection can be understood as what Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) describe as the '*interpretation of interpretation and the launching of critical self-exploration of one's own interpretations of empirical material*" (*p.6*). According to Mason (2002), refining researcher thinking can be as essential as reading and writing, as this is where some of the most influential writing can occur, after a period of reflection. I found this to be true, and although it was a timely methodological approach, and not my primary means of data collection, a research diary was imperative to the study's conclusions.

Ethnographic Analysis

A key concern of ethnographic analysis using several methods is bringing the data together, so that it's all answering the same thing; this, a difficult task, as ethnography over an extended duration produces a vast amount of data, demanding a systematic, self-conscious, and detailed analysis (Schatzman & Strauss 1973). As Fielding (1993) explains, analysis often requires a huge amount of the researchers' time to depict meanings, primarily through categorisation and interpretation. For Brewer (2000), analysis is not an individual slice of the research, but occurs throughout the field work stage, as well as

afterwards. Denzin (1997) describes it as a collaborative process used to both guide the interviews and observations, and to lead the researcher. Analysis itself can be understood as the process of bringing order to the data (Brewer 2000), by systematising sometimes indistinguishable comments and observations into recognisable patterns and categories, to locate the connections between them (Fetterman 1998). For this inductive ethnography, conducting the literature review followed once the field work stage was complete, as only then could the relationship be recognised between the primary and secondary data (Hammersley 1992). This deterred me from blurring the lines of what I already knew, with what I discovered.

Methodological literature points to several notions of ethnographic analysis; however, for this research, I have adopted thematic coding, using Spradley's (1979) method: the sub-code, code, and category. Holloway (2008) explains that this process helps bring order to disorderly data, showing how it was possible to arrive at varied structures and links. For example, a code was a word used to signify a phenomenon that I recognised in the text; and each code was unique, in that it was clearly different from another code. A sub-code was another descriptive label which allowed me to identify related content across the data and were used to distinguish phenomenon that associated with the over-arching codes; therefore, the sub-codes acted as the 'ingredients' of the broader codes. So not to get lost in the data, I begun reading through the data to get a sense of what it looked like, breaking it down into smaller sub-codes and codes which covered the sample accurately. I would often rethread the sample, noting where codes didn't match up, and when additional codes were required, a cycle that was repeated regularly. Once identified, I determined core themes, known as categories, which were collections of codes and sub-codes with comparable traits. Here I asked myself whether the codes and categories are central, reoccurring, and importantly, meaningful (Hammersley 1992). Producing analytical code was crucial, as it conceptualised outlines of first-hand indicators relevant to my research aims (Glaser 1978) and prevented me from getting lost in the data (Mason 2002).

Coding was an arduous undertaking, involving reading and rereading notes repetitively, listening to voice recordings, and immersion in transcripts, until phrases emerged frequently in the text (Brewer 2000). Therefore, I used a codebook for my analysis, which I regularly updated as the data collection progressed. Although this was a time-consuming approach (Potter 1996), the choice was taken not to use computer software, which supports the viewpoint of Seidel (1991), who highlights the risk of becoming too mechanistic by using technological systems. Instead, the codebook helped me dissect the transcripts, and I used the simple, old-fashioned tool of colour highlighter pens. This helped me to identify recurring words that emerged from the data, utilising my own judgements and interpretations to determine where each code would situate. I found it particularly important to gain awareness of

deeper meaning in the data, in areas where emotion and sensitivity was required. For instance, I found the very nature of a computer problematic, as I felt it would distance me from the real meaning of the phenomenon under study.

I completed data collection in June 2019 and began collating the interview and observational data, and organising them into relevant chapter sections, by reflecting the major categories (*e.g., identity, purpose, routine, camaraderie, belonging, peer support, stigma, pride, respite, awe, flow state*). An example of an analytic category is the yoga experiences. The following codes constituted the yoga experiences category: for example, reduced stress, reduced anxiety, increased attention, and a sense of accomplishment. Inside the code, 'reduced stress', the following sub-codes were identified: relaxation, breathing, movement, savasana, peacefulness, and music. It was often the case that codes corresponded with one another and with different categories; for example, peer support was a code referred to in both 'surfing and yoga experience' categories. Once this process was complete, I begun qualitative, vivid description of behaviour and talk, by reflecting the categories and codes. For Brewer (2000), this is where the ethnography comes to life as extensive quotations give voice to the participants, by using extracts from interviews to demonstrate each code; this is the essence of ethnography (Hammersley 1992), bringing a sense of imminence and connection in the field (Brewer 2000).

According to (Geertz 1973), the interpretation of data encompasses deep imagination and is a subjective activity by nature; therefore, it was important that I maintained a reflexive approach to my interpretations, to remove bias, and not to betray the emic point of view, or the literature. However, subjectivity itself inevitably creeps into the story as it avoids discovery; this variability in interpretations allow a degree of ambiguity, which Van Maanen (1988) explains helps to provide closeness with the reader. For Brown (2008), the researcher upholds an interpretive omniscience, and no doubt has the final word on how the culture is interpreted and presented. However, to help reduce bias and errors in the coding process, I utilised the knowledge and expertise of my research supervisors as second and third reviewers. By discussing the findings with them on a regular basis, it helped minimise errors and improved the overall credibility of the study. Moreover, while academics usually attempt to keep their voice out of what they write, known as silent authorship, I chose to reveal subjectivity utilising audible authorship (e.g., Charmaz & Mitchell 1997; Seale 1999). Therefore, I use the first person throughout the chapters to portray my own deep immersion in the field, and subsequent effect on the collection and analysis of data.

Ethnographic Writing

While writing this ethnography, the mass of data collected has been presented in a way that is understandable, logical, and demonstrates integrity; further, the narrative is written with care and draws out the stories of the students in a way that permits the reader a detailed insight (Atkinson 1990; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; O'Reilly 2005). This was a consuming process and took a great deal of time to depict the most meaningful method of portraying the experiences in the most authentic way possible. As stated by Hammersley (1990), ethnographies often take on a realist, or naturalist style of writing, commonly interchangeable terms, where layers are stripped of romanticism to present a real view of the data. By adopting this approach, I was able to help the reader feel they are observing the scene described, as the ethnography is presented as an objective actuality. In this thesis, the emic point of view is displayed through quotes (Wilcox 1982); however, the researcher upholds an explanatory parallel, having the final interpretation, and therefore, the decision on how the data is presented.

Indeed, there is a fundamental distrust among academics toward researchers making a statement of having authentically reconstructed social reality (Jackson 1989; Denzin 1991; Seale 1999; Brewer 2000). Therefore, it was important that this ethnography took a confessional (Schultze 2000), or vulnerable (Behar 1996) account of the phenomena, by emphasising my experience of conducting fieldwork, and offering a self-reflexive and self-revealing account of the research process. Here I could present my role as a research instrument, recognising my actions, failings, motivations, and assumptions, which were available for scrutiny and critique (Miles 1979; Whyte 1996). As such, I put myself alongside the students' vulnerability, and enabled a contrast between my own assumptions and the social cultures perceptions, urging the reader to do the same. In doing so, I use the research to reflect on the world of the researcher and reader simultaneously (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Therefore, I have adopted a reflexive approach to the writing of a realist account of my research findings, while attempting to develop a balance between an unreflective account in one instance, and self-scrutiny in another (Hertz 1993). For example, to discuss social camaraderie, I combine the emic view, the literature, and my own observations, yet I leave the reader in no doubt that the segregated approach to interaction prevailed. Therefore, through the following chapters, I regularly note any discrepancies in data collection, and potential personal, and cultural biases.

Throughout, I use an audible authorship voice (e.g., Charmaz & Mitchell 1997; Seale 1999; Brewer 2000), so subjectivity is exposed and bought to the surface of investigation; therefore, I utilise the first-person to portray my personal involvement and own influences. The quotes from students bought to light a sense of juxtaposition and deep involvement in the field (Brewer 2000). However, it is notable

that the use of quotations did not replace the detailed analysis, therefore, were not overused, an element which I paid close attention to when writing the main chapters.

Demonstrating Credibility

To demonstrate credibility, key aspects have been considered including reliability, generalizability, trustworthiness, and relevance, components which required ample contemplation to ensure the data and findings were dependable (Fielding 1993; Hammersley 1992; Fetterman 1998; Brewer 2000).

Reliability refers to producing results consistently and involves demonstratable research stability, through a repetition of outcomes (Brewer 2000). However, qualitative research exploring social situations are not a replicable incidence, in that the questions asked cannot achieve duplicate answers; therefore, reliability is difficult to prove. Specifically, if another researcher were to replicate this same study, in the same environment, and with the same people, the findings would differ. This is because there would be an opposing researcher bias and varied individual rapports established with students (O'Reilly 2005), making it inherently difficult to replicate. Additionally, if the same study with the same students were possible to simulate, and the findings were replicated, at the very least, subjectivity would deter the ability for analysis and interpretation to be identical (Hollaway & Jefferson 2000). Equally, the students would not be the same in any new form of this study, therefore, different students would have entirely different personalities, beliefs, and behaviours. Despite this, Silverman (2009) explains that a level of variability is tolerated in qualitative research, which displays a degree of reliability, provided the methodology and epistemological logistics consistently produce data that are similar, even if they vary in richness and ambience. Moreover, reliability is upheld by the rigorous nature of my research process, which ensured a state of being exact, careful, and acting with strict precision (Merriam-Webster 2016). This helped ensure that the quality of my research was thorough and truthful throughout. As Morse (2002) describes, without rigor, research is useless and becomes fiction; my rigor ensured reliability neutralising the subjectivity that is inherent in this type of research.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research, also known as validity, means the appropriateness of tools, processes, and data (Silverman 2009), for which the research questions are useable, choice of methodology applicable to the questions, sampling suitable, and the results and findings valid for the sample and context (Carcary 2009; Grossoehme 2014). In other words, how truthful is the research, and are the instruments used integral for the researcher to directly answer the objectives. In this instance, my involvement as an instrument of the research process greatly reduced the validity of the test. To

minimise this, a vast amount of time and meticulous attention was paid toward refining and defining my questions, methodology, sampling, and research processes. Validity is particularly important because the matter of subjectivity and circumstantial complications has fuelled relentless controversies concerning measures for quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Leung 2015), therefore should not be dismissed (Hammersley 1992; Fetterman 1998). Validity also suggests that the real world of participants is portrayed and that those studied can identify the social reality described (Bruyn 1966; Fetterman 1998; Brewer 2000). Therefore, I followed Daymon and Holloway's (2002) recommendation to carry out member checks, where a summary of the data from the interviews was bought back to individuals in the study (*while upholding confidentiality*), and emerging themes presented with the provision of transcribed notes from audio records; this allowed me to validate the real-world experiences (Cheater 1987; Stanley 1990; Brewer 2000). This process enabled transparency and reduced the chance of researcher bias (Singh 2014), as I maintained neutrality as much as possible, and as a result, trustworthiness (Golafshani 2003).

Generalisability is typically believed to be less relevant to qualitative research, in that the majority, if not all qualitative studies, study a specific issue of phenomenon among an identified populace or ethnic group, and of a concentrated locality in a precise context (Leung 2015). As such, generalisability of qualitative research findings is not usually an ordinary feature (Leung 2015; Fielding 1993), and there is an unwillingness among researchers to move to general classifications (Hammersley 1992). Therefore, the purpose of qualitative research has been focussed on providing in-depth explanations and meanings, as oppose to generalising findings. Better suited is the term transferability, as many ethnographers believe that comparable settings are expected to yield similar data (Evans 1983; Potter 1996), and that theory-based generalisation is achievable. This involves the transfer of theoretical concepts discovered from one situation to other settings and conditions (Daymon & Holloway 2002). However, Morse (1999a) disputes that if qualitative research is not considered to be generalisable, or transferable, then it is arguably of little use. For this study, generalisability is adopted by the extent to which theory can be developed and exported, to offer explanatory theory for the experiences of other individuals who are in similar situations.

Specifically, the setting for this research was selected based upon the researcher's ability to transfer the findings to similar settings, (i.e., HE institutions) and recruit students experiencing similar wellbeing challenges. It is possible, perhaps even likely, to deduce that these similar UK settings will involve students facing very comparable mental health and wellbeing challenges, with variations dependant on the divergent external circumstances and personality dissimilarities. This position is supported by the comments of Popay et al., (1998), who underline that "*the aim is to make logical generalisations to a*

theoretical understanding of a similar class of phenomena, rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population'' (p.8). Equally, Schatzman and Strauss (1973) propose that phenomenon acknowledgment can establish the ethnographer's trustworthiness, if others identify the situation and experience represented, which this thesis achieves.

According to Brewer (2000), relevance underpins a critical element of ascertaining qualitative research credibility, perhaps a solitary benchmark by which to judge the true validity of research. Consequently, many researchers look to studies that have a broad public and social relevance (Mason 2002; Williams 2003). This study achieves relevance in that the outcomes can be used by practitioners and professionals in the field of mental health and wellbeing, policy makers in sport and social interventions, and universities, and social enterprises, looking to adopt peer support group intervention, through the delivery of lifestyle activities. By very nature, ethnography is well situated to contribute to such social and public policy (Spradley 1979), by its prominence of understanding human problems. The ethnographic data produced will provide a view of wellbeing intervention among HEI's and help policy makers develop informed decisions (Brewer 2000). Locally, this research has already helped inform the key decision makers of surf and yoga therapy organisations in the UK, to better understand the intervention journey, and how it can be improved for its members. Vice versa, within this study's university setting, the student wellbeing team have been able to identify how intervention accessibility and referral processes are experienced, and improvements have been made.

Ethical considerations

Sanjari et al., (2014) said that based on the interactions between researcher and participant and given the nature of exploration and personal involvement involved with qualitative research, ethical considerations can be challenging, yet as Mason (2002) describes, a necessity, and should be anticipated in advance. For Brewer (2000), in doing so, the researcher can reflect upon how their own actions might affect the participants and can uphold the integrity of sociological examination. Typically, the rapport and intimacy that is held between researcher and participant raises an array of ethical concerns, such as the respect for privacy, formation of honest and open connections, and the avoidance of falsifications from misinterpretations (Warusznski 2002). Moreover, the researcher must be mindful of the participant's anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent (Truscott 2004), and should attempt to reduce the chance of intrusion into the autonomy of participants, as a matter of obligation. This is particularly important in the case of exceedingly sensitive subjects that are bought to the surface. Specifically, in this study, there are vulnerable individuals who often raised personal topics regarding

their own mental health. Therefore, the requirement and ethical duty of the researcher is to safeguard these students in the research process (Spradley 1979), and to ensure that this is well documented (Williams 2003).

This study indicates appropriate ethical consideration were achieved, given that the ethical approval was permitted by the university's *Research Ethics Committee*, and was subsequently granted by the crucial gatekeeper, the university's *Student Wellbeing* team. Gaining access from these key gatekeepers allowed me to progress my research and seek informed consent from the students themselves. This was an integral part of the ethics, and of upmost importance (Spradley 1979; Brewer 2000). Initially, I met with each new student in an individual intervention induction and presented my research topic both verbally and in writing (*providing an information sheet*), thereby, compliant with the duty to communicate the research aims clearly to those involved (Brewer 2000). Here I specified, in advance, which data will be collected and how the participants are to situate within this (Kitson et al., 1996). The in-person induction enabled me to inform the students fully of the different features of the research in coherent language, and it was from this point that a one-to-one relationship was formed.

For the interviews, each student was given the opportunity to volunteer and partake in what was described as a supplementary research component, where it was explained that not every participant who volunteered would be selected for interview, and the reasons why. Instead, 16 of the volunteers would be purposively selected. Throughout this process, I made sure not to pressurise students into participating in the research, or the interviews, and reminded them of their right to withdraw from the study, the anonymity of data, objective of the research, and how the results might be used (Orb et al., 2001). For those selected, before their first interview, I clarified the research topic and importantly, their anonymity, and once more asked their permission to audio record them. For the entire sample and throughout the study, I adopted the role of overt observer, so not to breach the principle of informed consent (Brewer 2000). Because access was granted, there was no need for a covert approach. Instructors, facilitators, and the participants, were all informed that the observational data would be collected continually, and were reassured that their names would be anonymised, and I would not reveal any personal information obtained that could reveal their identity. Therefore, all that were involved are given a pseudonym.

This research had the capability to be distressing, as the potentially vulnerable students may have recounted self-knowledge, or unwarranted emotions. Therefore, it was of particular importance that I took exceptional precaution not to unease them, particularly for interviewees (Brewer 2000). I achieved this by ensuring the focus of the study was on the experiences of the intervention and how it had

impacted them, to sway from delving into past trauma, or adverse experiences, that might have bought up potentially negative emotions. However, I had no doubt that the information shared would be sensitive, and I had to be especially careful not to cross the line of researcher, into that of a counsellor. Instead, I followed Mason's (2002) guidance to nurture the interviews to feel like a conversation between friends, which came naturally, given the time I had spent with them, and rapport developed. This enabled an informal atmosphere and persuaded the interviews from feeling like a therapeutic encounter, to that of a gratifying reflection through conversation. I believe I achieved this, as while emotional challenges and mental health difficulties were raised, there were no instances where the interviewees felt overly emotional, or times where the conversation became especially negative. Instead, the interviewees expressed maturity and a degree of excitement having left the interviews sharing their experiences positively, many having said that they felt productive and eased. This was important, as Williams (2003) states, social research should not ensue harm or distress, even if the consequence may be valuable to society.

Despite having felt reassured that I had not violated the interviewees trust or enquired too far into topics that bought up negative emotions, I made sure to alleviate any anxiety or fear of exposure by following up with the interviewees, considerately messaging them post-interview. Following Warren and Hackney (2000), this felt somewhat conflicting, in that I knew the commonality of qualitative research is that the interviewer is perceived a confident, or best friend. Consequently, I made sure my attentive rapport was not misinterpreted for a deeper friendship which students became reliant, therefore, I choose my wording carefully. Indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that a researcher could become an integral part of a participant's social world, a profound ethical consideration. However, I did not find this to become an actuality, an outcome I found to reflect the structural diversity, and uniqueness of the intervention. Moreover, I believe that throughout the process, I was able to manage the students' feelings and expectations, so not to overstate our relationship, a pertinent feature of research with potentially vulnerable students (Brewer 2000), especially given the nature of the referral.

Significantly, special precaution was taken in line with the crucial gatekeepers, the university's *Student Wellbeing* team. This is because students were professionally analysed and referred to the intervention on the understanding that it would benefit them, rather than cause distress, which relieved me greatly, given the line of enquiry. Throughout the study, my-self and the facilitators maintained an on-going contact with each student's counsellor, where each participant had given permission for me to discuss their records; as a result, the students had mental health protection, and all decisions regarding their mental health were made by professionals. This was an important ethical consideration, given my lack of qualified expertise. Once I had completed the study, and collected all the data that I needed, I made

sure not to abruptly stop interacting with the students, so that they would not feel discarded. This was made easier, as once I had completed the study, in concurrence, the intervention and academic year had ended, and the students had gone home, making the exit approach ensue naturally.

According to O'Reilly (2005), continuing considerations regarding ethics have resulted in researchers being more informed, reflexive, and critical. Upon my own reflection, I feel self-assured that I followed the recommendations on consent, anonymity, and confidentiality; moreover, I believe that I sufficiently safeguarded the wellbeing of participants, handling them with compassion and care.

Limitations of the research

My role at the university as an events manager, focussing on student wellbeing, came with a persona of leadership, responsibility, and support, which would have changed the way in which the interactions between myself and the participants was conveyed. Specifically, some of the students might have looked up to me, not as a member of the group, but as a support mechanism and facilitator. This had the ability to change the way in which I was able to conduct my observations, as the student's behaviours might not have been authentic in all instances whilst I was present: nonetheless, I did not feel this was true when conducting the fieldwork. Another limitation is that my position could have deterred some of the interviewees from disclosing thoughts on deeper social, emotional, and psychological health challenges, in relation to the intervention. Equally, given that I am not a qualified therapist, I had to carefully navigate delicate conversations, so not to bring up topics that were overly sensitive and breach my ethical responsibilities, conversations which might have been valuable for fulfilling the research aims.

I must accept that I may have missed several significant insights that a cultural insider might have gained; for instance, as the students' social relationships grew, I missed various occasions where they would spend time together, outside of the intervention. Although I was invited to join in on several circumstances, I felt that this crossed an ethical line between researcher and participant. This meant that I would miss out on instances of important exploration into social cohesion and peer support, and further segregated me with them as members of the group, both in and out of the intervention setting. I also recognised that because I had not been referred to the intervention with an underlying mental health problem, or indeed as a student in the equal, I was an outsider. Once more, I would not be able to fully participate as a member of the peer support group in the same way. As a result, I may not have been

able to obtain as detailed an insight that a researcher-referral might have been able to, who would have personally experienced similar challenges and experiences.

Likewise, my home setting, in an anthropological sense, was difficult to navigate. Although I had a distinct knowledge of both the surf and yoga experiences, and a detailed insight of student life, conducting ethnography in a social world I have inhabited for years carried drawbacks. This was because, at times, I would struggle to maintain an outsider perspective on that which was already so familiar (Wax et al., 1971; Burgess 1984; Brown 2008). For example, my research aims involved exploring the experiences from the student's perspective, such as what it felt like to surf for the first time: this, an experience I remember profoundly. However, the students were not learning to surf for the same reasons I was when I first begun. Therefore, I had to continually remind myself to see that which was familiar to me from the participant's perspective. Indeed, to a certain degree, it must be accepted that my own biases must have influenced the research process. There is also a bias in the sample towards white British students, who made up most of the sample; therefore, the study lacked cultural and ethnic diversity. This meant that the findings might not have been easily transferable for wider examination. Specifically, most UK universities have a higher intake of international students than Bournemouth University. This limitation was a direct reflection of the percentage of students that were engaging with the *Student Wellbeing* department at the time of recruitment.

Finally, my unavoidable inability to fully comprehend the participants experiences of the intervention displays the inherently ambitious task set out to achieve. Certainly, it was a challenge to consider the personal backgrounds of each individual and the influences this had on their behaviour. This was because everyone had their own emotional dimension, and experiences that without having had myself, would be impossible to understand fully, and therefore, my interpretation of their descriptions of these experiences alike. For instance, Linda explained how she heard voices telling her negative things, but when she was in the water, they would diminish, and said that it felt like the voices had been washed away. In this instance, my personal interest and bias moved towards recounting my own experience of how my stress would be washed away when surfing, misleadingly me to believe that I knew what it felt like to be Linda. Instead, I should have probed further to explore why she felt this way, and how this influenced her outside of the intervention. In such situations, I may have encouraged misrepresentative topics in conversations. Despite this, I believe this to be a rarity throughout the research process, given my consistency of carrying out member checks, and planning of the interview questions and research processes in advance. Equally, as Seale (1999) suggests, personal revelation of a misleading perspective can help to improve the trustworthiness of a study.

Chapter Four: A Step into the Unknown

Introduction

Chapter 5 isolates the stand-alone components of surfing amid the wider Resurface experience, and similarly in Chapter 6, independently exploring the distinct yoga experiences. This allows the data to underpin the perceived wellbeing value of the entire intervention, as well as describe the significance of the individual activities. Chapter 7 discusses the cohesive and interconnected contributory themes, which unequivocally emanated from the surfing and yoga experiences, and broader setting which transpired. However, to begin, this chapter presents findings from the early experiences of Resurface, describing the motivations and apprehensions concerning the students' experiences of joining the intervention, setting the foundations of their overall journey. It covers the initial referral by the university's wellbeing team, through to the opening weeks of the intervention, which ran parallel with the start of the students' academic year. This description of lived experience will promote a discussion of what constitutes the first stage of the intervention journey, offering an insight of the challenges faced from the start; this will help better understand the influence and experiences of the intervention by its completion. This chapter, demonstrated in the figure below, is split into two categories: *the intervention appeal and student motives;* and *the fear of the unknown:*

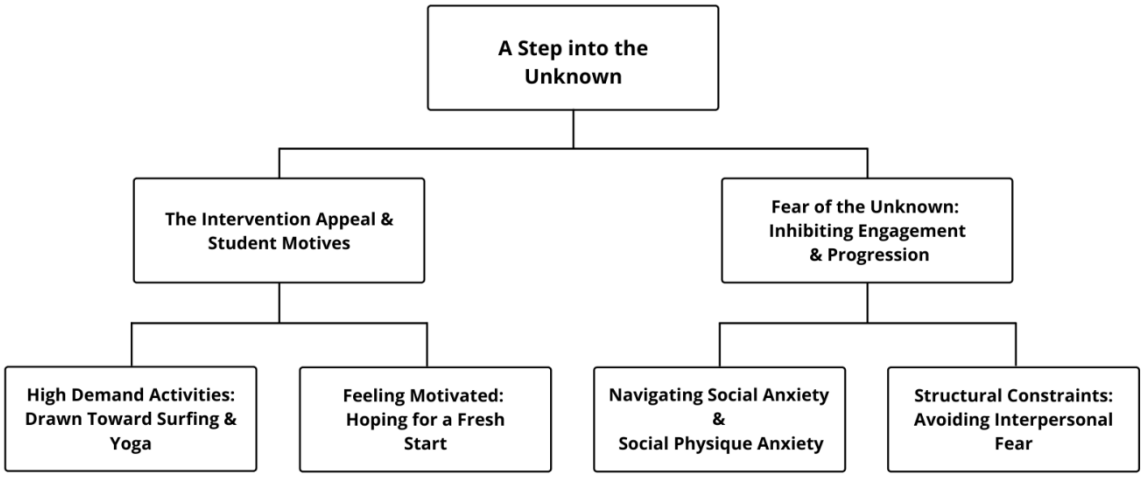

Figure 2: A Step into the Unknown

The key themes outlined in the diagram reflect my own observations noted amid the intervention inductions, early sessions, and primary interviews, conducted in the first academic semester. During these inductions, the intervention's lead-facilitator provided each student an understanding of what to expect and asked why they sought to join Resurface and their goals. This was to gain an understanding

of their background and intentions. Present at each induction, I was able to gain valuable observational insight into each student's personal and emotional world, as they underlined their motivations and personal circumstances. As a part of the primary interviews, I took the opportunity to ask the participants to reflect on their initial choices, thoughts, and feelings, before joining the course, and asked them once more, what motivated them to join Resurface. The interviews provided a time when the participants could reflect on the range of emotions regarding the intervention sociocultural world they had entered, and their experiences confronting unfamiliar environments, and participating in novel activities.

The Intervention Appeal and Student Motives

This section serves a deeper understanding of the students' motives and intentions behind joining Resurface, which arose from data discovered predominantly before the intervention begun, during inductions. This insight is important, as McCartan et al., (2020) explain, several issues create barriers to physical activity, and these can be increased for those experiencing mental health problems, who have considerably lower levels of participation compared with the general population (Wit et al., 2010; Vancampfort 2017). It has been acknowledged that those experiencing low moods and/or symptoms of depression, reflecting a number of students in this study, often lack motivation for physical activity, and live more sedentary lifestyles (Buckworth 2002; Sund et al., 2004; Martinsen 1989). Psychological issues include embarrassment, negative self-perception, and guilt (Glowacki 2017). Worries often include a lack of experience, perceived lack of ability, poor body image, and social anxiety (Cole 2010; Firth 2016b). Because physical activity is extremely valuable in the treatment of mental distress and illnesses (DOH 2011; Aldana et al., 1996; Penedo 2005; Chalder et al., 2012; NICE 2019), participation barriers prominent for those with poor mental health, and with the interventions facilitation of surfing and yoga, understanding the students' reasons, intentions, and motivations for joining Resurface, is of particular importance.

The challenges faced will be discussed in-depth in the second section of this chapter, titled '*Fear of the Unknown'*, which highlights the participants' feelings entering this new social world, and the difficulties encountered. This section provides a crucial insight into how Resurface enables increased exercise uptake and demand for wellbeing intervention, for those susceptible to lower levels of physical activity. I will begin by offering an understanding of the first stages of the journey in sequential order, reflecting the students' journey, beginning with what motivated them to take these initial steps, despite their '*fear of the unknown'*. By evaluating this data, the findings will support practitioners, universities, and other

relevant organisations, to work more effectively with similar client groups, in order to establish effective communications, marketing, and referral processes in the future (Ehrlich 2015; Young 2017; Wheeler 2018). This will help increase demand for, and engagement with Resurface, and other similar interventions in the future.

High Demand Activities: Drawn Toward Surfing & Yoga

The following words were recurrent in my post-induction observational notes, and later in my interview transcripts, which describes what enticed the students towards surfing and yoga, presented in the word cloud below:

Figure 3: Word Cloud for Feelings Towards Surfing & Yoga

The vocabulary used by interviewees reflected the importance of accessibility. Ollie was typical in his account of feeling competent to give surfing and yoga a go, which helped reduce anxiety of how he might perform, and the negative associations that follow, such as the stresses of winning or losing in front of peers:

> *Not many people have done surfing or yoga before, so I guess it's kinda niche, and I thought we'd all be pretty crap to begin with (laughing). For example, with football, you need ball control, which I don't have, so like joining the 5-aside league at Uni, I thought I'd just be humiliated, so couldn't get myself to go. But like, surfing's more relaxed, as less people have done it, so I guessed no one would be that great, and then I thought yoga just seemed like something I could do, I'm not even sure why. Then like, once I found out it was all for beginners, it sort-of just made it even easier to just go for.*

Echoing Ollie's account, numerous comments during inductions revealed similar attitudes, as several students rendered a sense of ease knowing that they would be starting from the same learning-point, with the activities categorised as 'beginner'. Like Ollie, many perceived surfing and yoga as marginal

activities, and this seemed to increase the perceived accessibility, and the notion that Resurface was for novices. This is important, as Amaddeo et al., (2001) explain, accessibility is the foundation of smooth entrance into social group structures and interventions for those with mental health problems, as it can make the early steps more manageable and appealing. This data suggests that the perceived accessibility of Resurface addressed some of the students' intrapersonal and structural obstacles during the early stages of referral. Certainly, Ngamini et al., (2012) argue that addressing such obstacles early on increases demand and prevents absenteeism, which correlates with the complete attendance maintained during the opening weeks of intervention. This theme links with another pertinent and potential deterrent which was averted, competition; Linda said:

> *I felt like I didn't have to compete with anyone, if it wasn't like this, I would've been too anxious to even join.*

Martins et al., (2015) explain that for many young people, competition in physical activity is a major participation barrier, especially given the negative associations that follow, such as the stresses of winning or losing in front of peers (Yungblut et al., 2012). This often limits accessibility, and competition coupled with anxiety is a principally hazardous blend (Martinsen 2008) and can be a debilitating experience for those with underlying mental health problems (Zhang et al., 2018). Like Linda, during her induction, Demi asked whether the activities were competitive, explaining that she did not enjoy rivalry, as it made her feel anxious, and that she'd signed up because of her understanding that both activities were not. Equally, once Demi felt reassured of the characteristically non-competitive nature of surfing and yoga, her body language improved. At her first interview, I asked Demi to reflect upon her initial draw towards surfing and yoga, as perceived non-competitive activities:

> *From a young age I've just never really been a competitive person, I guess it makes my anxiety worse; like I know I'd be the worst, and everyone would think of me differently. It would play on my mind and stop me from doing pretty much any sport. Like, my Mum always pushes me to do more, but competing is what scares me most, and stops me from signing up to things. I guess I thought with this it wouldn't be like that because it's just different, and like seems less pressurising, which got me wanting to join.*

For Demi, similarly for several students, the dread of competition was averted given the perceived non-competitive nature of surfing and yoga. This reoccurring theme is revealed early on; Billy commented:

There is just something about surfing and yoga, no one is the best, no one is the worst, there is no hierarchy, and that is something that helps me feel confident. If it wasn't like this, I'm not sure like I'd even be able to do what we do the same way. Like, if we see someone catch a wave, no one feels upset cause they didn't, instead, we're all just clapping and happy for that person.

Billy felt empowered by the non-competitive nature of the intervention, as he averted any fear of hierarchal judgement; this seemed to be central to his enjoyment of, and engagement with Resurface. According to Gilbert et al., (2009), it is common to dread the sense of inferiority that comes with competition, losing, feeling ashamed, and self-doubting. They explain that when people feel insecure in their social environments, particularly new settings such as Resurface, this experience can emphasise a hierarchical view of themselves and others, with a fear of rejection if these individuals feel they have become inferior, or subordinate. These findings suggests that competition increases vulnerability to anxiety and stress, and that surfing and yoga exhibit little competitive characteristics, portrayed as lifestyle activities, opposed to competitive sports. By nature, for these students, surfing and yoga manifest appealing non-competitive physical activities, attractive for those stepping into new social territories, facing pre-existing interpersonal and intrapersonal fears.

With a focus on surfing, the students generally appeared enticed by the sense of excitement and exhilaration, primarily at the prospect of being in ocean and on the beach, immersed in nature. Observations indicated that their enthusiasm originated from the idea of being captivated in a space unique and unacquainted, particularly for those that had relocated from inland regions. The lure of the natural environment draws back to the literature, where Turner et al., (2004) explain that there is a growing disconnect with nature and the outdoor environment among younger generations, a likely response to the increased connectedness with digital media over the past decade (Mayer et al., 2009). Enthused by the natural draw of surfing, Carl said:

Honestly, between Resurface and lectures, I just sit on my computer in my room and read rubbish online or game, or just sit there and overthink everything (laughing). So, basically, before, I would have nothing to do, but now I get the opportunity to go to the beach and in the sea, it's a new way of life for me, and anyways, what could be better than being at the beach! Like, I just wouldn't go without this to motivate me, so this is what got me most excited in the first place.

Carl described the sea as a central component of his positive experiences and appeal towards Resurface, having lacked engagement with any form of natural setting prior. Carl was drawn to the coast yet required the drive of the intervention to experience it wholly, describing Resurface as an '*opportunity'*, indicating that he wouldn't have fulfilled this longing without the interventions motive. Kelly (2018) discusses that from an evolutionary outlook, nature and water are intrinsically attractive, and this corresponded with what the students displayed as their feelings of excitement to be engaging in both; Tess said:

> *I've surfed a few times and really it's just a bonus; mainly I just want to be out in the ocean, in the water, or sat on the beach watching others surf. Growing up in Devon, I always felt drawn to the beach, I think it was just to be near water, there's something about it.*

Tess's comment, '*there's something about it',* portrays her intrinsic attraction to the ocean, supporting Kelly's (2018) discussion of the ocean's inherent lure. I recognised that throughout the inductions and the first interviews, surfing, and its aquatic environment, when compared with yoga, rooted a heightened draw for most of the students. Many of the students described their excitement to stand up on a surfboard, or the exhilaration to experience the waves crashing over them; Sajiv excitedly said:

> *I can't imagine the adrenaline of getting knocked off my board and having no control, or the thrill of standing and surfing above the water as it moves beneath me.*

Sajiv's perception recounts Diehm and Armatas's (2004) description of the rush that comes when riding a wave or being in an ever-changing aquatic environment. It was interesting to witness how for many of the students, this perceived adrenaline-boosting experience was desired, rather than feared. However, for a minority, this provoked anxiety, acting as a deterrent. At her induction, Chloe commented:

> *I'm anxious because I'm terrified of the sea, but I don't want to feel like this forever, I just want to push past it, so this should actually help.*

The anxiety inducing nature of surfing highlighted by Chloe is discussed in greater depth by the following theme, '*Fear of the Unknown'*. This concept also re-emerges in Chapter 5, exploring the surfing experiences, as the lure of an 'adrenaline rush' evolved throughout the intervention, and impacted several student's future orientation, providing something exciting to look forward to, as well as something to fear. For some students, this fashioned an achievable obstacle to overcome; Mitch said:

Now I've surfed a few times, I feel like I've crossed a sort of anxiety barrier, and although my recent surf was stormy and I couldn't get in, now I'm dying to get back in the water at its worst, to like sort of prove something to myself.

At first, Mitch appeared anxious at the prospect of surfing, yet after the first academic term, had conquered his fear and overcome anxiety, looking to confront greater challenges. This portrays the sense of achievement instilled by surfing resulting from its ever-changing, anxiety inducing environment, offering an obstacle to conquer, and for many of the students, a pathway towards self-confidence.

Yoga differed from surfing in its initial appeal, as some of the students displayed less enthusiasm compared with surfing, particularly the male participants in the group. Despite this, these same students seemed intrigued by the idea of giving it a go. The use of language and mood displayed by Jack was typical of the male interviewees when asked what initially enticed them to Resurface, while discussing yoga:

I'd never really thought about doing yoga, it just wasn't something that I'd really come across, like I am not very flexible, and I guess before this I imagined not many guys would be signing up. With surfing it's different, you dream of catching waves in some hot country, even if you've never lived near a beach, but yoga is just more, I dunno, like 'mehh' (laughing), like it sounds alright, but it didn't jump out to me when signing up for Resurface. I was more apprehensive I guess, but happy to give yoga a go.

Traditionally, the perception of yoga has established from uninitiated imaginings of petite, flexible women, twisting and stretching into challenging poses. As Quilty et al., (2013) explain, yoga has been erroneously interpreted as too spiritual or feminine for men. While less evident today, breaking societal gender stereotypes is a protracted process (Elemers 2018), and this misperception may answer why some of the male participants, such as Jack, perceived surfing as the more appealing component of Resurface. While both Josh and Adam assumed yoga as a complementary tool to improve their flexibility, helping them enhance their sporting capabilities, for the most part, the female students in the study revealed a more enthused outlook towards yoga. For the female participants, many had practiced yoga prior to Resurface, and for some, was the most attractive part of Resurface; Elisa said:

I was so excited about doing yoga and it's what got me to sign up. I used to go to SportBU and walk past and could see the classes happening in the studio. I always wanted to join, but

> *it made me anxious to just walk in as I'd never done it before. It was just something I really wanted to try because it looked so calming and relaxing.*

Elisa's account was shared by many students, both male and female, though generally, yoga seemed to have a heightened attraction for the female students, which was expected given its societal perception. However, the overall unanimity among both sexes, and principal incentive of yoga, was the perceived notion that it might offer a means to reduced stress. This was revealed in a post-induction field note by the following emblematic entry:

> *Most students typically understand that the primary outcome of yoga is stress relief, and this was a definite draw to the course, as a sort of crucial objective, or goal of taking part. This is promising to see, as they have set out with the intention to relieve stress, a forward-thinking notion. For example, Rob seemed to be initially deterred from the concept of yoga but held onto the thoughts that it would help him slow down, and reduces some of his daily stress, which made it worthwhile 'giving it a go'. This seems to be a reoccurring pattern for several students.*

Overall, the mood painted by the students regarding their perceptions of surfing and yoga, and the general interventions appeal, was positive, as they displayed a high degree of motivation toward joining. Certainly, for some students', there was a degree of anxiety aligned with surfing, and a fear of the ocean, yet this was quickly overshadowed by their eagerness to step outside of their comfort zones and try new things. Equally, there were doubts surrounding participation in yoga, though this was overshadowed by the notion of '*giving it a go'*, as Jack said, '*what's the worst that could happen'*. Throughout these early stages of the intervention and discussed by the following theme, several motivational factors surfaced which drew the participants towards Resurface, those that did not associate with the activities inherent lure.

Feeling Motivated: Hoping for a Fresh Start

There are three distinct themes that became recurrent in my post-induction observations, and again in my interview transcripts, which portray the students' motives behind joining Resurface, isolated from the lure of the activities. These were: *escaping the mundane, while longing for newness;* the *prospect of an enhanced wellbeing and new friends*; and, *the persuasion from family, friends, and counsellors*.

Several participants alluded to their feelings of a mundane existence, explaining how it was amplified as the hope of university fulfilment became fruitless, imbedding disappointment. For instance, during his induction, Josh commented:

> *You come to Uni thinking life will change and everything will just get better, but in some ways, it really only gets worse, which makes you want to just get away from it all.*

Like Josh, several interviewees described their longing for a new outlet to bridge the gap of what seemed to be, a sense of existential discontent; equally, this longing acted as a motivator towards Resurface, as many of these same students found it difficult to cope with their mental health while living among the chaotic, HE environment. Several interviewees described how university life fell short of expectation, and in some cases, acted as an incubator for further distress, deteriorating the very problems they sought to mend. Specifically, Tess explained how she had experienced anxiety and depression for several years and had hoped that university would help her '*break free'* and move towards a fresh start. Instead, Resurface took place of her longing for newness and respite:

> *Although I was nervous, I thought that university was finally a way out of the negativity in my past, a turning point. At school, I always felt really low, always anxious, and unwanted. I thought Uni would help me meet new people, and try new things, and feel good for once. As soon as I got here, it just felt the opposite, my flatmates all wanted to just party and drink, my course was stressful, and I felt even worse; so, Uni wasn't what I expected, and I just needed something to get away from it all. Like, Resurface stood out for me because it just looked so different to everything else, and I guess I just needed like a fresh start, and it offered exactly that.*

Tess's account was representative of the wider group, as Bowl (2003) explains, Higher Education is a major lifestyle change, and while this can instil simultaneous feelings of fear and apprehension, it can also be a change that is welcomed, as a means of starting anew, and an opportunity to grow. However, like Tess, many of these students' university expectations were not met, and Resurface seemed to take precedence by encouraging a sense of hope. Slade (2010) describes that for people facing mental health difficulties, the prospect of newness can be perceived as an opportunity to make a positive change, with a clean slate. Certainly, Tess's prospect of a new beginning was augmented by her need to recover from pre-existing distress. Equally, Anthony (1990) illuminates the process of mental health recovery, describing that a central turning point is the development of new meaning and purpose, and a sense of future orientation and hope. Like Tess, throughout the initial inductions, it was clear that many students

had not found a new purpose or meaning, or experienced their projected wellbeing progression, and longed for something new to satisfy this void.

This theme of existential dissatisfaction and dread overlaps the following motivational themes; that is, the students' personal desire to progress their own wellbeing and make new friends, coupled with encouragement from parents and counsellors. Extracts from the primary interviews portray the common vocabulary used:

> *I know I needed to do something, as my parents kept on nagging me to (laughing)!*
>
> Mitch

> *One of the reasons I joined was because my counsellor said I needed to do something active for my wellbeing, and something that would help me make friends*.
>
> Emily

> *I just knew I needed to do this, for me, my mental health, and so that I could get better, plus I knew making friends would help me like feel less lonely*.
>
> Chloe

> *Everyone kept telling me to try find a hobby, and I felt I would enjoy this, so I guess I was motivated by my family and friends in a way, but also my own excitement.*
>
> Sajiv

The post-induction transcripts highlight these same moods, and one field note following Bryony's induction became a common notion during the initial referral stages:

> *One of the major reasons Bryony signed up to Resurface is because she hopes to make a change and improve her wellbeing, yet also wants to make new friends. Bryony said that she had been advised to join Resurface by her parents and by student wellbeing, yet appears self-determined, as she understood the change she needed to make. This is positive, as Bryony knows that wellbeing progression is the intention of Resurface and seems hopeful that the course will achieve this for her, which set her intention and instilled a sense of hope.*

Acharya and Agius (2017) explain that hope underpins the processes for many aspects of wellbeing, and that hope is particularly important for mental health recovery. The sense of hope Resurface provided

shaped a crucial motive with which students, such as Bryony, described helped them to take the initial steps to join Resurface. Equally, the mismatch between the students desired level of meaningful social relationships, and what they perceived they truly had, also proved influential. As Bryony highlights, most of the students understood the detrimental impacts of loneliness on their wellbeing, and deeply wished to make new friends. This is important, as it is well known that the persistent subjective feeling of loneliness is a strong independent indicator of several physiological changes, and poor health outcomes (Petitte et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2012; Hawklet & Cacioppo 2012; Hawkley et al., 2010).

I soon discovered that many of the students set out with an intention to improve their wellbeing, and this was encouraging. Slade (2009) describes an intention that stems from a desired outcome is an important component of recovery, as the motivation is self-determined; for instance, Josh said:

> *I really need this to get better, I just have to put my head down get on with it, as I want to make this change in my life for the better.*

Like Josh, I asked Mitch why he want to join Resurface, where he described his intention to '*get better',* however, I later recognised how regular low moods led to demotivation, and structural barriers, such as transport, became difficult to navigate. During Mitch's interview, I asked whether his early intention to '*get better'* had kept him motivated to attend, despite these barriers:

> *I guess so yer, but really it was a mix of things, like my mum and dad telling me to keep with it, and like genuinely I was always excited to do Resurface.*

Mitch's self-determined motivation united with the enjoyment of the activities and encouragement from his parents, permitting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drives, helping him navigate adverse emotions, and maintain his attendance. According to Faries (2016), experiencing diverse motivations should theoretically dictate the success of health intervention, describing intervention motivation complex, yet crucial. This data reveals that intention alone is a poor predictor of health behaviour change and maintenance, because while intention can be high, the laborious nature of prescription, the intervention is this case, coupled with symptoms of poor mental health, often adversely affect subsequent motivational behaviour. For Mitch, this seemed true, as it was clear that his intentions to improve his wellbeing and '*get better'* were a part of a wider motivational process, which resulted in successive referral and his continued attendance.

This theme has set the foundation portraying the positive drives which primarily encouraged the students to join Resurface and maintain their attendance. This is important as the obstacles confronted during these early stages will help comprehend the lived experience in totality, and the necessity of these motivational drivers by the end.

Fear of the Unknown: Inhibiting Engagement and Progression

Despite most students displaying enthusiasm towards the prospect of joining Resurface, naturally, there was a degree of apprehension. As Hinton et al., (2015) says, a sense of unease is common as part of any intervention pathway, particularly for those with underlying mental health problems (Cole 2010; Glowaki 2017). This is important, because while several participants were able to navigate these barriers, others were not. For these students, their early experiences were not entirely positive. Specifically, worries were augmented because of poor mental health, where anxiety accounted for most reservations, and negatively impacted attendance. While not all the students' felt the same sense of unease, two clear themes were recognised, centred on prominent interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural apprehensions. The first, *social anxiety*, affected several students' interpersonal interactions, and closely related to *social physique anxiety,* and intrapersonal concerns. The second, *structural constraints,* involved apprehensions associated with transport, the referral process, a lack of time, and the activity setting. Occasionally, these same structural challenges acted as defence mechanisms misused by students, to shelter deeper interpersonal concerns.

This section will discuss these prominent trepidations, and display the groups general sense of unease, which acted as a barrier to participation and positive engagement. It will draw from data on the initial induction consultation, through to the first weeks of intervention, and display the journey that transpired from the early *fears of the unknown*, through the unfamiliar, becoming accustomed territory. By better understanding these experiences, practitioners and facilitators can help improve the transitional pathway into Resurface, by decreasing prominent concerns, and answering prospective participatory objections, before they arise.

Navigating Social Anxiety

It is well known that the experience of joining a new social group is especially daunting (Beesdo-Baum et al., 2012; NICE 2013; Fehm et al., 2005), such as attending a new university, starting a new job, or joining a club, such as Resurface. These occurrences can be uncomfortable social experiences, and lead to deep routed anxiety and fear. For those living with social anxiety, which Heimberg et al., (2009) describe as a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations, anxieties are intensified. For those

individuals, Öztürk and Mutlu (2010) explain that it is common to experience sweating, trembling, anxiety, a fast heartbeat, and stress. Linda, who lived with social anxiety, bought to light the fears she faced because of her social anxiety at Resurface:

> *At the beginning it was like really, really tough, and although it's getting better as I get to know people, it isn't easy. Erm, literally, when I'm at my worst I have to sort of force myself to go, or I just think of excuses why I can't.*

Part of the aim of Resurface is to improve student wellbeing by reducing anxiety for students such as Linda. Conversely, for participants facing pre-existing symptoms of social anxiety, to experience these benefits, a major social barrier had to be crossed. This is because Resurface involved meeting new people, primarily strangers, and talking in groups, starting new conversations, and stepping out of communal comfort zones, towards socialisation; Ollie said:

> *It is so unlike me to even join something like this, usually I'd just be too scared.*

Like Ollie, the students experiencing social anxiety faced a potentially debilitating problem preventing wellbeing progression and attendance. Certainly, while these students' anxiety eased over time, it was identified as a damaging influence amid the early experiences, and was broadly noted in my field notes, becoming an important topic of exploration during the first interviews. The following words were recurrent in my interview transcripts and fields notations, which describe the feelings associated with the initial sense of anxiety:

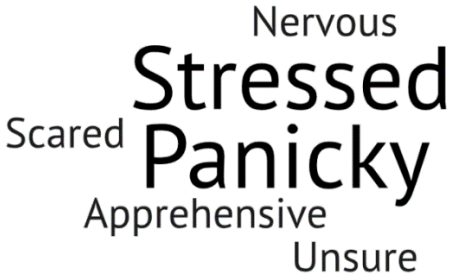

Figure 4: Word Cloud for Feelings Associated with the Initial Sense of Anxiety

The vocabulary used by several interviewees reflected a nervous mindset; Emily was typical in her account of feeling jittery and stressed on the day of her induction, and equally in the week prior to her first session:

Looking back now, I shouldn't have been so scared, but I couldn't help it at the time. I felt so nervous even coming to the initial welcome thing we had, to the point that I almost didn't go. I literally stood around the corner for so long trying to motivate myself to walk in and say hi to you both. So, like, you can only imagine how I felt going to the first actual session and meeting the group, it was terrifying (uncomfortably laughing). The whole week before I was just worrying, and then even on the day of the first session, I woke up so early, as I kept worrying about meeting everyone.

I went on to ask Emily what it was that worried her most*:*

Mainly just what people would think of me, as I don't really act the same when I'm feeling anxious, and everyone would think that I'm like stand-offish.

Ruscio et al., (2008) explain that it is common for socially anxious individuals to experience impairments in interpersonal connections, as Norton and Hope (2001) explain, they often misperceive social information, and show self-protective behaviours. This was true for Emily, as she described her '*stand off-ish'* outward manifestation in social situations. Emily appeared fearful of experiencing her symptoms of anxiety, and worried what people might have thought of her, reflecting deeper intrapersonal concerns. Emily went on to explain how she tried to overcome this:

My counsellor says I have to try and stop negative thoughts of what people think of me and focus on what people are saying instead of just thinking the worst, which makes sense, as I know that my thoughts usually fuel my anxiety. But also like, I just try focus on what I am doing instead. So, like, on that first session, I was so scared, I just focussed on surfing, which helped take my mind away from the social situation itself.

Emily avoided the social situation as best she could, looking to reshape her negative thoughts into positive ones; this helped her avert non-attendance. Another comment by Billy, recounting the early intervention stage, is indicative of those students experiencing social anxiety; '*the beginning was mostly just me feeling socially anxious'*. Coles et al., (2005) explain that social anxiety closely associates with age, and typically forms in the teenage years, easing with age, but can be augmented by mental health problems. This explains why so many of these students experienced social anxiety and were at risk of this undermining their positive steps and social cohesion. I found this particularly noticeable at the beginning of the first surfing lesson, captured by the following field note:

> *It was an awkward experience. They arrived sporadically and individually, scarcely approaching the meeting point on the beach where my-self and the instructors welcomed them. There was a sense of anxiety, a sort of fear in the air, as I could feel it was slightly different to that of the typical student group. You could sense how nervous people were.*

Semin and Groot (2013) would suggest that my subconscious construction of the social situation helped recount the students emotional signalling and sensory acquisition, drawing from indicators such as their facial expressions, body language, and vocal tones. This enabled me to identify the sense of fear I described to be '*in the air',* through my own subconscious construction. This diary entry progressed, documenting the facilitators asking the students to sit on top of their surfboards and introduce themselves to the person to their left, and have that person introduce them to the group:

> *While there were some louder characters who helped conversation flow, people such as Emily and Rob avoided eye contact, and appeared to have very low self-esteem, and seemed embarrassed. I shook hands with Rob, he was sweating / shaking. We then took part in a group circle introductory activity that was insightful; this helped the group dynamic, as most people adjusted, and it begun to feel less nervy. However, without me or the instructors there, and except for a few confident students, I feel many might not have talked at all, literally - not at all.*

It was clear that the instructors, the more confident students in the group, and I, had helped ease social tension; equally, once the focus had shifted from introductions, onto the surfing lesson, I recall the tension easing. The focus on surfing drew the students' attention away from social interaction, a distraction which is explored in greater depth in the following Chapter 5, '*Surfing Waves of Wellbeing'* while considering a *'flow state*' (Csíkszentmihályi 1990).

By the third session, I had developed a rapport with Rob, who despite living with social anxiety, had developed more confidence. We delved into an impromptu conversation while walking back, following a post-yoga coffee. I asked Rob how his initial anxiety could have been reduced, and noted this discussion in my journal once we parted ways:

> *Rob explained that if someone were to have met him before the first session, even just up the road, 5 minutes before, it would help him feel so much less anxious to have someone to walk over to the larger group with. As we went deeper, Rob went on to say that if someone were there with him, it would've eased his tension and helped him act more like the person he knows*

he is, oppose to the person people see him as, as his anxiety makes him retract his emotions from a sort of fear of being judged. Rob explained that he loathed how his social anxiety made him seem less fun, as inside he felt that he is fun person, but struggles to convey this externally. I noticed this a great deal comparing his upbeat conversation and body language with me, to that of the wider group.

Spokas et al., (2009) discuss that there is a growing evidence-base that suggests social anxiety is associated with the suppression of emotional expression. This proved true for Rob, as he found it difficult to express his authentic self among this new social group. Rob opening about his emotions surprised me, as it is well documented that those with social anxiety typically disclosed information about less intimate intrapersonal topics than non-socially anxious individuals (DePaulo et al., 1990; Alden & Bieling 1998). This suggests that Resurface had helped Rob gain confidence, given that prior to this moment, he was unable to attend lectures due to the severity of his anxiety. Our conversation continued, reflecting an area of interest that several socially anxious participants felt passionate towards implementing:

Rob said that if there was a group chat formed just for those that were socially anxious, they could get to know each other before; a sort of 'buddy up system'. I thought he would have been too nervous to meet a stranger before, but this seemed to appeal to him, if it meant meeting someone who felt the same as he did, an example of peer support.

This suggestion offers a recommendation for intervention facilitators around easing the anxiety-inducing first steps into the unknown Resurface social world. In the following sessions, among spontaneous conversations, I presented Rob's suggestion to four participants most affected by social anxiety. They agreed this would benefit them, explaining that having someone accompany them, that understood their anxiety, would help them to feel confident, or like Ollie described, feel '*more normal'*. This data mirrors a conversation with Tess during her first interview, as she discussed the apprehensions she'd felt before each session, which continued right through the first term:

Although I was nervous before each session and worried what people would think of me, I knew that inevitably, I would not be judged, as everyone had a reason they were referred, like something they were dealing with personally. So like, I could be quiet, low, walk out, or even have a full blown panic attack, but people wouldn't react like they would if this were any other group, they would sort of just understand. It's kinda helped me make friends easier, and it helped me actually join up in the first place.

Tess said that she felt reassured to display her anxiety, as she wouldn't be judged in the same way that she would in an alternate group setting. This echoes what Rob and the other socially anxious participants' desired, to be understood and supported by others that felt the same as them, and to normalise their anxiety. These findings recount Cadick (2015), exploring surf therapy among veterans with PTSD; Caddick found that participants were able to normalise and legitimise their suffering, just by knowing that they were not the only ones going through their similar experiences. This theme is crucial and discussed in more depth in Chapter 7 (*The Cohesive Contributory Themes),* as a crucial influencer of the peer support group structure Resurface emulated.

While additional characteristics of anxiety were exhibited by some of the students, such as the fear of learning new things, and participating in novel environments, for most, these experiences encouraged a higher degree of excitement, oppose to fear, discussed by the former theme 'the activities appeal'. However, one fear representative of several female participants, that was raised regularly, was social physique anxiety.

Confronting Social Physique Anxiety

Social Physique Anxiety (SPA) is routed in social anxiety and defined by Crawford and Eklund (1994) as the anxiety a person experiences when they perceive others to be negatively evaluating their physique. It is also more common among adolescents, young adults, and females (Motl & Conroy 2000). In this study, SPA was prominent among many female participants', who'd displayed a sense of unease during their consultations, indicating concerns representative of SPA, presented by extracts from post-induction field notes:

> *Linda asked if the changing facilities were separated by male and female and said that she felt uncomfortable changing in front of people.*
>
> *Bryony questioned the clothing requirement for both activities, and made an uncomfortable joke, saying that she 'wouldn't be wearing skimpy yoga pants', and if 'they'd have wetsuits in her size'.*
>
> *Demi scarcely, yet with determination, asked if there were individual changing facilities, so she could change alone for both surfing and yoga, indicating that she felt uncomfortable in her body.*

Chloe queried what it is like wearing a wetsuit and said she doesn't want it 'hugging her' too tightly, while uneasily laughing.

Similar extracts were common among the post-induction field notes, as several female students safeguarded their questioning in a comical and light-hearted manner; here, I sensed anxiety by their tone of voice, and by their body language. This was expected, as it is well known that exercise environments, such as Resurface, are inherently social and evaluative. As Mack et al., (2007) explain, these settings can foster preoccupation with self-presentation and anxiety, associated with how the body appears to others. Equally, it is well known that women experience a higher degree of SPA because of self-objectification (SO) (Melbye et al., 2007). In modern Western society, the female body is idealised as ultratrim and attractive (Hamilton & Waller 1993; Klaczynski et al., 2004). Likewise, sexualised images have a higher level of objectification of the body of women than men (Archer et al., 1983; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993), and SO and SPA has been frequently connected with the drive for slenderness, perfectionism, and body dissatisfaction (Diehl et al., 1998; Haase et al., 2002). Undoubtedly, past research indicates why SPA was not found to be a prominent issue among the male participants in this study.

Melbye et al., (2007) explain that the culturally idealised female body, and the colossal value placed on it by society, compels women to internalise these external standards, holding them as their own. This explains why, during consultations, some of the female students felt uneasy asking questions associated with their SPA. I felt that future intervention consultation could better provide answers in advance to students' making SPA related queries, as this would have helped avoid embarrassment and discomfort. Likewise, during her interview, Demi said:

I think if the changing arrangements and general clothing situation was advertised from the very beginning, it might have got more girls like me signing up.

Kowalski et al., (2006) suggest that a predominant approach for handling physique concerns is behavioural avoidance, by avoiding the situation that is likely to elicit anxiety. As Demi suggested, answering SPA objections before the intervention commenced might have increased attendance, reduced anxiety, and improved the participants' self-esteem. For example, if the marketing of Resurface promoted the individual changing facilities, it may have enticed more female students to sign up at the referral stage and access support, that they would not have had otherwise.

During the opening surfing session, I noticed that some of the female students wearing wetsuits for the first time, covered their physiques, cradled their arms, and were standing awkwardly. It seemed this was an attempt to avoid potential evaluations by others in the group. As a surf coach, external of Resurface, I regularly witness these same SPA indicators, reflecting wetsuits awkward, tight-fitting characteristics. However, SPA was prominent among some of the female students in this study, particularly compared with past groups I'd witnessed. I believed this to be a consequence of the added pressure of underlying mental health problems, and negative self-evaluations as identified by Melbye et al., (2007). Fortunately, this sense of social embodiment was much more prominent in the early sessions, as by the third and fourth sessions, it had eased considerably. However, this negative experience seemed to distract these students from their early positive experiences of Resurface. In a discussion with Bryony**,** one of the more confident interviewees, she described her SPA experiences:

> *I think most us girls worry about our bodies being on show. I mean we are wearing tight revealing wetsuits, which to get off or in you have to sort of dance, and not in the most flattering way, and like you've got people like Elisa who look like models, which doesn't help. Then in yoga, you might end up at the front of the class doing a posture and bent over with everyone behind you, which is just not the most comfortable thing if you are a body conscious person like me. I mean, I do think as time went on and I got to know people better I felt more comfortable, for example, Elisa made a comment about how my wetsuit made my butt look good (laughing), and this made me feel better about myself (laughing), I know it sounds silly (laughing). I think with Resurface that's just how it is, everyone is so supportive, even in little ways like that, and it makes such a difference.*

Mack et al., (2007) explain that adolescents who identified themselves as less attractive than their peers, typically reported higher SPA scores, and vice versa, those who do not typically reported lower. Similarly, Sabiston et al., (2007) state that peer group influences are known to perpetuate feelings of SPA. Equally, for Bryony, once she developed a rapport with Elisa, she received peer encouragement, which acted as a source of confidence and acceptance. However, Bryony self-objectified, equating her worth to her body's appearance, treating herself as an object to be evaluated. Indeed, rather than receiving self-worth based on her competence-based attributes, self-objectification manifested on appearance attributes, where Bryony experienced her body according to how it looked. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explain that this SPA experience can contribute to mental health problems. Certainly, as Resurface's activities involve a high degree of bodily exposure, students such as Bryony were susceptible to positive experiences being negatively influenced by the experience of their body, and by their mental health.

In one interview, a comment by Tess, '*once you get to know people, you just kinda don't care as much'* was symbolic the feelings of SPA lessening as time progressed, and intrapersonal concerns relieved. This recounts a study by Cox et al., (2011), who found that general feelings of acceptance and belonging in peer groups have been shown to help to buffer against SPA. Certainly, while the nature of surfing and yoga appeared detrimental to SPA for some students, the support from peers influenced a positive group cohesion, and eased their initial negative experiences.

Structural Constraints: Avoiding Interpersonal Fear

Crawford et al., (1991) infers structural constraints distal compared with more powerful interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints, such as SA and SPA. However, I discovered that for many students', structural barriers significantly impacted their intervention journey, embedding a sense of unease which obstructed their initial decisions whether to join the intervention, and/or attend sessions. For instance, numerous journal entries of post-induction extracts, or pre-induction discussions, highlighted the structural obstacles conveyed by several students:

> *Demi explained that she was worried about transport given the distance to the yoga studio & surf school, and that the bus timetable was difficult to navigate, and the walk would be 45 minutes.*

> *Before his induction, Adam's counsellor made contact, and explained that Adam was unsure about starting Resurface in the winter, given the sea temperatures, weather and choppy waters, but wanted to find out more, and suggested we were mindful of his underlying concern. Sajiv's counsellor warned that she needed to be eased into finding out more information about Resurface, as she was concerned about overcommitting to an already busy university agenda. Ollie explained that he had so much going on, with several other commitments, such as a society he was a member of, and his busy academic timetable, and he was worried about changing his routine.*

Alexandris and Carroll (1997) explain that structural constraints represent "*constraints as they are commonly conceptualised, as intervening factors between leisure preference and participation*" (p. 124). It was clear that the above factors, including time obligations, transport, the activity setting, environment, and a change in routine, acted as deterring intervening barriers. While each obstacle was

surmountable for those that actively engaged, I recognised how, as a result, some of the students developed a sense of unease in joining Resurface.

Despite these concerns, throughout the inductions, many of these students were dissuaded, each deciding to join the intervention. However, some drew upon these constraints later, as explanations for non-attendance, such as a lack of time, or problems with transport. Curiously, I felt that these structural concerns were often unreflective of the true origin for non-attendance, instead, substituting interpersonal reservations. This was evidenced by an impromptu conversation with Adam, who messaged to explain that he couldn't attend a yoga session, as he'd '*missed the bus'*. I responded offering to collect Adam from his residence, as I was passing his way. Adam reluctantly agreed, documented later that evening in a field note of our conversation on the journey:

> *Adam explained that he'd made an excuse as he hadn't missed the bus; instead, he was feeling low and anxious. Adam went on to explain that if I had not given him a 'nudge', he would've stayed in bed all day, as he didn't want to be seen in a low mood and depressed. He said that 'sometimes I just need to be dragged out of my house to go to things like this, otherwise I'd miss out on everything', and thanked me for collecting him.*

This similar experience arose with Emily misusing a structural constraint, explaining that she couldn't attend Resurface due to a prior commitment, a union society meeting. Given my contextual knowledge of Emily's social anxiety, I felt suspicious, and commented '*are you sure you can't fit both in, as it'd be great to have you join, you've been progressing so much and making huge steps'*. Like Adam, Emily grudgingly changed her mind, later confessing that she felt anxious, and used the meeting as a reason for nonattendance. Emily drew from several structural constraints throughout the intervention, and in our first interview, explained that encouragement from me, the facilitators, and her peers, had helped considerably. Emily explained that she was always 'happy' when she attended:

> *It gets me out of my own head and into the situation I fear, but once I face my fear, it sort of melts away most of the time; that's why I need people to persuade me out of my own head.*

Instead of reflecting genuine representations of the intervention's structural impediments, excusing non-attendance became a reality for several structural obstacles which students such as Emily and Adam misrepresented, sometimes regularly, to avoid interpersonal fears. This data mirrors research by Williamson et al., (2017), who examined the relationship between perception of constraints, and sport participation or nonparticipation. They found that structural constraints are rarely the real reasons for

nonparticipation. Likewise, past research has shown that individuals with poor mental health will excuse non-attendance using fabricated explanations, unrelated to their mental health (Campbell et al., 2015; Neal et al., 2005; Mitchel & Selmes 2007; Ciechanowski et al., 2006). As Campbell et al., (2015) explain, this is to avoid stigma or embarrassment, and/or reframe from revealing their distress, as a means of shielding their identity, or self-esteem. This data suggests that by eliminating structural obstacles persuasively and encouragingly, facilitators and peers can substantially influence individuals with mental health problems to surpass their interpersonal reservations and increase their attendance.
Not all structural constraints raised were interpersonal shelters, instead, some were sincere restraints, such as the fear of stormy conditions correlating with non-attendance in surfing, or the correlation between non-attendance in yoga, with demanding exam periods. However, these constraints were less momentous, and while common, did not dramatically influence the overall intervention attendance. Though, one indicative constraint discussed with Carl, which did raise concern, was the referral pathway to student wellbeing, and then to the intervention:

> *Getting there and having to fill in the forms and be in the waiting room, it's a long process, to then be on a waiting list before you even get any help. Like truthfully, I only went and singed up so that I could be referred to Resurface, as I'd seen it advertised and was told I had to be referred by a counsellor at the wellbeing centre.*

Carl found the referral process through the wellbeing service at the university structurally challenging, reflecting deeper intrapersonal constraints. This acted as a barricade to Resurface, and to the support Carl deemed necessary to improve his own wellbeing. This was because Resurface involved an agreement with the university to process referrals through its counselling service, a bridge for students looking to avoid psychotherapy, was difficult to cross. Carl describes how this experience formed a barrier to joining Resurface:

> *I guess that's why I almost didn't join, as I knew that I had to go through student wellbeing, and it just all felt so drawn out. I don't see why I couldn't just join Resurface without doing all that, like couldn't I just refer myself, as there must be so many more students like me with depression, anxiety, and all sorts, that would join if they didn't have to go through this, like, not all of us want to talk to someone, sometimes we just want to get on with it ourselves.*

Fortunately, this obstacle was averted, as Carl's eagerness to join Resurface and the activities inherent appeal, surpassed reservations towards the wellbeing service and referral. This is important, as it is well known that young people are less likely to seek help if they hold beliefs that they should be able to

handle their own mental health problems (Surtees et al., 1998). This data suggests that students such as Carl might not have entered the student wellbeing service without the lure of Resurface. This outcome might be deemed positive, as Carl subsequently registered with a professional at the university, offering mental health protection. However, Carl suggests the tip of the iceberg, in that many more students might have been interested in Resurface if the referral pathway was condensed, by implementing self-referral and avoiding counselling all together. Certainly, given the overwhelming demand on HE wellbeing services (YouGov 2016), and with the evident need for alternative therapeutic intervention (Thorley 2017), this data suggest that reducing structural barriers to Resurface, through self-referral (Rickwood & Braithwaite 2004), could be a means of reducing the strain on HE wellbeing services and increasing wellbeing intervention demand.

Summary

- This chapter paints a picture of the early Resurface experiences and sets the scene for the following chapters. It illustrates the appealing, non-competitive, achievable, and diverse nature of Resurface, and its ability to increase wellbeing intervention demand and accessibility for students with poor mental health. These findings further provide a crucial insight into how Resurface fundamentally enables increased exercise uptake for those susceptible to lower levels of participation in physical activity. Indeed, the data suggest surfing and yoga are attractive lifestyle activities and can improve the accessibility of peer support intervention.

- This chapter highlights the importance of encouraging intrinsic and extrinsic motivations through Resurface's marketing, promotions, and referral inductions, to increase accessibility and demand. A future suggestion for practitioners referring students to Resurface is to draw from several types of motivations, using the students' conversations to identify what type of motivational factors are important to them, to help guide them towards taking their initial steps. Specifically, as part of the referral pathway, university counsellors, as well as intervention-facilitator, should look to increase students' intrinsic motivation and self-determination through awareness of their innate human needs; these include autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan 1985; Rubak et al., 2005). The data suggest that this will help participants overcome their fear of the unknown and enhance their enjoyment and engagement with Resurface.

- Feeling anxious, apprehensive, scared, and stressed, and/or dealing with sleep deprivation, account for the subcategories of the major theme, '*Fear of the Unknown'*. This chapter portrays the fears faced by students during their early steps into an unknown social world, while navigating a chaotic student life. The data suggest that future intervention requires enhanced provision to improve accessibility, particularly for those facing SA and SPA, to encourage their participation, and cultivate a more desirable, and less anxiety-provoking intervention pathway. For instance, if the marketing of Resurface promoted the separated and individual changing facilities, it may have enticed more female students to sign up at the referral stage. If socially anxious students were introduced to one another prior to the first session, they may have benefited from peer support and reduced their feeling of anxiety and fear.

- Data displays several structural constraints that were detrimental to intervention attendance and demand, obstacles that were often misused as justifications for non-attendance, with the reality emulating underlying interpersonal fears. The findings suggest that by utilising persuasive language to counter structural objections and encourage attendance, and by removing structural barriers, facilitators, peers, and counsellors, can make a positive influence on sustained participation. In doing so, this will help students bypass their apprehensions and fears, and benefit from the intervention. Not all structural constraints raised were interpersonal shelters, instead, some were sincere restraints. One obstacle that must be overcome is the referral process onto Resurface, where self-referral may be a necessary tool for widening participation groups and improving engagement.

- The early findings support practitioners, universities, and other relevant organisations, to work more effectively with similar client groups, in order to establish effective communications, marketing, and referral processes in the future (Ehrlich 2015; Young 2017; Wheeler 2018). This will increase accessibility and demand to Resurface, and other similar intervention in the future, and subsequently help ease the strain on HE wellbeing services.

Chapter Five: Surfing Waves of Wellbeing

Introduction

This chapter explores the surfing experiences over the course of the entire intervention, which ran parallel to the students' academic year. This rich description of the participants' lived experience will help to promote discussion of what primarily constitutes the Resurface surfing experience, to understand its perceived impact on the student participant's wellbeing. This will help provide a description of the influences of surfing as a part of the wider intervention. The experiences of surfing are represented by the themes presented in Figure 5 below:

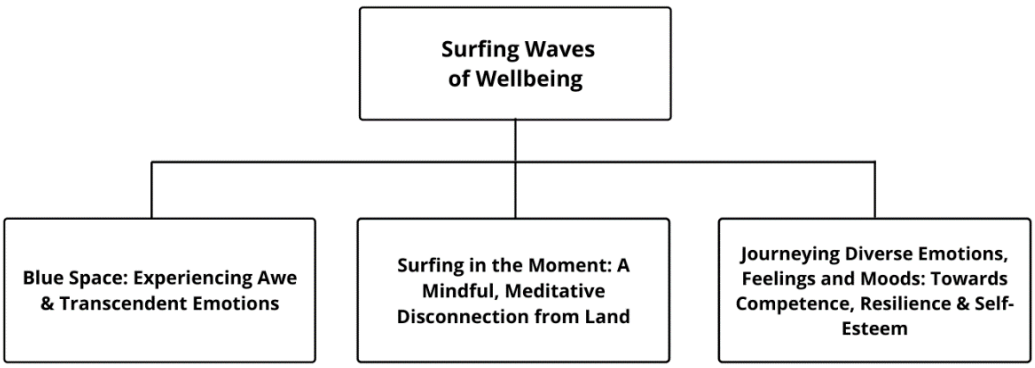

Figure 5: Surfing Waves of Wellbeing

Demonstrated in Chapter 4, a major appeal of surfing was its engagement in blue space (White et al., 2010); or as Depledge and Bird (2009) refer, the *blue gym*, expressing the concept of being active in a natural aquatic environment. The opening theme recounts students' experiences of awe immersed in a coastal setting and describes the embodied experience of blue space as a natural therapeutic environment. This theme depicts how the blue space experience transpired into shaping new perspectives of the student's social and emotional challenges. The following theme presents surfing's innate facilitation of timelessness, mindfulness, and present centeredness, and portrays how surfing provided a sense of respite from social, emotional, and psychological distress. This discussion describes the ways the aquatic environment posed a distraction from the mental health difficulties that several students perceived to be '*left on the land'*.

The final theme explores students' dynamic journey through varied emotions and feelings, expressing the mood-boosting effect of surfing, and the students' development of resilience and self-esteem. This section highlights the personal development sculpted through surfing, depicting students' confrontation with an ever-changing and anxiety-inducing environment, and describes the imparted sense of self-concept, progressing from Chapter 4's '*fear of the unknown'.* This discussion reveals students' perceived progression of self-confidence as their competence grew, and the ways surfing uniquely shaped additional areas of their academic and social lives, and ability to overcome distress. A better understanding of these experiences will allow practitioners and Resurface facilitators comprehend the distinct attributes of surfing, improve referral processes, and focus facilitation and overall impact of surfing as part of the wider Resurface intervention.

Absent from these themes, yet critical to the overall intervention experience, are the cohesive and interconnected contributory themes that surface in Chapter 7, which unequivocally emanated from the surfing experiences. These include social connectedness, belonging, identity, self-worth, acceptance, and peer support. While touched upon, these unified themes are later discussed in totality with the interconnected broader setting which transpired throughout the intervention; specifically, during surfing lessons, yoga practises, at coffee shops, social events, and while travelling to sessions. Hence, this chapter isolate the stand-alone components of surfing amid the wider Resurface experience, and similarly in Chapter 6, independently exploring the distinct yoga experiences, to separate the innate experience of each activity. This will allow the data to underpin the perceived wellbeing value of the entire intervention, as well as describe the significance of the individual activities, surfing and yoga, which are inseparable in real-life.

Blue Space: Experiencing Awe and Transcendent Emotions

The following words revealed in the interview transcripts and observational notes, uncover the students' experiences of awe encouraged by immersion in blue space, presented in the word cloud below:

Figure 6: Word Cloud for Experiences of Awe Encouraged by Blue Space

During interviews, several students reflected on situations which invoked feelings of transcendence, triggered by vast phenomena and interaction with aquatic and coastal stimuli, signifying what Shiota et al., (2007) termed as awe experience. Elisa described feeling *'at one with nature watching the sunset as the seagulls flew by'* and how this made her feel in a world bigger than herself; Carl recollected a sense of '*harmony in stormy waters'* as a *'reminder of mother nature's power'* which made him feel *'fearful and peaceful at the same time'*. Largely, the students appeared awestruck by the sense of wonder in the presence of a vast and novel environment, as their emotions recollecting blue space regularly demonstrated an awe experience (Shiota et al., 2007).

A good example was when Emily recalled '*looking out to sea beyond the horizon'* as it '*stretched as far as the eyes could see'* which made her '*feel humbled and at one with the universe'*. Emily reported feeling a common product of awe, which seemed to transcend her contemplation of the world, comparable with looking at the stars and contemplating the universe (Shiota et al., 2007). As Joye and Bolderdijk (2015) suggest, this sort of self-perception can transcend the self, and what often emerges is a sense of oneness with the universe. Equally, Emily appeared to experience a sense of connectedness with the world, a noteworthy occurrence, as this experience is known to encourage greater life satisfaction, and even improve academic performance (Edinger-Schons 2020; Huebner & Hills 2015). According to Bodei (2008), and Ewert et al., (2001), such connectedness can encourage positive emotions such as self-realization, an important facet of eudemonic wellbeing. Likewise, Ryff (2013) indicates that this experience can help a person gain awareness of their qualities, improve personal and creative growth, and encourage thoughts, feelings, and actions, that guide behaviour.

For some of these students', their awe experience even reshaped the way in which they contemplated their mental health problems. Mitch revealed the novelty and influence of the surfing landscape, as the perspective of his anxiety reformed because of feeling awestruck by what he described as nature's beautiful and vast environment:

For me, being in the ocean means immersing in mother nature's beauty, and its helped me change the way I feel about my problems, because when you're out there you're a part of something bigger than yourself, it's unexplainable, like it sort of humbles you as you fear it, but also it makes you think why you're even worrying about your own anxieties, as in that moment it all seems insignificant compared with what's out there in the world. I guess it's a cliché, but you like feel at one with mother nature, and for me, this is important, as I'm usually in the library, or in my room, and then suddenly, I'm at the beach with a cliff behind me, or in the ocean with waves crashing over me, and in this world that is so different to my every day.

Mitch's mental health problems felt small in the ocean, as he perceived himself an occupant of a minuscule part of a vast universe, and this stimulated awe as he contemplated nature's intricacy and beauty through a sort of respect and admiration of the sea. This resulted in Mitch moulding a new perspective of the social and emotional challenges he faced, as the novel setting reshaped his outlook of his anxiety, where he challenged its very existence. Mitch's awe-induced experience of blue space recalls research by Bodei (2008), who compares awe with sublime emotion, defining sublime as a mixed experience of emotions such as simultaneous fear and pleasure, resulting in a sense of vitality and self-realisation. For Mitch, sublime emotion was evoked by his imposing of the natural world, which is why it resembled feelings of awe, and encouraged feelings of wonderment (Bodei 2008; Joye & Bolderdijk 2015). Like several students, Mitch found the perspective of his own mental health reform being submerged in a novel, unfamiliar, yet vast and immersive environment; this experience seemed to progress his sense of eudemonic wellbeing. Similar emotions surfaced for Bryony, who during her second interview, bought to light an insight she'd anticipated sharing, prior to our interview:

I actually had this one experience I've been meaning to share with you. Basically, everyone was out in the water, and it was really rough and you could tell people were scared, and usually this would be me; but it was weird as I found myself just sort of floating there as everything went still and I was in a kinda trance, where I could see other people ahead trying to get past the waves in like slow motion. But erm, it was strange as I felt this powerful kind-of happiness, like when you'd get goose bumps watching a really good singer (laughing), as I was looking around taking in the scenery and just realised how I'm a part of this world, like I'm worth something and matter. I don't know what it was but being out there in that moment just made me think how really it doesn't matter what others think of me, which has helped me broaden my mind and sort of overcome a barrier to realise that I'm stronger than I think.

Hearing Bryony disclose her conceivably exceptional experience, I recalled Maslow's (1964) discussion of peak experience and emotional response. Maslow explains that during peak experience, a constellation of intense feelings surface concomitant with awe, such as "*wonder, surprise, amazement, reverence, humility, and surrender, before something great*" (Maslow 1999, p.89). He describes how this experience advances a form of perceiving reality and can have a mystic and magical effect upon the experimenter, in this case, Bryony. Bryony's self-transcendence and self-realisation constructed in that moment permitted a moving and elevated experience, and her sense of wonder and awe seemed to encourage a sense of self-worth, as she felt integrated with the world, immersed in blue space. I went on to ask Bryony how this had impacted her, now that she'd had time to process her experience:

> *It* sounds *silly, but I think I've finally recognised how all the problems that come with Uni are so insignificant, because assignment deadlines, or falling out with my flatmates, are just a small part of my journey in a much bigger world. It's hard to put in words, but I think like this awareness gives you a sort of inner peace, as just being out there has helped me come to terms with where I am now, and like slow down and realise that it's all gonna be ok.*

Bryony 's heightened emotion and exaltation appeared to suspend her into a deeper, more profound sense of belonging to the world. Certainly from a phenomenological perspective, Seamon (1984) would suggest this experience to derive an inner spiritual state, with which Bryony found hard to rationally explain, but equated to a sense of *'inner-peace'*. As Hinds and Sparks (2008, 2011) describe, inner peace closely associates with eudemonia, a type of psychological wellbeing associated with feelings of happiness, vitality, and life satisfaction. Like Mitch, Bryony's experience changed the perspective of her mental health problems, as her distress appeared unimportant when compared with the world and its enormity. Piff et al., (2015) explains how transcendent moods such as these, stimulated by awe, often inspire a sense of wellbeing, reverence, loving-kindness, and magnanimity; irrefutably, this was a necessary experience for students such as Mitch and Bryony, navigating poor mental health (Galderisi et al., 2015).

Another situation described by Tess, evoked an encounter with a jellyfish that she'd sat and watched, describing how this had helped her feel *'childlike and away from it all',* signifying awe, and a sense of serenity:

> *I just sat there watching it bob around for a while; it was actually really calming, even though it was sort of creepy watching this squidgy thing just kind-of living its life. But at*

> *the same time, it was captivating and peaceful, and made me feel childlike and away from it all.*

Cousins et al., (2009) explored people's emotional states when contemplating wild animals, such as Tess's jellyfish encounter; it was found that transcendent emotions surfaced as participants' described awe and wonder, with mixed emotional responses such as "*epiphany and joy"* (*p. 1075*). Tess experienced similar emotions and a sense of escapism, which together evoked transcendent moods, as she contemplated the jellyfish. For Tess, this experience appeared to inspire serenity and joy. Similar feelings raised for Elisa, who in her first interview described feeling '*at one with nature, watching the sunset as the seagulls flew by'*. During her second interview, I asked Elisa to expand on how watching the seagulls made her feel, and why:

> *I dunno like, it's just a nice thing to do, they'd sometimes just sit on top of the water and look around, which is sort-of calming, and I'd just watch them fly around peacefully, like sometimes I'd watch my dog at home just being a dog, and just think how easy his life is (laughing), and it just makes you pause and feel good watching them living their lives without a care in the world. So like, I know it sounds weird but, if I'm feeling low, this sort of helps me feel better in a way.*

Elisa's sense of wonder encouraged a positive mood state, as immersing in blue space provided an opportunity to encounter wild mammals in a unique way, captivated by awe. This sense of wonder stimulated mindfulness and escapism, because similar to Tess, Elisa was able to pay attention to the present moment, which suspended her into a sense of self-awareness and tranquillity. This is important because evidence shows compelling support for mindfulness as an influential therapy for poor mental health, and it has been found to support people feeling calmer, less stressed, and able to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings (Carsley et al., 2018; AMRA 2018; Johnson et al., 2016). This reflects Elisa's enjoyment of watching the seagulls whenever she felt low, as she experienced awe and subsequently, mindful escapism from negative thoughts and feelings.

While not all the students' described encounters with wild mammals, as this was a rarity given the UK's geographical position, it became clear that immersion in blue space had had a positive impact on most students' overall surfing experience. These findings indicate that the students' curiosity toward surfing was focused on more than its sporting attributes, as surfing's coastal environment begged a sense of reconnection with nature, and idealised escape from negative emotions. The

below transcripts portray the typical sense of awe that most of the students encountered throughout the intervention:

> *I'm not used to being in nature like this at the beach this often; coming from London it's so unusual, like I'm surrounded by concrete buildings, but now I'm in this beautiful place all the time being in the sea.*
>
> *Demi*

> *Being at the beach like this is just so different to my everyday, like there was this time watching the sunset which took my breath away and put me in a happy place all week.*
>
> *Billy*

> *It's weird, you walk like 15 minutes and enter a new world entirely which is so different from being in the Lansdowne, surrounded by buildings and stress; it makes you sort of stop and think that there's a whole world out there to explore.*
>
> *Linda*

Like those who kayak, fish, dive, or sea-swim, surfers are regularly exposed to the wildness and immensity of natural phenomenon; therefore, dramatic coastlines, sunrises, sunsets, and the ocean, are a part of the experience. For these students, many having relocated to the coast from in-land locations, experiencing awe were a rarity; specifically, they'd not encountered natural phenomenon such as the ocean, or a dramatic cliff face so frequently. Therefore, feeling awe was a predominantly novel experience, and this appeared to augment the coastal impact of their broader surfing experience. These finding recounts an article by Wallace (2014) titled '*the surprising science that shows how being near, in, on, or under water can make you happier, healthier, more connected, and better at what you do'*. Indeed, the students appeared happier in the sea, and more connected with themselves and each other. Equally, the data from this study supports past research into ST, portraying surfing as a progressive wellbeing tool, heavily weighted on its coastal, blue space environment (e.g., Armitano et al., 2015; Cavanaugh and Rademacher 2014; Clapham et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017).

As White et al., (2010) discuss, awe experience is said to play a significant role in our happiness and overall health, and while this study does not demonstrate awe experience to ameliorate symptoms of poor mental health, it presents the positive impact that blue space and awe has on students' overall sense of adventure, escapism, vitality, and wellbeing. The data show that for

several students', transitional stimuli was able to magnify their natural frame of reference in manifold dimensions, where they were able to reshape the perspectives of their mental health, encountering new environments and novel stimuli. Certainly, this theme highlights the key psychological benefits of awe, yet as Bonner and Friedman (2011) suggest, "*awe lacks a consensual and precise meaning*" (p. 222). According to Ashley (2007), awe might better be described as part of a broader concept of transcendent emotions, and the sublime experience toward nature, as the present study suggests.

Surfing in the Moment: A Mindful, Meditative Disconnection from Land

Presented by the former theme, awe and transcendent emotions had a powerful influence on the students' experience, a connection with the natural environment which inspired a state of absorption, helping them to disconnect. Disconnection and feeling present were a common theme during interviews and throughout observations, a reaction to a multitude of influences, including feeling awestruck. Although, it became clear that being physically active in the ocean seized a heightened influence on the students' distortion of time, as their focus remained deeply on the activity, with little time to dwell on negative thoughts and feelings; Carl said:

> *I think when I'm surfing, I feel like I'm just trying to concentrate not to fall into the water, so like your mind is completely concentrating on where you are in that moment, you don't concentrate on anything outside, like nothing else. So, I am being hit by waves, and just think of the next wave, and erm, am I gonna go over, or under it, or try not to lose the board, but you never really think about what's afterwards, you just live in the moment, so I feel there is quite a lot of concentration with surfing, like you can't just like switch off, you have to stay with it. So, it doesn't really give you time or the opportunity to think about anything negative, which makes you feel this sort of happy, calm feeling.*

What Carl experienced is commonly known as a flow state, defined by a person entering a state of captivation, full attention, and abstraction, in a personally gratifying activity (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). By achieving this state of consciousness while surfing, Carl's focus and awareness seemed to shift towards a meditative state. According to Seligman (2000), this is an integrally rewarding and fulfilling component of flow. Carl discovered this positive experience as his negative feelings disengaged, leaving him in a state of happiness, like what Seligman and Csikszentmihaly (2000) describes as a typical flow state experience, and a sense of joy and balance in life. During observations, I frequently

recognised how surfing helped the students absorb in the present moment, providing a disconnect from their sometimes-negative realities. The following diary extract mid-way through the intervention highlights a poignant change I'd documented among four students, before, during, and after one surfing lesson:

> *Today I took a group down to the beach in the mini-bus, and Chloe and Tess were talking about exam grades and dissertation deadlines and were generally worried; this coupled with Jack and Josh in low moods and not talking as much as usual. Perhaps this was because it has been raining/cold (heart of winter), but this changed the atmosphere of the journey. However, as soon as they begun the session, I recognised a shift in all four; it was as if the moment they set foot on the sand, and then into the water, their whole attitude changed. All four were smiling and generally seemed in a good place, laughing together. On the journey back the atmosphere had shifted - I explained how I noticed a contrast in their moods, looking to gage their reaction. They excitedly and together explained how surfing was the reason why. Chloe said that she wasn't worrying about university anymore, as her only thought was diving under the next wave, which put her in a 'sort of zone' where she couldn't' think about anything else - the others enthusiastically agreed.*

Like Carl's experience, this extract documents surfing's ability to provide a way of existing in the present (Snelling 2015; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015) and underpins the influence a 'flow state' on improving the students' moods and facilitating respite from distress and worry (Csikszentmihalyi 2014; Caddick 2015). Bleakley (2016) explored mindfulness and surfing explaining, "*the dance of surfing is an embodied performance that frequently touches upon experience where time slews in the strangest of ways*" (p.8). Equally, during several sessions, I found myself disconnected from my own thoughts as time slewed, occasionally diverting my aim to observe the group, as my focus was the ocean and the surf. For me, the ocean acted as a vortex, like what the students had described, and this helped me escape my own apprehensions. My personal experience held a mirror to the powerful influence of activity in an ever-changing aquatic environment. This helped me understand how the students might have felt disconnecting from their own thoughts and feelings. This prevailing theme of disconnect and living in the present moment was raised frequently during interviews; Elisa said:

> *I've never been able to just be in a moment without distraction like I have with surfing - your mind is completely absorbed, you catch some waves, try not to fall off, but mainly, you don't have to think about your anxiety or worries, or feel depressed, as there is a sort of complete*

disconnect from everything, which makes you feel at peace.

Elisa reported feeling an important distraction from her depression and anxiety, enabling her to alleviate negative thoughts, and exist in the present. This is important because it is common for people living with depression to associate with dwelling on, or living in the past, such as comparing how things used to be, or second-guessing decisions or actions (Kanter et al., 2008). Elisa regularly reported feeling anxious, which is associated with worrying about or living in the future, distressing over how things might turn out, or decisions that might have negative consequences (Grupe & Nitschke 2013). Conversely, Elisa described feeling at peace, and this associate with living in the present (Kiken et al., 2017). By focussing on this moment, largely excluding the past and future, Elisa focussed her energy and attention on surfing, being the only thing that she could control in that moment. Consequently, Elisa experienced respite and peace, or as Heidegger (1962) might say, a sense of 'at homeness' and 'being in the world', an existential theory of wellbeing. Elisa's experiences illuminate Dahlberg's et al., (2009) depiction of wellbeing as the intertwining of 'peace' and 'movement', at metaphorical, existential, and literal levels. Certainly, this was raised frequently throughout the study, as a meditative and therapeutic element of surfing; Josh said:

> *Surfing gives you that juvenile energy, where you don't like think or overthink, but just act on the impulse, like do the fun stuff not thinking, and just concentrate on what you're doing, or just concentrate on being, without anyone judging you. Like, you know your problems are there, but also they are not, if that makes sense, because you are in the moment not thinking about them. So, you sort of feel calmed and at ease as it's a distraction from just like everything, which kinda stays with you for days after the session; so, I guess now, this is something I look for outside of Resurface, to keep me feeling this way.*

Living in the moment, such as what Josh described while surfing, is a concept of mindfulness and meditation (Brown & Ryan 2003). Josh was free from distraction or judgment, and aware of his thoughts and feelings, without getting caught up in them; this, a characteristically meditative experience (Keng et al., 2011). This helped Josh to actively create conditions which helped avoid distraction and return to the object of focus, the surfing. This experience underpins core concepts of a flow state, as an actively moving and mindful mediation, helping students to experience the pleasure of being in the moment, an intrinsically positive experience (Chen et al., 2018; Key & Wang 2008). According to Aherne et al., (2011), this induced sense of happiness goes beyond a temporary high; instead, it is a general sense of wellbeing and lasting fulfilment. This corresponds with what Josh described as feeling '*calm and at*

ease', days after the surfing session. This meditative, mindful experience was again portrayed by Adam, as I'd asked him to describe what he loved most about surfing:

> *Surfing is the ultimate meditation, from the second you walk down to the beach you're absorbed, it's hard to explain but like, everything around you just take you in, like you're deep in nature's greatest elements. Like you can feel the wind on your face, and smell the sea-air, or hear the waves crashing at the shores as you're walking to the surf school. Then you're erm, putting on the wetsuit, and the wetsuit has its own sort of like smell which draws you further into a trance. Erm, but like more than anything, it's the moment you walk on the sand with your board, feeling the sand between your toes when you take your first dip into the sea, like, I actually think at that point it's almost like a blur, where my mind goes into this sort of other place entirely.*

I went on to ask Adam how this experience made him feel:

> *The whole experience just takes me away from everything and helps me feel more relaxed, and like I've tried actually meditating before, but it's never really worked, but with surfing, I can achieve this sort of mindset where everything that is wrong in the world is just left on the land, as once you step into the surf, your mind goes with you, away from everything. Then, after when we finish the sessions, things just feel better, which kinda stays with me and keeps me positive through the week, I think because I feel satisfied that I've actually done something good for myself.*

Adam was able to train his awareness, achieving a mentally and emotionally stable state, equating his experience to feeling '*relaxed'*, a desired emotion, detaching him from his mental distress. Equally, like Josh, Adam's focus on surfing took place in the here and now, absorbing sensory moments, such as smells, sights, sounds, and his consequent feelings. Cottraux (2007) describes this as mindfulness, defining it as "*a mental state resulting from focusing one's attention on one's present experience in its sensorial way*" (*p.28*). This is important because mindfulness is the cornerstone of meditation (Kabat-Zinn 1994; Baer et al., 2006), and a meditative state is known to increase focus and attention, carrying with it feelings of serenity and joy (Kabat-Zinn 1990; Davidson et al., 2003). For Adam, surfing had emptied his mind of stress, tension, and anxiety, and persuaded a progressive effect on his wellbeing. By experiencing mindfulness, Fredrickson et al., (2008) and Kok et al., (2013) suggest that Adam was able to safeguard and promote his future psychological and physical health, protecting against depressive symptoms, and amplifying his sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Both for Adam and

Josh, like several students in this study, mindfulness and subsequent positive emotions not only indicated hedonic wellbeing in the moment but encouraged eudemonic wellbeing and psychological health in the future. This is because their positive sense of wellbeing and self-satisfaction, often remained with them throughout the following week.

Throughout observations and interviews, it became clear that surfing and its encouragement of mindfulness promoted a desired meditative experience, or better, a flow state. It appears that surfing's ability to facilitate a flow state among the commotion of the student's contemporary lives was perceived to be necessary, offering stillness, composure, and respite. This amplified the students' sense of distraction from the problems they perceived to be '*on the land'*. For example, interviewee Ollie described the valued he placed on detaching from his '*inland world'*, as he immersed in a novel environment that he'd '*longed for',* when deciding to study at a coastal university. This echoed the wider participatory groups desire to detach from urban space and reconnect with nature. Congruently, and indicative of the wider group, during her second interview, Demi said:

> *I don't know what it is between land and water, but you just feel weightless, and that translates into all of your problems that you feel on land dissipating, you feel so much lighter, both physically and mentally; nothing there, no people, no stress, or other things, it's just you in the water with your board - what stresses do you have there, what bad things can happen to you there. Who will be reminding you of the bad times, you don't have technology, uni, boyfriends, flatmates, distractions; just nothing, you only have the water, you are away from it all – this is really special.*

Reflected in the literature, it is common for students to experience heightened stress at university (BACP 2019; Caddick et al., 2015; Hunt & Eisenberg 2010), and take on feelings of exclusion and psychological, emotional, and social distress (YouGov 2016). As Grant (2002) describes, concerns commonly include academic, relationship, and monetary worries, a reality for Demi. However, Demi felt '*weightless'* while surfing; this is important, as Slade (2010) positions, mental health problems can be all-consuming and feel like a heavy weight upon the experiencers' shoulders, offering little respite. This feeling of 'weightlessness' intrigued me, and I asked Demi to explain what this experience felt like:

> *It's weird, but like when I'm not surfing or just at home, my problems feel like my cat sitting on my chest, and he's pretty heavy (laughing), but not like in a way that like stops me doing things – but just enough to make me feel this sort of constant pressure. So, erm, I guess what*

I'm saying is that when I'm surfing that pressure sort of just goes away, like I feel my problems are washed away in the ocean, like my cat getting off my chest, if that makes sense?

For Demi, like several students in this study, the land was a chaotic environment consumed by stress and anxiety, reflecting what Demi describes as her '*cat sitting on her chest'*. Therefore, escaping this feeling became a rarity. This negative, weighted experience, was often deteriorated by digital distraction, implanting further disconnect and detachment from the natural environment. This is important because evidence suggests that the disconnect and detachment from our natural surroundings is growing among younger generations (Turner et al., 2004; Louv 2005; Mayer et al., 2009). Perhaps Demi's experience, like several students' experiences, indicates why the preponderance of ST literature, including this study, displays the largely positive influence of the ocean and coastal environment, as the bulk of exploration focusses on younger generations, predisposed to disconnect from nature. Equally, Demi's experience of respite supports research by Caddick (2015), who found that surfing detached participants from their negative feeling, much like the students' discovering a distraction and detachment from land. Indeed, surfing enabled these students to live in the present moment, or as Tess describes, '*to completely lose all track of time'.*

Resonating findings in the former theme exploring blue space and surfing, a concluding and consistent component of the students' sense of distraction, which encouraged a mindful, meditative state, was the oceans effect on what Nichols (2014) terms a *Blue Mind;* captured in both Ollie's and Chloe's interviews:

I breathe in the sea air and feel the salty spray on my face, the sound of the waves, and the blue of the ocean, and I'm just completely lost in the whole experience, and this is just so peaceful, and helps reduce my anxiety.

Ollie

You can just look at the ocean and it makes you feel good, I don't even know why, it just does, there is something about it that calms you.

Chloe

Nichols (2014) coined *blue mind* as a *"meditative state characterized by calm, peace, unity, and a sense of general happiness and satisfaction with life, in the moment"* (p.7). Nichols explains how water heightens involuntary attention and produces neurochemicals including dopamine (*which plays a role in how we feel pleasure*), serotonin *(that stabilizes mood, feelings of wellbeing, happiness and peace*) and endorphins (*associated with feelings of euphoria).* This state of involuntary attention reflects Ollie's

feeling of peace, or Chloe's experiences of calm, ensuing by a multitude of oceanic components. As Mingillon et al., (2017) explains, the colour blue has a healing effect which reduces stress by changing brain wave frequency. Likewise, Bolin and Abom (2010) discovered that the sound of the waves can help our brains enter a state of calm, by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Certainly, Nichols (2014) revealed how sea water can reduce anxiety by its soothing medicinal properties, which accounts for Chloe's unexplainable '*good-feeling'*. It is also widely considered that viewing water will decrease stress, increase attention capacity, enhance moods, and improve wellbeing (Cooper-Marcus & Barnes, 1999; Ulrich, 2002; Wheeler et al., 2012; White et al., 2010). The data in this study portrays the progressive wellbeing capabilities of *Blue Mind* experiences, those which account for the majority of students' positive surfing experience.

Overall, it was clear that for most of the students, surfing's mindfulness, meditative rudiments encouraged a state of flow, present moment centeredness, and disconnect from land, contributing an important sense of respite and detachment. As Nichols (2014) notes, "*surfing is the closest you will ever come to having a drug-like experience, without taking drugs*" (*p. 14*). In many ways, the data in this study resonates Nichol's surfing illustration, as the students relished a cocktail of feel-good experiences, directly influencing their moods, feelings, and emotions. Consequently, the subsequent section follows naturally, describing the student's surfing experience and supposed brain chemistry, stimulation, novelty, and the neurochemical '*rush'*, to which many surfers describe as '*stoke'*, that comes with catching waves, and being in an ever-changing, aquatic environment.

Journeying Diverse Emotions, Feelings, and Moods: Towards Competence, Resilience, and Self-Esteem

Surfing involved a dynamic setting, demanding a roller-coaster of conditions and situations; one week the surf was exhilarating, with strong winds, heavy rain, and large breaking waves; the next calm, with clear skies and gentle winds, prompting a slow wave shape and formation. While the students navigated the ocean to catch the waves, it created an experience of ever-changing emotions and feelings, impacting their collective and sometimes enduring moods. This is important because moods have been widely accepted as direct influences of progressive mental health (Yeung 1996; Van Den Berg et al., 2016). The following words revealed in my observational notes and interview transcripts set the scene, uncovering the students' moods, emotions, and feelings, before, during, and after surfing; presented in the word cloud below:

Figure 7: Word Cloud Uncovering Students' Moods, Emotions, & Feelings Surfing

Visibly, there was a distinct contrast between students' experiences having surfed larger swells, windier conditions, and tougher weathers, with that of calmer seas and clearer skies. Specifically, the calmer conditions elevated feelings of serenity and peace; Billy said:

> *My favourite part of surfing is just bobbing on the board chatting to Linda and Tess, talking about our plans for summer and dissertations. Like, we might not know each other that well, but we are on the beach like we've been friends for years. I guess just being in the sea puts you in a naturally comfortable place. Like, you can just be yourself and feel relaxed, and that's what I look forward to most.*

The calmer conditions enabled Billy to experience a comforting environment to connect with other students', and a place where he was able to feel calm. Similarly, I documented Josh's comment after a sunny, gentle surfing session, while walking back to the changing rooms:

> *Such a good mood man, I could just sit out there for hours with the sun beaming on my face, it's my happy place.*

Josh's relaxed mannerisms and composed body language echoed the wider groups' feelings following the more still surfing sessions, as he appeared calm, confident, and content. While these calmer sessions encouraged positive experiences, they primarily reflected the progressive experiences of the formerly discussed blue spaces, therefore, will not be the primary focus of this section. Instead, it will concentrate on the more characteristic and regular experiences of surfing larger swells, where students confronted windy, rainy, cold, and unforgiving conditions. This is highlighted by Josh's emotional contrast the subsequent week, after a particularly tempestuous surf:

That was crazy (laughing), so much fun (laughing), the waves were huge (laughing), did you see I got up once and proper rode the wave all the way in?

Intrigued by Josh's emotional contrast the following week, I spoke with him at a social event, asking Josh to reflect on his experience having surfed the larger waves; enthusiastically he responded:

Like, before my mind was all over the place, but then it was so fun, when I like proper rode a wave in it was this moment of Zen which sort of soothed my mind, and since then I've just felt happy all week.

Josh was excited reminiscing on his surfing experience, and he'd projected his voice so that his story was audible to others at the cafe. This behaviour indicated Josh's pride in having battled the stormy conditions and catching a wave, and his experience of flow. Josh described excitement and adrenaline discussing his ocean experience, yet when catching a wave, his experience moved to a '*moment of Zen',* which he'd reported '*soothed'* his mind, and encouraged feelings of happiness. This data recalls a discussion by Diehm and Armatas (2004), who describe the rush and adrenaline surge when riding a wave, or being in the ever-changing aquatic environment. They describe surfing as intense, exciting, and exhilarating, as well as serene, quiet, and calming. Correspondingly, Bleakley (2016) describes the natural high while standing up and riding a wave, experiencing the calm above the waves, amid the storm below. Josh's experience of excitement and parallel calmness echoes a common surfing experience, and one that seemingly promoted positive experiences for several students in this study. Like Josh, the students' feelings and emotions went beyond hedonic value in the moment yet inspired a heightened sense of vivacity which replenished their exhausted cognitive attention, and overall mood. Similarly, during his second interview, Ollie made an evocative comment, reflecting several participants surfing depiction:

It makes me feel alive, it's like when I'm surfing, I've got adrenaline dripping from my ears (laughing), it's like a drug I can't get enough of, which sort of helps my moods whenever I feel low or depressed.

Ferreira et al., (2018) describes how surfing releases a cocktail of chemicals in the brain known as the happy chemicals; these chemicals affect our emotions, feelings, and moods (Dsouza et al., 2020). Likewise, Brewer et al., (2013) explains how the exhilaration of surfing generates a neurochemical response spiking the body with oxytocin, serotonin, endorphins, and dopamine; this rush of chemicals has been found to be beneficial as a treatment for anxiety, stress, and depression (Dfarhud et al., 2014;

Delaney & Madigan 2009). This accounts for why Ollie's low moods and depression temporarily alleviated and explains why Ollie felt '*alive',* as he figuratively described adrenaline '*dripping through his ears'*. Regular displays of these feel-good surfing experiences were raised during interviews; Linda said:

> *I don't know what it is, but when I surf I feel this sort of natural high, like I'm in this state of pure bliss.*

What Linda described as a '*state of pure bliss'*, similarly reflects the brains response to endorphins and serotonin (Dfarhud et al 2014); together they invoke a powerful state of euphoria, or as Linda describes *bliss*. Linda's experience echoes what Carl described during our second interview:

> *It's exhilarating, like I thought I wouldn't be able to stand up, but then I did, and I couldn't believe I was actually surfing (laughing), I was so pumped!*

Like Linda, elated by success, Carl reported feeling exhilarated having surfed standing up, which stimulated a sense of achievement and self-esteem. According to Berridge and Kringelbach (2015), after catching a wave, surfing releases a chemical even more powerful than endorphins, named dopamine. Dopamine is a substance linked with the brain's reward and pleasure centre. Pittsinger et al., (2017) linked the anticipation before surfing with incredibly high amounts produced as the result of an unexpected success, such as the students catching their first waves. This explains why Carl felt '*pumped',* expressing his feelings of excitement and joy. This is important, as Belujon and Grace (2017) found, dopamine promotes wellbeing and counters the distress caused by various forms of mental health problems. Certainly, this portrays surfing as a progressive wellbeing activity for the students in this study, who commonly experience psychological, emotional, and social distress.

Carl's feeling of elation echoes the unanimous feeling of accomplishment that several students described, as they stood up on their boards and rode the waves. This theme of success re-emerged on numerous occasions during interviews, not only outcomes of catching waves, but also having overcome cold sea temperatures, maintaining balance while paddling, and battling larger, harsher swells. Linda commented, '*I can't believe I've even got the confidence to go in the sea when the waves are that big, like that's such a big thing for me'*. Billy said, '*I never thought I'd be able to get in the sea in the middle of winter, like freezing cold, but now I can, which is just like, what*!'. There were multiple opportunities for accomplishment, and while not every student experienced equal exhilaration, the majority showed

a positive shift in their mood post-surfing, by what appeared to be a consequence of self-esteem. This often transpired into the following day; Jack said:

> *Now when I'm feeling depressed, I can go surfing and just have fun; and like afterwards, I feel so energise and confident, but also calm, and this always makes me feel good for the rest of the day, as I'm always productive and feel accomplished. But then I'd wake up again and my depression would take over. So I'll sort of be waiting for the next session to feel good again.*

Post-surf, Jack felt restored, as his emotions transitioned from a short-term feeling in the moment, to an elevated mood, each ensuing day. This is important, as Tyng et al., (2017) explain, while emotions are significant, they are fast automatic reactions that can be intense, which once processed, impact how we feel, as emotions are assigned meanings. However, for our mood to change, a combination of positive emotions and feelings must occur, which infuse a longer lasting effect, such as Jack feeling *bad* before surfing, and *good* afterwards. This is important because depression and anxiety are typically characterised by long-lasting low moods, which impacts behaviour and rational (Brackett et al., 2004). This also explains why Jack felt productive post-surfing, as his recent positive mood and sense of accomplishment, provided confidence, clarity, and motivation. Jack's experience, like many students' depiction, illuminates the progressive impact of surfing on mood and cognition, supporting several prominent ST studies (Pittsinger et al., 2017; Caddick 2015).

The students' surfing experiences were limited and impacted by the ocean and surfing conditions, and dynamic situations typically accounted for mixed emotions, feelings, and moods. At times, the harsher conditions took an adverse impact on some of the students' surfing experience. In her second interview, recalling particularly harsh weather, Sajiv said:

> *It was so scary and I felt so anxious, like before going I actually felt sick I nearly didn't come; my anxiety was at its like worst. Like, in the morning I could hear the wind howling outside my window, and it was so cold out, and I even called my Mum and was saying I didn't think I could go, but she didn't even like push me to (laughing), she was saying for me to give it a miss and stay home! (laughing)*

Despite obvious distress, Sajiv joined the lesson, yet fear added to her already anxious state of mind. I immediately recognised Sajiv's apprehension as she arrived, abetted by equivalent students' evident

alarm at the prospect of this stormy session. Nonetheless, Sajiv pushed past her fear, and an extract from my diary sets the scene of this surfing lesson:

> *Today was rainy, windy, and stormy surf; the waves were big and there were strong rips, the sky was dark / it was generally loud, with howling wind and it was very cold. I recognised a change in the students' moods from previous weeks as they approached the surf school. The coaches were positive and calm, so not to deter them. I think this fearful experience bought the students' closer; Chloe was hugging* Sajiv*, encouraging her, and telling her it'd be fun; in the boys changing they were laughing about how scared they felt; Jack said, 'well if we're gonna die, we might as well die together', as the others humorously nodded their heads. There was this prevailing sense of camaraderie, as if we were going into battle. As soon as we approached the water, the mood had shifted; everyone went for it, even* Sajiv*, who was out back, further than many students.* Sajiv *was laughing, padding into waves, falling off her board, & seemed as though her fear had gone. She had a big smile on her face afterwards; it was heart-warming to see them all overcome fear.*

For many students, it appeared they had experienced a positive twist on an initially negative experience, strongly encouraged by camaraderie. However, I recall not all students' pushing aside their fear, which was highlighted by a lower attendance throughout the intervention, correlating with tempestuous surf conditions. Sajiv's contrasting experience was particularly memorable, as she'd participated despite a deep rooted fear. During her interview, I looked to discover what helped Sajiv dissipate her fear during this session; she responded:

> *I guess when I arrived at the surf school, I saw everyone else was scared too, which made me feel safer, as we were all in it together. Then coming out of the changing rooms as this big group I remember feeling sort of brave, but scared at the same time, like I could feel my heart beating, but by the time we got in the water I think adrenaline just kept me going, sort of like my anxiety turned into excitement, and it was actually way more fun that I'd thought. After we'd finished, I remember just feeling so good, like, looking back at the sea I couldn't believe that I'd actually been in there, which felt amazing caused I'd done something I never thought I could have. I think this sort of helped me change how I saw my anxiety, because I realised that I was stronger than I thought.*

Sajiv was noticeably frightened of the prospect of surfing, yet journeyed through challenging emotions and overcame her fear, abetted by encouragement from peers, and realisation that she was not alone in

her feelings. This inspired a sort of mutual fear among the group, which led to a feeling of triumph and elation, as they'd battled the surf together. This intense experience stimulated camaraderie, a social connectedness known to reduce anxiety (Cunningham et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2018; Heisel et al 2018; Stanley et al., 2018). Like Jack's remark *'well if we're gonna die we might as well die together',* Sajiv felt a part of a team, as her perceptions of the spirit of camaraderie enable her to push aside her fear, re-igniting a sense of personal belonging and safety, reducing her anxiety. This corresponds with several studies in ST literature (Matos et al., 2017; Caddick et al., 2015; Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2018; Snelling 2015), all of which highlight an absence of peer-exclusion and improved emotional and social competencies through surfing, as well as a sense of camaraderie and social cohesion.

Like Sajiv, many students appeared scared prior to the stormy surfing lessons, yet fear often transpired into excitement and a sense of accomplishment. Moriarity and Gallagher (2001) explored fear in surfing and the psychological implications and found that a prescription of fear can be soothing to the human psyche, because when the brain senses risk, the body sends out norepinephrine, a chemical much like adrenaline. Equally, this accounts for Sajiv's notion that '*adrenaline kept me going'*; as Moriarity & Gallagher explain, once risk subsides, the body sends out dopamine to the brain to applaud its survival, which can be a positive psychological experience. This reflects Sajiv's sense of achievement she'd described, as she accomplished something she'd never thought she could have and felt good. This is important because experiencing accomplishment is a dominant factor in developing positive wellbeing (Seligman 2011; Kern et al., 2015), especially when personal value, such as Sajiv persevering to overcome fear and anxiety, is attached to the subjective achievement (Schueller & Seligman 2010). According to Seligman (2011), subjective achievement also impacts a growth mind-set. This is illuminated by Sajiv's outlook towards her anxiety, as she looked back at the sea, having conquered the surf, realising that she was stronger than she'd thought. Many of the students' portrayed similar outcomes of achievement and pride, abetted by surfing's imbedded risk and reward, and elevated by their own development and capabilities progressing:

> *I always felt this sort of butterfly feeling in my stomach, like excited but also scared, but like it got easier as I knew what I was doing, and I always felt good afterwards, it was like I did something heroic with my day, which I think made me feel more confident, like now I could do more outside of Resurface.*
>
> Bryony
>
> *I never thought I'd be able to do this, even getting in the sea was unheard of for me, but now I'm fully surfing which has helped my confidence so much.*

Emily

I've sort of learnt that I can achieve so much more in life, cause it sounds cliché, but if I can do this, I can do anything sort of thing, like University isn't so tough anymore.

Rob

The nature of surfing's goal focus, to stand up and catch a wave, paddle out back, or tackle stormy conditions, formed a mastery climate of progression, with something new to accomplish each session. This supports Brymer and Oades (2009) notion of "*balancing the natural state of fear, with knowledge based on personal capabilities and technical expertise*" (p. 123). Indeed, the students' fear subsided, as their confidence and capability grew. These findings fit with work by Godfrey et al (2015), who state that when subjected to the sea and its energizing environment, this connection promotes resilience. This was true for Rob, having declared, *'if I can do this, I can do anything'*, as surfing enabled him to cope better facing the pressures of university life. Certainly, it was often the case that the students' achievement led to an enhanced mood and self-worth, which correlated with feeling competent in the surf.

The groups competence reflects Rob's comment '*I can do this'*, or Bryony's explanation that '*it got easier as I knew what I was doing'*, as they progressively felt capable to surf. This is important, as according to HalisSakız et al., (2020), young adults who feel incompetent, view themselves as incapable, and tend to have poor self-esteem and resist tackling new challenges (Michal et al., 2004). Equally, the students in this study reported mental health problems, with low levels of self-esteem and self-worth. These findings support numerous studies of ST (e.g., Caddick 2015; Snelling 2015; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015) displaying surfing's innate ability to help individuals with poor mental health to develop self-esteem and self-concept. Specifically, a statement by Tess during her final interview portrays the impact of surfing on her self-narrative:

It makes me feel proud of myself, like I did that, not someone else, but me, I was the one who got in and surfed; erm, it makes me feel so good, and gives me a story to tell myself, that's like, more than just, 'oh I went to the library today'. Now I can see myself as someone that's adventurous, and others can see that too, like even my Dad says I've changed so much.

Self–esteem, according to Henriksen et al., (2017), is a basic feature of mental health, and feels good because it calls on the emotion of pride (Abdulghani et al., 2020; Godfrey et al., 2015). Tess described feeling proud surfing, as she had an adventurous experience to attach to the narrative of her existence.

This is important, because those dealing with mental health problems typically define their narratives by lived experiences of adversity or struggle, and according to Llewellyn-Beardsley et al., (2019), for a recovery narrative, there must be a shift towards self-defined strengths, successes, or survival; a shift which Tess portrays through of her surfing. Likewise, Henriksen et al., (2017) said that those with high self-esteem experience fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression, and as Orth et al., (2012) explain, are more likely to have higher wellbeing, and better social relations. Fortunately, Tess was able to hold a favourable attitude towards her-self by what she'd accomplished, and this encouraged self-concept. This is important because self-concept is often more malleable for young students' such as Tess, going through the process of self-discovery and identity formation (Oyserman et al., 2012: Rosenberg 1965).

The data from this study strongly demonstrates that surfing has the capability to help students with poor mental health to build resilience, as they learn to adjust to the oceans challenging environments, while encountering high-risk situations. Billy said, '*surfing helps me to deal with my problems better, and by knowing that I'm capable of more, I can see my mental health as another wave I got to ride'*. According to Silva-Villanueva (2019), resilience is viewed as a defence mechanism which can help those with mental health problems cope in the face of adversity. Equally, resilience is known to help reduce anxiety, boost self-esteem, and improve problem-solving skills (Hartley-Brewer 2001; McPherson et al., 2013; Sandester & Kennair 2011). Surfing led these students towards positive wellbeing, and the high intensity experience was often transformative, providing a space to build new perspectives, encouraged by bravery and resilience.

Overall, this section highlights the students' journey through diverse moods, emotions, and feelings, interchangeably shifting between happiness, elation, calm and tranquillity, through to fear, discomfort, and anxiety. These experienced often mixed with a multitude of cognitive response and feel-good occurrences. Largely, the students reported feeling good, having pushed past their subjective boundaries, which frequently lead to a sense of achievement and self-esteem. Certainly, it was found that as their competence grew, so did their confidence and resilience, both within surfing, and externally, amid their university lives.

Summary

Blue Space: Experiencing Awe and Transcendent Emotions

- The opening theme displays students' experiences of awe and transcendent emotions, as their embodied experience of blue space illuminates' surfing's inherent therapeutic environment,

supporting the ISTO (2019) definition of surfing balancing on the therapeutic elements of the ocean. For several students', by considering nature's intricacy and beauty, they were left captivated by a sense of wonder in the presence of a vast and novel environment. This experience often altered the perspectives of their own mental health and constructed positive eudemonic wellbeing. However, awe was a subjective experience, and not all the students' experienced the coastal environment in the same way, many experiencing a degree of fear and anxiety; this sometimes overshadowed their capacity for positive experiences.

- Surfing's' natural setting promoted a meditative escapism, and with it, a sense of serenity and joy. This experience induced a sense of wonder and stimulated mindfulness, as the students were able to pay attention to the present, suspended in a sense of self-awareness and tranquillity, and transporting them away from their mental health problems. This echoes robust evidence showing compelling support for mindfulness as an effective therapy for poor mental health (e.g., Carsley et al., 2018; AMRA 2018; Johnson et al., 2016), and literature by the likes of Caddick (2015), displaying surfing's capacity to offer respite from mental health distress.

- The findings support surfing as a pathway to Maslow's (1964) description of peak experience, as several students' self-transcendence and self-realisation constructed through surfing, permitted a moving and elevated experience. This heightened emotion and exaltation suspended students into a deeper, more profound sense of belonging to the world, and perceivably, a sense of inner-peace and eudemonia (Hinds & Sparks 2008, 2011). However, this experience was limited by the ocean's conditions and the students' prior mental health, moods, and emotions.

- Many students had not encountered natural phenomenon as the ocean while surfing, and this novel experience formed an integral part of their experience. Because the lessons lasted one and a half hours, durations involved consuming the natural environment for extended periods. Here, the focus of surfing was more than physical activity, as the coastal setting begged an idealised escape from their '*chaotic'* student lifestyles. This was important, as the university environment was a major influencer of their psychological, social, and emotional difficulties, many describing issues such as tiredness, stress, depression, and loneliness. A pause through surfing proved beneficial in separating university life, classrooms, and student accommodation, with the Resurface social world.

- The opening theme supports surfing as therapeutic by environment, prior to the added impacts of the activity itself. This reflects several researchers' appreciation of nature-based activity

(e.g., Coon et al., 2011; Mitchell 2013; Pretty et al., 2005; Pretty & Barton 2010). I agree with Ashley (2007) and Bonner and Friedman (2011), that awe might better be described as part of a broader concept of transcendent emotions and the sublime experience toward nature, as it lacks a consensual and precise meaning. Future research might explore blue space and transcendent emotions, contrasting the impact of surfing in a natural coastal setting, with that of an artificial wave setting. This would identify the influence of blue space, juxtaposed with the components of surfing's specific sporting mechanisms.

Surfing in the Moment: A Mindful, Meditative Disconnection from Land

- The subsequent theme displays the physicality of surfing in a blue gym environment, and its impact on the students' ability to let go of negative thoughts and feelings, by distorting their sense of time. This supports Csikszentmihalyi (2014) notion of a flow state, where the findings highlighting surfing's innate ability to provide a way of existing in the present (Snelling 2015; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015), underpinning surfing's capacity to improve participants moods, and offer respite from distress and worry (Csikszentmihalyi 2014; Caddick 2015). Much like the experience of nature and escapism, a flow state provided these students' a necessary distraction and alleviation from their mental health problems.

- By experiencing the present, excluding past or future thoughts and feelings, surfing provided a place of peace, or '*at-homeness'* (Heidegger 1986), supporting ST as a mode of mindfulness and meditation (Edenfield & Saeed 2012; Kabat-Zinn 2003). Subsequently, the students' experienced happiness and wellbeing, and increased their focus and attention, encouraging feelings of serenity and joy. This experience fortified a progressive effect on the students' wellbeing (Davidson et al., 2003), and surfing acted as a safeguard, protecting against depressive symptoms, by amplifying several students' psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction. This experience often helped students to structure new and adventurous self-narratives. Not only did these positive emotions indicate hedonic wellbeing in the moment, but they encouraged eudemonic wellbeing, and psychological health, in the future.

- The students' distress largely associated with the land, many describing the sea as a safe place to alleviate the weight of university worries, mental health problems, and digital distraction. This supports research showing the growing concern of student wellbeing, and the consequence of disconnect from natural environments, and the increased connectedness with digital media (Mayer et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2004; Louv 2005). The ocean acted as a vortex, helping

students reconnect their minds, and inspiring what Nichols (2000) described as a *blue mind.* Specifically, the sea represented a space of involuntary attention, and a sense of mindfulness through its diverse elements. For instance, the sounds of waves and smell of the salty sea air, provided a sensory, meditative experience. Despite this, their *blue mind* experience was often limited by grey skies and the indignity of wriggling into a damp wetsuit on a rain-swept beach. Certainly, some students might balk at such utopian talk.

Journeying Diverse Emotions, Feelings, and Moods: Towards Competence, Resilience, and Self-Esteem

- The final theme represents the students' journey through emotions and feelings, illuminating the mood-boosting influence of surfing, supporting research showing exercise as a means to enhanced affective, moods, and emotional states (Liao et al., 1975; Voss 2013). Surfing's impact on the students' feelings and emotions seemed to go beyond direct hedonic value in the moment, as it inspired a heightened sense of vivacity which replenished their exhausted cognitive attention and overall mood. This was often found to be important for alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety, those that are typically characterised by long-lasting low moods (Brackett et al., 2004). These findings illuminate the progressive impact of surfing on students' moods and cognition, strongly supporting Pittsinger's et al (2017) ST conclusions.

- Surfing inspired a '*zen-like'* feeling, reflecting research by Dfarhud et al., (2014), highlighting surfing and the brains response to oxytocin, endorphins, and serotonin. These are habitually described as the 'happy chemicals' (Ferreira et al., 2018), responsible for our moods (Dsouza et al., 2020). This chemical concoction invoked a state of euphoria, influencing the students' positive affect, or their subjective experiences of moods. These findings support research by Pitsinger et al., (2017), who discovered that through a single 30-min bout surfing, the experiences of moods and tranquillity increase dramatically. Because moods have been widely accepted as direct influences of wellbeing (Yeung 1996), these findings support surfing as an affective wellbeing tool. Equally, these findings agree Brewer et al., (2013), who found surfing's mood-enhancing capacity beneficial as a treatment for anxiety, and alleviator of symptoms of depression.

- On numerous occasions', the students' indicated experiences characteristic of a dopamine rush, or '*stoke'* that comes with the exhilaration of surfing, encouraging a feeling of accomplishment. For example, the feeling of success having stood up and caught a wave or being immersed in tempestuous conditions, while battling the cold sea and strong onshore winds. These findings

support Belujon and Grace (2017) who highlight dopamine's ability to promote a sense of wellbeing which counters the distress experienced caused by various forms of mental health problems, as the students' described feeling happy having overcome fear, and accomplished, having learnt a new and adventurous skill.

- The students' fear added to an already anxious state of mind. This is highlighted by the evident alarm at the prospect of stormy seas, and lower attendance correlating with tempestuous surf. However, findings also support Moriarity and Gallagher (2001), who found that a prescription of fear can be soothing to the human psyche. The students' fearful experience infused camaraderie and re-ignited a sense of personal belonging and safety, supporting several researchers' description of camaraderie as a social connectedness which reduces anxiety (Cunningham et al 2018; Kintzle et al., 2018; Heisel et al 2018; Stanley et al 2018). This corresponds with several ST studies (Matos et al 2017; Caddick et al., 2015; Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2018; Snelling 2015), all of which highlight an absence of peer-exclusion, and improved emotional and social competencies, indicative of camaraderie and social cohesion.

- Surfing's mastery climate provided a continual aim, augmented by the duration of the course being longer than the typical ST intervention. Consequently, these students had ample time to progress their skills and build confidence. Often, competence led to self-esteem, self-concept, and self-worth, supporting several ST researchers (Caddick 2015; Snelling 2015; Godfrey et al., 2015; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015). This is important as it is well known that students with high self-esteem, self-concept, and self-worth, are likely to experience fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression (Henriksen et al 2017; Manning 2007; Connolly 1989) and have higher wellbeing and better social relations (Orth et al., 2012).

- Surfing constructed coping mechanisms to help the students' face the daily pressures of university life, upheld by resilience, as they learnt to adjust to challenging environments while encountering high-risk situations, motivating bravery. These findings support Silva-Villanueva (2019) who said that resilience acts as a defence mechanism which can help those with mental health problems cope in the face of adversity, along with several studies (Hartley-Brewer 2001; McPherson et al., 2013; Sandester & Kennair 2011) showcasing resilience to reduce anxiety and boost self-esteem. Largely, the students' reported feeling *good* having pushed past their subjective boundaries; yet their emotions and feelings moved interchangeably between happy, elated, calm, and tranquil, towards fearful and anxious.

This chapter paints a picture of the primary surfing experiences; it illustrates the diverse nature of surfing, and portrays the students' improved wellbeing, and alleviation of social, emotional, and psychological distress. While these findings do not prove amelioration from symptoms of poor mental health, they present the positive impact of surfing on students' wellbeing. The outcomes fit with Hewitt's (2019) account that there is a broad need for HE providers to adopt interventions which improve overall wellbeing, instead of symptom-focused interventions. With the rise in student numbers and increased demand facing HE wellbeing services (Thorley 2017), surfing offers an alternate and/or complementary therapeutic option towards progressing student wellbeing.

Chapter Six: Experiencing Yoga as a Journey to Wellbeing

Introduction

While yoga includes a multitude of styles, this study explores hatha yoga, practised during Resurface. Hatha yoga is characterised as a slow-paced, meditative, and gentle practise, comprising movement, postures, relaxation and breathing (Collins 1998). This chapter explores the experiences participating in this form of yoga over the course of the entire intervention, which ran parallel to the students' academic year. This rich description of lived experience will help to understand its perceived impact on the students' wellbeing. The students' yoga experiences are represented by the themes presented in Figure 8 below:

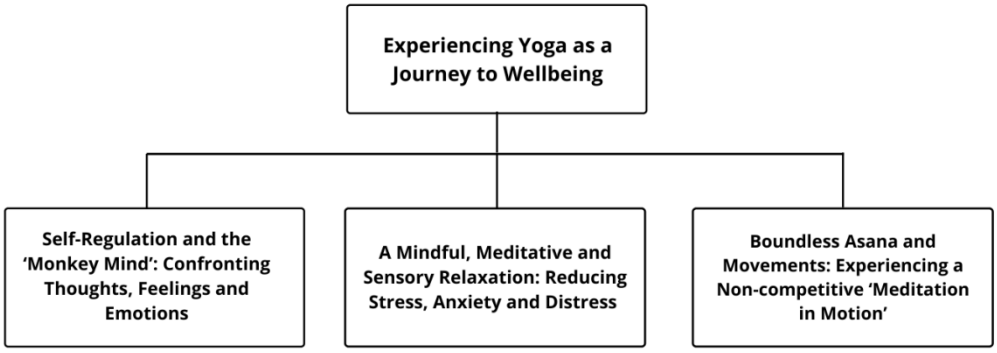

Figure 8: Experiencing Yoga as a Journey to Wellbeing

The opening theme uncovers the students' mixed emotions and feelings, as they paid attention to their thoughts, while attempting to self-regulate their emotions and feelings that arose. This theme depicts the journey endured having confronted interpersonal feelings and memories, as well as the skills developed to manage these. It describes the link between slowing down and relaxing during yoga, with reduced stress and anxiety. This discussion describes the ways in which controlled breathing exercises and sensory stimulants fortified yoga's inherently calming, meditative, and mindful environment. The final theme explores the students' sense of '*meditation-in-motion'*, as they experienced boundless asana (postures) and diverse movements, within a fundamentally non-competitive, physical environment. This section highlights yoga's dynamic and often challenging setting, bounding between quick and arduous poses and intentional movements, through to slow, restorative, and gentle movements, and discomforting postures.

These findings are important as a better understanding will allow practitioners and facilitators to comprehend the distinct attributes of yoga, to specify intervention referrals, and develop the focus of its programming to improve functioning and perceived impact. Like Chapter 5's, *'Surfing Waves of Wellbeing'*, this chapter isolates the stand-alone components of yoga amid the wider Resurface experience, independently exploring the distinct yoga experiences. Therefore, the cohesive and interconnected contributory themes that surface in Chapter 7, such as social connectedness, belonging, identity, self-worth, acceptance, and peer support, while relevant to yoga and inseparable in real-life, are absent from this chapter. This will allow the data to underpin the perceived wellbeing value of the entire intervention, as well as describe the significance of the individual activities, surfing and yoga, before connecting these themes in a final discussion.

Self-Regulation and the 'Monkey Mind': Confronting Thoughts, Feelings and Emotions

The type of yoga practiced involved a slow-paced, moderate style, where students spent considerable time facing spontaneous thoughts and emotions, often concerned with the past and fantasies about the future, including interpersonal feelings and intrusive memories. The word cloud below represents the observational notes and interview transcripts that uncover the students' mixed emotions and feelings, as they paid attention to these thoughts while attempting to self-regulate their emotions, and negative feelings that arose, often reflecting their own vulnerability:

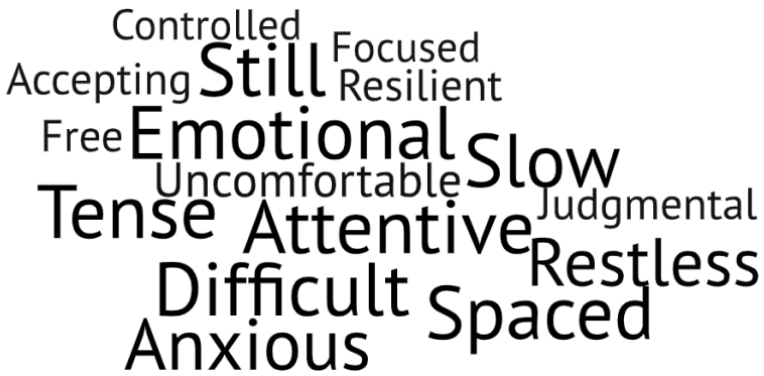

Figure 9: Word Cloud Uncovering Students' Mixed Emotions and Feelings during Yoga

During interviews, several students described a sense of stillness and silence resonating from their practise, which encouraged respite and tranquillity, as well as focus, thoughtfulness, and control. For

example, Bryony evoked '*hearing nothing other than the sound of your own breath'* as she was '*still, like everything had slowed down*' which made her feel that she was getting '*a break from everything and everyone'.* Ollie described feeling *'totally spaced out'* as he comically emphasised feeling '*tranquil, like a meditating monk in the mountains'*. Billy recollected a sense of '*focus'* which felt *'kinda nice, like feeling in control of my own mind'*. Many students appeared to benefit from increased self-awareness, and by shifting their focus from anxiety or fear to self-awareness and control, they were able to concentrate on the teacher's instruction to observe, identify, and accept their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, instead of reacting to them. Specifically, in an interview with Emily, she described how the teacher's instruction had helped her to manage undesirable thoughts and feelings:

> *I would just try to concentrate on what Claire would say, rather than let my thoughts take control, because I knew if I didn't, I'd think of negative things. Like, she'd tell us to sort of let our emotions in, but welcome them, and let them go, which was helpful because I was able to accept how I was feeling, but not let my anxiety takeover. Erm, that way I'd be able to choose how I felt, instead of letting my thoughts choose for me.*

By paying attention to her thoughts and letting them pass through, Emily took control of her mental focus, resulting in a perceived sense of accomplishment. Seemingly, Emily self-regulated her cognitive functioning through her own willpower, and by managing incipient responses and impulses. Consequently, she was able to reduce her anxiety by focussing on stillness and control. Emily's mindful experience was shared by several students in this study, and is one that is well documented in yogic literature: for instance, it is broadly considered that such stillness of the mind provides freedom from damaging types of emotion (*e.g. anger, craving, greed*) embedded in excessive self-absorption or perseveration (Luszczynska et al., 2004; Baumeister et al., 2007; Zell & Baumeister 2013). Similarly, Mitch reveals his development of self-regulatory behaviours as the intervention progressed:

> *I feel like I'm really grasping things now, like I was able to think in a different way, like not let my thoughts take over.*

Mitch's comment was indicative of several students' emerging capability to regulate their emotions, and experience respite from distress. For Gard et al., (2014), a focus of contemporary psychotherapy is such development of self-regulation tools to reduce psychological distress. Indeed, several students displayed the potential self-regulatory mechanisms of yoga for psychological health and wellbeing, theories playing an increasingly central role in sub-disciplines of cognitive science, psychology, and medicine (Compare et al., 2014). This is important because students with mental health problems often

find it difficult to self-regulate their emotions, resulting in exposure to stress and dysregulation of emotions. Over time, this can elicit negative psychological and physiological health outcomes (e.g., depression and stress) (Schwartz et al., 2000; McCarthy et al., 2006). However, several studies on self-regulation and wellbeing have shown that HE students with self-regulation skills tend to experience fewer problems with addictive behaviours (e.g., alcohol) (Gross 1995,1998; Siegler 2006), social adaptation (Moore et al., 2008), and academic achievement (Abelson et al., 2005).

Despite seemingly positive experiences for many, early interviews and observations revealed that not all participants achieved such progressive, self-regulatory behaviours. Instead, these experiences were more consistent towards the end of the intervention, once the students' yogic aptitude had improved, and self-regulative skills developed. Certainly, throughout the early months, negative feelings, thoughts, and emotions, inhibited progressive experiences. During her first practise, Chloe promptly left the studio mid-way through; eager to understand Chloe's reasons, I asked why, captured in an early field note:

> *I dunno, I just felt anxious, like my mind was racing, and I couldn't concentrate on anything, so just wanted to get out.*

Like Chloe, Josh highlighted similar cognitive experiences during these early practises:

> *Honestly, it's not my favourite part of Resurface, like I spend so much time in my own head with my thoughts, and erm, like can't enjoy it the way I'm supposed to, because I just can't concentrate on anything properly.*

Both Chloe and Josh appeared uncomfortable during the opening practises, and while this uneasiness reflects explanations raised in Chapter 4, such as social anxiety and social physique anxiety, both directed a seemingly more complex, mind-wondering experience. To better understand Chloe's motives for exiting early, during her first interview, I asked her to reflect on this practise, and why she'd walked out of the studio:

> *I think it's just the sitting there, like the whole thing can feel quite slow, and I hate being left with my thoughts; like even at night going to bed my mind races, and I just think of bad things, so I try to distract myself with T.V. Erm, I suppose that's why I like surfing, cause I'm totally out of it and can't think of anything else, but then with yoga, when we are doing the slower bits, I just overthink everything and feel worse after.*

Vago and Zeidan (2016) explain that when the mind is left to its musings, it is common to experience a torrent of evaluative thoughts, emotions, or feelings; known as the 'monkey mind'. This raises an applicable metaphor for Chloe's propensity for a restless mind, skipping from one thought or feeling to another, as a monkey swings from branch to branch. Indeed, both Brown and Gebard (2005) and McCall (2007) explain how yoga can be a problematic activity for those with mental health problems, as it involves time consumed by the mind, which can lead to negative emotions that are not always dealt with effectively. It was discovered that the students' 'monkey minds' shaped unnecessary stress and anxiety and often halted their connection to the practise, and with themselves. Linda stated early on that yoga felt '*stressful'* and it was '*difficult to concentrate'*, and that this was '*frustrating'* and made her feel '*anxious'*. Certainly, as Miller (2014) points out, '*when a lake is unsettled, a single stone's effect is barely noticeable, and that the same is true of the mind'* (p.8); in that the student's restless minds were easily distracted, unproductive, and often unable to benefit from the intentions of the class. Equally, early on, several students were incapable of connecting on a deeper level, or able to self-regulate their emotions to achieve mindful states and respite. These early findings position yoga as a theoretically harmful activity for students with mental health problems, supporting evidence connecting self-generated thought to negative mood states (Smallwood et al 2007, 2008), unhappiness (Killingsworth 2010), anxiety (Peterson et al 2005; Simpson et al 2001), and depression (Smith and Alloy 2009; Farb et al 2007).

Another issue which arose during interviews was self-judgement, resulting from thoughts that the students had about themselves, and the meanings attached. This picture is painted in an interview with Linda:

> *I'm always anxious before because I know I'll be facing that little voice telling me I'm not good enough; like I'll watch everyone else being able to keep up but have to sit out when it gets too difficult, which sort of reinforces my own failure. Like, I think I should've gotten better by now, and because I haven't, I feel like I don't fit in with everyone else.*

For Linda, yoga involved confronting her thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and with these, self-judgements, and critique, and found it difficult to manage these effectively. This resulted in feeling like an outsider, and impacted Linda's self-esteem and self-worth, as she evaluated her actions and perpetuated anxiety, devaluing herself, with little self-compassion. This is important as both Mikulincer et al (1990) and Durkin et al (2016) explain, self-judgement negatively affects anxiety and depression. Equally, Phaedonos (2011) suggests that those who are non-judgmental have lower levels of depression,

anxiety, and stress related symptoms. However, it was often the case that students faced negative thoughts about themselves and wallowed in the meanings attached. During Rob's first interview, he said:

> *I know it's bad, but I'm always thinking how stupid I must look in the yoga and thinking less of myself, like I sort of evaluate everything I do, or how I look, erm, or what others are thinking of me, erm, and I'm always critical of myself and thinking the worst.*

Paying attention to judgemental thoughts was somewhat an intention of the practises, with the aim to develop cognitive skills to manage these effectively. An often-cited definition of mindfulness in yoga is "*paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally*" (Bodhi 2011, p. 4). However, for Rob and Linda, this was something both reported feeling anxiety towards and were undoubtedly eager to avoid. This was unsurprising, as depression and anxiety have been closely connected with negative interpretation of ambiguous information (Butler and Mathews 1987; Eysenck et al 1991). Certainly, it was important that both Rob and Linda overcame self-critique, as Lawson et al (2002) explains, non-judgmental thinking is an important facet in predicting psychological wellbeing.

While momentous, these early findings suggest that the moderate components of yoga fostered a space for some of the students' feelings of self-judgement to spiral, and that they lacked the competency to self-regulate and accept these thoughts, resulting in an emotionally detrimental experience. It became clear that during the early sessions, these students' inability to focus attention on the face of extraneous distraction was problematic, and the preliminary findings pose yoga as a potentially damaging activity for some students with poor mental health, particularly in the short-term. However, over time, most participants had learned to manage their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and benefit from the slower aspects of the practises. By paying attention to their thoughts and letting them pass through, they were able to change how they experienced and understood them.

Because self-regulatory experiences were more prevalent towards the end of the intervention, this positions a theoretically problematic issue for future YT intervention. This being, if students were to quit during the early weeks of intervention, concerning wellbeing, they'd likely be leaving worse off than they'd begun. This is because these positive, self-regulatory experiences, only became common mid-way through the year. This is emphasised during several interviews at the end of the intervention:

> *I'd just like think differently and reject negativity, and like Claire would say to recognise*

emotions as allies to connect with, which sort of made sense and helped me think positively, erm, and she'd like compliment us and tell us that we're good enough and important, which seems silly, but made me feel good.

Demi

Normally if I'd think bad things about myself, I'd believe it, but I guess yoga helped me think differently and not take bad thoughts so literally, which kinda helped me outside to think more positively and be kinder to myself.

Jack

It was clear that for Demi and Jack, learning to accept, rather than judge their thoughts and emotions, helped them to manage them effectively, and acknowledge their feelings without engaging in negative opinions and evaluations. This is important because recent theories on self-regulation postulate that explicit reappraisal can decrease the adverse impact of prolonged and repeated stress-related activity (Koole et al 2011; Geisler et al 2013); this explains why Demi '*felt good'* after the session, having received appraisal. Likewise, Jack was able to translate his non-judgemental thinking, self-compassion, and acceptance of emotions outside of the studio, indicating the potential long-term implication of yoga for emotional flexibility and resilience. Notably, these self-regulatory outcomes required a degree of verbal instruction and appraisal by the teacher; like many features of yoga, the culpability of yoga's success lying with the teacher's competency and experience (Desikachar et al 2005; Gross 2007).

Another technique which helped some of the students to ease their mind-wandering and remain present, was a technique called the Body Scan Meditation (BSM). This is where the students were instructed to pay attention to the different parts of their body and bodily feelings, in a gradual sequence; Elisa describes:

Claire got us to concentrate on parts our bodies from foot to head and focus on how each part felt and all the sensations. Erm, this really helped cause if my thoughts were getting too much, I'd be able to just focus and stay calm.

Gibson (2019) believes the BSM as an effective meditation that can help a person return to, and maintain, a relaxed state amid tension and distress, such as Elisa described. These findings support Fuente et al (2018), who explain that if attention is trained to focus on a single point of concentration, thoughts and emotions settle into the mind's natural stillness and sensory clarity. Adam underlined the relaxing and distracting nature of BSM, documented in a field note post-practise:

It's like you are trying so hard to concentrate on each body part without getting distracted, you can't think of anything else stressing you out.

Kabat-Zinn (1994) describes distraction as the loss of selective attention on sensory experience outside of a single point, which echoes Adam's experience of respite from stress. By engaging in BSM, many of the students experienced an antidote for mind wandering, which seemingly encouraged a positive wellbeing experience. However, this posits a markedly simplistic polarization of mind wandering as negative, and mindfulness as positive. Specifically, this theory lacks a more nuanced perspective on the relationship between mindfulness, and mind wandering. For instance, it is widely considered that mind wandering can encourage future-oriented and creative thinking, as well as relief from boredom (Baird et al 2011, 2012; Seli et al 2019; Pachai et al 2016). However, I feel compelled to support Khasla (2004), that yogic intentions are not to draw attention away from external stimuli, or outside of the conscious control, but to gain self-awareness and to focus attention on the present. This is particularly relevant for those students who suffered with anxiety, as mind wandering amplified existing anxiety, and often initiated a negative wellbeing experience.

Overall, the opening theme support authors who suggest yoga has the capability to help individuals with intense emotions to better understand, recognise, and accept their emotions, resulting in an improved psychological state and self-compassion (Lavey et al 2005; Sauer-Zavala et al 2012; Compare et al 2014); or as Lutz et al (2008) describes, "*improve the capacity to disengage from aversive emotional stimuli, enabling greater emotional flexibility*" (p. 4). Certainly, from a mindfulness perspective (Germer 2005), the students' acceptance underpinned their willingness to let things be. Equally, self-awareness seemed to develop their sense of self, as they got to know themselves better and cultivate a more non-judgmental relationship with themselves. This study agrees Fuente et al (2018), that mind wandering, and mindfulness, are opposing mental states with conflicting effects on mental health. Certainly, spontaneous mind wandering bought with it self-reflective states, contributing to negative processing of the past, and worrying about the future. This regularly interrupted the practises intentions to help students "*non-judgmentally observe the on-going stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise*" (Bond et al 2013, p. 125). Nevertheless, the teacher's instructions were not intent on suppressing the students' feelings or emotions but aimed at non-judgment recognition and acceptance. This, over time, improved the students' ability to self-regulate their wandering minds and experience peace, acceptance, and respite. This positions Resurface's yogic arm, as a principally progressive wellbeing experience over the longer term.

A Mindful, Meditative and Sensory Relaxation: Reducing Stress, Anxiety and Distress

Emphasised in Chapter 4's 'A Step into the Unknown', during the early weeks, a number of students seemed highly stressed whilst comprehending the intervention. This stress illuminates' issues such as social anxiety and social physique anxiety, structural barriers, and the prospect of stepping out of their comfort zones. Equally, these same students confronted difficulties ensuing wide-ranging mental health problems, and many appeared overwhelmed by the enormity of completing a degree, and the disarray of university life. In summary, the atmosphere before the early practises was broadly tense. The first entry in the field notes discussing yoga is indicative of the anxiety and stress experienced by many of the students at the beginning:

> *Before the session, in the lobby while waiting, I made a point of asking some students how they felt about the academic year ahead, as I wanted to understand the general feeling. It was clear that most were worried / stressed about their workload; also, there was a feeling of uneasiness towards Uni life, with some 1st year's bringing up flatmate disputes / worries concerning other students clubbing/drinking habits. This coupled with a general feeling of awkwardness surrounding the newness of the group, which made an uncomfortable social setting.*

Before the first yoga practise, the atmosphere was undoubtedly anxiety-provoking. Despite this, the link between slowing down and relaxing, with reduced stress and anxiety post-class, was striking from the start of this research, portrayed by this same field note:

> *After the class there was a feeling of calm, as if everyone had been hypnotised: they left the studio entirely differently to how they had entered. The relaxing nature of the class helped me feel peaceful, but also the students were acting calmer, and many of them thanked Claire (teacher). I overheard Elisa say, 'thank you so much that was literally the best I feel so relaxed', and Emily, who struggled with social anxiety, and barely socialised before the class, comfortably talking with Sajiv.*

Despite the prior theme uncovering several students' negative experiences having confronted difficult thoughts and emotions, during these early practises, there was a parallel atmosphere of calmness, which often repeated itself, challenging these corresponding findings. This was highlighted by Carla's comments after her second practise:

I've gone from a 3/10 to a 10/10 and feel so relaxed, I just wanna go home and sleep (laughing).

In the beginning, there seemed to be a distinct contrast between students who'd let their thoughts and emotions take precedence, with those who did not, such as Carla. These students benefited from the core intention to relax, slow down, and experience respite from their chaotic student worlds. An indicative example of this experience was revealed by Billy, during his first interview:

It's great, like I'll walk in all stressed and anxious, but walk out a new man ready to tackle whatever life throws at me. I think that's what I like most about yoga, you can leave everything at the door and just relax.

Insights such as Billy's were occasional during the beginning, yet became more common as the intervention progressed, reflecting the students' experiences and familiarity with yoga evolving, and comfort in the group. Billy's comment was indicative of the yogic experiences most students portrayed throughout the intervention; specifically, Billy explained feeling calmed and de-stressed, encouraged by yoga's relaxing and soothing nature. This was expected, as yoga is well known to reduce stress by stimulating the sympathetic nervous system and reducing cortisol (Miller et al., 2005; Raison & Miller 2003). The principal component surfacing this anxiety-releasing, stress-reducing outcome, was the influence of *controlled breath regulation*, known as Pranayama (Sengupta 2012). Tess sets the scene for the ways in which yogic breathing was taught and experienced:

From the beginning we were told to concentrate on our breath and control how we inhaled and exhaled. So, we'd sort of have to breathe deeply and then softly, and do things like hold our nostrils, or place our hands on our hearts and bellies to feel our breath moving in and out; erm, and Claire would tell us to like move our bodies with our breath and concentrate on breathing from start to finish, which made me feel so much more relaxed and less stressed.

As Thirthalli et al., (2013) explain, even a few deep breaths engage the vagus nerve, sending a signal to the nervous system to slow the heart rate and reduce cortisol, the primary stress hormone. Tess indicates how the students repeatedly practised deep, conscious breathing, meaning the vagus nerve was stimulated for extended durations, pushing the students to advance out of the sympathetic stress, towards parasympathetic relaxation. While there is a myriad of controlled breathing practises in yoga, as the intervention progressed, I came to understand that we'd practised common yogic techniques of

ujjayi breath, bellows breath, three-part breathing and alternate nostril breathing. To better understand these techniques, during the final interviews, I asked the students to describe their breathing experiences and how they'd felt:

> *I think it made me feel calmer and more content, but also like in control, which was unexplainable but just worked, like we'd try and breathe deeply and feel our breath going in and out, which sort of got rid of any stress or anxiety and just made me feel so much calmer.*
>
> Bryony

Bryony described ujjayi breath, known to calm the mind and nervous system (Saoji et al 2019). Ujjayi breath involves inhaling and exhaling through the nose and making each inhale last as long as each exhale, until breaths are long and smooth.

> *I loved feeling the breath in my body, like I've never done that before, where you think about your breath and feel it going through you, erm, and I guess it made me feel less anxious, and like my stress was just melting away.*
>
> Carl

Carl touched upon three-part breath, a slow and smooth technique known to reduce anxiety and stress (Sengupta 2012). This involved placing one hand on the chest and the other on the navel, and inhaling into the chest, upper abdomen, and belly, and releasing the same way.

> *We breathed in putting our arms in the air and then lowered them while breathing out and making this like noise, where like everyone was hissing (laughing). It was strange, but I remember in this one lecture I was stressing so much that when I got home, I did the same thing and it actually made me feel better.*
>
> Ollie

Ollie described bellows breath, an energy, stagnation, and frustration releasing technique (Budhi et al., 2019), which involved raising hands and inhaling through the mouth, and exhaling while making a 'HA' sound.

> *I liked the one when we'd hold our nostrils and breathe in through one and out the other, like I could feel my body and mind calming simultaneously, and just felt so much less stressed and better afterwards.*
>
> Demi

Demi described alternate nostril breathing, known to lower factors such as heart rate, respiratory rate, and stress (Upadhyay et al., 2008; Sinha et al., 2013). This technique involved closing the right nostril with the thumb, inhaling deeply through the left nostril, and closing the left nostril with the ring finger, releasing the right nostril. While each technique had its own distinct advantages, it was clear that reduced anxiety and stress directed their breathing experiences, as the students explained feeling relaxed and stress-free. Brown and Gerbarg (2005) explain that controlled breathing techniques influence the autonomic nervous system, inducing a state of relaxation. Certainly, these findings support such conclusions, portraying yogic breathing techniques as influential tools for relaxation, and effective mediators of stress and anxiety. This is particularly important, as stress is a powerful influencer of several mental health ailments such as anxiety and depression (The Physiological Society 2017), especially among the student population (Fuller et al., 2000; Granath et al., 2006; YouGov 2016).

Another striking component which helped the more socially anxious students to relax, was the lack of involuntary conversation before, during, and after the practises. For example, the teacher instructed the students to finish their conversations before entering the studio, without speaking, until the class had finished. This allowed each student to decide the degree to which they socialised, or whether they socialised at all. For some students, this provided an influential motivator which had helped them to integrate slowly and comfortably into the Resurface social world, and maintain their attendance:

> *The quietness at the beginning is helpful, like knowing it will be silent when I walk in just makes me comfortable as I don't know what to say in groups like this. Like I don't think I'd even be able to do Resurface otherwise, like with surfing I get so anxious I sort of have to force myself to go, but with yoga it's easier.*
>
> Rob

> *I like how you don't have to talk because it takes me a while to feel comfortable, so going in knowing I just get to relax and not panic as much, feels so much better. Like I close my eyes so the size of the class doesn't matter, so erm, I can just go in and be quiet, without looking strange, which is nice, because usually I just feel like I'm being judged by everyone.*
>
> Emily

The teacher's instruction to remain quiet upon entering the studio helped prevent Emily and Rob's SA from disrupting their practise and acted as a primary motivator which encouraged their attendance. This is important, as Leigh and Clark (2018) explain, those with SA often experience absenteeism from most forms of social gatherings; however, Rob reported feeling '*comfortable'*, and Emily found it '*easier'* to

attend these yoga sessions. While SA is characterised by a marked and persistent fear of being humiliated or scrutinised by others (Kessler et al., 2005), yoga offered Emily the ability to avoid scrutiny by remaining quiet, closing her eyes, and avoiding '*judgement'*, without seeming '*strange'*. Another yogic component that played a role in relieving the students stress and anxiety were the sensory stimuli, encouraged by relaxing sounds and calming scents. During her first interview, Sajiv commented on her experience of gentle music during yoga:

> *Honestly, it's the music that does it for me, like I could almost sit there without yoga and just feel so relaxed and less stressed.*

It is well known that music can play a positive role in the way a person feels, by improving moods and reducing stress (Bronnimann et al., 2013; Kwong 2016). For instance, Kwong (2016) found that pleasant and soothing sounds can improve psychological and emotional health and reduce levels of cortisol. Like several students in this study, it is of little surprise that Sajiv described music as a central component of her positive, stress reducing yogic experiences. This is important, because negative moods and high levels of stress were common among this student group, often disrupting their psyche and overall experience. Another comment by Adam highlights a similar sense of calmness, encouraged by soothing yogic music:

> *The peaceful music was one of my favourite parts, because it was so calming and put me in a tranquil state.*

Like Sajiv, Adam suggests that yogic music was not a marginal experience, but a central part of his practise. With students lacking engagement with calming music for the mind (Barton 2018), and the type of music played being slow and peaceful, with gentle singing and quiet harmony, it was clear that this had improved the students' sense of relaxation and mindfulness, almost like an integral meditation. Despite this, there were infrequent times where yogic music elicited difficult emotions, causing potentially unfavourable thoughts and feelings. A field note documents an encounter with Chloe after an early practise:

> *I just got really emotional and started crying (laughing). I think the music just got to me; like I was already having a bad day and think it all just came out (laughing).*

While music had the potential to steady Chloe's mind by eliciting calming emotions, it also had the capacity to surface difficult emotions, disrupting the soothing nature of the practise. This experience is

common, as Levitin (2006) found, the brain processes auditory information while listening to music, displaying activity in areas such as the hippocampus, the area for emotion regulation. Likewise, Blood and Zatorre (2001) explain that the brain can convert music into stimulation of neural elements that are typically associated with emotion and feelings. This means that if the students' emotions were particularly negative, yogic music had the potential to amplify these and encourage an emotional release, like what Chloe had described.

Another sensory component repeatedly bought up during interviews was the experiences of incense burning (*sandalwood scented*), eliciting a calming studio atmosphere:

> *Every time you walk in you get hit by this wall of smells, it's like you're being taken to another country, where you can just relax and forget about the day.*
>
> Josh

> *I love how good it smelt in the room; it just added to the whole experience and sort of put me in this meditative zone.*
>
> Bryony

Bryony's mind associated the scent of incense burning with a meditative state, which helped her move quickly into a relaxing yogic '*zone'*. Similarly, Josh remembered this state of relaxation and recreated it each class through the associative power of smell. Other important aromas revealed during interviews included the lavender eye pillows, and essential oils, used during savasana (*the final resting pose of the practise*). These were described as signals for the students to unwind:

> *You put the lavender things on your eyes and sort of zone out, like everything just stops, and you're so relaxed you just want to sleep.*
>
> Billly

> *The eye pillows are the best, like as soon as you put them on, you know it's time to relax, erm, they're so good I even have one at home now, and this helps with my anxiety.*
>
> Bryony

> *There are so many nice smells as well, like when Claire waves her hands over your face, and you can smell the oils and just go into this sort of peaceful place.*
>
> Demi

Calming scents were regularly used during savasana, where the teacher rubbed lavender oils into her hands, swaying them over the students' faces as they lay on their backs, using small lavender scented pillows to cover their eyes, to encourage a mindful state. This is important, as Hofmann et al., (2010) explains, an environment of mindfulness encourages meditation, and directly correlates with positive mental health. Though, this postulates a decidedly simplistic declaration of mindfulness as positive, dismissing prior discussion of the potentially damaging influence of mind wondering, which several students described. Nonetheless, this study recognised that these scents broadly calmed the students, supporting several researchers who suggest that scents used during yoga calm the nervous system, reduce anxiety, and encourage positive moods (Diego et al., 1998; Jacobs et al., 1996; Sayorwan et al., 2012). Together, incense burning, lavender oils, and the aroma of sandalwood the studio transpired, shaped an inherently calming, meditative atmosphere, almost like a yogic time portal encouraging relaxation.

Overall, with the use of calming aromas and gentle yogic sounds, the relaxing nature of the practises were amplified, and this encouraged a stress relieving, anxiety reducing, and wellbeing promoting setting. Together, with controlled breathing exercises, the students journeyed through an environment of peacefulness' and tranquillity. A defining description by Josh, who'd originally described yoga as '*not my favourite part'*, captures the outcomes of one practise, where his sensory experiences and breathing exercises enthused a '*quick fix'*, with long-term implications:

> *I was having such a stressful day, my timetable shot up, I pretty much was out of my flat from 8:30am to 7:30pm Monday to Friday, sometimes later like 10-11. I was feeling so stressed on that Wednesday, I remember coming to the yoga just walking in and being like I am leaving everything at the door, going into this chilled environment, with the lavender bags, and just relaxing. And I didn't fall asleep, but completely zoned out, and for the first time in a long, long time, my brain switched off properly, cause I was so focussed and so in that moment and open minded, and I was like so surprised, so after that I took away breathing exercises and that's like helped me on tough nights trying to get work done, like I will just stop what I am doing, put on some relaxing music, instrumentals, and just sit, close my eyes, and do these breathing exercises, controlled breaths, that's it. 15 minutes later I'm feeling back at it. And it's a weird thing, like I never thought I could find a temporary quick fix for my stress or anxiety, cause before I had this, I would get so anxious, hate doing anything, and stop for ages and lose focus.*

Josh perceived yoga as an environment designed to reduce his stress and anxiety, as he reported experiencing respite from stress: moreover, Josh learned new tools for repeating these practises, and translated them into his daily life. This is important, as like Josh, several students also described feeling intense pressure to complete assignments, and to socially flourish at university. These students said that the stress associated felt insurmountable, stimulating emotions which impacted their overall mental health and wellbeing. Opportunely, it appeared that the more yoga was practised, the less likely the students were to experience emotional burnout, agreeing with several academics who have marked yoga as a prevailing stress and anxiety management tool, and stimulant of positive moods (Granath et al., 2006; Khalsa 2004; Lavey et al., 2005; McCall 2007; Woodyard 2011).

Boundless Asana and Movements: Experiencing a Non-competitive 'Meditation-in-Motion'

Yoga involved a dynamic and often challenging setting, demanding diverse movements and postures, at differing tempos. One moment the practise was energising and arduous, with quick, flowing actions, balancing poses, and intentional movement: the next, calm, and slow, with restorative, gentle, yet discomforting postures, encouraging alignment and mental repose, resulting in a feeling of lightness, ease, and relaxation. It was often the case that differing conditions opposed one another, mirroring the student's individual physical capabilities. During their first interviews, Carl and Jack said:

> *Moving more and stretching less was more my kinda thing, otherwise it's too difficult, and actually just a bit frustrating. Like, there's that pigeon pose which was just impossible (laughing), like, let's be honest, I'm just not that flexible (laughing).*
>
> Carl

> *I was thinking with yoga am I fit enough and flexible enough, and there were times when I was struggling because of upper body strength and my bad posture, like I hunch allot. And also I have flat feet, and my calf muscle is massive, everybody always notices (laughing). So, things like down dog I can't do as my feet can't be flat on the floor.*
>
> Jack

Like several students in the study, Carl and Jack found the yogic postures and movements challenging, and somewhat irritating at the beginning: this feasibly triggered feelings of self-doubt and failure.

During one interview, Jack despondently said '*I just feel like I suck at sport, like I can't do anything that involves exercise'*. Conversely, during their first interviews, Elisa and Sajiv commented:

> *I love the bits where we are just stretching, it's so relaxing and makes me feel so good afterwards, it's like my body has had a full MOT.*
>
> Elisa

> *It's like a workout that you can sort of relax into, but also one that's not too difficult.*
>
> Sajiv

Elisa and Sajiv's physicality and agility, opposed Carl and Jack's early yoga experiences, where it was clear that from the beginning that the physical capabilities of each student impacted their own subjective experiences. However, for the majority, during these early stages, most rudiments of the practises bought with it discomfort, where students attempted unfamiliar postures and challenging movements; Josh commented:

> *It's quite difficult, erm maybe because I'm unfit, I don't know, but it's actually painful sometimes, like trying to move my body in a way that it doesn't want to. Like I feel like I've got a long way to go before I can actually enjoy it.*

Josh struggled to attain fundamental postures and movements, indicating that he did not '*enjoy'* the practises, due to physical discomfort. Hamsworth (2014) explain that the role of enjoyment in wellbeing is neglected, as it could play a crucial part in understanding how wellbeing is influenced, and that enjoyment is what leads to personal growth and long-term happiness. However, enjoyment does not necessarily indicate positive wellbeing. Josh's physical discomfort and the challenges yoga presented set a baseline to improve from, paving the way towards progression and self-esteem. Ensuing Josh's sixth practise, while travelling home together, I'd documented his response having asked how he was getting on with yoga:

> *Yer it's really good, I'm like proper getting the hang of it now and can see the benefits.*

The same was found true for most students who'd initially found the practises physically challenging: once their fitness, familiarity, and flexibility developed, their progression, enjoyment, and gratification often followed. This resulted in positive outcomes: for example, by the final interviews, most students described feeling lower muscle tension, restored posture, and muscular relaxation:

That evening I felt like my whole body was floating, like my legs were dead (laughing), but also really relaxed.

Demi

It makes my body feel light; erm, like the stretching is a sort of deep body relaxation which makes me feel like I've had a full body massage.

Chloe

I've always had bad posture, but the yoga has got me thinking about improving it and now I feel that I'm moving better and standing more upright.

Tess

These physical outcomes were expected. For instance, Kambalekar (1969) and Balaji et al., (2012) explain that yoga differentiates from conventional physical activity, as asanas are isometric; this means that they bring steadiness and lightness to the body and can correct posture and reduce pain. It was certainly the case that several students perceived this experience as a body and mind connection, which together encouraged subjective wellbeing:

I always feel so good after, it's like being kind to my body makes me feel so much better about myself.

Billy

I know it's cliché but they say a healthy body, healthy mind, but that's actually true, because after yoga cause you feel so much better physicality, you also feel better mentally.

Ollie

Every time I do yoga my body feels good, and because my body feels good, so does my mind.

Tess

Yoga helped several students to feel better in their bodies, and inspired positivity and bodily comfort, opposing pain or injury. Ollie said, *'healthy body, healthy mind'*, and this seemed true for several students, as physical comfort commonly translated into psychological ease. While seemingly simplistic, this is important, as it is well known that when a person feels better in their body, it will stimulate a progressive wellbeing experience (Sainsbury & Gibson 1954; Vallath 2010). As Dolan and White

(2007) explain, subjective wellbeing and physical health often parallel. Equally, these findings reflect Steptoe et al., (2015), who found that those without physical pain and tension display better hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing. Indeed, it appeared that as the students released tension and pain, they felt better in their bodies and developed a body reconnection and vitality. This appeared to naturally motivate a positive sense of subjective wellbeing.

Another clear outcome of yoga's physicality was its ability to distract the students' attention: for instance, Khalsa et al., (2009) describe yoga as '*meditation-in-motion'* by its diverse challenges and boundless asanas. The students often described feeling captivated by yoga's movements and challenging postures; Tess said:

> *There would be so many postures and balances, and sometimes we'd move from one to the next so quickly that I couldn't think of anything negative.*

Tess's description recounts an earlier discussion during Chapter 5 '*the surfing experiences'* emphasising a *flow state*, described by Csikszentmihalyi (2014) as a person entering a state of captivation, attention, and abstraction, in a personally gratifying activity. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) report several in-depth accounts of flow state, yoga, and wellbeing, echoing data revealed in this study. These include intense involvement, deep concentration, lack of self-consciousness, and a loss of a sense of time. This equivalent sense of flow was raised regularly during interviews, as several students repeatedly described characteristic experiences of Csikszentmihalyi's flow state depiction:

> *I can just turn up and leave everything at the door, cause when I'm in there I can just relax, like it goes so fast that we'll be moving from one thing to the next, without the time to think of anything else, you sort of lose track of time and forget everything going on.*
>
> Elisa

> *I love it because it stops me from overthinking, because there's so much going on you just have to try to keep up, which sort of takes your mind away from everything bad going on outside, which like distracts you from everything and anyone.*
>
> Carl

Like surfing, yoga encouraged a flow state, reflecting yoga's stimulation of 'mindfulness-through-movement' or 'mediation-in-motion'. Though, it was clear that the students' experiences interchanged and contradicted between flow-like experiences of movements, postures, and attention, with reflective

experiences of self-awareness, restlessness, and distress. While these reflective experiences required a degree of self-regulation, it seemed that yoga's 'meditative-motion' had helped the students to focus on present sensory input, without cognitive elaboration, or emotional reactivity. This typically resulted in experiences of peace and respite. This is important, because for Kabat-Zinn (1990), the underlying principle of mindfulness is to live in the present, offering a remedy to the stressors manifested by guilt, fear, or anxiety. Certainly, for these students, their intermittent state of immersion in yoga had helped them to sustain their attention and experience respite from stress, mental distress, and the external world, which often presented its own challenges.

Discussed in Chapter 4's '*A Step into the Unknown'*, a final noteworthy theme raised was the non-competitive nature of yoga, and subsequent increase in the students' confidence and attendance as a result; Chloe said:

> *I get really anxious and can be flaky when it comes to group things like this, but with yoga I can go into the class and just focus on myself, no one else. It's weird, like there's few times where you can be alone, just working on yourself, and not competing with others. Claire would say to not think about anyone else, but just focus on yourself and go inward. So that's what I did, every time I'd get my matt out, I'd just think, this is me-time now, I don't have to worry about whether I'm flexible or not, I just focus on me.*

I went on to ask Chloe how this non-competitive nature had made her feel:

> *Calmer and like nothing else matters. Erm, it's just one of those things where I can feel comfortable in myself, and confident and not embarrassed if I get something wrong.*

Chloe's comment highlights a theme several students bought up during interviews discussing yoga, and the wider intervention. It was clear that both surfing, and yoga, embodied non-competitive activities, and were accessible and attractive to beginners. This is important, because for many young people such as Chloe, competition in physical activity act as a major participation barrier (Martins et al., 2015), especially given the negative associations that follow, such as the stresses of winning or losing in front of peer groups (Yungblut et al., 2012). However, the dread of competition was averted, thanks to the perceived non-competitive nature of yoga. This data signifies that yoga offers an appealing non-competitive group activity for students stepping into new social territories, facing pre-existing interpersonal and intrapersonal fears.

Summary

- The students displayed mixed emotions and feelings, as they paid attention to their thoughts while attempting to self-regulate their emotions. Repeatedly, interpersonal feelings and intrusive memories were raised, and during the early months, this withheld potential wellness experiences. These findings echo literature pointing to a tendency in yoga towards experiences of persistent evaluative thoughts, emotions, or feelings, known as the '*monkey mind'* (Vago & Zeidan 2016). This trend raised an applicable metaphor for the students' propensity for a restless mind, skipping from one thought or feeling, to another. This was problematic for those with particularly poor mental health, and often encouraged negative emotions and self-judgment that were not always dealt with effectively. These preliminary findings posed yoga as a potentially damaging activity for students with poor mental health, principally in the short-term.

- As the intervention advanced, the students' yogic aptitude improved, and most developed self-regulatory competences, helped by techniques such as body scan meditation and controlled breathing exercises. Subsequently, many discovered an antidote for mind wandering, benefiting from a positive wellbeing experience. By increasing self-awareness, they were able to concentrate on the teacher's instructions to observe, identify, and accept their thoughts, instead of reacting to them. This resulted in an improved psychological state, supporting several authors (Lavey et al., 2005; Sauer-Zavala et al., 2012; Compare et al., 2014) signifying the long-term impacts of yoga, such as increased mental focus, accomplishment, and respite from negative thoughts. Indeed, this data supports the self-regulatory mechanisms of yoga for psychological wellbeing (Compare et al 2014), which is important, as it is well known that students with mental health problems often find it difficult to self-regulate their emotions (Schwartz et al., 2000; McCarthy et al., 2006).

- The atmosphere during the early practises reflected the students stress and anxiety comprehending the intervention and social implications. This coupled with distress consequent of wide-ranging mental health problems. Despite this, the link between slowing down and relaxing, with reduced stress and anxiety post-class, was striking from the start of this research. Though self-regulatory inabilities uncovered several students' negative experiences, during these early practises, there was a parallel atmosphere of calm. It became clear that there was a distinct contrast between students who'd let their thoughts and emotions take precedence, with those who did not. For example, from the beginning, many of the students reported feeling

relaxed and de-stressed, encouraged by yoga's soothing nature. Certainly, yoga was portrayed as a '*quick fix'* for stress and anxiety. The principal component surfacing this anxiety-releasing, stress-reducing outcome, was controlled breathing exercises, known as Pranayama.

- The more socially anxious students in the group struggled to unwind; however, the lack of involuntary conversation before, during, and after the practises, helped considerably ease their tension. This is because the practises were structured in a way that allowed each student to decide the degree to which they socialised. For some students, this was a substantial motivator which helped them socially integrate at their own pace and maintain attendance. This is important, as Leigh and Clark (2018) explain, those with SA often experience absenteeism from most forms of social gatherings. However, these students found it '*easier'* and felt more '*comfortable'* attending the practises, particularly compared with surfing, which some had described as socially '*intimidating'*. Instead, yoga offered these students the ability to avoid scrutiny by remaining quiet, closing their eyes, and avoiding perceived judgement, without seeming abnormal or delimited by the interventions habitually social setting.

- Many of the students' associated the scent of incense burning and lavender with a meditative state, which helped them to move quickly into a relaxing yogic '*zone'*. Together, the comforting scents and gentle music shaped an inherently calming, meditative atmosphere, depicted as a '*yogic time portal'* encouraging relaxation. Conversely, there were times where this same environment elicited difficult emotions, causing potentially unfavourable thoughts and feelings, however, this was infrequent. More commonly, yoga was described as an environment that reduced stress and anxiety. This was necessary, as the students felt intense pressure to complete assignments and to flourish at university, and the stress associated felt insurmountable, often stirring emotions negatively impacting their wellbeing. Therefore, the more they practised yoga, the less likely it appeared they would experience emotional burnout. These findings agree several academics marking yoga as a prevailing stress and anxiety management tool (Brown & Gerbarg 2005; Sengupta 2012; Saoji et al., 2019; Thirthalli et al., 2013).

- During the beginning, yoga's physicality proved frustrating, stirring some of the student's feelings of self-doubt and failure. Conversely, other students found yoga's physicality '*relaxing'* and '*easy'*. It was clear that the physical capabilities of everyone impacted their own subjective experiences, and that yoga's physical challenge set a baseline for students to improve from, paving the way towards progression. Specifically, once the students' fitness, familiarity, and flexibility developed, their gratification followed. By the final interviews, most described

lower muscle tension, restored posture, and muscular relaxation. By bringing steadiness and lightness to their bodies, this mind-body connection was often perceived as a sense of subjective wellbeing. Consequently, yoga helped many of the students to feel better in their bodies by encouraging body-positivity, often translating to psychological ease.

- Yoga's physicality distracted the students' attention, captivated by boundless movements and challenging postures. This recounts an earlier discussion during Chapter 5 '*Surfing Waves of Wellbeing'* emphasising a *flow state (*Csikszentmihalyi 2014*)*. Indeed, like surfing, yoga encouraged a flow state during the faster tempo segments, reflecting yoga's stimulation of '*mindfulness-through-movement'*. This sense of flow was raised regularly during the final interviews, where many of the students described a sense of distraction and respite from negative thoughts and feelings. Certainly, for these students, their intermittent state of immersion in yoga helped them to sustain their attention and experience respite from stress, distress, and the external world, which often presented its own wellbeing associated challenges.

- The non-competitive nature of yoga fortified many students' confidence, with some describing this component critical to their sustained attendance. It was clear that from the beginning, yoga embodied a non-competitive, lifestyle activity, and one that was accessible and attractive to students experiencing mental health difficulties. This was important, as for some of these students, competition in physical activity posed a major participation barrier. However, like surfing, the dread of competition was averted because of the perceived non-competitive nature of yoga. Therefore, yoga offered an appealing non-competitive group activity, easing students pre-existing interpersonal and intrapersonal fears.

This chapter paints a picture of the primary yoga experiences; it illustrates the diverse nature of yoga, and evidences the students' improved sense of wellbeing, and alleviation of stress, anxiety, and respite from distress. Whether yoga should be used as a stand-alone intervention for mental illnesses is at best, questionable and problematic; yet, as adjuvant or parallel to other therapies, or as a tool for wellbeing promotion aimed at symptoms of distress, yoga appears an encouraging and progressive wellbeing activity. While these findings do not prove amelioration from symptoms of poor mental health, they present the positive impact of yoga on these students' subjective wellbeing. These outcomes fit with Hewitt's (2019) account that there is a broad need for HE providers to adopt interventions which improve overall wellbeing, instead of symptom-focused interventions. With the rise in student numbers and increased demand facing HE wellbeing services (Thorley 2017), yoga offers an alternate and/or complementary therapeutic option towards progressing student wellbeing.

Chapter Seven: The Cohesive Contributory Themes

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the reader with a picture of students' experiences and challenges at the start of their journey, which helps better comprehend the influence of the intervention by its completion. The feelings they described may be viewed as the product of uncertainty pending the unknown. These are symptoms that are well documented in the literature on social anxiety, social physique anxiety, and participation barriers for students with mental health problems (Jennifer et al., 2021; YouGov 2016). The following chapters (Chapters 5 & 6) take the reader through the significance of the individual activities, surfing, and yoga, with the inductive approach capturing experiences of importance to students. Absent from these chapters, yet inseparable in real-life, the current chapter presents the cohesive and interconnected contributory themes, which unequivocally emanated in totality with the broader intervention setting; specifically, during surf sessions, yoga practises, social events, and while travelling to sessions. It offers insights into the students' experiences of their complete journey and presents their reflections on their evolution over the year, and cohesive feelings of their central experiences. These insights underpin the perceived wellbeing value of the entire Resurface intervention, by connecting themes in a final discussion.

The opening theme uncovers the social connectedness and cohesion which encouraged togetherness, shifting student's perspective from exclusion to inclusion, as they developed new relationships and an affinity to the group. This theme describes the student's feelings of acceptance and understanding through peer support, where many faced similar mental health challenges, and found listening to other experiences, stories, and coping strategies, valuable, and importantly, trustworthy information sources. It describes the feeling of safety in Resurface and the ways in which the non-judgmental ethos encouraged deeper conversations and camaraderie. The following theme explores Resurface as a 'third place', a term developed by Oldenburg (1989) to define places where people meet for social interaction. It portrays the social surroundings separate from the students two usual social environments of home (i.e., student accommodation), and the workplace (i.e., academic life), which often merged. The alternative space provided by Resurface was found to be an identity affirming experience and allowed the students to embark upon new adventures, in a structured and supported community. This section explores the students' desire to 'escape' from their first and second places, and experience respite from

what many had described as a toxic university world. Equally, it delves deeper into self-image, self-esteem, and social roles, as Resurface members, surfers, and yogis.

Social Connectedness, Acceptance, and Peer Support: Belonging to a Safe and Non-Judgemental Tribe

Linda sets the scene for the opening theme of this chapter, highlighting her sense of kinship in Resurface, and belonging to the group. She explained feeling accepted and a part of something, in a way that she had not felt before:

> *The biggest impact from all this is probably the people and having something to be a part of, because I never felt normal in a group environment, and always feel like an outsider, so avoided joining new things to sort of protect myself. But now, I belong to something, this is my group, and this is what brings me joy.*

Linda's outsiderness highlights a common trait experienced by those with poor mental health, as Mushtaq et al., (2014) reports, repeatedly feeling rejected for being different or excluded, lonely, and isolated. Hog (2001) points out that feeling like an outsider negatively affects mental health levels and can result in a fear of rejection. This is important, because in feeling threatened by rejection, people do their best to avoid it. This portrays Linda's characteristic nature to avoid new social groups such as Resurface. Certainly, the emotional importance of belonging is a theme that runs through much of psychological literature (Jennifer et al., 2021; Over 2016; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), and Linda, like most participants, raised social connectedness and belonging as a crucial experience. Social connectedness appeared regularly throughout this study, surfacing prominently in the final interviews:

> *I think it about being a part of something, but also for other people going on that journey, as you help each other, and they help you in return. For me, this is bigger than, we are all simply doing yoga or surfing, because it becomes more than the activities, but the people, and that you know you have this whole new group that are there for you, and you can truly call your friends, erm, this is what keeps me coming back.*
>
> Billy

> *It is all nice and like togetherness with people, like there isn't a clique, like one day I'm chilling with Ollie, then next time, me, Tess, or Demi, or Josh, you just mix in with people like*

> *one big group. This is really nice. Even when you get picked up on the way, you just talk about your day and what you've been up to, and this makes everyone just feel like family, like we're all so close now, and like if one of us isn't there, we're like, wait where's Demi, because we care and look out for each other.*
>
> Carl

Kenrick et al., (2010) explain that people are defined not only by their behaviours, preferences, and interests, but also by their relationships, social roles, and group affiliations. This study finds that social cohesion encouraged togetherness, where a sense of '*we'* replaced '*I'*, shifting students, such as Billy and Carl, perspectives from exclusion, to inclusion, as they developed new relationships and an affinity to the group. This is important because students with poor mental health often struggle making deep connections and can feel excluded (Jennifer et al., 2021; YouGov 2016). Despite this, the solidarity having become an established member of the Resurface social group encouraged a sense of value, for example, Carl's recognition of another members absence. Billy describes the motivation of '*togetherness'*, stating that the other participants '*keep me coming back'*, shining a light on the nature of Resurface's fundamental appeal, and the sense of belonging which emerged. This sense of belonging and social cohesion coursed throughout the interview transcripts: indicatively, Sajiv explains how she felt valued and developed self-confidence:

> *I am just happy to walk in the room and have someone say "hey" and really care and know who you are. Not everyone is like that, so welcoming and that, but coming to this group it just feels really good, like its cliché but you like actually feel part of something. Like it took a while, but it would be weird, going into Uni I'd be quiet and keep myself to myself, but then I'd walk into Resurface and have this new confidence, like I'd always think to myself, this is a place where I matter.*

Maslow (1943) positions belonging as a basic human need, a factor for human development, and a foundation of human motivation. Equally, evolutionary theory places belonging to a group as an essential factor in survival (MacDonald 2009), and the power of the tribe is well documented (Baumeister et al., 1995; Buss 2009; Gere & MacDonald 2009). This is important, because students like Sajiv, often begin university seeking new tribes, embarking on novel social adventures, while confronting interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges (YouGov 2016). Indeed, Buote et al., (2007) underline the significance of a cohesive, socially satisfying social group for students at university, finding that those without, often feel homesick and lonely, and that this is substantially more difficult for those with mental health problems. Prior to Resurface, Sajiv lacked a cohesive social group

and a sense of belonging, however, as the intervention progressed, she became an established member of the Resurface 'tribe', and her confidence and self-worth emerged. I asked Sajiv how she felt this experience had impacted her, now that she'd finished the intervention:

> *I guess it prevented me feeling lonely, like even when I wasn't there, I felt that I had this new group in my life, and that made me feel good, like I didn't have to be there physically, but they were just with me in my mind, and it's that sort of knowing that they are there that makes me feel better. Like, I've never had this before and used to feel sad just thinking like I had no friends, and that people didn't want me around.*

Sajiv described feeling a part of the group, even while not physically being with them; this figurative togetherness proved significant, especially given Sajiv's prior feelings of social rejection. This is important, as Eisenberger et al., (2003) report, feeling left out of a group activates heightened cortical activity in areas of the brain associated with physical pain. Essentially, it hurts, quite literally, to be left out of a group. According to Williams (2007), social rejection is highly stressful and can lead to depression, confused thinking, and even aggression. However, with the support of her new group, Sajiv reported feeling social inclusion. Over (2016) says that those who are accepted members of a group tend to feel happier and more satisfied, which seemed true for Sajiv. This central experience became apparent throughout the participatory group, highlighting the dominance of social belonging and connectedness in Resurface. Likewise, several students describing a feeling of togetherness and self-worth:

> *Now we all just meet outside of Resurface, it's like we're a family, like it's sparked a sort of tight-knit circle where we all do thing together, like go for walks with Tess, or coffee with Bryony.*
>
> Demi

> *I think the biggest thing I'm going to take from all this is the friends I've made along the way, and the memories created.*
>
> Tess

> *I know this sounds strange, but it's like our own sort of like little cult (laughing), like we are so close now, and we are just like this unit of people that look out for each other.*
>
> Jack

> *The best thing is that I'm seen, and heard, and matter, like before, no one really knew who I was, but now I have this group that care about me.*
>
> Adam

> *We all get the Resurface t-shirts, and like you'll see Jo wearing it around Uni and be like, 'Oh Hey', and like wave to each other, which is nice, because you all feel together.*
>
> Elisa

Baumeister and Leary explain that humans have a need to belong, or "*a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful interpersonal relationships*" (1995, p. 497). Resurface emulates these interpersonal characteristics, offering the students a space and a place to build self-esteem and self-worth, through feeling valued, connected, and a part of a supportive community.

Another dominant feature that inspired a sense of belonging was the students' feelings of acceptance and connectedness, encouraged by peer support; Emily describes:

> *I love being surrounded by people who accept me for how I am. For me, it has kind of been like, I don't know, like I felt more accepted in Resurface than I have done in a very long time, like normally I just constantly hate how I am, always being loud, so I try to supress that, and for the first time now, it's welcoming, a positive thing (crying), it's just so nice. My family and you guys are the only ones that know some things about me, because I am able to talk about it, as it is personal, and people outside won't be so accepting, they think badly about you, and that is such a lonely place to be, like, although I am surrounded by people, I feel so lonely, whereas here I can be around 5 people only, but feel like I am surrounded by positivity and happiness, and that is such a great thing.*

Emily appeared relieved to be a part of Resurface, having perceived judgment in other groups prior. This is important, as Maslow (1943) discuss, humans are social animals, and thrive when feeling understood and accepted. Self-esteem seemed to shape a part of a sociometer, monitoring Emily's relational value in the other students' eyes. Accordingly, her sense of belonging and acceptance was not just an index of individual personal value, but also indicated acceptance to the group. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explain that self-esteem is not just high self-regard, but the self-approbation that we feel when included in groups, like what Emily had described taking part in

Resurface. Echoing Emily's thoughts and feelings, Ollie's sense of acceptance raised a small manifestation, of a much larger theme, demonstrating peer support:

> *Even in the first couple of weeks getting to know people, I wasn't intimidated or scared, because I knew these people are all there for the same reason as me, so there are no bad feelings, no prejudices, nothing negative, erm, and I think that's it, there is literally nothing negative about the group, you are completely accepted, there is 100% acceptance, we are all in the same boat, and it is always something positive.*

Ollie reported feeling comforted by the group dynamic, and his seemingly strong sense of acceptance within it. Likewise, the interview transcripts were showered with quotes shining a light on the positive influence of peer support, as the students described an accepting and supportive community, where they felt comfortable, supported, and integrated:

> *It's the reassurance that everyone is going through something, like not alone, it shows you don't have to be quiet to be going through something, like in Uni and school, talking to people felt quite forced, so it was really nice in general, not to worry about that, it just felt nice, it felt very natural, which I loved, I don't know, erm, just good, like we're all there helping each other and supporting each other.*
>
> Sajiv

> *With this group, I feel more at peace, at level, I feel like, I don't have to know their issue, but I know that I am not alone, like, there probably could be others with anxiety, erm, so, I feel like it makes me more comforting to try and work on my anxiety, it's a massive thing actually, it matters allot, like if people weren't from wellbeing I would struggle, but not this, as we're all in it together, which helps me feel comfortable working on myself around other people going through the same.*
>
> Emily

Davidson et al., (2006) explain that peer support is based on the belief that *'people who have faced, endured and overcome adversity can offer support, encouragement, hope and mentorship to others facing similar situations'* (p. 443). This proved true for these students, who often described feeling comforted knowing that other participants faced similar social, emotional, and psychological challenges; as Emily said, '*we're all in it together'*. This is important, as it is common for those with poor mental health to feel isolated and alone (Student Minds 2017); however, Resurface offered a place

of safety, acceptance, and support. These outcomes of peer support link closely with the students sharing stories, including coping strategies and personal experiences; Chloe said:

> *I suppose with counselling I would leave crying and go home in a really low mood. I thought it would get better, but instead it would roll over and I never felt understood, as they couldn't be in my shoes, like how can they know my experiences and understand them – with Resurface, it's healed me – my depression has gone, I'm ok with large groups, and I feel I can cope now.*

I asked Chloe why she'd thought this was:

> *I guess joining this big group of people who are feeling the same things, you hear their stories, their experiences, and how they dealt with things, and they give you support in a different way. I usually feel alienated, and no-one gets me – erm, this is why this is so unique, as I am understood by the very nature that other people in the group just get it, get me, and this helps me cope. Hearing what others are going through is massive, this is core; we are not alone, they are not counsellors, but there to better themselves, and this is even better than counsellors.*

Resonating Chloe's experiences, Gartner and Reissman (1982) describe peer support as an emotional support reciprocally provided between people sharing similar experiences, and a way of normalising and legitimising mental health related experiences. According to Mead et al., (2001), this is much easier between peers than it is with a counsellor, as people habitually find connection with others that feel like them; this accounts for Chloe's preference of peer support to counselling. Likewise, Forchuk et al., (1998) said that traditional therapeutic relationships are different from peer relationships in that, "*peer relationships have more of a mutual, reflective nature and include friendship and an equal power base*" (p.202). The findings in this study parallel Caddick's (2015) study of veterans participating in ST, as they described a boundary between civilians and themselves, explaining how others "*just didn't get it*" (p.291). They embodied a deeper connection, like what Shotter (1993) termed as *knowing of the third kind*. Burkitt (1999) describes these experiences as the commonalities of feeling and meaning in how people relate, as a sort of instinctual knowledge from within, as they share not only experiences, but each other's problems. This '*knowing of the third kind'*, or '*instinctual knowledge'* was shared among the students, often emphasised during interviews; Josh said:

> *I guess that if the group wasn't aimed at students from wellbeing, then it wouldn't be the same, cause others wouldn't get it or understand. Like, when everyone was talking on the beach after*

our last session, Carl and the others were sharing their techniques they use to better themselves, which just made so much sense, and that was nice to hear, because I felt so alone and not ok, like I couldn't be fixed. That sounds extreme, but it can start to feel a little bit like that, but then hearing new ways to open up and learn to cope from people who have experienced what I have, really makes me feel better, and sometimes like, hearing these, it was quite inspiring how they moved on, from that difficulty and dark times, like it didn't engulf them, which makes me feel hopeful, like a light at the end of a tunnel – like it wouldn't be the same hearing it from someone that hasn't experienced it.

Given the students in this study are of similar ages, all having experienced comparable forms or mental distress or illness, Josh found listening to their experiences, stories, and coping strategies, valuable, and importantly, perceived them to be dependable, and trustworthy information sources. Perhaps most significantly, sharing stories and hearing others comparable experiences inspired hope, as Josh reported a sense of optimism for the future, knowing that there was '*light at the end of the tunnel'*. This is important, as Sünbül et al., (2018) indicate, hope builds resilience and increases positivity during difficult circumstances. It is also considered that hope improves wellbeing, reduces the intensity of depression, and protects against suicide and negative, self-deprecatory thinking (WHO 2001). This non-judgemental, peer support environment is indicatively portrayed by a field note in the early weeks, described as a sort of 'cultural conformity' from the offset:

I coach surf lessons for diverse groups, but have never experienced anything quite like Resurface. There is an incredibly kind and welcoming atmosphere, and while the students don't necessarily talk about the issues all the time, you can tell there is a sense of unity knowing they are all there for the same reason, so they act a certain way. Everyone is kind, supportive, and there feels to be no clique culture. It's as though personalities and interests are welcomed from all walks of life, with no judgement, just kindness. No one makes snarky jokes, there are no testing characters deterring focus from the intervention; there's just a friendly, calming, sort of family feeling, that everyone falls into.

During the interviews, and after the first semester and parallel intervention season, the students echoed similar thoughts and feelings, signifying the kind, welcoming, and supportive atmosphere of Resurface:

People don't gossip in the way friends do, it isn't back-stabby, as I have mainly female friends, they will be like 'omg look what she is wearing', but in Resurface, you can turn up in anything, and no one cares. Because everyone knows your there for a reason, so it just creates this vibe

that is just nice, everyone just talks nicely to each other, and you kind of feel relaxed knowing that you don't have to worry about being the odd one out.

Chloe

Everybody knows there is some sort of mental health reason; it's almost like you don't have to tell anybody, it is already here, but everyone is so nice because of it. It is a very big thing to me and how I feel. There is no other group like it, where you can have that experience. In some ways, I was worried about joining Resurface because I thought it would be this weird mental health thing where everyone is just like, it sounds bad, but a bit crazy, but like it's not, they're the best people I've ever met, and most genuine, and I think it's because everyone just gets what it feels like.

Elisa

The stigma associated with mental health is a concern among HE sectors (Conley 2017), yet the atmosphere of Resurface was kind and welcoming, seemingly combatting such stigma. Elisa explains, '*everyone just talks nicely to each other',* highlighting its unfamiliarity. This is because only these students knew what it felt like to feel '*different',* and this led to a non-judgemental group dynamic, as Mitch and Demi explain:

I'm never being judged, I could turn up wearing what I want, looking how I want, and still feel like I'm not being judged, because everyone has this link with each other, like yer, we're all here for the same reason.

Mitch

I think everyone is in the same boat, everyone is going through difficult times, so no one is going to judge you, whereas, with your usual friends, they don't always know this, but in Resurface we are together, so there is no comparison, and that alone contributes to you feeling relaxed in this environment; like if people don't understand your situation, how can they truly show compassion.

Demi

People with lived experiences of a mental health problems commonly report feeling devalued, dismissed, and dehumanized (Hamilton et al., 2016; Thornicroft et al., 2010), yet Mitch and Demi described feeling valued and supported, as they mattered and fitted in. This data portrays the safe and non-judgemental environment which enabled these students to live out their mental health challenges, without masking, or feeling embarrassed by them; Rob commented:

If I were to have a panic attack in this group, because we all know we are there for particular reasons, it makes it feel like an underlying safe feeling, so yer, if I did have a panic attack, everyone would know what is going on, and I feel like everyone there would really help me, and not judge me - whereas, if I were in a different group, everyone would be like 'what the fuck is this guy doing', so it feels super safe.

This feeling of safety, encouraged by a compassionate sense of cultural conformity formed at the outset, allowed Rob to be himself, his true self, avoiding embarrassment or prejudice associated with his mental health difficulties. Likewise, Billy said:

Resurface is like going on holiday where you can be someone you truly want to be, but when you think about it, you're just being yourself, who you really are when you're not around others who just don't get it.

Billy's account echoes numerous students' feeling of safety within the Resurface social world, which is important, as several students reported feeling little opportunity to bond with other students going through similar mental health issues (Student Minds 2017). Therefore, the feeling of safety and connection seemed to be a rarity. Indeed, many had highlighted the benefits of being able to '*be'*, authentically, and without the strain of judgment:

I'm probably more myself than anywhere else. I am louder outside of this, but really that's not me, whereas in Resurface, I am just me, I can relax, be quieter, and just myself, and feel content. Outside, I have to try harder all the time, whereas in Resurface I don't have to.

Sajiv

With my friends outside, some of them don't know, so I have to hide it more, and this makes me feel like it's a burden, and it's exhausting just not being myself.

Chloe

There's no elephant in the room, which is really nice, as we can be ourselves, not the people we pretend to be outside of it.

Emily

The students appeared comfortable together, and this feeling of safety motivated an unfamiliar, yet desired space to share and connect with other likeminded students, in a deeper and more meaningful

way. This experience often encouraged deeper conversations, described in a field note towards the end of the intervention:

> *Emily was sitting with Linda, Demi, and Tess at the side of the surf school, leaning against the railing, having just changed. They were talking about what they had planned for the rest of the day, and in a light-hearted way, Linda commented 'I'm literally suicidal all the time, so just trying to keep busy otherwise I just sit around all day feeling depressed'. At my surprise, the others didn't react awkwardly. Instead, they nodded their heads and Demi responded (to my recollection), 'have you been to wellbeing?', and Tess mentioned 'I used to feel the same' and revealed the medications she used for her depression and how they had helped. The conversation continued supportively and most strikingly, comfortably, though ended swiftly as others left the changing rooms, interfering deeper discussion.*

I followed up with Linda, signposting her to relevant wellbeing services, she received the necessary support. Afterwards, I remember feeling struck by the relaxed nature of such deep and personal conversation, as Linda felt comfortable to share profound thoughts and feelings, in such an open setting. I felt that Linda's conversation did not feel like a cry for help, yet that she wanted others, that perhaps understood her, to know how she was feeling, to experience comfort, having voiced her concerns to others that '*just got it'*. Linda's account highlights the inherent nature of the Resurface social dynamic; safe, supportive, understanding, and empathetic. Another aspect that struck me about this dynamic was the students making light of more difficult, personal situations, often in a comical manner. For example, before surfing, Mitch declared:

> *As if we couldn't be more anxious, you're about to chuck us in the ocean in the middle of winter and hope we don't freeze to death - good luck!*

The group laughed, and there was a sense of solidarity and humor which placed the students in high spirits. Another occasion involved Carl who I'd overheard joking at a coffee shop, referring to Resurface, myself, and this study:

> *So basically, he's put a bunch of depressed people together and seeing if we all cheer each other up (laughing).*

The others laughed, enjoying the comical and dark nature of the observation. These findings parallel Caddick's (2015) study of veterans participating in a 6-week ST course. Caddick explained that *Black*

Humor, described by Hockey (1986) as a way of making light of struggles, bonded the veterans, and lifted their moods. Like the veterans, the students fostered a personified relationship, by laughing, joking, and feeling understood, while not having to explain themselves to others.

Overall, Resurface's peer support dynamic proved a fundamental contributor towards the students' wellbeing and was the most prominent feature of the intervention. This study strengthens Dennis's (2003) argument that peer support groups improve people's lives and hold the capacity to reduce the use of formal mental health, medical and social services. Applied to the HE sectors, with the lack of resources and increased demand for student wellbeing services (Reavley & Jorm 2010), Resurface offers an effective addition, or alternative, to the support offered by qualified mental health clinicians. As Page et al., (2018) determined, there is no dependable evidence that peer support improves mental wellbeing, however, this study provides an evidence-base for effective advocacy interventions such as Resurface, as a form of peer support, by constructing new meanings for personal experience, and providing social support.

Fleeing a Chaotic Home: Seeking and Escaping to the Resurface 'Third Place'

The 'third place' was a term developed by Oldenburg (1989) to define places where people could meet for social interaction, most markedly in the form of conversation, to consolidate or cultivate a sense of identity, and contribute to social capital and citizenship; Billy positions:

> *Resurface is mainly a place where we all hang out, get to know each other, and make friends.*

Oldenburg (1989) suggests that a healthy third place is the cornerstone of wellbeing, yet it was clear that prior to Resurface, many of these students did not have a third place, or at the least, one that encouraged health and wellbeing, or adequately supported their mental health. Indicative of the wider group, Carl said:

> *It's one big chaotic mess where all the things that make my mental health worse come together, and not just for a day, which is scary, as there's no escape, that's it, one you're in, you're in.*

The following theme unpicks accounts such as Carl's, and portrays the social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home (i.e., student accommodation), and the workplace (i.e., academic life) which often merged, and in the case of Resurface, one that allowed the students to explore their authentic identities, and embark upon new adventures in a structured and supported community; Bryony explains:

> *It's like an escape to another world outside of Uni life, where everything is just better, in every way.*

The desire for a third place seemed more a requirement to *'escape'* from the students first and second places of home and work. This is important, because several students reported a perplexing university environment, with chaotic student accommodations, and perplexing campus settings:

> *You've got to learn to manage money, time, like be organised and on time for things, it's all new, and you feel so unprepared, like you don't learn these things at school, and then all at once, suddenly it hits you.*
>
> Linda

> *Uni is so stressful, partying, drinking, waking up early for lectures, no sleep, and you do it all again the next day, like, yer it's fun at times, but it's exhausting.*
>
> Chloe

> *When you arrive you get thrown into a flat where you meet a few people and that's it, away you go; they drink, take drugs, whatever, if it's not your thing then what, what you gonna do. I end up sitting in my room and shutting myself off from everyone.*
>
> Josh

> *Like at college, I would always choose practical things, but Uni is just like deadline after deadline, exams, tests, everything, you don't get a break.*
>
> Demi

> *Whenever I go to a lecture, I get really anxious, like I don't know where to sit, I sometimes just wait outside trying to talk myself in.*
>
> Emily

The students' description of university life, stressful, chaotic and anxiety-provoking, is unfortunately common. A recent report by the University and College Counselling Association (BACP 2019) highlighted increased levels of stress and psychological health difficulties in UK universities. Likewise, the Unite Students (2016) insight report shed light on the drop in wellbeing levels among UK undergraduates, finding two-thirds of students having reported a drop in wellbeing after going to university due to issues such as tiredness, lack of energy, and stress. Grant (2002) suggests that academic, relationship, and monetary worries are the major sources of stress. The students' depiction of university life and the daily difficulties they faced echo past research, signifying that the HE environment is a major influencer of wellbeing problems and mental health related issues in students. Certainly, for Oldenburg (1989), when your first two places of home and work compromise your wellbeing, a third place acts as an escape, and a place of safety and support. Given the feelings depicted among the students first and second places, it was no surprise that the Resurface third place felt like an escape, and a break from what many had described as a toxic university world:

> *I see it as a total escape, like there's not the same level of pressure, or stress and expectation, and it's just a chance to make friends in another world, but a break from my current world, from everything that is stressful and difficult.*
>
> Mitch

> *Like you are stepping into a new bubble, where every week you are taken away in this bubble, you're on the beach surfing, in the sun, or doing yoga, hanging out with new people. Then I go back to my bubble, it's so separate, so separate, and you feel like rejuvenated, like an injection of energy and positivity.*
>
> Tess

> *I planned my week around it and factored it in; it was that whole kind of escapism thing. It's nice, cause like with Uni it is such a bubble, whereas you get to go and forget all of this and it breaks you away from everything.*
>
> Billy

Tess describes Resurface as a '*bubble',* indicating a positive notion; likewise, Billy defined university as a '*bubble'*, representing a more negative connotation. I looked to unpick what it was about Resurface that the students found so inherently positive, the enduring images from the film *Endless Summer* is the group of surfers chasing waves around the world, or the depiction of yogi's living in nature, breathing and stretching towards wellness. Upon reflection, these scenes evoke a sense of freedom, and one that

many of the students in this study regularly recreated with their Wednesday afternoon surf and yoga sessions. On a personal level, when I am surfing with friends, on the beach at 6am, paddling out to sea, and away from the residential and urban centres of Bournemouth town or Talbot campus; for two hours, we escape and enjoy our own *Endless Summer* experience. However, for these students, Resurface appeared to mean more than a sense of freedom and adventure; it emulated a necessary respite from university, a place and space to feel free and adventurous, yet safe, supported, and isolated from university. This 'escape theme' is common in discussions of the third place, and typical of this description is the discussion of the modern coffee shop, by Wechsberg (1966:16):

> *"A coffee house is his home away from home, his haven and island of tranquillity, his reading room and gambling hall, his sounding board and grumbling hall. There, at least he is safe from nagging wife and unruly children, monotonous radios and barking dogs, tough bosses and impatient creditors".*

The coffee house, bar, or pub has conventionally been a dominant third place in former generations (Oldenburg 1989); however, the remarks and observations from this study suggests that modern society is witnessing the emergence of new 'third places', that are progressively important and attractive in society. This study suggests that Resurface, its peer support and lifestyle activities, fulfil many of the criteria of the traditional third places; Ollie said:

> *I could have a really shit Monday and Tuesday, but wake up Wednesday morning and I don't care, cause I'm like, even though I'm tired and everything could get on top of me and put me down, instead, I have this peace and quiet in the studio, or down at the beach enjoying myself, and just being a part of something a bit different and away from everything else.*

Ollie finds peace and tranquillity with his Wednesday afternoon sessions in the sea or at the studio. Oldenburg (1989) defines a third place as a setting accessible to inhabitants, perceived as their own, and providing opportunities for social interaction, or 'play', that comes from the delight in association; Ollie discovered this with Resurface. Indeed, participation in the third place does not guarantee anything, and the consequences of participation are emergent, not linear, and sequential (Oldenburg & Brissett 1982). This study, through the observations provided, contends that continuous participation in the Resurface social world does offer students' social experiences and relationships that are progressively absent in modern society, and certainly within the HE environment. This perhaps echoes the digital age, and ever-changing social cultures of today (Mayer et al., 2009).

Upon personal reflection, often when I am stressed at work, or when someone doesn't understand me in my personal relationships, I will go surfing. This is one way of exhausting unhappiness and dealing with that problem. It seemed that for these students, when they were struggling with their mental health, or finding university stressful, they desired Resurface. Often, there was a direct correlation between Resurface, work, and life in general. The findings suggest that Resurface offered students an important respite, escape, and recuperation during the challenges they confronted. Equally, it was also directed that Resurface emulated more than a 'break', but an important respite from their mental health problems, Jack highlights:

> *The struggle, the stress, the upset, everything, it is always there, then instantly, like it was never there, you get a break from the problems each Wednesday, a break from everything that is bad; this is my time, and the only time where I get this sort of pause in my life to feel free and away from it all. It's as though my mental health doesn't exist, because for that tiny segment of the week, I'm free from the problems.*

Jack suggests that the appeal of the Resurface third place was regularly found in the effect that the place had on his sense of time. As raised in chapter four and five, experiences of a 'flow state' were identified, as Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defined, those who enjoy what they are doing concentrate their attention, forget their personal problems, lose their sense of time, feel competent and in control, and have a sense of harmony with their surroundings. A flow state reflects Jack's description, feeling in control of his wellbeing for '*that tiny segment of the week'*. Feeling in control is a fundamental feature of a flow state, as time stands still while the surfer or yogi, becomes captivated in the moment. Oldenburg (1989) specified that today's society is often scheduled and structured, and we often overlook that the most pleasing and unforgettable instants of our lives, are typically not premeditated. For some students, Resurface provided those memorable moments and a chance to escape, and become a part of a different world, absent from the troubles of the day, and an outlet for stress, anxiety, pressure and tension. Certainly, the routine of a third place was important, offering students something tangible to commit to, and structure their weeks around:

> *To know that we have Wednesday afternoons blocked out for every week, something to look forward to, I can have it in my calendar, and it makes me feel safe, and that makes me happy, and that stops the chaos.*
>
> Chloe

> *It is nice to have the once-a-week thing, a schedule of something to look forward to. Erm, I really like a routine in my life, I write my timetables out, and I know that 2-4pm, I have Resurface, which feels good.*
>
> Demi

> *It is just nice to have, especially when you have a lot going on outside of Uni in your personal life, and with exams, it is just nice to have that hour which is for you.*
>
> Tess

In a student world generally described as disordered, stressful, and anxiety-provoking, it is considered that regularized routines, such as those described, can buffer the adverse impact of stress exposure on mental health (Goodwin et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020). Because routines have a pivotal role in mental health during acute stress (Hou et al., 2018), Resurface's fixed weekly schedule encouraged stability and dependability, and offered a sense of future orientation; Demi said, '*it's something to look forward to'*. This study proposes that Resurface can be assumed in terms of both seeking and escaping; in that the students are able to escape from their homes (and their home lives), and seek out adventurous and courageous experiences, structured into their weekly routines with Resurface.

Seeking and escaping might also be used to describe the role of social identity in these same contexts (Green & Jones 2005). For instance, attending Resurface, whilst serving as a third place, helped some of the students to escape from perceivably inauthentic identities, and seek out identification within a non-judgemental, surf and yoga culture, where a portion of their self-concept and diversion from stigma, derived from perceived membership to this new social group; Mitch said:

> *Now I just tell people that I am a surfer I guess, that is my identity, and really, I want that identity, for example, when I go for job interview the first thing I would say is I do yoga and surf, it makes me seem interesting, and it's the same with my friends now, they don't see me as the boring mental health freak, they see me as the cool one.*

Mitch's self-image and social role was positively impacted by his newfound identity as a Resurface member, surfer, and yogi; this inflated his own view of himself and increased his self-esteem. Certainly, for those with mental health problems, perceiving or exaggerating their flaws and weaknesses that others don't see is a common trait (Dufour 2016). This accounts for Mitch's self-perception of being '*boring'* to his friends and branded by his poor mental health. However, Mitch's social identity established in the Resurface third place improved his confidence, self-worth, and group affiliation, as

he reported feeling valued by his qualities and interests, separate from his every day. For many of the students, Resurface provided an exciting and identity-affirming set of experiences, Bryony indicates:

> *With all the books I've been reading on yoga, I actually got so into it, I found it amazing, and just took it all on, erm, and then like even the fact that when I go to Resurface, usually outside of Resurface, it's like, what can we do for fun, let's go have a drink, whereas now I realise you can have fun without drinking, like I don't need to be that person, I can be the yoga person, or the one who surfs, or even reads (laughing). This whole new person has come from it, and now I can say that I am a better person all the way, and my friends see that too.*

The honesty and realness that Bryony found in Resurface reflects the experiences of people who are cherishing their time in the sea or at the studio, as if it was the most genuine part of their lives. This indicates that this time alone is the time when they feel most themselves and valued; Chloe said:

> *Resurface is where I am me, the real me, away from the fake me I have to be around Uni friends. Once I get there, I'm away from the person I feel I have to be outside of Resurface.*

These findings suggest that when the students dress into their wetsuits or studio garments, they are changing from their everyday outfits that exist in the real world, and into another detached uniform, which reflects their surfer, yogi, or Resurface identity, and the social world attached to that identity. Individual and collective identity assumed prominence for the students in this study, as feelings about their self-image were inspired by their involvement in a new culture and a new life world. This vindicates Bourdieu's (1989) assertion that the self is fashioned in social interaction, as the students' self-understanding was challenged by a change in role and an unexpected mirror on surf and yoga culture, as a substitute for their stigmatised 'mental health' identities. Resurface helped many of the students to avert associated mental health stigmas, and reform identities they were proud to showcase to their friends, families, and themselves:

> *I feel my friends have a perception of me getting help for my mental health and Resurface has changed their perception of this. Erm, this led me to telling more and more people in my own way that I am struggling without preconceptions; like you can tell the world now, because you have this cool thing behind you to stop people judging you. Like, I have a new story attached to who I am; the adventurous one, not the one with the mental health. It's added a whole new part of who I am.*
>
> Billy

The surfing is unique, like not everybody does it, like if I said 'oh I do football', it wouldn't get the same reaction as 'oh, I'm a surfer', this uniqueness makes me feel proud, like I want people to know about Resurface, why I do it, and what it's all about, cause its cool, not just some mental health thing.

Carl

Billy and Carl's transformed individualities encouraged them to showcase their association with Resurface to others and feel confident to share Resurface's mental health connotation. Billy believed he could speak about his mental health '*without preconceptions'* as the '*cool'* nature of Resurface helped him to feel confident '*getting help'* with his mental health, and not feel stigmatised. This is important, as universities are particularly tough environments for students with mental health problems, where it is often the case that they are excluded from peers, and victims of derision. Indeed, a major barrier to receiving professional help is the stigma surrounding mental health, as it is difficult for students to evade prejudice, as they are labelled from the offset with the preconceptions of what it means, and how seeking help for support might define them (Conley 2017). While mental wellbeing has been historically misunderstood (WHO 2018), Resurface helped these students to grow confidence to speak out, and talk about their mental health, while transitioning into a therapeutic setting, without fear of prejudgment. Equally, the students' attachment to Resurface and newly fashioned identities, helped them to share their own lived experiences of mental health, which previously felt unattainable:

When you say 'mental anything' it says this person might be a weirdo; so I don't think when you say mental health people mean what they are saying, but you are instantly judged before people even ask – then the stigma is stuck with you for life, so I wouldn't really say anything until Resurface, because it's different, it's like doing mental health stuff is actually something good to be seen doing.

Jack

If I went to this and it was a mental health helping thing, my identity would slowly shift into the guy with mental health problems, like, this puts stigma on me, as when you talk to someone and say you do therapy, it slowly gets in their fucking head and subconscious, sand slowly drips in, and they think I'm ill, I have mental health, and it slowly weighs me down, so it is so good it is not like that. You know mental health doesn't last forever, and labelling a club with mental health will not help that at all.

Mitch

Like Jack and Mitch, many of the students felt that traditional forms of counselling were something to be ashamed of and suppress, and that Resurface had helped change their perception of receiving support. This is because with Resurface, it was something to be proud of; Ollie said:

> *As soon as you say student wellbeing, it's like counselling, you are labelled straight away, like being in a mental health psyche ward or something, and I think that aspect of Resurface, of being proud of this, means that people aren't ashamed to share their story, because the main purpose of it is not 'mental health', instead, it is about people growing and building up themselves.*

Resurface's successful branding as a fashionable, lifestyle activity club, helped avert stigmas and discomfiture, and encouraged students such as Ollie to make steps towards wellbeing. This was accomplished in a way that rejected the social perception, or self-perception, that Ollie was on a '*mental health psyche ward'* and characteristically '*labelled'* or defined by his mental health. This is important, as it is well-known that students find it difficult to attend support services associated with mental health, as the stigma attached can create a significant barrier, often an outcome of perceived prejudice (Bathje et al., 2011). The Association for University and College Counselling (2010) found that when diagnosed mentally ill, the associated stigma can be as disabling as the problem itself. However, Resurface had helped ease some of these students' transition into a therapeutic setting, and acted as an appealing alternative to one-to-one counselling, a topical and current concern amid the HE sectors (Conley 2017). Social media also played a role in helping several students overcome stigmas and share their association with the Resurface third place:

> *I've never talked about my mental health until I felt proud to share my photos on FB - it helped me share that it wasn't all bad, that I am still normal. Like, before Resurface, I didn't even really tell people about my mental health, but then I started sharing things on social media, and people asked questions, and I felt confident to tell them why, as it wasn't just, 'oh I'm ill'.*
>
> Josh

> *People are interested in knowing about Resurface, so I can share publicly on Facebook or Instagram what we have done and be proud of this, and then I can talk to others about it, which opens the conversation of mental health.*
>
> Demi

I show everyone all the footage and photos, and share with my friends, and my mum is on Facebook and sees what we are doing and is like, 'that is so cool', and it makes me feel good, as you then can kind of reflect on it yourself and reminisce and think, yer, I did that.

Linda

Many young people are losing touch with nature and falling into the digital trap, and the students in this study position directly in the digital-lifestyle phenomenon, known to be detrimental on mental health (Twenge et al., 2020). However, in the case of Resurface, digital media acted as a catalyst for sharing experiences publicly and helped students to open conversations of mental health, by raising awareness in a unique, fashionable, and perceivably '*cool'* way. It became clear that the student's attachment to the Resurface as a third place had altered theirs, and others' perceptions of HE mental health and wellbeing services. This meant the universities 'Student Wellbeing' department incorporated a unique therapeutic tool to refer students into, helping those that found counselling '*embarrassing'* to take control of their own wellbeing with a holistic, lifestyle activity approach. This is important, because with the rising levels of student distress and the fear of stigma attached to wellbeing services, it is not always appropriate, or possible, to offer counselling. This study proposes that many students require better support in the way of alternative health intervention, and that Resurface is well situated to provide this. Dufour (2016) discussed the multi-faced role of assessment for counselling in higher education:

"It is important to ascertain if there is anything that can be put in place to help the student practically through signposting them to other support services; as when a student is struggling, this can be a complex issue requiring several different sources of help (p.71)."

In her final interview, Chloe opened about her perceptions of the university's *Student Wellbeing* service, and its dissimilarity to the Resurface third place:

Student wellbeing is reminding yourself about your worse times and mental health, and like what worries you have, and that can make you feel defeated when those memories overtake, erm, that's why I need to make new memories, and this is what Resurface does. It is important. Like there are certain words that make me feel inferior and bad about myself, and 'mental health' is one of them, but Resurface makes me feel positive and good about myself, like if I constantly went to counselling, I would just think 'oh my god' I have a mental health problem, it is obvious really. Resurface tackles this and makes me feel normal, away from all of that and student life in general.

Chloe described Resurface as a place for future orientation, and a dwelling to escape and create new memories within, and avert the stigmas and difficulties associated with counselling and university life. With the majority, if not all British universities dealing with increasing student welfare issues, and waiting lists for campus counsellors on the rise, and a lack of counsellors and intervention substructure in place to deal with the epidemic (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2011; YouGov 2016; Thorley 2017), these findings provide an insider's view of the way HEI's might handle future student welfare integration. In doing so, this study will help prompt new methods to reduce stigma as a barrier to leisure participation, and develop innovative approaches of holistic, lifestyle, peer support intervention.

As Oldenburg (1989) ascertains, in a third place, there are no stigmas, there is no obligation; social status does not matter, and there are no prerequisites or requirements that would prevent acceptance or participation. For these students, the Resurface third place was wholesome, never snobby, or pretentious, but accepting of all types of students, from all walks of life, with varied mental health problems. Resurface emulates Oldenburg's (1989) depiction of a third place, as a piece of each individual student was routed in the social group, in a space they could be present and connect, without judgment or prejudice, and experience an authentic sense of place, and a desired *flow state*. Emily describes:

> *It's here that our problems are left on the sand, as we wash our thoughts of outside influence, and re-connect, as a group, away from external distractions.*

Resurface enabled students such as Emily a third place, a place of solitude, away from workplaces, or student halls of residence, and absent from the bright lights and alcohol fuelled student nightlives, and into a supportive, health-promoting community. The contention in this study is not that third places are in decline, but rather it is the traditional third places, such as pubs and clubs, that are in decline, and being challenged by new third places like Resurface. Carl said:

> *This is a place where I can just be me, and not act up to who I'm supposed to be in Uni, drinking and going out and all that, which just makes things worse.*

Carl's description recalls a study by Niel and Thing (2019), who discussed conflict for secondary school students negotiating youth culture and academic identities. They described problems for young people merging sports culture with youth culture, in that living a healthy and physically active life, compromised the norms of youth culture, which involved a social arena of parties and alcohol. Niels and Thing (2019) suggest that students are in a constant process of negotiation, where they struggle to

fit into both contexts. These same conclusions can be drawn from the findings in this study: in that several students found themselves negotiating academic identities, fitting in with the social norms of student life, while exploring healthier Resurface identities, serving as a third place of physical activity. For these students, they are regularly in that Resurface third place, and one that creates a sense of both escape, and freedom.

Though the concept of the third place is one that has received little consideration within the mental health intervention literature, and there is little empirical evidence either to support or refute the concept, these findings demonstrate that Resurface is a likely third place, and argues that students often share a socially learned personality structure, or habitus (Bourdieu 1984), bonded by their mental health problems and peer support. Linked to this idea of habitus, peer support, and the concept of the third place (Oldenburg 1989), the findings have illustrated how students find Resurface to be socially meaningful and important environment for progressing mental health and wellbeing: during her final interview, Elisa commented:

> *I could pin 100% of my wellbeing over this year improving contributed to this. Just talking about it makes me feel good, I'm smiling now; it's a constant reminder of what I can achieve. I know this might not always be here for me as I graduate next year and move back home, but now I know what doing something like this can do for my life, it's inspired me to take hold of my life and make it a great one; join more clubs, be outdoors, meet people, exercise, just live. I now know how important it is to have a thing for me, a group of people and support, away from my day to day, and separate from the stress of everything else.*

Elisa's Resurface experience motivates her to continue her journey into similar third places once she graduates. The very notion of a peer-supported third place, an escape, a sense of freedom, and a place to progress wellbeing with other likeminded individuals, was greatly desired. Seemingly, Resurface's legacy for these students, lives in their participation in similar third places in the future, or indeed their continuation of Resurface. These findings indicate the necessity of third places themselves, for students struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of a group of students referred by a university in the South of England into Resurface: a surf and yoga intervention aimed at students with poor mental health and wellbeing. A qualitative, inductive approach has helped to grasp the subjective nature of the experience and present a holistic view of the process. The findings obtained from my ethnographic approach will offer a fresh perspective on student wellbeing, peer support, and HE wellbeing intervention, in a way that will contribute to filling some of the gaps in knowledge around combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy. This conclusion will summarise major research findings, show what I have learnt from my research, and state the implications for the Resurface student wellbeing intervention and participation. I will then indicate possible future academic research and professional pathways uncovered by the findings, and then end the thesis with my reflections on the research process and the outcome for me, the researcher.

This study evidenced that ethnography as a methodology provides a rich understanding of the culture of surf and yoga therapeutic interventions and student culture. The findings from this study exemplify that below the surface, the lived experiences have proved to be multifaceted. The findings illustrate a complex and diverse range of experiences and reasons for engaging with Resurface. In the context of lifestyle activity participation, this study has recognised that students, as active participants in surfing and yoga, are attached to the social world they inhabit, and that the activities provide an identity affirming experience. The results offer evidence that perceivably, surfing, and yoga provide contrasting, yet synergising benefits to student participants who are experiencing mental health difficulties, irrespective of ability, or level of performance. Prior to this study, existing research had not offered any evidence regarding the nature of the experiences of student participation in surf and yoga, peer support intervention, or the extent of the identification with the act of participating in an intervention such as Resurface.

In summary, the findings from this ethnographic study have led to a deeper understanding of the social world of this therapeutic intervention, and how participation in this social world leads to positive wellbeing outcomes for students with poor mental health. This study has been able to make an original contribution to existing knowledge in five key areas:

- It provides new knowledge of proactive, preventative wellbeing intervention, and adds to the knowledge of wellbeing by helping better understand the role of targeted social interaction through physical, lifestyle activity. This is vital, as there is a lack of qualitative research exploring wellbeing interventions of any kind among the HE sectors, and past intervention models are typically delivered reactively, at a time of mental health crisis.

- It addresses a gap in previous literature in exploring the impacts of surfing and yoga combined as part of a cohesive therapeutic intervention and increases understanding regarding combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy, and the therapeutic and cultural relationship between surfing and yoga.

- By following the same sample of students over extended durations, this study facilitates an understanding of the dynamics of a lifestyle activity intervention, and by tracking participant's changes over time, gains new knowledge of the longer-term perceived impacts.

- The perceived impact of surfing and yoga wellbeing intervention is explored from an alternate angle that had not been investigated, that of students in higher education. The need to better understand these distinct experiences for students is because their mental health experiences are distinctly dissimilar to that of wider society. Equally, there is a lack of HE mental health resource, and growing demand on HE mental health services for wellbeing intervention such as Resurface.

- It provides new knowledge of the social experience in a third place of peer support, and how this influences the outcomes on the student participants' wellbeing. Past research has been inconclusive in answering whether peer support is an effective wellbeing tool when implemented as part of activity intervention of this kind, and there is a lack of guidelines on how such a provision should be delivered, which this study has filled.

The qualitative approach facilitates exploration of the emotional responses to the many challenging situations that the students found themselves in, offering a narrative that is often missing from empirical studies of mental health intervention. As an insider having explored the Resurface world, the findings deviate from existing research on wellbeing intervention experiences and demonstrate the unique nature of combined, surf and yoga intervention, and how it differs from other interventions in terms of experiences, and why these activities synergise. The key themes of this study, whilst having associations and similarities with other HE activity interventions, are distinct to student peer support intervention,

surfing, and yoga, and differ from the more generic intervention frameworks which have been advocated by previous researchers around HE wellbeing intervention.

A Framework for Understanding the Student Resurface Experiences

The interpretive philosophy informs my contribution of a closing view of an integrally subjectively lived experience. I note Madison's (2008) comment that '*these experiences are more intricate than we could ever hope to capture in abstract models*.' (p. 9). I too believe that it is difficult to fully capture the characteristic nature of the Resurface journey, and I therefore could not offer a framework that is pertinent to all participants, in all situations. Based on these findings, I purely offer an articulation of the subjective experiences of Resurface, experienced diversely by students contingent on numerous factors, and whose outcome is perceived to be both positive, yet inexact. The principal findings are revealed by this study's documenting of five key areas, and are an early link in a concatenation which requires further investigation:

- The early experiences of the Resurface journey, involving the motivations and apprehensions concerning these experiences, such as the allure of surfing and yoga and the students hope for a fresh start; conversely, the fear of the unknown inhibiting engagement and progression, such as social anxiety, social physique anxiety, and structural constraints.

- The experiences of awe immersed in a coastal setting, and the embodied experience of blue space as a natural therapeutic environment. Further, a deeper understanding of surfing's capability to increase resilience, self-esteem, mood, and self-confidence, as well the new perspectives formed of the student's social and emotional challenges. This includes surfing's innate facilitation of timelessness, and the importance of mindfulness, and respite from distress.

- Yoga's influence on the students' emotions and feelings, as they attempted to self-regulate their wondering minds, while confronting interpersonal feelings and memories; this highlighting the importance of slowing down and relaxing, and dominant outcomes of reduced stress and anxiety. This includes the experiences of asana (postures) and diverse movements, with quick and arduous poses, through to restorative, gentle movements, encouraging a flow state, flexibility, and a meditation-in-motion.

- The importance of feeling understood and accepted emulating peer support, through social connectedness and togetherness, shifting from exclusion to inclusion, and encouraging a feeling of safety, a non-judgmental culture, deeper conversations, and camaraderie. This surfacing the difficulties faced as students confronting similar social, emotional, and psychological challenges, and the outcomes of listening to other experiences, stories, and coping strategies, and hearing dependable, and trustworthy information sources.

- A detailed understanding of Resurface as a third place, evolving the social surroundings separate from the students two usual social environments which often merged, and in the case of Resurface, one that allowed the students to explore their identities and embark upon new adventures in a structured and supported community. This includes the exploration of the student's desire to escape from their first and second 'places' and seek respite from an often-toxic university world, while delving deeper into self-image, self-esteem and social roles as Resurface members, surfers, and yogis.

By documenting these five-key areas, this study permits me to present the ensuing figure as a graphic illustration of how I made sense of the students' journey:

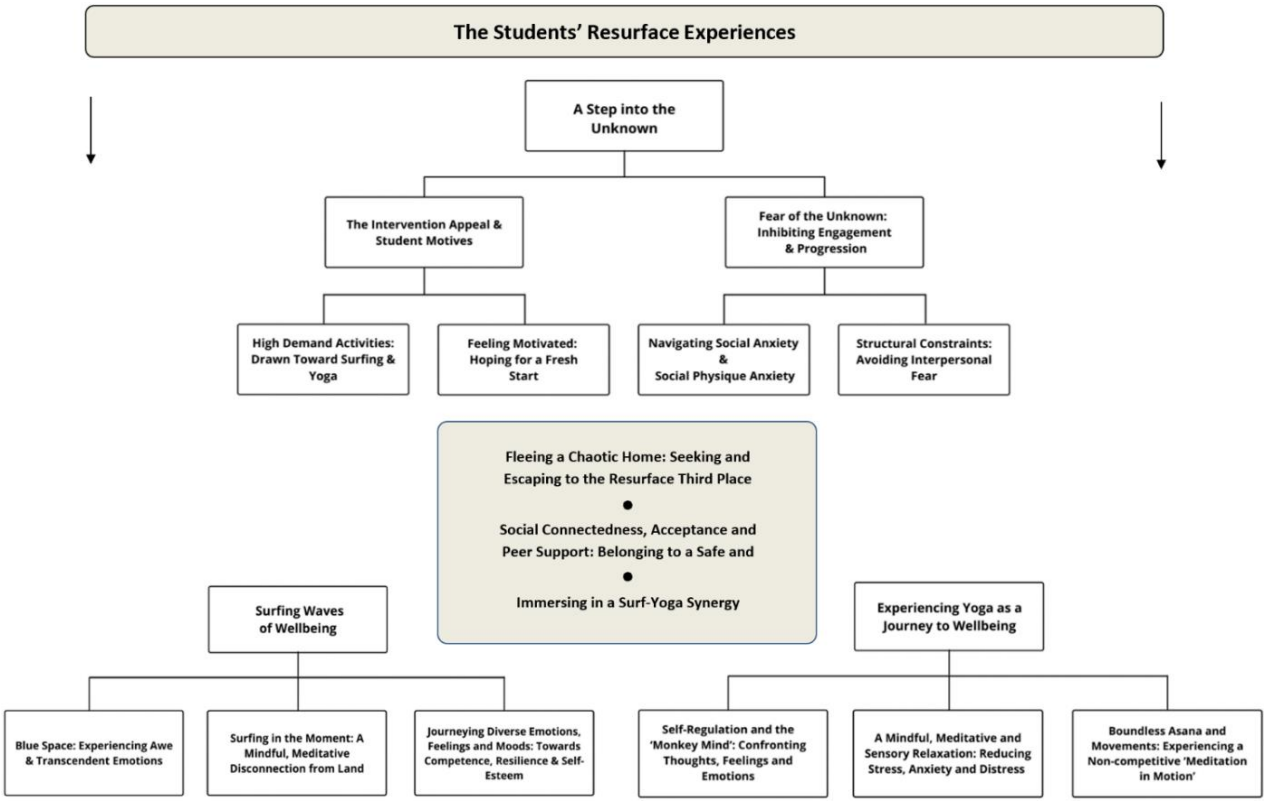

Figure 10: A Framework for Understanding the Students' Resurface Experiences

Figure 10 above presents a graphic illustration of how I made sense of the students lived experiences of Resurface. There are four central components to the diagram, which reflect an understanding of these experiences. The first theme to the top of the framework denotes the primarily early experiences of the Resurface journey and is entitled 'A Step into the Unknown', highlighting the beginning of the intervention, from referral into the early weeks. While these experiences were common at the beginning, they are not separable from the complete intervention, and often presented throughout the study. Likewise, the following themes interweave, and reflect the interchanging activities, students' academic journeys, and their personal progression. The central section of the diagram depicts the components which represent the core experiences defining Resurface, emanating from the surfing and yoga experiences: the cohesive and interconnected contributory themes. These often-represented outcomes which most students had described as crucial to their sense of subjective wellbeing and enjoyment of Resurface.

The third and the fourth sections isolate the stand-alone components of surfing and yoga amid the wider intervention experience, independently separating the innate experience of each activity. This helps underpin the perceived wellbeing value of the entire intervention, as well as illuminate the significance of the individual activities, surfing, and yoga, which are inseparable in real-life. These themes are not exclusive and have not evolved in isolation but interweave and link on several levels within the social world of the student participants. By addressing the entire Resurface experience, I have been able to analyse familiar conceptualizations of the process of change and experiences that occurs during and throughout an entire intervention referral onto Resurface. My understanding stands some resemblances with, and marks some departures from, several of the models found in the associated literature; discussed in the ensuing themes.

A Step into the Unknown

The themes from the initial stage of the Resurface journey (excitement, hope, apprehension and fear) are well recognised as intervening barriers in the literature on HE mental health integration (Wit et al., 2010; Cole 2010; Hinton et al., 2015; Firth 2016b; Vancampfort 2017. In the current study, participant experiences identified the initial stage of the intervention to be a time of vulnerability and anxiety, with stress was at its most intense at the beginning. This was the time when the symptoms commonly attributed to the state of fear were experienced: social anxiety, social physique anxiety, structural constraints, panic, apprehension, nervousness, and worry characterised the first stage of the journey.

This suggests a link between the integration into a new intervention environment and social, psychological and emotional disturbance that is observed by many researchers, to name a few, Mack et al., (2007), Ruscio et al., (2008), Glowacki (2017) and Firth (2016b); most commonly, the early stage of referral was a time of distress. These findings agree with Amaddeo et al., (2001), who explain accessibility to be the foundation of smooth entrance into social group interventions for those facing mental health difficulties, and Ngamini et al., (2012), who argue that addressing such obstacles early on increases demand and prevents absenteeism. This study also mirrors the work of Williamson et al., (2017), suggesting that structural constraints are rarely the real reasons for nonparticipation, and reflects findings by Moscrop et al., (2012), that non-attendance strongly associates with presentation of mental health problems, such as the social anxiety and social physique anxiety.

Fear, apprehension, and worry were not a widespread occurrence among the group: the prevalence and intensity of mental health difficulties varied among students as a function of a host of factors, including motivation, personality, previous experiences, and severity of poor mental health. Some of the students' early experiences also illustrate the appealing, achievable, and diverse nature of surfing and yoga, which drew upon intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, characterised by self-determination and autonomy. Surfing and yoga were attractive activities for students with poor mental health, many describing feeling enticed at the prospect of being in the ocean and on the beach, or de-stressing during yoga. This non-competitive environment proved imperative: supporting Gilbert et al., (2009), it is common to dread the sense of inferiority that comes with competition. Resurface helped ease referral and engagement as a result of these inherently non-competitive activities. This study contends that Resurface acts as a catalyst to sport and leisure participation, for students who without, would not have likely participated otherwise due to poor mental health, a likelihood well documented (Buckworth 2002; Sund et al., 2004; Martinsen 1989).

Whilst this study highlights the early experiences as a time of upheaval, which carried the power to influence the referral process, the route to regaining a sense of comfort within the group was supported by early social interaction and diverse motivations, such as the students' hope and willingness to improve their wellbeing. Davidson et al., (2006) states that peer support groups are characterised by hope, which became clear in the current study from the offset, also supporting Agius (2017), in reiterating that hope underpins motivation and attendance, an important facet to health recovery. This study also supports Slade's (2010) notion that the prospect of newness can be perceived as an opportunity to make a positive change, and the work of Anthony (1990), who explains that the process of mental health recovery often involves a central turning point of new meaning and purpose, future orientation, and hope. While it is well known several issues create barriers to physical activity for

students experiencing mental health problems (e.g., Wit et al., 2010; Vancampfort 2017; McCartan et al., 2020), the early experiences were often a time of confronting fears and anxieties, and overcoming them, with hope at the prospect of wellness, friendships, and personal growth.

Surfing Waves of Wellbeing

This research adds to the emerging literature on nature-based physical activity (e.g., Coon et al., 2011; Mitchell 2013; Pretty et al., 2005) by showing how increased subjective wellbeing is grounded in the students' embodied lived experiences of blue space. For instance, this study observes an association between what Shiota et al., (2007) termed 'awe experience', and transcendent emotions, as an embodied experience of blue space during surfing. The students altered perspectives of their own mental health, increased eudemonic wellbeing, sense of adventure, escapism, vitality, and decrease in stress, are findings supported by most studies of ST (e.g., White et al., 2010; Armitano et al., 2015; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Clapham et al., 2014; Godfrey et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017). In the current study, the ocean encompassed an inherent lure, reflecting the notion of the 'blue gym' (Depledge & Bird 2009), and its ability to encourage greater life satisfaction and wellbeing.

This was reflective of Bodei (2008), concluding that activity in blue space encourages positive, sublime emotions, together with feelings of awe in nature, which was perceived as powerful, vast, and complex. For several students, awe stimulated self-realization, as Piff et al., (2015) explain, an important facet of eudemonic wellbeing. Findings supported the ISTO's (2019) definition of surfing intervention balancing on the therapeutic elements of the ocean. However, this was not a generalisable process; there was not only fluctuation in surfing experiences across the student group but also in the individual's subjective experiences. For instance, not all students experienced the coastal environment in the same way, some experiencing fear and anxiety, which overshadowed a positive experience. Such variability is supported by those researchers who view the surfing process as a mutable and subjective process (e.g., Hinds & Sparks 2008, 2011; Godfrey et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2017).

This is not to propose that the students did not nurture and progress their wellbeing through their surfing experiences, rather, surfing and the respite it fashioned, appeared to satisfy a more immediate need for subjective wellbeing. Surfing's natural setting promoted a mindful and meditative escape, transporting students away from their mental health problems and distorting time. This was reflective of Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) depiction of a flow state, an often-documented surfing phenomenon (e.g., Seligman 2000; Snelling 2015; Cavanaugh & Rademacher 2014; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015). Surfing provided a place of peace, or '*at-homeness'* (Heidegger 1962). Findings

supported ST as a mode of mindfulness and meditation (Edenfield & Saeed 2012; Kabat-Zinn 2003) and showed compelling evidence for mindfulness as an effective therapy for poor mental health (Carsley et al., 2018; AMRA 2018; Johnson et al., 2016). Likewise, the current study reiterates work by Caddick (2015), illuminating surfing's facilitation of respite from distress. This notion of respite is an important addition to this field of research and indicates that nature-based physical activities such as surfing could have a role to play in improving student's wellbeing, even if it is only for a certain temporal period each week. Specifically, the students' distress largely associated with the land, and the ocean acted as a vortex, helping them to reconnect their minds, similar to Nichol's (2000) account of a *blue mind*. However, this *blue mind* experience was limited by grey skies and the indignity of wriggling into a damp wetsuit on a rain-swept beach. Nevertheless, the findings at large, illuminate Dahlberg et al's (2009) depiction of wellbeing as the intertwining of peace and movement, at metaphorical, existential, and literal levels.

By surfing and connecting with the ocean, this study showed that the impact on a students' feelings and emotions went beyond direct hedonic value in the moment (Pittsinger et al., 2017; Aherne et al., 2011) yet inspired a heightened sense of vivacity which replenished their exhausted cognitive attention and overall mood. Outcomes displayed exercise as a means to enhanced affective, moods, and emotional states (Liao et al., 1975; Voss 2013), and subjective experiences of moods as direct influences of mental health (Yeung 1996). In line with research by Brewer et al., (2013), data showed surfing's mood-enhancing capacity as a beneficial treatment for anxiety, and alleviator of depression. This resonates with Dfarhud et al., (2014), Diehm and Armatas (2004) and Delaney and Madigan (2009), who all showcase surfing and the brain's response to oxytocin, endorphins, serotonin, and the link with feelings of euphoria, and reduced symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression. This also mirrors the work of Belujon and Grace (2017), who highlight dopamine's ability to promote a sense of wellbeing which counters the distress experienced caused by various forms of mental health problems, and Moriarity and Gallagher (2001), who found that a prescription of fear can be soothing to the human psyche, acting as a natural high (Bleakley 2016). Likewise, this study offers much evidence for the important link between camaraderie, social connectedness, and reduced fear and anxiety (Cunningham et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2018).

This study's findings offer a view of the mastery climate of surfing and the students' journey towards competence, which subsequently led to increased self-esteem, self-concept, and self-worth, supporting several ST conclusions (e.g., Caddick 2015; Snelling 2015; Godfrey et al., 2015; Lopes et al., 2018; Morgan 2010; Stuhl & Porter's 2015). The students' increased self-esteem, self-concept and self-worth, often paralleled fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression, following prominent ST conclusions (e.g.,

Orth et al., 2012 Henriksen et al., 2017; Manning 2007; Connolly 1989). These researchers found that ST participants are more likely to have higher wellbeing and better social relations. It became clear that surfing developed the students coping mechanisms and resilience, as they learnt to adjust to challenging environment; this study offers much evidence for the important link observed by Silva-Villanueva (2019) between resilience and mental health, which acts as a defence mechanism helping those with mental health problems cope in the face of adversity, along with several studies (e.g. Hartley-Brewer 2001; McPherson et al., 2013; Sandester & Kennair 2011) highlighting resilience as a tool for reducing anxiety and increasing self-esteem.

Experiencing Yoga as a Journey to Wellbeing

The current study offers evidence for the links between mixed emotions and feelings during yoga and self-regulatory behaviours (Brown & Gerbarg 2005; Sengupta 2012 and Saoji et al., 2019). This reflects the journey endured by the students, having confronted interpersonal feelings and memories resulting from their mental health problems, and subsequent self-regulatory skills to manage these. During the early months, this challenging mind wandering experience withheld some of the student's potential wellbeing outcomes. Previous research has also shown that yoga can be a problematic activity for those with mental health problems (Brown & Gebard 2005; McCall 2007), pointing to a tendency in yoga towards experiences of persistent evaluative thoughts, emotions, or feelings. Such cognition is often described as the '*monkey mind'* (Vago & Zeidan 2016), which raised an applicable metaphor for some of the students' propensity for a restless mind, skipping from one thought or feeling to another. This raises a problematic issue regarding yoga participation and mental health, where matters such as self-judgment and over-thinking were not always dealt with effectively.

The findings during the first term of Resurface portray yoga as a potentially damaging activity for students with poor mental health, principally in the short-term. This study showed yoga as a subjective, malleable experience, reflecting the individualisms of participants (Khalsa 2004), and mirrored the work of Smallwood et al., (2007, 2008) connecting self-generated thought to negative mood states. In line with previous literature, it was also discovered that self-generated thoughts connected with unhappiness (Killingsworth 2010), anxiety (Peterson et al., 2005; Simpson et al., 2001), and depression (Smith & Alloy 2009; Farb et al., 2007). It became clear that there was a distinct contrast between students who'd let their thoughts and emotions take precedence from the beginning, with those who did not: those able to control their wondering minds early on, sooner reported the positive outcomes of yoga. For instance, the data observed a link between stillness of the mind, and freedom from damaging types of emotion. This was reflective of Fuente et al., (2018), showing that mind wandering, and

mindfulness are opposing mental states, with conflicting effects on mental health. Likewise, this study identified the direct association between mindfulness and positive mental health (Hofman 2010), and the link between mindfulness, non-judgmental thinking, and reduced stress and anxiety (Phaedono 2011).

Mirroring previous literature (Schwartz et al., 2000; McCarthy et al., 2006), the students' early stress, anxiety, social implications, and 'monkey minds', were typical of students with poor mental health. However, hailed a positive development, the changes in self that students witnessed were simultaneously an outcome of yoga: the link between slowing down and relaxing during yoga, with reduced stress and anxiety, echoes prominent YT findings (e.g., Khalsa 2004; Bodhi 2011; Thirthalli et al., 2013). For instance, as the students' yoga aptitude improved, many discovered an antidote for mind wandering. Supportive techniques included body scan meditations, controlled breathing exercises, sensory stimulants, self-awareness, and the physicality of the practises, which fortified yoga's renowned calming and mindful environment (Khalsa 2004; Netz & Lidor 2003; Smith et al., 2007; Berger & Owen 2016). This points towards the long-term implication of yoga, such as mental focus, accomplishment, and respite from negative thoughts (Lavey et al., 2005), and reiterates yoga's self-regulatory mechanisms for psychological wellbeing (Sauer-Zavala et al., 2012; Compare et al., 2014). However, echoing the work of Desikachar et al., (2005) and Gross (2007), the culpability of yoga's success strongly lied with the teacher's individual competency. Similar to what Duan-Porter et al., (2016) discovered, this study found that while yoga helped rationalise anxiety by supporting the recognition of thoughts and feelings that have led to anxiety, successive outcomes involved specific teaching styles, instructions, sustained practise, and indeed willing participants.

The principal components showing the anxiety-releasing, stress-reducing outcomes of yoga were controlled breathing exercises, sensory stimulants, and the physicality of the practises. The senses stimulated by the yogic setting impacted the students' feelings of peace, mindfulness, and relaxation. The current study echoed a correlation between progressive wellbeing and the studio environment that has been well-documented (e.g., Blood & Zatorre 2001; Thirthalli et al., 2013; Ray et al., 2001). It found that controlled breath regulation, termed Pranayama (Sengupta 2012), including prominent techniques of three-part breath, ujjayi breath, bellows breath and alternate nostril breathing, helped reduce students' anxiety and stress, release frustration, and encourage relaxation. This supports evidence by Thirthalli et al., (2013) showing controlled breathing's influence on the autonomic nervous system and its capability to encourage a state of relaxation, and its aptitude as an effective mediator of stress and anxiety (Brown & Gerbarg 2005). Equally, data supports the notion that the practise of Body

Scan Meditation (BSM) can be a valuable and effective meditation to help a person return to and maintain a relaxed state during tension and distress (Gibson 2019).

Previous research has found yoga to bring steadiness and lightness to the body, lower muscle tension, restore posture, and encourage a mind-body connection (Kambalekar 1969; Balaji et al., 2012; Sainsbury & Gibson 1954; Vallath 2010). Likewise, this study offers a view of an individuals' bodily feelings during yoga, and the link between progressive wellbeing. It agrees with Dolan and White (2007), that subjective wellbeing and physical health parallel. The current study observes an association between physicality in yoga, and Csikszentmihalyi's (2014*)* description of a *flow state*, as the student's attention was often centred in the present. Conversely, given the physicality of yoga, with boundless movements and challenging postures, some students were drawn towards feelings of self-doubt and failure, disrupting potential *flow state* experiences; equally, others found yoga's physicality untroublesome. This study contents that each individuals' capabilities impacted their own subjective experiences. It found that the cohesive characteristic of yoga and participants individualities obstructed the efforts made to determine measurable, statistical, and reproducible outcomes of health. Despite this, undisputedly, as the students' fitness, familiarity, and flexibility developed, gratification followed, often resulting in increased subjective wellbeing, and respite from distress.

Social Connectedness, Acceptance, Peer Support: Belonging to a Safe and Non-Judgemental Tribe

This study offers a view of the students' feelings of *outsiderness*, a common trait for those with poor mental health, as Mushtaq et al., (2014) reports, repeatedly feeling rejected for being different or excluded, lonely, and isolated. It showed that feeling like an outsider negatively affects mental health levels and often results in social group evasion; conversely, that Resurface's appeal, and the subsequent sense of belonging which emerged, encourages intervention engagement, and reduces the impacts of non-attendance. Findings supported the emotional importance of belonging, reiterating a theme that runs through much of psychological literature (e.g., Jennifer et al., 2021; Over 2016; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020), and the position of solidarity having become an established member of the Resurface group, and sense of value, confidence, and self-worth which follows. MacDonald (2009) describes belonging to a group as an essential factor in survival, and the power of the tribe is well documented (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1995; Buss 2009; Gere & MacDonald 2009). This was reflective of the link between Resurface and the *tribe*, and the work of Buote et al., (2007), outlining the significance of a cohesive, socially satisfying group for students, and also mirrors the work of Over (2016), who contends that those who are accepted members of a group tend to feel happier and more satisfied with their lives.

This study offers evidence for the important link observed by Kenrick et al., (2010), that people are defined not only by their behaviours, preferences, and interests, but also by their relationships, social roles, and group affiliations; in other words, the self is not just a 'me', but also a 'we' (i.e., their social identity). Resurface offered a place to build self-esteem and self-worth, by feeling valued, connected, and a part of a supportive and safe community. A sense of belonging and acceptance was not just an index of individual personal value, but also indicated acceptance to the group, which supports Baumeister and Leary (1995), that self-esteem is not just high self-regard, but the self-approbation that we feel when included in groups. This study illuminates the positive influence of peer support, and the importance of an accepting, supportive community for students to feel comfortable, safe, and integrated. Agreeing with Davidson et al., (2006), it is true that peer support is based on the belief that people who have faced, endured, and overcome adversity can offer support, encouragement, hope and mentorship to others facing similar situations. Likewise, that peer support can encourage individuals to share stories, including coping strategies and personal experiences, in a meaningful and impactful way (Davidson et al., 2006). This study contends that this is much easier between peers than it is between a counsellor, reflective of findings by Mead et al., (2001), that people habitually find connection with others that feel like them, and that traditional therapeutic relationships are different from peer relationships.

In the current study, participant findings identified the notion of '*Black Humor'* (Caddick 2015), described by Hockey (1986) as a way of making light of struggles. The students fostered a personified relationship, by laughing, joking, and feeling understood, while not having to explain themselves to others. They embodied a deeper connection, similar to what Shotter (1993) termed as knowing of the third kind. Previous research has also described these experiences as the commonalities of feeling and meaning in how people relate as a sort of instinctual knowledge from within (Burkitt 1999). This study strengthens Dennis's (2003) argument that peer support groups improve people's lives and hold the capacity to reduce the use of formal mental health and social services. Applied to the HE sectors, with the lack of resources and increased demand for student wellbeing services (Reavley & Jorm 2010), Resurface offers an effective addition or alternative to the support offered by qualified mental health clinicians. This study mirrors the work of Page et al., (2018), in that, while there is no dependable evidence that peer support improves mental wellbeing, the current study provides an evidence-base for effective advocacy interventions such as Resurface as a form of peer support, by constructing new meanings for personal experience and social support.

Fleeing a Chaotic Home: Seeking and Escaping to the Resurface Third Place

The constitution of the Resurface journey (seeking and escaping) is well recognised in the literature on the 'third place' (Wechsberg 1966) a term developed by Oldenburg (1989). Findings identified that many students lacked a third place, or at the least, one that encouraged wellbeing and adequately supported their mental health. It found that escaping their two usual social environments of home (i.e., student accommodation), and the workplace (i.e., academic life), often described as perplexing, toxic, and chaotic, allowed them to explore new identities, and embark upon new adventures in a structured and supported community. In line with the University and College Counselling Association (BACP 2019) report, the current study shows that university is a sometimes-damaging environment for students with poor mental health, and further that the Resurface third place counterbalances the adverse impacts of this setting. It is true that Resurface evokes a sense of freedom, and one that many participants recreated with their Wednesday afternoon surf and yoga sessions: it emulates a necessary respite from university, and a place and a space to feel free and adventurous, yet safe and isolated from university. Data identified Resurface as more than a 'break', but a necessary respite from mental health problems, an important component of progressive wellbeing (Hutcheon et al., 2011; Caddick 2025; YouGov 2016).

The contention of this study is that the conventional bar or club, which have long been dominant third places (Oldenburg 1989), is witnessing the emergence of new third places that are progressively important and attractive within society. This study suggests that Resurface fulfils many of the criteria of the traditional third places, and strengthens Oldenburg and Brissett's (1982) notion that participation in the third place does not guarantee anything, and the consequences of participation are emergent, not linear, and sequential. Equally, this study contends that continuous participation in the Resurface social world offers social experiences and relationships that are progressively absent in modern society and in particular, higher education, and most predominantly, for students with mental health problems. Findings showed that the routine established in a third place is imperative, offering students a tangible commitment to structure their weeks around. This was reflective of Goodwin et al., (2020) and Hou et al., (2020), who found that regularized routines buffer the adverse impact of stress exposure. Resurface's fixed weekly schedule encouraged a sense of stability and dependability and offered students a sense of future orientation, a finding supported by Mayoh and Jones (2015), who recognised it as an important feature of wellbeing experiences.

For Green and Jones (2005), the theme of seeking and escaping might also be used to describe the role of social identity in these same contexts. This study contends that Resurface, whilst serving as a third

place, helped several students to escape enduring identities and mental health stigmas attached to their individualities, and seek out identification in a surf and yoga culture. This study observes an association found by Hamilton et al., (2016) and Thornicroft et al., (2010), between people with lived experience of a mental health problems and feelings of devalue, dismission, and dehumanization, or exaggeration of flaws and weaknesses (Dufour 2016). Conversely, that Resurface helps students to avoid embarrassment or prejudice associated with mental health difficulties, and that the social identity established in the Resurface third place can improve students' confidence, self-worth, and group affiliation. Equally, findings showed that digital media acts as a catalyst for sharing experiences publicly and opening conversations of mental health, raising awareness on a digital platform. It was suggested that when the students dress into their wetsuits or studio garments, they are changing from their everyday outfits that exist in the real world, and into another detached uniform, which reflects their surfer, yogi, or Resurface identity, and the Resurface social world attached to that identity. This vindicates Bourdieu (1989) assertion that the self is fashioned in social interaction, as the students' self-understanding can be challenged by a change in role and an unexpected mirror on surf and yoga culture, as a substitute for their often stigmatised 'mental health' identities.

Mirroring the work of Oldenburg (1989), in the Resurface third place there are no stigmas, there is no obligation; social status does not matter, there are no prerequisites or requirements that would prevent acceptance or participation. For the students in this study, their third place was wholesome, never pretentious, but accepting of all types of people, from all walks of life, and with varied mental health problems. Resurface emulates Oldenburg's (1989) depiction of a third place, as each individual was routed in the social group, in a space they could be present and connect, without judgment or prejudice, and experience an authentic sense of place. Though the concept of the third place is one that has received little consideration within the sport and leisure studies literature, and there is little empirical evidence either to support or refute the concept, these findings demonstrate that Resurface is a likely third place, and argues that students often share a socially learned personality structure, or habitus (Bourdieu 1984), bonded by their mental health problems and peer support.

Immersing in a Surf-Yoga Synergy

Much has been written about the modern culture among surfers and yogis' living in coastal locations, a lifestyle which emerged in the late 60's 'soul surfing' movement, yet no research has been conducted exploring this synergy, or with a focus on surfing and yoga for mental health, which is seeing an emergence. This left a gap in understanding combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy and the therapeutic relationship between surfing and yoga unclear. The findings from this study emulate historic

cultural links, those found to hold a significant synergy and positive experiences (Muggleton 1998; Kidman 2008; Wheaton 2013). Data showed that Resurface enriches this historic, cultural relationship, and that this is a dominant factor of the student's identity affirming experiences, and the interventions overall success. Most prominently, numerous student's self-image and social role was positively impacted by their newfound identities as a Resurface members, synergising as surfers, and yogis, shown to be considered fashionable identities. The student's social identities attached to surfing and yoga, depicted as a trendy lifestyle, improved their confidence, self-worth, and group affiliation, valued by their qualities and interests. This provided an exciting and identity-affirming set of experiences and encouraged a sense of belonging.

This study finds that the physical parallels of surfing and yoga are inherently complementary, such as the flexibility, stamina, hip and core stability, strength, balance and breathing, that derives with each. This is important, as Resurface nourished these synergised experiences, helping many students to translate the physical conditioning developed in the studio, into the ocean, and vice versa. For example, through yoga, the students felt better in their bodies, which translated to how they felt when surfing. They had the opportunity to build surfing foundations and impart many valuable lessons learnt on the mat, in the ocean. Many described feeling stronger, more stable, flexible, and aware of their bodies, outcomes which are necessary in surfing, and helpful in the learning process to pop-up, catch a wave, and negotiate the challenging aquatic environment. Additionally, a focus in yoga was conscious, controlled breathing, which helped a number of students in inhospitable surf conditions, enduring intense aerobic activity.

Mental strength was also a prominent cohesive outcome. Through yoga, the students were able to open their minds, which was important in the ocean, as a failure to recognize their surroundings increased fear and reduced learning opportunities. For instance, self-awareness was crucial, so that they understood their abilities, and yoga increased self-awareness, encouraging students to recognise, harness, and channel their minds. Correspondingly, mental focus in surfing was deemed valuable, as it involved a steep learning curve, a phase which the learning process of yoga paralleled. Yoga taught the students to let go and vice versa in surfing, allowing things to 'just be'. This was important when confronting fears, particularly those the students were unable to control, these included surfing stormy conditions, or self-regulating undesirable thoughts and feelings in the studio. Just like yoga, this study found that mindfulness and meditation is a common activity that comes hand in hand with surfing. Both activities encouraged Csíkszentmihályi's (1990) notion of a flow state, present moment centeredness, mindful-mediation, mental focus, patience, and a mind-body connection. These outcomes resulted in reduced stress and anxiety and increased subjective wellbeing. In surfing, the students had to truly let

themselves go, and the ocean was the perfect place to put this skill to practice. The uncontrollable environment helped them learn to accept and navigate uncontrollable thoughts and calm their often-chaotic minds.

This mental and physical surf-yoga synergy enhanced the overall Resurface experience, and prompted a well-versed, cohesive programme, and richer involvement, which increased early intervention interest and uptake, promoted holistic wellbeing, and permitted greater diversity. Findings showed that by combining surfing and yoga, Resurface offers synergising year-round intervention, compensating the adverse impacts of challenging weather, which often halts the capacity for long-term ST. Further, that yoga provides an alternate seasonal (i.e., autumn-spring) activity, which simulates and synergises several core components of surfing, allowing the most momentous experiences occur, that of a year-round third place of peer support. This is important, as HE wellbeing interventions and likewise, ST interventions, often lack longevity, however, by bringing together surfing with yoga, Resurface removes confinement to sparce weeks, and increases inclusivity, variety, and intervention attendance.

With research displaying participation levels in leisure activity lower for those with poor mental health (DoH 2016), and leisure activity demonstrated as an essential component for wellbeing (Milena et al., 2000; Penedo & Dahn 2005; Iwasaki et al., 2014), Resurface builds a bridge between leisure activity participation and intervention for students with poor mental health, as an appealing and holistic alternative. By considering the historic traditions of surfing and yoga, the modern-day uptake of surf and yoga, the formation of Resurface, and lack of research in this field of study, the findings fill a gap in understanding combined surf and yoga intervention efficacy and the therapeutic relationship between surfing and yoga.

Summary

I set out with the aim to understand whether or not the intervention causes any noticeable impacts on the students subjective wellbeing and lives; to comprehend the cohesive contributory factors or influences that affect their overall experience; the social group dynamic in relation to peer support; the extent to which surfing and yoga as shared activities are valuable tools for wellbeing; and how students experience perceived mental health stigma through participation in an intervention of this kind: these intentions have been satisfied. This study shows that surfing and yoga facilitate wellbeing in ways that a clinical or medical model approach are incapable to cater for. For example, partaking together as a group not only enables students to enact health-promoting identities, yet also draws them out of social isolation and enables positive relationships and peer support, benefits which are characteristically

omitted or glossed over by a medical focus on treating symptoms. This study supports the synergising use of surfing and yoga, not as a solution or as a cure for mental health problems, but as a promising addition to approaches of treatment and support for students experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing. Overall, I have satisfied the ethnographer's responsibility to produce research that has relevance and impact beyond the research community (Brewer 2000; Williams 2003), however, the findings are an early link in a chain which requires further investigation, discussed in the following section.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has produced findings that have direct relevance to HE institutions, responsible for the delivery of physical activity, exercise, and wellbeing promotion and intervention, and local, regional, and national policy makers tasked with government mental health objectives. The findings are relevant to a diverse range of non-profit enterprises, as well as educational establishments that are positioned to influence wellbeing advocacy intervention. These findings offer direct recommendations and implications towards future Resurface intervention, as well as those tasked with the referral into Resurface, such as HE wellbeing providers, practitioners, and mental health charities. They will offer direct recommendations that have broad implications for individual ST and YT providers, as well as describe the efficacy of combining these activities for wellbeing promotion and intervention in the future. In addressing the challenges understanding the students' Resurface experiences, it is hoped that the findings of this study provide empirical evidence that can be used to develop effective mental health policies and interventions that will lead to improved health and wellbeing for students, and the wider community, particularly for those with poor mental health. It is argued that lifestyle activities, such as surfing and yoga, have the potential to contribute towards the development of peer support interventions to promote physical, social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing, and should be given higher priority within public and private sector mental health provision and promotion.

The Early Intervention Experiences

By alerting us to the Resurface intervention for students in a university setting, this study finds surfing and yoga to be perceivably attractive lifestyle activities, instead of competitive sports – thus, increasing students exercise uptake and engagement. With a strong evidence base for peer support as an effective mediator of students' mental health problems and with the findings raised in Chapter 8, '*The Cohesive Contributory Themes'*, future interventions should explore utilising the lure of non-competitive 'lifestyle activities' such as surfing and yoga, to take advantage of the health benefits of peer support

groups for wellbeing intervention, serving as an inviting 'third place' of wellness, respite, exercise, and peer support. It would be interesting to discover whether this was an isolated pattern or whether other interventions adopting similar lifestyle, nature-based activities (i.e., rock climbing, kayaking, skiing, and mountain biking), syndicated with indoor activities such as yoga, meditation and breathwork, have similar progressive outcomes. This is important, because there is real value for, HE institutions, local government and public sector organisations throughout the United Kingdom promoting wellness intervention, to deliver practical measures such as providing appealing pathways within local communities, to broaden the uptake of activity intervention as an alternative therapeutic tool, to help manage the currently over-stretched health services.

To help inform decisions on training and resource allocation, a future recommendation for those referring students into Resurface is to use referral consultations and students' conversations to identify what type of motivational factors are most important to them and draw upon several types of motivations, to support students during their early steps into unknown territory, often deemed anxiety-provoking and challenging. The findings of this study illustrate that for future consultation, university counsellors and facilitators should work cohesively to identify student's intrinsic motivation and self-determination to help them to overcome associated fear, structural constraints, and anxiety, and answer participatory objections before they arise. This is important, as while intention can be high, the laborious nature of referral with the student's poor mental health, adversely affects motivational behaviour, which has not been fully explained. Furthermore, in this study, to qualify, students with mental health problems required a clinical diagnosis. This positions a barrier for students that feel certain mental health issues are stigmatised, who are often unreported or untreated. Scope exists to provide a more thorough description of practitioner roles, levels of expertise, and skills used in the referral process. This further highlights the need for training to facilitate intervention encounters across the HE sectors and deformalize these in instances deemed necessary; this tends to be ignored as a specific area of study and, as such, would merit future studies.

The students experiencing Social Anxiety (SA) found the sociability of group intervention daunting and described notions of tailored support to help ease their transition. These findings would suggest resulting benefits if facilitators were to introduce these students to each other through forming online group conversations prior to beginning, as well as implementing pre-intervention get-togethers, as a sort of 'buddy-up' initiative exclusive for these students. There is value in that these students will have the opportunity to attend early sessions together, building a sense of social camaraderie, support, and encouragement. Upon referring to the existing literature on peer support, introducing students who understand one another's anxiety will increase their confidence and normalise their experiences,

reducing feelings of awkwardness. Scope exists to explore the provision of volunteers or facilitators to accompany SA individuals on a 1-1 basis during the early sessions, pending their comfortability socialising independently. Future research opportunities exist within the following key areas: a deeper exploration inside SA student's experiences of 'buddy-up' initiatives, and the outcomes of 1-1 support. Of particular interest would be a further exploration of how SA is experienced in relation to the cohesive contributory themes raised in this study, such as the notion of a third place. Moreover, research is lacking on the views of surf and yoga therapy for participants with social anxiety; a practical recommendation is for intervention providers to offer bespoke groups, exclusive for these individuals.

Students experiencing symptoms of Social Physique Anxiety (SPA) confronted diverse challenges; scope for practical measures exist for surf schools accommodating intervention to offer individual changing spaces and changing robes (*for changing discreetly in public settings*), and for facilitators to offer students the opportunity to arrive early to change into/select their wetsuit. Similarly, facilitators to offer students the opportunity to arrive early before yoga practises, allowing them to situate towards the back of the studio and avoid SPA that comes with being more noticeable at the front. Resurface and similar organisations might look to provide separate male and female groups to decrease SPA that arises with mixed gender programmes. This study recommends that consultation conversations could better clarify the steps taken by Resurface concerning SPA in advance to students' raising personal queries, to help avoid discomfort and embarrassment. The findings of this study suggest that future intervention requires enhanced provision to improve accessibility for those facing SA and SPA, to encourage participation and cultivate a more desirable, and less anxiety-provoking pathway. However, with body image effecting mental health most significantly in young adults, perhaps the issue, or even a suggestion of wearing a wetsuit may be enough for young adults to decline entering the intervention altogether. Nevertheless, a deeper examination of how participants cope with the onset of SA and SPA and the experiences of surf and yoga therapy is one area that would benefit from further research.

Structural constraints were often misused as justifications for non-attendance, with the reality representing deeper interpersonal issues. I recommend practical measures: by eliminating structural obstacles and communicating persuasively and reassuringly, facilitators, volunteers and peers can make a substantial influence on the ability for students indicating structural constraints, to surpass their interpersonal reservations and attend a greater number of sessions. However, facilitators should be vigilant, as not every structural constraint was dubious. Findings from accompanying research would help us to understand how and why structural constraints are used; this will help to inform future Resurface intervention policy and procedure. Certainly, this would provide recommendations for facilitators and volunteers regarding training, to help motivate students with erroneous constraints

engage. Upon referring to the existing literature on barriers to participation in surfing and yoga, there appears to be very limited coverage relating to the psychology of participation barriers and wellbeing intervention in such activity. This study concurs with the ideas of Crawford et al., (1991), that structural constraints are distal compared with more powerful interpersonal and intrapersonal constraints and should be considered as such.

Other practical recommendations involve removing structural barriers: for instance, offering transport services and encouraging lift-sharing, promoting the effectiveness of wetsuits, providing better quality wetsuits, heated changing facilities, and locating at a central yoga studio that is easily accessible and with good heating. Facilitators might look to provide structural support with participants routines and time management, particularly during their initial consultation, to help plan the intervention into their weekly schedules. An important practical recommendation is for facilitators to contact students before each session, to query whether they will be attending, and explain that they are expecting them, to increase accountability, extrinsic motivation, and attendance. Further, by alerting us to the experiences of referral, several students might have been interested if the referral pathway was condensed, by taking measures such as self-referral, evading the more formal processes. Indeed, a deeper examination of how students are referred and gain access to interventions is one area that would benefit from further research, which has not been fully explained.

Unlike Resurface, the New Zealand based ST intervention 'Live for More' provides intensive clinical counselling, practical life navigation skills, and mentoring sessions as part of their overall delivery. To help improve how mental health support is carried out, Resurface could look to replicate this, by bolstering its provision from a clinical standpoint. Specifically, the findings suggest that some of these students would have benefited from specialised interpersonal support. For instance, recruiting mental health professionals as volunteers and/or facilitators would have increased the level of therapeutic support, and accessibility for those with more severe mental illnesses, and social anxiety. Another practical recommendation towards better inclusion is to focus marketing for those susceptible to poor mental health, such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, emergency service workers, mental health clinics, and psychiatric hospitals. By alerting us to the benefits of the Resurface intervention, early findings support facilitators, practitioners, universities, and organisations to work more effectively with broader client groups for wellbeing promotion, to establish effective communications, marketing, and referral processes in the future, to help increase attendance, equality, and engagement. It would be interesting to discover whether the positive outcomes of Resurface occur in these groups and their lived experiences. These findings could be fully utilised to

help achieve current government physical health and activity objectives for advancing mental health equalities strategies (Department of Health 2020).

Surf Therapy

Surfing's blue space environment encouraged a positive wellness experience; however, surfing is not widely accessible among HE institutions: of particular interest would be an understanding of ST experiences utilising in-land artificial wave facilities, which are seeing an emergence, with the first UK '*Wave Garden'* in Bristol. By exploring interventions involving consistent and quality surf, investigation into the wellbeing experiences of artificial surfing juxtaposed with surfing's 'blue space' environment could be facilitated. Indeed, the outcomes of surfing independent from its natural environment are valuable and should be adopted on a broader scale for intervention. For instance, future research opportunities exist involving ST in an artificial setting, perhaps within a 'green space' environment. Additionally, artificial facilities allow for better surfing progression and can reduce the fear associated with unreliable natural conditions. Though this study contends that a prescription of fear can be soothing to the human psyche, such as the experiences surfing stormy, windy conditions, it also conflicts this notion, finding that the drawbacks of 'risk and reward' can outweigh the benefits. A deeper examination of how participants cope in an artificial setting might provide understanding of an experience which betters suits the needs of beginner surfers with poor mental health; this will help to inform future ST facilitation.

Equally, what would be revealing of an insight into artificial surf environments, is a deeper understanding of what proportion of the health benefits of surfing are attributable to blue spaces, which has not been fully explained. There is scope for a deeper exploration inside the world of blue space activity for wellbeing. Of particular interest would be a further exploration of the categories of activities used to deliver blue space intervention: for instance, surfing is generally classified in the adventure-sports genre, with a tendency to emphasise the immersive and experiential qualities of activity in blue space. Britton et al., (2020) and Foley (2015) find notable absentees from the type of activities used in blue space environments that are typically more accessible such as walking, running, or swimming; those that involve very little in the way of resources or funding. A practical recommendation is for future interventions to explore the use of these more affordable activities to gain the benefits of blue spaces and peer support, increasing the accessibility, and the durations of intervention; such implementation would merit future studies, to help develop current government physical health and activity objectives, and intervention strategy.

Live for More, a non-profit ST organisation based in New Zealand, provide surfing intervention to high-risk people who are disengaged from society ST. Often these individuals are caught up in drugs, alcohol, and crime, and have slipped through the cracks of conventional intervention. Scope exists for future intervention to pursue ST with a focus on drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and researchers to carry out a deeper examination of the experiences and outcomes. Existing work in ST focuses on exploration of those with poor mental health and wellbeing; however, Fleischmann et al., (2011) found a dramatic and sustained reduction in opioid use occurred after a 6-month surfing intervention, though there is a relative paucity of similar research on the impact of ST for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Boscombe, home to where this study took place, is the most deprived area in England, encompassing the highest number of drug rehabilitations clinics in the UK. Resurface is positioned for targeted intervention for these groups and should work closely with local policy makers tasked with such objectives.

The findings of this study build an argument for government policy surrounding surfing, and wellbeing. Of certain attention is the protection of local surf zones, ending plastic pollution, the recovery of the ocean, and action on climate change, which findings suggest would progress ST experiences and community wellbeing, by improving blue spaces and ground swell (i.e., wave quality) potential. There is real mental health and wellbeing value in local governments and public sector organisations throughout the United Kingdom reducing the damaging impact on natural surf reefs that results from coastal dredging, often causing changes to currents, and negatively impacting surf zone hydrodynamics. Equally, sewage and plastic pollution in UK waters is having devastating consequences to the health of people and the ocean, and negatively impacts surfers' access to, and enjoyment of surfing's blue spaces. This study finds that surfing is an important facet of wellbeing and that those tasked at developing coastal infrastructure, conservation, and development, must consider surfing, and other water sports, wellbeing implications. To help inform decisions on local policy and objectives, this research builds an evidence base for the therapeutic benefits of surfing and should be considered in the efforts made campaigning for clean water, an end to plastic pollution, the recovery of the ocean, and action on climate change. ST organisations should work with cross-sectorial stakeholders including environmental charities, NGOs, health experts, businesses, and community leaders, to evidence and discuss the need for policy drivers and legislative change to better protect the marine environment.

Yoga Therapy

This study's preliminary findings position yoga as an adverse activity for students with poor mental health: for instance, the initial practises encouraged negative emotions and self-judgments that were not always dealt with effectively. The findings from this research inform practical recommendations for

teachers to provide physical, movement-based styles of yoga during early sessions, to decrease the likelihood of mind wandering that comes with slower, restorative, yin-based practises. These findings suggest that the resulting benefits will encourage participants towards Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) notion of a flow state, or as Khalsa et al's (2009) description of '*meditation-in-motion'*, which this study found beneficial in facilitating respite from mental distress, a core component which students described to be most beneficial. Upon referring to the existing literature on YT, teachers who adopt slower, restorative styles, must hold suitable certification and training so that vulnerable participants are guided safely through their practise. While slower, restorative practises are beneficial in wellbeing promotion, these should be introduced gradually at an appropriate juncture.

In the context of yoga for therapeutic intervention, this study recommends that teachers are trained by professionals in the field of mental health. Currently, teachers attain credentials through diverse routes and traditions, and there's a much less predictable outcome and understanding of anatomy, physiology, psychology, and yoga theory. YT is deliberately directed to an explicit aim or aims in relation to a wellbeing condition, whether on a physical, psychological, or spiritual level. YT often uses a dedicated approach that considers the individual, their abilities, and requirements, so that predictable and beneficial outcomes are more likely. A deeper examination of how participants experience yoga intervention with trained mental health professionals would be useful. Resurface facilitators and similar organisations should recruit teachers with a therapeutic background, with skills which collaborate with the students and hold a safe space to empower them towards their own wellbeing, within the broad frame of YT. This would help reach students with more severe mental illnesses.

This study concurs with the ideas of Khasla (2015), that to access the full benefits of yoga, participants require a great number of practises. The sessions delivered throughout this study were irregular, making it difficult for the deeper, more profound benefits of yoga, often revealed in existing YT literature, to transpire; scope exists to explore the Resurface intervention over a longer duration. This will offer a fuller picture of the relationship between student wellbeing, peer support, and sustained yoga practise, parallel to the students full university journey. Additionally, there might be value in breathwork being introduced throughout HE institutes, not just for wellbeing intervention, but on a wider measure, for students' respite, wellbeing, and academic success. This study situates yoga and breathwork as core components of the students reduced stress and anxiety, and existing literature on yoga for HE academic success is sparce. Universities might look to implement yogic practises between lectures and before exams as part of students' curriculum, and a study of British HEI yoga intervention should record and evaluate its findings, implications, and outcomes.

The findings of this study illustrate some of the male students' perception of yoga as a female specific activity: some male students were hesitant of the yogic facets of the wider intervention. Contrarily, later during interviews, these same male students described yoga's benefits and highlighted their own enjoyment. It is well known that the benefits of yoga are not gender specific, therefore, there is value in those tasked with promoting yoga intervention, such as Resurface, to focus its marketing on content with male representation, and normalising yoga for men. Moreover, investigation into YT exclusively for men tends to be ignored as a specific area of study and, as such, would merit future studies, particularly in the realm of peer support. Further, by combining surfing with yoga, surfing steals a primary incentive for the male students, who without, might not have discovered yoga at all. With existing evidence showing the wellbeing benefits of yoga for mixed genders, a practical recommendation is to utilise a combination of adventurous, lifestyle activities, such as surfing or kayaking, combined with yoga, to entice male students with poor mental health towards yoga.

The findings of this study illustrate how the sensory components of yoga significantly enhance the sense of flow and respite that comes with escaping to a studio, serving as a relaxing third place of restoration. A practical recommendation for Resurface facilitators is to capitalise on the sensory components of yoga; of particular interest would be a further exploration of how participants senses can impact on the delivery of yoga for therapy. Likewise, this study shows that the location and environment are crucial components of yoga's progressive wellbeing outcomes. Adversely, local to where this study took place, there is a lack of studio space accessible for therapeutic intervention. Those that are quality and support a sensory environment, and are also available for non-profit use, meaning that private yoga studios are typically unavailable during peak times, (e.g., evenings, and weekends). In the wider context of souring societal mental health problems and the evident lack of activity intervention involving yoga, there is a need for an increased focus on high specification, available, and affordable studio spaces for yoga intervention, both in the HE sectors and for local, regional, and national, government consideration and funding. This study shows that there is community wellbeing value in local councils and public sector organisations throughout the United Kingdom promoting and providing adaptable, multi-use community spaces, that are quiet, aesthetic, and affordable.

A Surfing & Yoga Third Place: Augmenting Synergies and Increasing Intervention Efficacy

With an emergence of independent research exploring surfing and yoga for wellbeing, upon referring to the existing literature, there appears to be no coverage relating to the investigation of combined surf and yoga intervention, as initiated within the current study. Resurface emulates a historic link in modern culture among surfers and yogis', a synergy which this study evidence as a valuable fruition for student

wellbeing intervention; for example, it can be an identity affirming experience and decrease surfing's intervention seasonality. By alerting us to its efficacy, more research is needed to offer a fuller picture of this relationship, to help better understand the approaches and capitalise on important wellbeing outcomes. Topics for accompanying investigation include: the experiences of identity and mental health stigma; a focus on a broader demographics, specifically for those with more severe mental illnesses; and a more global exploration of surf and yoga intervention efficacy, experiences, and outcomes. It would also be interesting to investigate complimentary activities that might bolster current surf-yoga intervention, such as social events, or similar activities that can widen intervention uptake.

To help inform Resurface facilitators on intervention efficacy, a practical recommendation is to increase surf-yoga synergies; for instance, enlisting yoga teachers who impart yoga for surfing, with a defined purpose, such as surfing fitness, balance, and flexibility. Likewise, yoga teachings should aim towards self-regulation and mindfulness with an emphasis on surfing, to help participants manage their anxiety before surfing. This study illustrates the potential for surf coaches to adopt yogic methods, such as the use of body scan meditation and breathing before surfing, to help ease students minds and increase mindfulness. Similarly, it would be beneficial for surf coaches to explain the benefits and importance of patience in surfing, drawing from harmonising yogic teachings; vice vera, yoga teachers to convey the lessons taken from surfing into the studio, such as overcoming fear, explosiveness, and balance. The findings of this study show that the parallels between surfing and yoga emulate a synergy that is valuable to mature, building on the socio-cultural implications which sew the seed of identity reform, and encourage a sense of belonging.

Though the concept of the third place is one that has received no consideration within mental health intervention literature until now, and there is no empirical evidence either to support or refute the concept, these findings demonstrate that the Resurface intervention is a likely third place. However, the limited research on third places inclines to look at immediate social factors and their relationship to sustained attendance. This study suggests that the wider social context, as well as the therapeutic, peer support related experiences of the third place, would be an important motivator for participants attending intervention, and is an area meriting further investigation, exploring the role of advocacy interventions as new third places for wellbeing. Observations undertaken as part of this study suggests that interventions such as Resurface do fulfil many of the functions of the third place and should be explored in greater depth, particularly in relation to HE student support, developing the theme of seeking safe, non-judgemental, peer supported places, and escaping from chaotic student worlds, a theme which is well recognised in the literature on the third place (e.g., Wechsberg 1966). Future Resurface facilitation should bolster its social opportunities, providing more social activities, such seasonal

community events, pre-session, and post-session discussions (e.g., fire circles or at coffee shops), to enhance these ‘’third place’ experiences. Further, a sense of belonging to a third place was a crucial component of the intervention’s success: Resurface organisers might look to host surf and yoga retreats and provide branded clothing to increase this experience.

Linked to the theme of seeking and escaping to a third place, potential exists to further explore the role of social identity in these same contexts, and to investigate surf and yoga intervention, whilst serving as a third place, and its role in reducing mental health stigma, as well as the role this environment plays as an avenue to develop and support participants confidence, self-worth, and group affiliation. Other topics of future research involve investigation into social media as a catalyst for sharing third place experiences publicly, to open conversations of mental health, and raise awareness on a digital platform in a way that increases ‘third place pride’, instead of deepening stigma. Practical recommendations lie with Resurface’s digital media team, to fully utilise the influence of social media to increase uptake, self-referral, discussions, and importantly, to lead the way in reducing stigmas attached to participation in wellbeing intervention.

Summary

No academic research had explored the impacts of surfing and yoga combined as part of a therapeutic intervention for any demographic, despite this amalgamation expanding among global communities and having been regularly adopted by several ST organisations. Research of these individual activities for wellbeing intervention is a field experiencing extensive growth and interest, predominantly in the realm of alternative and complementary therapies. Nevertheless, the evidence for efficacy is still in its infancy, particularly in the realm of surf therapy, and wholly in the arena of combined surf-yoga, wellness intervention. In the arena of positive psychology, while individual surfing or yoga intervention studies are rare, and with a lack of statistical power, most studies witness growing trends in the promotion of positive wellbeing indicators, which this study supports. Individual surf and yoga interventions have been highly recommended in a variety of settings as complementary lifestyle practices. However, more research is needed to properly understand the underlying mechanisms responsible for the positive results of surfing and yoga intervention as combined activities on mental health and wellbeing, which this study has initiated.

Considering the potential geographical, financial, and other limitations/challenges involved, I suggest that together, surfing and yoga intervention can be a useful combined activity to promote wellbeing in students experiencing diverse social, emotional, and psychological difficulties. Warranting this

recommendation, this study shows that surfing and yoga can offer meaningful benefits to students' subjective wellbeing, serving as a third place for peer support. These findings specify that surfing and yoga might need to be practiced continually to build and maintain wellbeing and to prevent students from spiralling into a 'chaotic student-life'. Surfing and yoga can, at least, be considered together with formerly traditional approaches to supporting students, such as clinical or medical approaches. Indeed, these are attractive therapeutic options and, like exercise, may be of certain use where students reject supposedly psychological diagnoses and treatments. As this study shows, surfing and yoga would be an attractive option because it is non-pharmacological, has negligible adverse effects, and augments the benefits of peer support and social connectedness, serving as a healthy and non-judgemental third place.

While this study does do not prove the student's amelioration from symptoms of poor mental health, it presents the positive impact of surfing and yoga on their subjective wellbeing. These outcomes fit with Hewitt's (2019) account that there is a broad need for HE providers to adopt interventions which improve overall wellbeing, instead of symptom-focused interventions. With the rise in student numbers and increased demand facing HE wellbeing services, Resurface offer an alternate and/or complementary therapeutic option. Applied to the HE sectors, with the lack of resources and increased demand for student wellbeing services (Reavley & Jorm 2010), Resurface offers an effective addition or alternative to the support accessible by qualified mental health clinicians. The findings evidence surf and yoga therapeutic intervention as a valuable wellness pathway and suggests that Resurface, and other similar activity-based, peer support interventions, should be implemented throughout educational establishments, as well as recognised within governmental local, regional, and national mental health policy, and given higher priority within public and private sector mental health provision and promotion. An important mental health policy which would have a positive influence on HE wellbeing services is the development of integrative referral processes from student counselling services into activity interventions such as Resurface. However, a challenge that policy should address is those holistic interventions such as Resurface are few and far between, and not always taken seriously as pathways towards wellbeing promotion and mental health rehabilitation.

Locally, Resurface should be promoted and advocated to those that are positioned to influence and refer participants, and a broader target audience should be identified. Future HE wellbeing providers, practitioners, and mental health charities, tasked with the referral into peer support and leisure activity intervention, should look to increase uptake of such intervention. Individual ST and YT providers should try to combine their activity for wellbeing intervention, to advance combined activity interventions that lead to improved health and wellbeing for students and the wider community. Researchers should address the delivery and promotion of wellbeing intervention, by investigating key

areas of development, and should be given higher priority within funding avenues and policy. For instance, there is a lack of qualitative research exploring wellbeing interventions of any kind among the HE sectors, and current models of intervention are typically delivered reactively at a time of mental health crisis, instead of working actively with students through preventative measures.

Reflections on the Research Process

This study has explored the experiences and perceived wellbeing outcomes of the Resurface intervention and shown that a participatory approach allows for a richer and deeper level of understanding and the potential for further analysis of the Resurface intervention culture, than a more distanced methodology. The ethnographic approach permitted me to apprehend the cultural reality of student participants and facilitated statements on the nature of their experiences, identity, and behaviours. An important aim of this study has also been to stress the 'participant' in participant observation and as underlined by Sands (2002), to balance the sometimes-challenging role of scientist / observer, and participant / population member. Regarding the topic, I feel confident that the emphasis of the research was suitable, given its application to mental health and wellbeing, peer support, and the experiences of surfing and yoga intervention. As outlined above, the use of an ethnographic approach to investigate the students' experiences of the intervention was carefully chosen, and I discovered that observational and interview data harmonised, capturing diverse facets of the social world of the students, and shaped a more balanced viewpoint of the phenomenon of Resurface. Like all ethnographers, I was absorbed in the world I was investigating, therefore, it is to be anticipated that my individual views would be subject to change.

I have been allowed entree through the qualitative approach to delicate issues of student mental health and wellness intervention, that could not have been sufficiently explored through quantitative approaches. Although laborious, I am confident that this was the only approach that could have brought similar insights and an appropriate scope of data, allowing me to draw conclusions about the Resurface experiences, without losing the importance on the individual student as a participant. The inductive method involved setting aside, yet recognising prior assumptions, such as student mental health, and common surfing and yoga experiences. This allowed me to work without too much influence of past opinions on the experiences of students, and indeed experiences of surfing and yoga participation. This directed unanticipated intervention themes emerging such as mental health stigma and student wellbeing services, 'black humour', and the notion of a 'third place' for wellbeing intervention. Likewise, I was able to fill gaps in the literature while pointing to additional areas that I did not have

time to research in greater depth, for instance, the influences of social media on wellbeing intervention. Like the remarks of Brown (2008), a test of this research was that a great volume of primary and secondary data was collected, which required a rigorous selection process that was relatively challenging.

I believe that the emic view has been prioritised in this study, using the student's perspective to lead conversations on their intervention experiences. However, despite the weight of the interview, I remain hesitant exactly what features of the innermost social world of the student and the intervention experiences were missed. Equally, qualitative researchers are cautioned that the process of examining and understanding data is predisposed by personal predispositions (Brown 2008), and I recognised that my interpretation of emergent themes were inclined by my previous experiences as a surfer, yogi and student, and my own biases and perspectives on what constitutes wellbeing intervention. For instance, I believed the activities would hold more importance in shaping the student's wellbeing, compared with the cohesive contributory themes, which proved most momentous. Numerous interviews exemplified that this was a limitation on my part, with novel themes emerging, which I would not have formerly recognised or accredited as being important foundations of the student's social world, that I have occupied since 2012. As this study advanced, my consciousness of such bias was used to drive me to contemplate alternate evidence, and this is revealed in my explanations on fear and surfing, anxiety during yoga, and other negative aspects associated with participating in the intervention.

Recognising Fetterman (1998), an additional challenge of this study involved the holistic detail of thick description to the broader depiction of mental health experiences. I acknowledge that the integration of the perspectives of a broader range of students with diverse mental health problems, perhaps those more severe illnesses, equally, those with milder symptoms of poor health, would have improved the study further, contributing a more complete picture of the HE, student 'mental health' scene. Like all ethnographers, I was immersed in the world I was studying, consequently, it is to be anticipated that my individual perspectives would be subject to change. Reflections on student mental health, wellbeing referral, and surfing and yoga, including emotional responses and behavioural attitudes to such experiences, saw a growth in my opinions and feelings. For example, I came to understand social anxiety in a way I had not anticipated and was drawn to better understand these experiences and coping mechanisms, to document potential advances in future student experiences. This held significance for my future Resurface facilitation and how I interacted within the social world which I inhabited. Consequently, the authority of ethnography to influence change beyond the study setting is fulfilled.

My interest in the experiences of surfing and yoga, as well as student wellbeing intervention, inspired this research project. Though I have actively participated in surfing and yoga and among HE activity intervention for several years, it was the access through abundant hours of interviews that exemplified the challenges that many students face. This newly developed knowledge has improved my qualities and skills as Resurface's co-director and lead-facilitator: I am a better instructor, more understanding of the difficulties faced as students, and better at responding to the diverse challenges they confront, compassionately and appropriately. This has helped me to guide recommendations and developments for the wider organisation and future strategies. Further, this fresh insight into participation in surfing has improved my abilities as a qualified surf coach with UK Surf England, the national governing body for the sport. As a result of this study, I am a better coach, more receptive to the thoughts and feelings of participants outside and inside of the Resurface world. Likewise, I have seen a growth in my own knowledge of student wellbeing intervention. Despite extensive contact with students in a HE environment, it was this study's period of rigorous contact with, and research into, the experiences of students' intervention experiences and mental health journeys, that made me progressively conscious of the intricacy of student mental health and referral.

A research limitation of this study is that the key informants are a minor segment of the student community, those professionally classified with mental health and wellbeing problems, and therefore, whilst it is not so generalisable, the focus allows the data to reveal deeper, more intimate lived experiences. Also, with eight female and eight male interviewees, a less balanced gender sample might have produced alternative themes, perhaps research involving exclusive male or female groups would have raised different conclusions and interpretations of the peer support nature of the intervention. Likewise, researching targeted groups for individuals with parallel mental health related problems and equal severities would have been useful. Further, at the time of collecting data, this gender balance inaccurately reflected the gender imbalance in the university's wellbeing division, a predominately female populace. Perhaps more male students would have signed onto Resurface if a split gender group option existed. Indeed, while an important theme of this study was associated to the students' desire for better mental health and wellbeing, a public health challenge that requires attention, and is a probable limitation of this study, is how to encourage and support more male students towards mental health services. This is important, as men hold a greater majority of the population that are not willingly accessing mental health services. It is in this field that additional research is necessary, among a broader population.

Another research limitation was that the participatory inclusion criteria was not fully followed by those who referred the students to the intervention. For example, due to the sensitive nature of referral, the

recruitment criteria to be eligible for the intervention were based on approval from qualified counsellors, who invited students with milder systems of 'poor mental health' to take part, leaving the judgment of the initial participatory criteria down to these professionals. Here, I recognise my inability to double-check that inclusion criteria were met before students entered the intervention, as this was left with the professionals. This left me vulnerable and, in a situation, where towards the end of the study, findings had indicated that one student was experiencing more serious mental health problems and had '*slipped through the net'* of suitable inclusion criteria. That said, a major component of the inclusion criteria was that students referred to Resurface would benefit from the intervention, rather than experience further distress, which proved true for this student, as her experiences were primarily positive in regard to wellbeing promotion.

Using ethnography within the Resurface social world, as both researcher and active participant, I have enabled exploration within a less formal, non-professional identity. Consequently, those reading this thesis will witness my participant identity in an intervention setting and gain a perception of my lived experiences as a surfer, yogi, student, and individual, through both my own wellbeing experiences and the experiences of others. Personally, this study has confirmed that I am a person who enjoys experiencing a phenomenon physically, before being able to clearly comprehend it. On reflection, this thesis could be likened to learning to surf, or the very practise of yoga, comparable to ascending a steep mountain. As a researcher, I resisted the finish line, striving for mastery to overcome limitations. This likeness has endured with me throughout the research process whilst incisive for completion, and in this instance, in the direction of my own experiences of better mental health and wellbeing.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Continuation with Resurface after study (anonymised and not identifiable)

Name	Comment
Carl	Graduated – moved away from Bournemouth.
Linda	Still a Resurface member, 2022.
Bryony	Still a Resurface member, 2022.
Owen	Graduated – moved away from Bournemouth.
Rob	Graduated – moved away from Bournemouth.
Billy	Graduated – moved away from Bournemouth.
Tess	Sustained Resurface membership for 2 years after.
Demi	Sustained Resurface membership for 1 year after.
Jack	Sustained Resurface membership for 2 years after.
Josh	Sustained Resurface membership for 2 years after.
Sajiv	Sustained Resurface membership for 1 year after.
Adam	Sustained Resurface membership for 2 years after.
Elisa	Sustained Resurface membership for 1 year after.
Chloe	Sustained Resurface membership for 2 years after.
Emily	Graduated – moved away from Bournemouth.
Mitch	Sustained Resurface membership for 1 year after.

Appendix 2

An Illustration of the 2018-2019 Resurface Intervention

Appendix 3

Resurface Today: 2022

Today, Resurface is an established, non-profit Community Interest Company (CIC), that I co-direct and facilitate along with Psychotherapist, Nicole Grilo, and Occupational Therapist, Eve Mansfield, offering regular clubs and courses in the community for people of varied ages and backgrounds. Resurface work with local stakeholders such as mental health charity, Dorset Mind, specialist psychiatric unit, Pebble Lodge, fostering agency, Blue Sky, Dorset NHS Foundation, Bournemouth University, several educational establishments, and numerous practitioners. Resurface deliver weekly clubs for 18–30-year-olds, and 12-week 'Local Retreats' for those 30 years and over, providing lifestyle activity intervention for both students and the wider community. Resurface's on-going relationship with Bournemouth University advanced over the course of three years, establishing a contract with ResLifeBU, a student wellbeing programme, who reimburse a 50% subsidiary for its student referrals, and a sustained partnership with the universities Student Wellbeing department, who regularly refer students.

Over the course of this study, Resurface introduced several policies, procedures, and activities. With the success of combing lifestyle activities for intervention and pursuing personal interests, Resurface introduced the growing trend of cold-water immersion, accompanied by a beachside, wood-fired sauna. Combined cold-water / sauna immersion has diverse health benefits with emerging research: participation provides a mood-boosting experience, strengthens the immune system, increases mental resilience and self-confidence, reduces stress and anxiety, and improves overall health and wellbeing. These experiences synergise with those found in this study's interconnected, cohesive contributory themes, predominantly the theme of social camaraderie, and the students' identity affirming experiences. To bolster social interaction and peer support, Resurface deliver regular social events involving live music evenings, social dining opportunities, and pertinent Docufilm screenings. To grow the theme of belonging, seeking and escaping to a third place, Resurface offer retreats as well as branded clothing, and encourage its members to socialise outside of the intervention.

To increase permanency and engagement, Resurface encourage its members to shape hobbies out of the activities they partake in, working closely with partner surf, yoga, and sea-sauna providers. To provide a more purposeful pathway, Resurface offer members volunteering opportunities and on-going training and development. Following digital media recommendations, mental health stigma and referral,

Resurface developed its website and social media platforms, using media as a catalyst for self-referral and encouraging its activities for mental health progression, in an accessible and fashionable way. To improve facilitation for members facing more severe mental health illnesses, Resurface adapted existing policies and procedures, including an amended and comprehensive mental health risk assessment, referral process, and consultation. Further, Resurface received funding from several stakeholders, including Dorset Mind, JP Morgan, and the National Lottery. Most recently, BCP council, in line with their regional strategy for coastal wellness, secured funding for Resurface (CIC) to develop a beachfront 'Wellness Hub', to deliver intervention on a larger scale in Boscombe, among the UK's most deprived areas.

Resurface, serving as a Third Place, is a theme which two Bournemouth University students were interested in developing as part of their dissertation in Media Production. A Third Place was transferred onto a virtual platform for a moving and creative docufilm, podcasts, projection, poetic overlay, and photographic content, that showcase Resurface as an experience from an insider's perspective, or as 'A Third Place'. This project was displayed for a live Resurface event in 2020, created as a stylistic monologue, featuring natural sound effects crafted from Bournemouth's vast landscape. The documentary is highly raw and honest, surfacing the participants' lived experiences and harmonising a key component of the Resurface experience translated in this study, that of a third place. Ensuing succession of this Ph.D., along Resurface's growing team, I plan to continue improving operation of Resurface by utilising the recommendations propositioned in this study, to better foster an environment of health and wellbeing, and deliver a third place for a broader demographic, to improve members outcomes and positive experiences. The findings from this study will be used to inform future policy and procedures, and develop local, regional, and hopefully, national government mental health objectives for the future.

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