

An Intersectional Exploration of Job Experiences for Equity-Owed Lifeguards

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Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Human Kinetics

School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
June 9th, 2025

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Abstract

Lifeguarding in Canada has historically been a white-dominated field. Amid the current nationwide lifeguard shortage, it is critical to examine the experiences of equity-owed lifeguards and identify how workplaces can more effectively support and include individuals from diverse backgrounds. In my thesis I address two research questions: (i) How can organizations increase the representation of equity-owed individuals in lifeguarding? and (ii) What are the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards? The thesis is presented in a two-paper format, with each paper responding to one of the research questions. In paper one, I address the first research question using an intersectional theoretical framework and archival research, with data analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The analysis led to the identification of three promising practices for organizations in Canada and the United States to enhance representation in lifeguarding: (i) accessible programming, (ii) inclusivity and equity in the workplace, and (iii) culturally relevant programming. In paper two, I investigate the second research question using a qualitative descriptive methodology. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using RTA within an intersectional framework. The findings informed three key recommendations to improve workplace experiences for equity-owed lifeguards: (i) shared leadership, (ii) education on sexualization and sexual harassment, and (iii) equity-owed community outreach and barrier reduction. Together, the two papers underscore the need for systemic organizational change to increase representation and improve the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to Audrey. Thank you for your continuous support as a supervisor and constantly pushing me to uncover my true potential as a researcher and student. Team Giles, thank you for always supporting me and taking the time to provide me with feedback on my work and teaching me valuable aspects of academia. Meredith, my Master's lab mate, I could not have completed my thesis without you. Thank you for supporting me academically and emotionally, I am beyond grateful to have gone through this with a best friend and leave with a strong friendship.

To my participants, thank you for giving me the opportunity to shed light on the raw experiences of being an equity-owed lifeguard. I would not be able to conduct this valuable work without you all.

To my committee members, thank you for your time and guidance throughout this process and challenging me with your valuable insight.

I want to thank my family, Mom, Dad, Michael, and Vittoria, for their continuous support throughout my studies and constantly reminding me of my ability. To my parents, thank you for providing me with the endless opportunities and ensuring I had a strong swimming ability, which led to my passions.

To my grade 12 calculus teacher Mrs. Stevens, thank you for calling home and encouraging my parents to get an educational reassessment, which led me to uncover my true potential with the educational support and resources I needed to succeed.

Finally, to my roommates, Laura, Maya, Tiffany, and Abby, thank you for always being there for me, celebrating my wins, and picking me back up through the challenges I faced. Thank you for your patience and love.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Lifeguarding used to be a sought-after job for teens and young adults, especially in the summer months (Harrington, 2025). There are various reasons why the job has become less appealing for teens and young adults such as the time it takes to become qualified and the cost of training courses (Lasto, 2019). Moreover, the lifeguarding wage used to be significantly more than the Canadian minimum wage; however, as minimum wage has increased, lifeguarding wages have not increased at the same rate, making the job less attractive (Bessem & Glenn, 2024). These factors also serve as barriers of entrance to the lifeguarding workforce. Worsening this, the lifeguarding workforce suffers from a notable lack of diversity, the lifeguarding workforce suffers from a notable lack of diversity, further minimizing the size of the talent pool for organizations and play a role in the lifeguard shortage (Alhmidi, 2022).

Swimming skills can enhance one's access to leisure and can be potentially lifesaving. Nevertheless, numerous Canadians who are members of equity-owed groups, a term used to refer to groups whose members are historically, persistently, and systematically denied equal access, opportunities, and resources due to unearned disadvantages and discrimination (Craven et al., 2024), have difficulty accessing opportunities to learn these skills due to systematic barriers and discrimination experienced by ethnic minorities, low-income individuals. Systemic barriers within the context of this thesis is referring to the ingrained obstacles that lead to unequal opportunity and limit participation which are reinforced through existing policies, practices, and societal norms. In particular, the existing literature suggests that and newcomers, low-income individuals (Im et al., 2012), gender-diverse individuals (Anderson et al., 2018), and persons with disabilities (Pack et al., 2017) are deterred from participating in swimming and learning essential skills, making it difficult for them to join the lifeguarding workforce.

To address the lack of diversity in lifeguarding, I formulated two research questions: i) How can organizations increase the representation of members of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding?; and ii) What are the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards? I explored each question in a separate manuscript, using distinct but complementary approaches. In the first paper, I drew on archival research to examine historical and ongoing efforts aimed at enhancing diversity in lifeguarding. In the second paper, I employed semi-structured interviews to centre the voices of equity-owed lifeguards and illuminate their lived experiences. Together, I offer valuable and novel insights, while suggesting practical recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and equitable lifeguarding workforce in Canada.

Literature Review

In this section, I discuss the multifaceted issues concerning equity in aquatic environments, drowning prevention, and lifeguarding. In tandem, I shed light on the inaccessibility and lack of inclusion in aquatics, the inequitable distribution of drowning incidents, and the historical context of discrimination in aquatics. I begin by examining how drowning disproportionately affects members of equity-owed communities. Building upon this foundation, I discuss the deep-seated roots of discrimination within aquatics, particularly focusing on inequities that have resulted in and continue to result in disparities in access to and representation in lifeguarding.

Inequities in Aquatics

Scholars investigating inequities in aquatics have often centred their analyses on the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities, emphasizing how racism, along with geographical and social location, shapes access and participation (Hastings et al., 2006). However, in recent years, scholars have drawn attention to the marginalization faced by other equity-owed groups,

including gender-diverse individuals (White, 2021), sexual minorities (Anderson et al., 2018), and individuals with disabilities (Hammond et al., 2014). In the following section, I expand on the existing literature by examining how members of these communities encounter systemic barriers and discrimination in both recreational and professional aquatic spaces.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Gender, as a social construct, shapes individual experiences, interpersonal interactions, and institutional structures (Musto, 2014). Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities that influence how people perceive themselves and each other, on the other hand, sex refers to the set of biological attributes in humans and animals (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2023). Within the context of lifeguarding, women candidates frequently encounter discrimination from men peers, which can result in informal segregation during both training and on-the-job settings (Musto, 2014). Media representations further reinforce gendered stereotypes by portraying the ideal lifeguard as a strong, hypermasculine figure, thereby reinforcing exclusionary norms (Jaggard, 2001). While gender-based discrimination influences the experiences of women in lifeguarding, women continue to participate within the field.

Discrimination also affects members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and those who use other terminology (2SLGBTQI+) community in sports and leisure contexts, including aquatics (Therriault & Witt, 2014). Given the pervasive norms of heteronormativity, many 2SLGBT+ lifeguards conceal their sexual orientation in the workplace to avoid stigma and discrimination (Anderson et al., 2018). Transgender and non-binary individuals, in particular, face exclusion due to the rigid gender norms embedded in aquatic culture and sport (Caudwell, 2022). Growing up in binary sporting environments can

result in a sense of alienation and challenges in expressing one's transgender or non-binary identity in aquatic spaces (Caudwell, 2022). The embodied nature of swimming and the associated attire amplify these challenges, with transgender individuals frequently experiencing scrutiny for wearing binders or other concealing garments (Caudwell, 2022; Elling-Machartzki, 2017). Such scrutiny, along with fears of discrimination from patron, especially in gender-segregated changerooms, can contribute to a pervasive sense of unsafety and exclusion (Elling-Machartzki, 2017). Indeed, aquatic spaces, by upholding binary structures and heteronormative assumptions, often perpetuate the marginalization of gender-diverse individuals (Theriault & Witt, 2014).

Disability

Disability is commonly associated with functional physical or cognitive differences, including but not limited to physical, cognitive, and learning disabilities (Kiuppis, 2018). However, individuals with disabilities often do not perceive their conditions as limitations and instead actively seek inclusive strategies to fully engage in physical activity (Kiuppis, 2018). For example, swimmers with physical disabilities often identify simply as swimmers, rather than seeing themselves as belonging to a separate category (Pack et al., 2017). Despite these non-deficit self-perceptions, individuals with disabilities frequently encounter exclusion in aquatic settings due to systemic discrimination, inaccessible infrastructure, and ableist attitudes (Pack et al., 2017).

Efforts to foster inclusion are often led by able-bodied and neurotypical individuals, resulting in policies and practices that may unintentionally reinforce ableism and overlook the lived experiences of disabled people (Hammond et al., 2021). The concept of *neoliberal-ableism*, which reflects the convergence of neoliberal values with ableist norms, further compounds these

issues by prioritizing individual responsibility, productivity, and physical competence (Hammond et al., 2021). As a result of these standards, individuals who do not fit dominant norms experience marginalization that can make aquatic environments feel unwelcoming or inaccessible, especially for those seeking to participate in swimming or pursue roles in lifeguarding (Hammond et al., 2021). To meaningfully challenge these inequities, it is crucial to adopt a participatory approach that centres the voices of individuals with disabilities in the design and implementation of aquatic programs (Hammond et al., 2021). Only through inclusive and equity-driven strategies can aquatic spaces move beyond tokenism toward truly accessible and affirming environments for all.

Racism and Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in a Canadian Context

Although Canada is often portrayed as a multicultural society, systemic and institutional racism continues to shape access to and experiences within aquatic environments (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019). While Canada has not historically implemented the same explicit segregationist laws for swimming pools as places in countries like the United States, discriminatory attitudes, particularly those held by Euro-Canadian leadership within institutions, have contributed to enduring racial exclusion in aquatic spaces (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019; Rousell & Giles, 2012). In the Canadian context, swimming has long been a white-dominated sport and leisure practice, influenced by broader socioeconomic inequities that have constrained access for Black communities (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019). As a result, many Black Canadians remain underrepresented in aquatic recreation and lifeguarding – a pattern that is self-sustaining and perpetuated through generational exclusion (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019).

In addition to the racism experienced by Black Canadians, other equity-owed groups similarly experience race- and ethnicity-based exclusion in aquatic contexts. Indigenous peoples in Canada also experience systemic and structural barriers to participation and representation in aquatics. In northern and remote communities, many of which have predominantly Indigenous populations, there is a chronic lack of qualified lifeguards (Rousell & Giles, 2012). As a result, municipalities often recruit seasonal lifeguards from the South, who are typically white Euro-Canadian individuals unfamiliar with the cultural context of the communities they serve (Giles et al., 2007). This dynamic reinforces colonial power imbalances and undermines community sovereignty over local recreation services.

Moreover, leadership styles vary across cultures and communities; as a result, not all communities respond best to the same approach (Owan et al., 2022). Rousell and Giles (2012) found that southern lifeguards frequently exhibit authoritarian leadership styles, contributing to unwelcoming and racially charged atmospheres within aquatic facilities. Indigenous youth are often mischaracterized as disruptive or defiant, rather than being understood in the context of intergenerational trauma, colonial violence, and a lack of culturally safe programming (Rousell & Giles, 2012). Such deficit-based perspectives can influence the behaviour of people in the setting and hinder efforts to build trust and inclusivity in aquatic environments. Addressing these challenges requires more than increasing the number of trained lifeguards; it demands a commitment to anti-racist, culturally responsive, and community-centred approaches to aquatic programming and staffing.

Income

In high-income countries, the culture of lifeguarding often reinforces exclusivity by promoting meritocratic ideals and a longstanding lifeguard legacy. "Lifeguard legacy" refers to

individuals who inherit the profession from their parents, which contributes to a perceived sense of superiority and entitlement in the workplace (Kloet & Annette, 2005). The lifeguarding workforce is predominantly composed of white, middle- to upper-class individuals, through which ideas surrounding the exclusive nature of the profession and limiting opportunities for individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds are further entrenched within the context (Kloet & Annette, 2005).

Becoming a lifeguard involves both financial and physical demands, creating significant barriers for those wishing to enter the aquatics workforce. For example, proficiency in swimming, which is often linked to class and social privilege, is a fundamental requirement (Kloet & Annette, 2005). As a result, individuals from low-income backgrounds are at a disadvantage, as swimming lessons, particularly those that meet the rigorous standards needed for lifeguard certification, are often cost-prohibitive. According to the American Red Cross, cost is a leading factor identified by many American parents as preventing them from enrolling their children in swimming lessons (American Red Cross, 2021). In Canada, the cost of pursuing lifeguard certification can exceed \$1,000, as candidates must complete a series of courses, including the Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, Standard First Aid, National Lifeguard, Airway Management, and Instructor's courses (Ireland, 2023). For instance, in the City of Ottawa, the cumulative cost of these certifications is \$1,070 (City of Ottawa, 2022). This financial burden creates an additional hurdle for low-income individuals, making it challenging for them to pursue a career in lifeguarding. Some municipalities and organizations have attempted to address these barriers through targeted subsidies, diversity recruitment campaigns, or access programs; however, these efforts are often implemented in silos, lacking coordination or a cohesive strategy that addresses the intersecting nature of financial, social, and ethnic/racial exclusion. These

fragmented approaches are particularly concerning given the current and growing lifeguard shortage across Canada, which underscores the urgent need for more inclusive and systemic solutions (Alhmidi, 2022).

Overview of the Lifeguard Shortage in Canada

While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing lifeguard shortage in Canada, the crisis was not entirely a consequence of the pandemic. Lifeguard shortages were a persistent issue long before COVID-19 (Alhmidi, 2022). During the height of the pandemic, pool shutdowns and the two-year suspension of swimming lessons created several challenges that limited the pipeline of future lifeguards (Giles et al., 2023). In particular, these shutdowns and suspensions meant that fewer new lifeguards were trained, existing lifeguards were unable to maintain certification (lifeguard qualifications are only valid for two years), and fewer swimmers progressed through lifesaving levels (Alhmidi, 2022). These disruptions contributed to a significant shortage of qualified personnel in aquatic spaces, further reducing access to public swimming and aquatic programs.

Beyond the staffing issues created during the COVID-19 pandemic, the lifeguard profession is also characterized by high turnover, which introduces problems for employers and communities. In general, the demographic attracted to the profession is high school students between the ages of 16 and 18 (Ireland, 2023). Since these individuals often transition to post-secondary education or other career paths, the profession experiences frequent staff departures, leading to an ongoing cycle of recruitment and training (Ireland, 2023). In high-income countries, the average career span for a lifeguard is approximately 2.67 years (Stallman, 2018). The short tenure of lifeguards means that public aquatic facilities often face challenges in maintaining a stable workforce and keeping facilities open. Additionally, the brevity of lifeguard

careers limits opportunities for individuals to gain expertise, leading to a workforce of largely inexperienced water safety educators. This lack of experience is not without consequence. It may contribute to an increased risk of drowning incidents as less experienced lifeguards may be less equipped to respond effectively in emergencies (Stallman, 2018).

Diversity and Job Retention

The barriers to lifeguard training are contributing factors in the minimal diversity within the workforce, the smaller pools from which to draw potential employees, and it may pose difficulties retaining equity-owned employees. Employees who differ from their colleagues in religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and generation often hide or mask differentiating factors to try to gain respect and inclusion from their peers (Grissom & Keiser, 2011). Further, employees who are uncomfortable in their workplace and feel unrepresented amongst their peers often search for other job opportunities where they believe they will feel included (Brown, 2018). Diversity amongst staff members heavily influences an individual's job retention (Brown, 2018); as the aquatic industry lacks representation of members of equity-owned groups and is mainly comprised of individuals of white European descent, lifeguards from equity-owned groups may be more likely to leave their jobs. These dynamics speak directly to the need for strategies that both increase the number of equity-owned lifeguards and improve their workplace experiences.

The existing body of literature demonstrates that there is a need to understand what policies and practices work in diversifying the lifeguarding workforce. Further, it is important to hear from equity-owned lifeguards themselves to understand their workplace experiences. These are the issues I examined in this Master's of Arts thesis . In the following sections, I outline the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations of my research.

Epistemology

The epistemology of a research project is crucial to consider because it allows readers to be informed about the researcher's beliefs surrounding knowledge creation (Crotty, 1998). Explicitly describing my epistemological perspective also enables me to ensure that my theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and analysis are aligned (Crotty, 1998). For my research, I engaged with a constructionist epistemology. Constructionists produce meaning by engaging with the world in a specific context through social interaction and collaboration (Crotty, 1998). Through this process, constructionists acknowledge multiple perspectives and continuously reflect to construct meaning and knowledge regarding a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism is the most appropriate epistemology for my research because I co-constructed and interpreted the knowledge regarding the lack of representation of equity-owned groups in lifeguarding and how it impacts and impacted individual's experiences in the aquatic field. Overall, using a constructionist perspective allowed me to construct meaning regarding the phenomenon of the lack of diversity in lifeguarding and how it influences workplace experience (Crotty, 1998).

Reflecting on my constructionist epistemology, I acknowledge the impact of my subjectivity and situatedness on my thesis project. As such, I will take a moment to introduce myself and reflect on my positionality, experiences, and identities of privilege and oppression. I am a 22-year-old settler of European descent, with a father who immigrated from Italy and a mother who immigrated from Portugal. Both came from low-income families and now live in Canada with three children, including me. As a child of parents who immigrated to Canada when they were young, I have seen the lack of opportunity my parents had and the struggles my grandparents faced when navigating a new country in which residents speak a different language

and practice a different culture. I identify as a white, queer, cisgender female with Attentive Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), who grew up as middle-class. I acknowledge my privilege and how it has allowed me various opportunities. Growing up, I could engage in swimming lessons - despite my parents having no swimming skills of their own. My passion for aquatics continued to grow through aquatic sports (e.g., artistic swimming and water polo), which led me to become a lifeguard for the City of Ottawa and Dovercourt Recreation Centre, and now a Head Instructor with the City of Ottawa's summer lifeguard qualification program.

My parents allowed me and my siblings to engage in sport and recreation, both competitively and recreationally, while we were growing up. Despite our different experiences, I have carried my siblings' experiences with me, especially in an aquatic setting. My brother, who is 26 years old, has Cerebral Palsy, and his engagement with aquatics was very different than mine. I saw him struggle in lessons and be made fun of by other participants, and he even had instructors who did not want to teach him. Seeing the differences in experiences, despite coming from the same family, has led me to reflect on the multiple identities that shape an individual's experience in aquatics. As a result, my upbringing, experiences, and identities have shaped and continue to shape who I am today. I must reflect upon my positionality to continue being reflexive throughout my research.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is commonly used as a theoretical framework in sociology, psychology, anthropology, health sciences, and social work (Ferree, 2018). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a Black feminist legal scholar and activist, coined the term intersectionality in the late 20th century. Since then, intersectionality has become a defining paradigm for critical scholarship, growing out of the legacy of Black feminist thought and efforts to hold white institutions

accountable for linear activism (Pape et al., 2023). In sport sociology research, intersectionality serves as a valuable theoretical framework and tool to understand and redress social inequities in sports (Pape et al., 2023). Using intersectionality in my research allowed me to focus on more than one category of oppression and analyze how intersecting social locations (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) impact lifeguarding diversity and job experience.

Those who adopt an intersectional perspective recognize that social inequities arise from the intersections of various social constructs such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and nationality (Winker & Degele, 2011), which are historically constructed and institutionalized (Walby et al., 2012). These inequities, influenced by power systems that perpetuate oppression experienced by equity-owed populations (Walby et al., 2012), are significantly shaped by social stratification, contributing to individuals' societal positions (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Scholars who apply an intersectional lens often move beyond one-dimensional views of oppression, recognizing that identities such as gender, race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and ability, intersect to shape individual experiences (Wyatt et al., 2022). Power systems coalesce to create a complex network that marginalizes individuals across intersecting social locations (Moradi, 2017; Wyatt et al., 2022), with those in power actively suppressing the voices and experiences of members of equity-owed groups (Wyatt et al., 2022). As a researcher, using an intersectional framework enabled me to expose the ways in which historical and cultural power dynamics influence social hierarchies, access to resources, and opportunities (Collins, 2020).

Since its introduction in the late 1980s, intersectionality has been used to reveal that single axis thinking can undermine social justice struggles (Cho et al., 2013). Social justice is defined as thoughts and behaviours that help reduce discrimination, prejudice, and oppression in

society (Lee, 2012). At the core of intersectionality, researchers employ social justice to advocate and create spaces for marginalized groups (Cho et al., 2013). Those who apply a social justice approach strive to dismantle the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized groups by understanding and challenging the interlocking mechanisms of discrimination (Cho et al., 2013). Consequently, the desire for social justice allows researchers to fuel the goal of an intersectional theoretical framework and push to advocate and dismantle oppressive power systems.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a framework has strengths that lie in enhancing awareness of oppression, promoting inclusivity, and guiding nuanced analyses and interventions for social justice. Recognizing the intersections of multiple social identities allows a more refined analysis of how oppression and privilege influence lives (Sawyer et al., 2013). Another strength of using an intersectional framework is that researchers can highlight individuals' unique challenges due to intersecting identities, amplifying the voices of equity-owed groups (McCall, 2005).

Additionally, intersectionality can foster a more inclusive and holistic understanding of social issues, promoting empathy and solidarity across diverse communities (Sawyer et al., 2013). As a tool for social justice advocacy, intersectionality enables the researcher to develop targeted policies addressing the root causes of systemic inequities, contributing to more effective interventions (Lee, 2012). Ultimately, this approach's strengths reinforce the importance of employing a multiple-axis approach to understanding and examining the experiences of people who experience oppression however, its weaknesses may still shape its application.

While intersectionality proves valuable for understanding the complex nature of social identities and oppression, researchers working with this approach as a theoretical framework

may also face challenges. There is a risk of oversimplification or misinterpretation due to the intricate web of intersecting factors, potentially leading to confusion or essentializing experiences (Ferree, 2018). Further, focusing on intersecting identities may sideline specific issues, diluting targeted efforts against inequity (Christofferson, 2021). Through my research, I navigated the weaknesses of an intersectional framework through a thorough understanding of intersectionality. I also avoided oversimplification by ensuring that I attended to each axis of inequity.

Methodology

While I used an archival approach, which I describe below, for my first paper, for my second I used qualitative descriptive methodology (QD) to guide my thesis, which is highlighted in my second publishable paper, as the first publishable paper did not require a methodology. In this section, I discuss the history of its development, the components, the strengths and challenges, and the suitability of QD to my research.

History of Qualitative Descriptive Methodology

Qualitative descriptive (QD) methodology was first defined by Sandelowski (2000) and gained recognition in the early 2000s as a distinct approach within qualitative research. Those who use it are oriented towards the goal of providing a comprehensive summary of events or experiences using everyday language. Compared to other qualitative methodologies, QD involves minimal theorization or recontextualization. Instead, researchers engaging with QD often emphasize straightforward descriptions of participants' perspectives (Sandelowski, 2000). A QD design is particularly well-suited for exploring specific phenomena when time or resources are limited (Bradshaw et al., 2017), such as during a master's student's research. This

approach is used to identify key components of events or experiences and to generate practical insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Kim et al., 2017).

The Components of Qualitative Descriptive Methodology

QD methodology is characterized by its flexible and pragmatic design, without a rigid structural framework. Scholars have outlined key features of QD and its value as a methodological approach within qualitative research (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Kim et al., 2017). One foundational component of QD is its alignment with a naturalistic perspective, which involves examining phenomena in real-world contexts without experimental manipulation (Kim et al., 2017). This approach lends itself well to the collection of data that reflect events or experiences in equity-owned lifeguards everyday, unaltered form, contributing to accessible descriptions. QD is also considered less theory-driven compared to other qualitative methodologies (Sandelowski, 2000). Using it, researchers can engage with diverse theoretical frameworks, which can be selectively integrated or omitted depending on the study's objectives and context (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). This flexibility applies to both data collection and analysis, enabling researchers to accommodate variability while prioritizing the authenticity of participants' accounts. Data collection methods commonly used within QD include individual and focus group interviews that are minimally structured or semi-structured to support the generation of context-rich insights (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Sampling strategies typically involve purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Kim et al., 2017). Researchers using QD typically present their findings through clear and direct descriptive summaries of everyday language, prioritizing accessibility over abstract interpretation (Kim et al., 2017).

Strengths and Challenges

As a methodology, the use of QD presents both strengths and challenges. Kim and colleagues (2017) suggested one of the primary strengths of the methodology is its flexibility. In particular, the absence of rigid boundaries allows researchers to integrate techniques from other qualitative traditions, which can support the collection of rich detailed data and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Kim et al., 2017). QD is characterized by a lower level of inference compared to more interpretive methodologies, which contributes to a more authentic representation of participants' experiences and supports the generation of data that are both contextually grounded and unique (Chafe, 2017). The focus on plain language allows for findings to be accessible and practical, particularly useful in applied fields such as healthcare, education, and community-based research (Sandelowski, 2000). QD is especially well-suited for examining under-researched or niche topics, in which preserving the authenticity of individual experiences is essential (Sandelowski, 2010). With an emphasis on first-hand accounts, the methodology is valuable for researchers whose goals are to explore the “what,” “how,” and “who” of a phenomenon (Villamin et al., 2024). Researchers have also expressed the suitability of QD for novice researchers due to the flexibility of the application (Villamin et al., 2024); however, there are also critiques that the flexible nature of of QD can make it complex for novice researchers (Kim et al., 2017).

A notable challenge for novice researchers is the limited procedural guidance available in the literature, which can complicate decisions related to data collection and analysis (Kim et al., 2017). Like any research methodology, QD presents challenges related to both its design and its reception within the academic research community. QD is sometimes perceived as a less sophisticated or overly simplistic approach, which can lead to questions regarding its methodological legitimacy (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Without a clearly articulated rationale, QD

studies may be misinterpreted as lacking rigour or depth, especially when compared to more theory-driven methodologies (Sandelowski, 2010). This perception can also influence how the findings are received, with a tendency to undervalue research that prioritizes practical outcomes over conceptual or theoretical contributions (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Additionally, the use of QD generally relies on the interpretation of participants' accounts through the lens of the researcher, introducing the potential for bias and raising concerns about interpretive validity (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). However, in line with my constructionist epistemology, which is used to emphasize that researchers construct their understandings of the phenomenon based on their experiences and interpretations, this is not a concern for me.

Suitability for My Research

The overarching goal of my QD research was to highlight and amplify the voices of equity-owed lifeguards, as well as provide a more nuanced account of their understandings of their social realities and the nuanced nature of their experiences (Chafe, 2017). The use of QD supported me in this work, through which I was able to engage in a low-inference, participant-centred approach that maintained proximity to the lived experiences shared during interviews. This methodology was particularly valuable in capturing subjective perspectives while avoiding excessive theorization or abstraction (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Aligned with Sandelowski's (2010) emphasis on using QD to explore the "who, what, and where" of a phenomenon, QD provided a flexible yet rigorous framework for presenting rich, descriptive insights into the workplace realities of equity-owed lifeguards.

Methods

In the following section, I outline my sampling approach, purposive sampling, and the methods I selected to answer my research question. I used archival research to address my first

research question: How organizations can increase the representation of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding? and semi-structured interviews to address my second research question, “What are the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards?” I chose each method to align with my methodology and to best amplify the experiences and voices of members of equity-owed groups. I began conducting semi-structured interviews only after receiving approval from the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board (H-06-24-10479). While awaiting ethics approval, I focused on collecting archival data, which did not require ethics approval. Following approval, I continued with archival data collection along with the semi-structured interviews.

Sampling

When conducting qualitative research, researchers make sampling choices that enable them to deeply understand the phenomenon they are studying (DeCarlo, 2018). Diverging from an emphasis on statistical representativeness in quantitative research, qualitative researchers generally prioritize sampling methods that enhance the study's rigour (Gill, 2020). In this research, I used purposive sampling, which involves the selection of participants based on specific characteristics desired by the researcher (DeCarlo, 2018). I employed this sampling technique in both my manuscripts and both for archival research and semi-structured interviews.

In my first paper, I used purposive sampling to collect archival data, with documents selected based on predetermined criteria and relevance to the research focus. I sourced texts from multiple databases, including the Government of Canada Web Archives, CBC Archive, Library and Archives Canada, SportDiscus, and ProQuest. Consistent search terms were applied across all databases, including “lifeguard training,” “swimming diversity,” “lifeguard demographics,” and combinations such as “(lifeguard OR life guard OR life saver) AND (equit* OR divers* OR minorit*).” I selected documents based on their alignment with the inclusion criteria, their

applicability to identifying promising practices, and their origin in either Canada or the United States.

In my second paper, I used purposive sampling to investigate the experiences related to marginalization and lifeguarding, which were essential for capturing nuanced perspectives. I drew upon my network within the aquatic community through social media, recruiting self-identifying equity-owed individuals based on gender, sexual orientation, disability, race and ethnicity, age, and income who are currently working as a lifeguard or who worked as a lifeguard within the past five years. This intentional selection was a deliberate attempt to garner valuable insights from current and former lifeguards, aligning with an intersectional perspective to amplify diverse equity-owed voices (Crenshaw, 1989). When I invited participants to take part in the study, I provided them with consent form, which was completed prior to the start of the interview process.

Method 1: Archival Research

Archival research encompasses examining primary and secondary resources to gather data and comprehend the contextual background of phenomena (Caseñas & Kalsbeek, 2006). Primary sources offer direct evidence or firsthand accounts, while secondary sources provide analyses, summaries, or evaluations derived from or interpreting primary sources (Caseñas & Kalsbeek, 2006). Researchers employing archival research focus on primary sources, delving into their historical context to construct meaning (Caseñas & Kalsbeek, 2006). Particularly valuable for historical analysis and secondary studies, archival research involves selecting, interpreting, and constructing meaning from primary sources, with secondary sources serving as efficient starting points for further exploration (Stewart, 2012).

The use of archival research aligned seamlessly with my epistemological perspective of constructionism, which emphasized the construction of meaning. Researchers who use archival data are aligned with a constructionist perspective as it facilitates the analysis of how meanings, values, and social realities have been historically and culturally constructed within specific social contexts (Odularu, 2024). In this research I used archival research to collect various documents to inform my three promising practices to increase the representation of equity-owned lifeguards in Canada and the US. While conducting my archival research, I looked for policies and programs that were previously implemented in Canada to increase equity-owned community members' engagement in swimming and lifeguarding. As the topic is very specific and niche, the lack of results led me to expand my search to the US as the lifeguarding workplace is similar across Canada and the US. Throughout the data collection process, I found documents dating back to 1939 that were relevant in understanding the relationship between equity-owned lifeguards and the lifeguarding workplace. However, due to limited data in digital archives explicitly addressing policies and programs, I expanded the search to include past and existing initiatives found on organizational websites accessed through Google.

Before selecting archival research as one of my methods, I conducted a review of its methodological strengths. Scholars have noted that archival research enhances the rigour of a study by contributing historical depth and longitudinal insight (Fisher & Chaffee, 2018). By adopting this approach, I leveraged existing data housed in digital archives, offering a cost-effective alternative to the often time-consuming and resource-intensive process of collecting new data. Additionally, archival research provides valuable historical context, allowing researchers to trace the evolution of policies, practices, and events over time (Fisher & Chaffee, 2018).

Despite these advantages, accessing some archival sources presented a significant challenge. Initially, I aimed to obtain files and documentation from the Drowning Prevention Research Centre of Canada, located within the Ontario Lifesaving Society. However, despite directly contacting the organization, I was not granted access to their database or given direction regarding available archival materials.

Method 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, a prominent form of the interview method, are contextually bound conversations co-created by participants and researchers (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Researchers who use semi-structured interviews can be flexible while they utilize predetermined questions as a framework and create space for open-ended responses. Interviewers employ open-ended questions to elicit detailed and nuanced participant responses, supplementing them with follow-up prompts and inquiries for clarification. Ultimately, the use of semi-structured interviews facilitates a co-created discourse between participants and researchers, enabling sharing unique perspectives (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

In my research, I focused on evoking the uniqueness and authenticity of the experiences of equity-owned lifeguards in the workplace. To avoid generalizations and foster in-depth exploration of their experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with self-identified members of equity-owned groups who are current and past lifeguards. Prior to conducting the interview, each participant completed a short demographic questionnaire to ensure that all participants met the interview requirements. In addition, to simple demographic questions, participants provided answered questions about their experiences in the workplace, and they stated their preferred pronouns. All participants were given the option on in-person interviews if they resided in Ottawa or on Zoom regardless of location. All participants opted to engage in

online interviews as they took place over the summer months and was easier for participants' schedules. Below is the participant table of the 14 participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Name	Age Range	Identities	Organization	Years Worked as a Lifeguard
Alex	40-44	Gay, Older, Man	Municipality A	2000-2006, 2022-Present
David	18-19	Indigenous, ADHD, Man	Private Facility A	2014-Present
Emma	20-24	Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility B	2017-2022
Kevin	25-29	Asian, Gay, Man	Municipality A	2016-2021
Kiara	25-29	South Asian, Woman	Municipality D	2015-2019
Lucy	30-34	Latina, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility C	2016-Present
Maggie	20-24	Indigenous, ADHD, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility A	2021-Present
Marin	25-29	South Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Water Park	2014-2019
Matt	20-24	Trans, Gay, Man	Municipality A, Private Facility C	2017-Present
Mia	20-24	Deaf, Bisexual, Woman	Municipality B	2018-2021
Rachel	25-29	Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility B	2015-2020
Sarah	30-34	Lesbian, Type 1 Diabetes, Woman	Municipality A	2010-2020
Taylor	20-24	Bisexual, Dyslexia, Woman	Municipality C, Private Facility C	2020-Present
Tess	20-24	Indigenous, Woman	Private Facility C	2018-2022

Note. this table depicts participants' equity-owed identities and their places of work.

Online interviewing increased over the COVID-19 pandemic, and the innovation of video call platforms improved (Keen et al., 2022). Online interviewing has shown strengths in increasing the engagement of equity-owed populations in research, allowing for flexible

scheduling and reaching participants outside of where the researcher resides, reducing the researcher's travel costs (Keen et al., 2022). In addition, virtual interviews also increase safety for participants, limiting exposure amid the pandemic (Sah et al., 2020), and increasing psychological safety of participants choosing where they want to share their story within their home or in an alternate space (Weiner et al., 2021). For my research, conducting synchronous online interviews possessed the same strengths as in-person face-to-face interviews. Researchers who use face-to-face interviews indicate strong participant engagement, allowing for real-time clarification, posing additional questions, and utilizing the interview's flexibility to discuss aspects of the research that are significant to them, ultimately enhancing the robustness of the data collection process (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Valuing the strengths of in-person face-to-face interviews, while emphasizing the inclusivity of the research, online video interviews via Zoom was the most suitable for my thesis. During my virtual interview process I faced poor internet connection with one of my participants and, to avoid the participant having to repeat what they said or with the potential of mishearing, we switched to a phone interview part way through.

Despite the benefits of semi-structured interviews, the process was time-consuming and labour-intensive. For each interview, I was required to coordinate a time, write and review the transcript, and conduct the analysis (Opdenakker, 2006). To mitigate the time-consuming and labour-intensive realities of semi-structured interviews, I provided clear information to all participants about time commitment, flexible time slots for convenience, and used the auto transcript populated by Zoom. As an individual with a learning disability of phonetic coding disorder, I faced numerous challenges throughout the transcription process. Despite reviewing and listening to the recording multiple times, I ended up utilizing my resources of text-to-speech

on Word to verify the organization of the transcript, and to listen to the interview again if words were missing. Each participant received their transcript within a one week of the interview, and they were invited to redact any information they wished, add information, and to verify the transcript. Once approved, I continued with my data analysis with the transcripts.

Data Analysis

For my research, I employed reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Researchers use RTA to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Derived from thematic analysis, RTA allows researchers to emphasize reflexivity, wherein researchers critically reflect on their assumptions and biases that may influence their data interpretation (Trainor & Bundon, 2021) to promote transparency and rigour in the research process. Throughout the six phases of analysis (familiarization of data, coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme defining, and report writing), researchers maintain critical reflection to generate meaningful insights from the data (Trainor & Bundon, 2021).

Researchers who use RTA can delve deeply into the data collected, facilitating a systematic and comprehensive construction of patterns and themes (Crowther & Grecic, 2022). When researchers actively engage in a reflective process, they can focus on nuanced insights that might be overlooked, leading to a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Crowther & Grecic, 2022). Further, when employing RTA, researchers have flexibility in their approach, allowing them to adapt the analysis to suit the specific context and research questions (Crowther & Grecic, 2022).

Despite numerous strengths, RTA has limitations as a data analysis method. One of the alleged weaknesses of RTA is the subjectivity in the interpretation of data (Stuermer et al., 2022). While reflexivity is a central tenet of RTA, researchers who use RTA are meant to address their

biases, which can be challenging (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Additionally, RTA involves multiple cycles of coding, theme development, and reflection, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive and may pose challenges regarding the feasibility of conducting RTA when the research produces large data sets or limited resources (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Lastly, the flexibility of RTA can lead to ambiguity or lack of standardization in the process and can jeopardize the rigour of the research (Stuermer et al., 2022). Despite RTA having a variety of weaknesses that a researcher can encounter, there are strategies to help mitigate these issues.

Throughout my thesis, I actively navigated the commonly cited limitations associated with RTA by maintaining a strong commitment to reflexivity, transparency, and rigour. Operating from a constructionist epistemology, I did not perceive my lived experiences in aquatics as sources of bias; rather, I regarded them as meaningful insights that informed my research, continually reflecting on their influence throughout the process. RTA proved to be time-intensive, particularly during the transcription and coding phases. Although I remained diligent in transcribing interviews shortly after they were conducted, the process took longer than anticipated due to the impact of my learning disability, specifically my challenges with attention to punctuation. Similarly, coding was mentally demanding and required more frequent breaks than expected to ensure that each transcript was analyzed with care and attentiveness. Despite these challenges, my ongoing reflexive practice, transparency about my positionality, and clear articulation of my role as a researcher allowed me to address and mitigate the potential weaknesses in my RTA findings.

Thesis Format

My thesis is structured using the “publishable paper format.” In the first paper, I address my first research question: how can organizations increase the representation of equity-owned

groups in lifeguarding? In the second paper, I explore the subsequent question: *what are the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards?* Together, these papers make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature by addressing key gaps related to the diversity in lifeguarding, or lack thereof, and the experiences of equity-owed lifeguards in the workplace. By centring the voices and lived experiences of equity-owed lifeguards in my thesis, I sought to amplify perspectives that are often marginalized in both academic and professional discourse. Ultimately, the findings of my thesis are intended to inform efforts to create more inclusive aquatic workplaces and contribute to the diversification and retention of the lifeguarding workforce.

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**Chapter 2: Promising Practices for Increasing the Number of Equity-Owed Lifeguards in
Canada and the United States of America**

Currently under review at the *International Journal of Aquatics Research and Education*

Abstract

There is currently a shortage of lifeguards in Canada and the United States of America (US) (Frommer, 2023; Santucci, 2024), and those who are working as lifeguards often do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (Martinez, 2020). Increasing the number of lifeguards from equity-owed groups is a potential way of increasing the lifeguard workforce and decreasing the shortage of workers in these important roles, as well as a moral imperative. In this paper I explore challenges to and promising practices aimed at increasing the representation of members equity-owed groups in lifeguarding. I begin with an overview of lifeguarding in Canada and the US. Then, we summarize key challenges to the inclusion of members equity-owed groups within lifeguarding. Next, I use archival research, an intersectional theoretical approach, and reflexive thematic analysis to highlight promising practices for promoting equitable access and inclusion for members of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding.

Keywords: Lifeguarding, Diversity, Inclusion, Equity-Owed Groups, Canada, United States

Lifeguards play a critical role in maintaining safe aquatic environments. Despite their importance, there is currently a shortage of lifeguards in Canada and the United States (US) (Frommer, 2023; Santucci, 2024), and those who are working as lifeguards often do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (Martinez, 2020). As such, increasing the number of lifeguards from equity-owed groups is a potential way of increasing the lifeguard workforce and decreasing the shortage of workers in these important roles. Equity-owed groups are defined as the communities outside the dominant group, such as racialized individuals, women, gender diverse individuals, 2SLGBTQ+, members of the disability community, immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people, religious minorities, and those who live on low-incomes (Darroch & Sheppard-Perkins, 2023). Members of these communities continue to face marginalization in numerous spaces, including aquatics.

The social inclusion that can be facilitated by recreation is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging, improving mental health, and enhancing the overall quality of life (Edwards et al., 2022). However, the inclusive potential of recreation is not automatically realized; it requires deliberate efforts to ensure that equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles are integrated into recreational spaces and programs to promote the inclusion of members of equity-owed groups. EDI is fundamental in recreation, as it ensures that everyone, regardless of their identity, can participate in and benefit from recreational activities (Edwards et al., 2022). Access to recreation is often influenced by a range of factors, including the uneven distribution of facilities, socio-economic disparities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender, sexuality, disability, and perceived social status (Edwards et al., 2022; Oncescu et al., 2023; Rich et al., 2024). systemic barriers, which are not the result of individual actions but rather arise from broader societal norms, institutional biases, and historical inequities (Allison & Hibbler, 2004), act as major

exclusionary factors for equity-owned individuals' access to recreation. These systematic barriers exclude members of equity-owned groups from having equal access to formal aquatic instruction and lifeguard training, which can limit their engagement in aquatics and reinforce social inequities.

In this paper, I begin by providing the context for lifeguarding in Canada and the US. Then, through a critical review of both grey and peer-reviewed literature, I provide an overview of key challenges to the inclusion of members equity-owned groups within lifeguarding. Next, through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2021), I outline three promising practices aimed at increasing the representation of equity-owned groups in lifeguarding and how they have been used in practice. Promising practices are strategies and approaches that have demonstrated the potential to effectively address specific challenges and achieve desired outcomes (Lyon et al., 2017). By highlighting promising practices and their potential impact, I offer concrete ways to foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive lifeguarding workforce, which can contribute to safer and more inclusive aquatic spaces for all.

Review of Literature

Identifying the promising practices for increasing the representation of equity-owned groups in lifeguarding is dependent on the country context. While we are most interested in research on equity-owned groups in the Canadian lifeguarding context, as that is the context in which both authors work, this body of literature is limited; as such, we have also drawn on literature from the US. Given the similarities in certification requirements and as both are large, high-income countries in North America, I argue that the two contexts can inform each other.

Below, I provide the context for lifeguarding in Canada and the US, and I review challenges that contribute to a low level of representation of members of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding.

Canada

In 2018, Statistics Canada reported over 4,700 public pools nationwide, with 98% of them owned by municipalities (Statistics Canada, 2018). The majority of aquatics participants in Canada are white, middle-class individuals, resulting in a persistent lack of diversity and inclusion for equity-owed groups in lifeguarding (Gomes et al., 2022; Kloet & Annette, 2005). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, lifeguard retention was already a challenge as most Canadian lifeguards stop working before the end of their post-secondary education as the average lifeguard was between 16-18, but the Covid-19 pandemic further worsened the shortage (Ireland, 2023). During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada, public pools were closed, and lifeguarding certification and re-certification courses were cancelled due to restrictions, leaving an even greater shortage of trained lifeguards who were available to work (Ireland, 2023). In attempts to increase the quantity of qualified lifeguards in 2023, the age requirement for the National Lifeguard qualification lowered from 16 to 15 in the province of Ontario; however, it is still too early to see the effects of this adjustment (Lifesaving Society, 2024b).

Although lifeguard training in Canada has changed over time, programs and recruitment efforts have seen minimal adjustments to include equity-owed groups (Gomes et al., 2022). Socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic identity, and regional disparities have historically influenced access to aquatic facilities and lifeguard training, with Indigenous communities particularly affected by systemic barriers linked to the legacy of colonialism (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019; Rousell & Giles, 2011).

In Canada, the Lifesaving Society is a national organization with provincial and territorial branches that promote water safety and drowning prevention. It offers the accredited National Lifeguard program (Lifesaving Society, 2024a). Although the Lifesaving Society emphasizes diversity, flexibility, creativity, and community-driven inclusiveness, it has not yet adapted its curriculum specifically to address equity-owed lifeguards (Lifesaving Society, 2024a). Nevertheless, the Lifesaving Society has stated that its training programs are designed to maximize the participation and success of individuals of various ages, skill levels, and abilities (Lifesaving Society, 2021). Further, the Lifesaving Society offers inclusion clinics that individuals can take to enhance their inclusion education, but they are not mandatory (Lifesaving Society, 2021). Despite these efforts, trainees have reported that inclusivity components are either skipped or rushed through during training (Faster Capital, 2024).

United States of America

The legacy of racial segregation in the US has had a profound impact on access to public swimming facilities. From the late 1890s to the 1970s, segregation in pools transitioned from being primarily class-based to being racially motivated, deeply embedding discrimination in the history of public swimming (Wiltse, 2007). The enduring effects of this segregation continue to shape perceptions of who belongs in aquatic spaces, often marginalizing members of communities of colour (Waller & Bemiller, 2018). These exclusionary practices have restricted access to pools and influenced who works in the aquatic field. Despite efforts over the past 20 years to increase diversity through targeted programs for equity-owed groups, 77.2% of lifeguards in the USA in 2022 were white and able-bodied, while the average age of the lifeguarding workforce was 23.2(Data USA, 2022).

Key organizations like the American Red Cross and the YMCA set lifeguard training standards nationwide (American Red Cross, 2023; YMCA, 2023). While the American Red Cross provides a widely recognized certification that can be pursued at many pools, the YMCA offers its own lifeguarding certification, the YMCA Lifeguard v6 Certification, available exclusively through its facilities (YMCA, 2023). The American Red Cross has stated that it fosters a diverse environment and aligns its mission with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, which is specified as valuing the diversity of backgrounds, experiences, abilities, race, ethnicity, gender identities, ages, sexual orientation, and cultures (American Red Cross, 2024). Differing from the Canadian Lifesaving Society, the American Red Cross has made the effort to adjust its curriculum to engage a more diverse audience by implementing mandatory EDI chapters in its courses (American Red Cross, 2024). American Red Cross (2018) has an *Inclusion Resource Guide* that was created to help lifeguarding instructors accommodate various candidates' needs such as physical disabilities, learning disabilities, behavior issues, and seizure disorders. This resource guide is available for all instructors to promote equity in their programs while still ensuring candidates are meeting the necessary standards (American Red Cross, 2018).

Challenges to EDI in Lifeguarding

Financial Barriers

Individuals who have completed their lifeguarding qualifications often mention that the cost is high, the courses take a long time, and the locations where the courses are offered are often not close to home or are not offered at times that work with busy high school schedules (Taylor, 2016). Organized sports and recreation can be prohibitively expensive for many individuals, creating significant financial barriers that limit access to these activities (Windspeaker, 2017). For example, during an Alberta Sports Connection meeting, a newly

appointed Ojibwe member highlighted the dangers posed by the high costs of swimming lessons, which restrict access to aquatic programs for many members Indigenous communities (Windspeaker, 2017).

In Canada, lifeguard candidates must take and successfully complete the following courses: Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, Standard First Aid, and National Lifeguard (Lifesaving Society, 2024). Many employers also require prospective employees to complete three additional courses: Lifesaving Instructor, Swim Instructor, and Airway Management (Lifesaving Society, 2024) as instructor-lifeguards are desirable employees. According to the Ontario Lifesaving Society 2024 Pricelist, becoming a certified lifeguard can cost individuals up to \$1737.33 before tax (Ontario Lifesaving Society, 2024). In addition, National Lifeguard, Airway Management, Swim Instructor, and Lifesaving Instructor must be recertified every two years, with costs ranging from \$71.24-\$89.05 each before tax, while Standard First Aid must be recertified every three years, with costs ranging from \$90-\$115 before tax (Lifesaving Society, 2024). These expenditures can deter candidates from completing and maintaining their lifeguarding qualifications.

Lifeguarding candidates looking to pursue lifeguarding through the American Red Cross must take the American Red Cross Lifeguarding certification, which only has the prerequisites that the candidate must be 15, and pass a 300-yard swim test, tread water, and retrieve a ten-pound brick from the bottom of the pool (American Red Cross, 2024). Candidates who choose this route pay \$350USD plus tax for the qualification and must recertify it every two years. In addition to the lifeguarding qualification, candidates must complete first aid and CPR/AED certifications that costs \$64USD plus tax, which must be recertified every two years (American

Red Cross, 2024). The financial burden of aquatic programming limits the pool of potential lifeguard candidates, as many individuals simply cannot afford the necessary training.

Importantly, the quality of lifeguard training and programming often varies depending on the area's socioeconomic status. In a reflective piece published in 2016, a former lifeguard from Southern Ontario discussed the substandard conditions they faced while working in lower-income neighbourhoods (Walter, 2016). They noted that pools in these areas are more rundown, leading to inferior programming, frequent pool closures, and compromised workplace safety for young lifeguards. Consequently, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds continue to experience inequitable access to quality aquatic programs and services.

Geographic Barriers

Significant disparities exist between urban and rural areas regarding access to lifeguard training resources. Indeed, facility location significantly impacts the availability and quality of organized swimming lessons and lifeguard training opportunities (Environmental Assessment Office, 2006). Those living in urban areas often benefit from more robust infrastructure and training opportunities, while those living in rural locations struggle with fewer resources, exacerbating the challenge of creating an equitable, diverse, and inclusive lifeguard workforce (American Lifeguard Association, 2023). In northern Canada, Rousell and Giles (2012) found that northern communities often rely on seasonal staffing to keep pools and waterfronts operational. Many of these staff members come from southern Canada. The reliance on southern Canadian staff, who are often culturally insensitive or ill-prepared for the unique needs of northern communities with large populations of Indigenous Peoples, has perpetuated the cycle of predominantly white lifeguards in the territories (Rousell & Giles, 2012).

Identity-based Exclusion

An individual's identity is multi-dimensional and can be complex, as aspects of an individual's identity are not always visible at first glance or encounter (Rogers & Syed, 2021). In aquatic environments, those with visible aspects of their identities can often be excluded and face inequitable treatment by peers and the public (Yonan, 2021). The dominance of white Eurocentric individuals at swimming facilities has deeply influenced the swimming and lifeguarding demographic, often portraying a negative image of those outside the dominant group (Wong, 2011). Historically, lifeguards have been taught to employ a trait-centred approach when identifying potential risks in the pool based on age, gender, body weight, race, or ethnic background, which has led to the profiling of certain groups, including children, minorities, obese individuals, and those with disabilities (Pia, 1999).

Such training perpetuates the notion that aquatics and lifeguarding are unsuitable for individuals who do not fit the "ideal" profile. Despite this type of training not currently being used, new lifeguards are heavily influenced by those who preceded them and their superiors, ingraining these negative habits into current lifeguarding systems (Hall et al., 2009). As individuals who are currently in decision-making roles within lifeguarding organizations were often trained around the time when ideal lifeguards were white, heterosexual males from a high socioeconomic background (Wong, 2011), the culture continues to be exclusive and inequitable for lifeguards who are part of equity-owed groups.

Sex, Gender, Religion, and Exclusion

A lack of inclusion related to sex, gender, and religion play significant roles in the barriers to creating an inclusive lifeguarding environment (Thomas, 2001; MacMillan, 2008). Females who are a part of the dominant group identified in lifeguarding (i.e., white, middle to upper-class) still face discrimination in the industry as a result of their sex (Thomas, 2001).

Women and girls have reported needing to push back against masculine ideologies, such as authoritarian leadership and muscular build, to carve out a place for themselves in aquatics (Thomas, 2001). Additionally, lifeguarding is often subject to hyper-sexualization, affecting both men and women, from peers and the public.

Sex- and gender-based discrimination have impacts on lifeguards. Female lifeguards have been sexually harassed by peers and the public, which is often blamed on the type of attire they wear for work (Lo, 2001). Furthermore, female lifeguards have also been objectified in the workplace, with a common observation that only white, blonde, and thin lifeguards are deemed relevant or desirable (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). Females often face pushback from their male counterparts, saying they are weak and not strong enough for the job (Hunnicutt, 2017). Despite lifeguard training holding the same standards for males and females, females are often seen as less capable and excluded from the lifeguarding. Further, the lack of inclusivity in lifeguarding often deters individuals—particularly trans and gender-diverse people—from engaging in swimming due to fears of confrontation or harassment in gendered spaces like changing rooms (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2014). Discriminatory practices, such as the rejection of t-shirts or modest swimwear as inappropriate swimming attire, further compound these barriers (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2014).

In addition, members of religious minorities face similar discomfort with Western swimsuit standards. Historically, swimsuits provided similar coverage for men and women, but Western fashion has evolved to increasingly reduce material in female swimwear (Rust, 1977). As Western swimsuit norms have become more revealing, individuals from equity-owed groups that prioritize modesty—such as Muslim women—are often excluded from aquatic spaces (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012).

Addressing the challenges outlined above is necessary in combatting the low representation of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding. Importantly, however, in previous research researchers have failed to address these issues in an intersectional fashion, instead relying on siloed approaches. In the following section, I outline the theoretical approach I used for identifying promising practices for increasing the representation of members of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding.

Theoretical Framework

The importance of EDI in lifeguarding is best understood through the lens of intersectionality, a theoretical framework initially articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). One of the key tenets of intersectionality is the idea that individuals possess multiple, intersecting social identities such as race, gender, class, and ability, which collectively shape their experiences of inclusion or exclusion (Frisby, 2011). Intersectionality is used to focus on interlocking systems of oppression, the unique and context-dependent experience individuals possess, equity-owed groups, to challenge existing power structures, and to advocate for inclusive and transformative change (Al-Faham et al., 2019). This framework has become a cornerstone of critical scholarship as it challenges the limitations of linear, single-axis approaches to social justice (Pape et al., 2023).

In the context of lifeguarding, an intersectional approach is essential for understanding the complex realities faced by equity-owed groups. EDI initiatives in recreation often focus on a single aspect of identity, such as race or gender (Arora & Wolbring, 2022); however, such a narrow focus can be insufficient in addressing the diverse needs of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups (Frisby, 2011). For example, a recreation program designed to be inclusive of women may still exclude those who face additional barriers due to their race,

ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability (Joseph, 2017). Employing a single-identity inclusion approach, such as women-only swims in aquatics, can create more equitable, diverse, and inclusive environments. Importantly, though, an intersectional approach would reveal that this practice is insufficient for achieving true inclusion (Caudwell, 2022). Incorporating intersectionality into EDI efforts into lifeguarding is not merely a theoretical exercise; it is a practical imperative for promoting social justice and equity in the field.

Data Collection and Analysis

Using archival research, I analyzed materials spanning 1939 to 2021 sourced from multiple databases, including the Government of Canada Web Archives, CBC Archive, Library and Archives Canada, SportDiscus, and ProQuest. The search terms included “lifeguard training,” “swimming diversity,” “lifeguard demographics,” and combinations such as “(lifeguard OR life guard OR life saver) AND (equit* OR divers* OR minorit*).” I then conducted a full-text analysis of 45 documents.

I employed Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to analyze the data collected from archival research. Rooted in thematic analysis, researchers who employ RTA emphasize reflexivity, prompting researchers to critically reflect on their assumptions, biases, and positionality that may influence data interpretation (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). This approach enhances the transparency and rigor of the research process. The analysis follows six iterative phases: familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, theme refinement, defining themes, and writing the report. I read and manually coded the data by tagging text that described approaches that were used to facilitate the inclusion of members of equity-owed communities. While there were many different codes, the most prominent included the following: engaging equity-owed groups, collaborative design, flexibility, financial barriers, culturally sensitivity

training, representation in training materials, safe and welcoming spaces, and physical inclusion. I used these codes to develop themes pertaining to promising practices: accessible programming, inclusivity and equity in the workplace, and culturally relevant programming. The finalized themes were based on an intersectional theoretical approach, which was selected prior to the archival research. Importantly, establishing the theoretical perspective prior to the data collection allows the coding and theme analysis to be influenced by both deductive and inductive approaches to analyzing the data (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Using this approach, I identified three promising practices that promote an intersectional approach to mitigating the lack of representation of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding.

Notably, in RTA, researchers engage in ongoing critical reflection (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). As such, it is important to outline our positionalities. I am a first-generation Canadian graduate student of Portuguese and Italian descent who identifies as a woman who is queer, neurodivergent, living with a learning disability, and cisgender. Having grown up participating in aquatic sports, swimming lessons, lifeguarding, and swimming instructing, the first author has a wealth of personal and professional experience within the aquatic environment. My identity as a lifeguard intersects with my identity as part of multiple equity-owed groups, giving me an important vantage point on the lifeguarding workforce. My identity and lived experiences have shaped my perspective, highlighting the importance of reflexivity in examining promising practices in aquatics.

Results and Discussion

Promising practices can serve as criteria when creating or evaluating programs, policies, or organizational efforts (Lyon et al., 2017). In the context of recreation, promising practices are commonly used to enhance participant engagement through increasing inclusivity and targeting

underrepresented groups (Miller et al., 2009). Lifeguards play an important role in the provision of recreation at bodies of water. Importantly, however, lifeguarding continues to be relatively exclusive (Kloet & Annette, 2005). To increase the representation of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding, promising practices must reflect approaches that foster lifeguarding skill development, enhance program accessibility and inclusivity, and minimize the entry barriers in lifeguarding, and minimize the barriers individuals may face while in the lifeguarding workforce.

Promising Practice 1: Accessible Programming

To become a certified lifeguard in Canada and the US, candidates must successfully complete a series of required courses. However, these courses often present significant financial, time, and location-based barriers, disproportionately impacting equity-owed groups. Accessible programming addresses these barriers holistically, creating a more inclusive environment. While addressing individual dimensions—such as offering scholarships, sliding-scale fees, and subsidized training to mitigate financial burdens—can reduce exclusion, adopting an intersectional approach can enhance overall inclusion. For instance, financial support alone may not suffice if courses are scheduled in ways that conflict with work, family, or education commitments or are held at facilities far from communities that experience marginalization. Flexible scheduling, condensed programs, and strategic location choices are essential to overcoming these temporal and geographical barriers (Genderman, 2012). However, a more equitable approach considers how these barriers intersect. Organizations can collect and analyze demographic data to identify underrepresented groups and respond by developing tailored programs that offer financial assistance, flexible schedules, and accessible locations. Such multidimensional strategies address categories of obstacles and tackle the compounded effects of systemic inequities, creating pathways for greater participation for equity-owed groups. By

removing these interlocking barriers, lifeguarding programs can better reflect and serve the diverse communities they operate within, promoting both representation and inclusion.

Examples of Promising Practice Use

Several programs have adopted a multi-dimensional approach to accessible programming in lifeguarding, targeting intersecting barriers experienced by equity-owed groups. In Phoenix, Arizona, scholarships and travel assistance are provided to individuals who are racial and ethnic minorities participating in lifeguard training, thus addressing barriers related to finances, geography, and racial exclusion (Martinez, 2020). In Canada, programs targeting Indigenous communities, in which residents often live with low incomes (Wilson & Macdonald, 2010), have also drawn on a multi-dimensional approach. For instance, 3-Fires, an Indigenous-owned business, offers Indigenous participants financial support and guidance to progress through lifeguard certification levels (Elliot Lake Today Staff, 2023). The City of Edmonton, Alberta, has a program called Nîkânîw, a free aquatic leadership initiative, which similarly aims to engage Indigenous individuals in lifeguarding (City of Edmonton, 2024). Additionally, a free summer camp in West Kelowna, British Columbia, provides Indigenous youth with lifeguard training, enabling them to promote water safety in their communities (ISPARC, 2022). These programs employ an intersectional approach by addressing the compounded effects of racial, ethnic, and economic inequities, thereby creating more equitable pathways into lifeguarding.

Promising Practice 2: Inclusivity and Equity in the Lifeguard Workplace

Lifeguarding is a public-facing job, and equity-owed individuals can face discrimination or adverse treatment by the patrons who use the facilities and others in their workplace. Not all equity-owed identities, such as sexual orientation and non-visible disabilities, are visible, leading to those with visible identities as equity-owed community members being made more vulnerable

to exclusion. The adverse treatment of equity-owed lifeguards underscores persistent inequities within aquatic environments. Employing an intersectional approach to combat the exclusivity and inequity in lifeguarding requires organizations to adapt training materials by depicting a variety of individuals with different positionalities in lifeguarding roles, teaching lifeguarding candidates using various teaching styles, requiring inclusivity training and inclusive workplace policies. If lifeguarding employees feel the sense of physical and psychological safety and have a sense of belonging in the workplace culture, the representation of equity-owed lifeguards is more likely to increase (Creon & Schermuly, 2019).

Examples of Promising Practices in Use

In the context of aquatics and lifeguarding, creating a safe and inclusive space for members of equity-owed groups in pool facilities is the first step to increasing exposure to lifeguarding. Implementing and running equity-owed group-targeted swims not only creates a safe space for individuals to learn and practice swimming, but it also challenges the narrative of who is accepted in the aquatic space. In recent years, several Canadian universities have introduced specific free of charge swim sessions for equity-owed groups, such as individuals from the 2SLGBTQ+ community and those with sensory sensitivities. For example, institutions like Queen's University, the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, Toronto Metropolitan University, the University of Guelph, and the University of British Columbia offer weekly swim times reserved for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals (Queen's Athletics & Recreation, 2023; Toronto Metropolitan University, 2024; University of British Columbia, 2023; University of Guelph Fitness and Recreation, 2024; University of Toronto, 2024; University of Waterloo, 2022).

As inclusion becomes increasingly recognized as a vital component of recreation and leisure, the University of British Columbia have introduced designated swim times tailored for individuals with sensory sensitivities. Those who offer these sessions create a calming environment by lowering blinds, reducing pool capacity, increasing the presence of support staff, and minimizing noise (University of British Columbia, 2023). These modifications provide a more accessible aquatic space for both patrons and staff members with sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or those on the autism spectrum, allowing them to participate without the anxiety-inducing stimuli of regular swim times. Hosting these swims sets an important precedent that everyone is welcome, regardless of identity, and can expose the broader public to more inclusive workplace. As the exposure of equity-owed groups to swimming increases, it can lead to more equity-owed individuals pursuing lifeguarding.

Lifeguarding has built a reputation as being a great summer job for teens and college students (Burchett & Eslinger, 2023); however, this reputation may prevent adult and senior lifeguards from feeling included at work. As pools globally continue to face a lifeguarding shortage and a lack of diversity, various cities have created programs targeting adults and seniors in the community to get certified as lifeguards free of charge (Dillon, 2023). In Clarington, Ontario, a new lifeguarding program called Lifeguarding at Any Age has emerged. The program is supported by a Seniors Community Grant of \$17,830.29 and aims to certify adults and seniors in aquatics to help fill lifeguard positions free of charge (Dillon, 2023). Similarly, the City of Waterloo launched an initiative to engage adults in lifeguarding for free (CBC News, 2023). This program allows adults who pass a skill assessment to take their Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, Standard First Aid, National Lifeguard, Life Saving Society Instructors and Swim Instructors courses paid for by the city (CBC News, 2023). The City of Waterloo recognized that they

struggled to staff daytime swims, which led them to this free program for anyone over 18 in hopes that they can find more long-term employees (CBC News, 2023). Outside the free training programs, patrons and staff have noticed an influx of adult and senior lifeguards (Black Press Media, 2021). Grand Forks, British Columbia, saw a positive increase in lifeguarding staff after reaching out to older adults to be lifeguards as it helps them stay active and can supplement their income (Black Press Media, 2021). Comparably, aquatic facilities have started recertification courses for adults and seniors who have previously worked as lifeguards and need recertification to get back on deck (Ireland, 2023). Facilities have seen a positive turnout for these programs as they limit the outsider feeling that older adults may feel when training with teenagers (Ireland, 2023). Tackling the intersection of age and income is vital when trying to diversify and increase lifeguarding staff, lifeguarding has a minimum age, but there is no maximum.

Promising Practice 3: Culturally Relevant Programming

Culturally relevant lifeguarding programs are an essential step toward creating inclusive aquatic environments that reflect and respect the diverse backgrounds of participants. Programs that are designed to be inclusive must integrate cultural understanding, remove barriers to access, and foster a sense of belonging for equity-owed groups, such as racialized individuals, newcomers, and communities with limited exposure to water safety practices. By adapting teaching methods, offering multilingual resources, and addressing beliefs related to gender and modesty, culturally relevant lifeguarding programs ensure that training environments are welcoming and accessible. Instructors who are training lifeguard candidates must take action to ensure an inclusive environment and understand various perspectives and experiences from individuals who come from different backgrounds. Such initiatives not only diversify the workforce in aquatics but can also promote water safety within communities that have

historically been excluded from aquatic activities, ultimately reducing disparities in swimming proficiency and drowning rates (Irwin et al., 2009).

Examples of Promising Practice in Use

While organizations and workplaces in North America have implemented inclusivity training and instated inclusivity policies, the adaptation of lifeguard programs to be culturally relevant continues to fall short. Despite the lack of actionable change from the governing bodies that create lifeguarding curriculum, organizations that offer lifeguard training have taken steps to promote more culturally relevant and inclusive programs. In Canada, Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario established the Northern Water Safety Fund (WSF) to support water safety and promote participation in water-based sport and recreation in Northern Indigenous communities (Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, 2024). The WSF provides funding for certifications such as swimming lessons and lifeguard training, as well as for safety and recreational water programming equipment (Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, 2024). These programs support culturally relevant, affordable programming as programs are subsidized and are delivered by local individuals who understand the community's needs, language, and dynamics, fostering more tailored training. Although the qualifications remain consistent with other certifications, having programs taught by community members allows for a cultural nuance.

Other attempts to increase the diversity of lifeguarding staff and work towards a lifeguarding staff that reflects the public that uses facilities, various organizations have employed an intersectional approach to remove financial barriers for ethnic and racial minorities. For instance, the City of Rochester, NY, and the City of El Monte, CA, both offer six-week lifeguarding courses for lifeguard candidates who are a part of ethnic and racial minorities with financial support to increase the diversity of their lifeguarding teams (Sepulveda, 2023; Vargas,

2021). These programs take work beyond the single access of financial barriers to also address its intersection with a lack of ethnic, racial, and linguistic representation because the programs provided are by instructors who are a part of ethnic and racial minorities with similar lived experiences as the candidates (Vargas, 2021). Having lifeguard candidates being able to relate to their instructors it can help foster more culturally relevant programming, as increased representation within these programs leads to greater cultural relevance (Jones et al., 2016).

Facilitating inclusive swim options can also lead to inclusive and equitable lifeguarding courses that can translate into the workplace. For example, efforts to create more inclusive spaces for Muslim women have led to specific swimming times designed to meet their needs. For example, the University of Sherbrooke pool offers a female-only swimming program organized by the Canadian Muslim Women's Institute, through which many Muslim women have learned to swim (Suderman, 2012). Similarly, in 2016, the City of Winnipeg initiated the "Burkini Pool Party," encouraging Muslim women to develop swimming skills in a safe and welcoming environment (CBC, 2016). The City of Mississauga took a further step by developing a program where Muslim women can complete their lifeguard training in an all-female, Muslim-only group (Panjwani, 2008). This program exemplifies the use of an intersectional approach in lifeguarding programs, targeting individuals whose religious and sex identities intersect.

Conclusion

To effectively increase the representation of equity-owed lifeguards in the lifeguarding workforce, organizations can follow industry leaders and innovators in implementing the three key intersectional promising practices that I have highlighted. Certainly, more intersectional initiatives are needed to make the lifeguard workforce more representative of the communities' lifeguards serve. I invite members of the aquatics community to continue to innovate to ensure

that all axes of inequity are addressed by engaging in further intersectional initiatives.

Ultimately, implementing intersectional practices will create a more equitable and supportive pathway into lifeguarding, which can help to create a larger, more diverse workforce.

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**Chapter 3: Fish Out of Water: The Experiences of Equity-Owed Lifeguards in Ontario,
Canada**

Abstract

The aquatics sector has a notable lack of diversity in lifeguarding due to a variety of social, economic, and historic factors. In this paper, I explore the experiences of 14 equity-owed lifeguards in a variety of workplaces in southern and eastern Ontario, Canada. Using semi-structured interviews, an intersectional theoretical approach, and reflexive thematic analysis, I produced three themes: (a) white heterosexual men are considered legitimate authority figures in lifeguarding; (b) young women lifeguards experience sexualization and sexual harassment; and (c) race- and ethnicity-based social exclusion's impact in the aquatics workplace. Based on these findings, I propose three practices to create more inclusive and supportive environments for equity-owed lifeguards.

Key words: Lifeguarding, Equity-Owed, Intersectional theory, Canada

Members of equity-owed groups, individuals who experience oppression associated with ethnicity, race, income, religion, disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, and/or age (Oncescu et al., 2024) commonly face challenges in recreation and sport workplaces (Stodolska et al., 2020). Within aquatics-based recreation and sports spaces in Canada, whiteness dominates lifeguarding, posing workplace challenges for members of equity-owed groups. Indeed, in Canada, lifeguarding has traditionally been dominated by individuals from privileged backgrounds (Rich & Giles, 2014), fostering exclusionary cultures that neglect lifeguards who are members of equity-owed groups (Rousell & Giles, 2012).

For this study, I examined the workplace experiences of 14 Canadian equity-owed lifeguards through individual semi-structured interviews (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021), intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989), and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study equity-owed groups are defined as the communities outside the dominant group, such as racialized individuals, women, gender diverse individuals, 2SLGBTQ+, members of the disability community, immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people, religious minorities, and those who live on low-incomes (Darroch & Sheppard-Perkins, 2023). Based on my findings, I produced three themes: (a) white heterosexual men are considered legitimate authority figures in lifeguarding; (b) young women lifeguards experience sexualization and sexual harassment; and (c) race- and ethnicity-based exclusion in the lifeguarding workplace. Following a discussion of these themes, I propose several courses of action that can be used to create a more inclusive lifeguarding workplace.

Literature Review

Understanding the experiences of equity-owned lifeguards requires an examination of the systemic factors shaping workplace dynamics in aquatic environments. Due to limited lifeguard-specific research, in this review of literature, I draw from broader workplace studies.

Whiteness and Exclusion in the Workplace

Whiteness is rooted in the perceived normalcy and superiority of European identities and cultural practices (Hardy, 2024), and it deeply influences workplace culture and norms (Al Ariss et al., 2014). In North American workplaces, professional standards often align with white cultural values (Bohonos, 2019). Workplace and labour union practices have historically enforced white male norms under the guise of professionalism, a concept rooted in white, male aristocratic ideals (Bohonos, 2019). White individuals often view their cultural as the social standard, reinforcing exclusion and assimilation (Reitman, 2006). In equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives, the influence of whiteness is particularly significant, as white Human Resource (HR) personnel may engage in passive allyship, further reinforcing whiteness as the social standard. Recognizing and addressing this issue is crucial for fostering genuinely inclusive workplaces (Hardy, 2024).

There are important gender-, race-, and ethnicity-based differences within workplace leadership. In Western workplace environments, leadership is often associated with masculine traits and qualities such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and competitiveness (Blake-Beard et al., 2020). Women, regardless of race or ethnicity, are often perceived as less suited for leadership due to patriarchal systems of oppression, while white men remain disproportionately represented in leadership roles and benefit from the continuation of these systems (Bierema et al., 2016). Women of colour have reported the highest levels of workplace discrimination from workplace leaders, while white men have reported the lowest (Ridgeway et al., 2022). Men from non-

dominant racial groups are also marginalized in leadership roles; regardless of their background, they are often positioned in lower-level roles (Rosette et al., 2008). White male leadership remains favoured in Western organizational structures (Soklaridis et al., 2022).

Despite the absence of explicit exclusionary or discriminatory policies, the lifeguarding industry in North America remains exclusive, disadvantaging equity-owed groups. This exclusivity is rooted in historical processes of colonisation, which has had lasting impacts who is welcomed in aquatic spaces (Clark, 2021). In Canada, swimming programs reflect Eurocentric norms, marginalizing members of Indigenous and racialized communities (Nzindukiyimana & O'Connor, 2019; Rich & Giles, 2014). Standardized water safety programs are often developed based on white cultural norms, which can overlook diverse relationships with water and swimming.

Exclusion in aquatic spaces extends beyond race and ethnicity, as it also affects individuals who are religious minorities and experience disabilities (Allison, 2014). These exclusions reflect broader power dynamics and the politics of belonging (Lenneis et al., 2022). Muslim women often face limited access to aquatic spaces due to swimsuit norms in Western societies that are informed by gendered expectations and anti-Muslim narratives (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023). Similarly, individuals with nonconforming bodies may experience exclusion when swimming culture adheres to Western clothing standards. (Lenneis et al., 2022). Aquatic environments are often structured around able-bodied standards, with facilities and programming frequently often lack the inclusion of people with disabilities (Vaahtera, 2022). This exclusion intensifies at the intersections of disability, race, and gender, as non-adaptive spaces uphold the dominant image of the ideal swimmer as white, male, able-bodied, and muscular (McMahon &

Dinan-Thompson, 2011). Overlapping systems of oppression result in exclusionary practices in aquatic settings.

Sexualization and Sexual Harassment

Forty-seven percent of Canadian workers have reported either witnessing or experiencing some form of inappropriate sexual harassment or sexualization (Burczycka, 2021); however, women are disproportionately affected. Among people in Canada aged 25-34, 57% of women reported experiencing inappropriate sexual harassment or sexualization, compared to 37% of men (Statistics Canada, 2024). There are many forms of sexual harassment that take place in the workplace. The most common form of sexual harassment includes some form of gender harassment, including sexist hostility and crude behaviour (Johnson et al., 2018), which occurs when co-workers undermine the individual rather than pursue sexual activity (McDonald, 2012). Researchers using an intersectional lens have highlighted the increased risk of sexual harassment faced by racialized women, emphasizing how the intersection of race and gender increases their vulnerability (Brown, 2019).

Sexualization also significantly affects women's job experiences and workplace dynamics. Sexualization occurs when a person is valued for their sex appeal over their other characteristics, alongside being sexually objectified, wherein individuals are considered as an object for others' sexual use rather than having capacity for independent action and decision making (Papageorgiou et al., 2022). When the focus shifts to a woman's physical appearance, she may be perceived as an object rather than a professional (Guillén et al., 2024). Women who wear revealing clothing are often seen as less competent, tying their value to their appearance (Guillén et al., 2024).

Clothing attire dictating the level of respect that women receive in the workplace is an important issue in aquatic environments. Western swimsuit norms for women often place them in a near-naked state, leading to feelings of vulnerability and self-blame for social interactions that may be misconstrued as sexual (Scott, 2010). Women lifeguards report frequent harassment, including offensive touching, lewd remarks, and catcalls (Sawyer & Pitman, 1999; Blackstone et al., 2014).

Importantly, men and 2SLGBTQ+ lifeguards experience harassment differently than straight women. Men lifeguards often receive flirtatious remarks from younger girls (Lefkow-Hynes, 2021). 2SLGBTQ+ lifeguards have reported homophobic reactions, with some heterosexual individuals expressing discomfort sharing aquatic spaces with them (Allison, 2014). This exclusion reinforces societal norms that marginalize 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in aquatic settings (Caudwell, 2022). These findings demonstrate the importance of intersectional approaches to lifeguards' workplace experiences.

Importance of Diversity in the Workplace

Fostering diversity in the workplace encourages the sharing of a range of perspectives, often resulting in more efficient and innovative work environments (Gross-Golacka & Wiktorowicz, 2022). Increased employee motivation and satisfaction are also key outcomes of a diverse workforce (Croitoru et al., 2022). By implementing inclusion policies and valuing diversity, organizations can help employees feel respected, improving performance and output (Croitoru et al., 2022), while it can also expand the talent pool during recruitment processes (Orsini & Magnier-Watanabe, 2022).

A diverse workplace can also impact employee retention. Employees who differ from their colleagues in ability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, and

generation, may feel pressured to mask their identities for acceptance (Brown, 2018). When they lack representation or comfort at work, retention rates decline as they seek employment elsewhere (Brown, 2018). On the other hand, when equity-owed groups are represented in leadership and among co-workers, employees from these groups are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and remain with the organization (Grissom & Keiser, 2011).

Diversity in lifeguarding is essential for fostering inclusive, equitable, and accessible water safety environments for workers and the public. Researchers have highlighted that a lack of representation among lifeguards and other aquatic professionals can contribute to disparities in swimming proficiency and safety outcomes, particularly among members of equity-owed communities (Gilchrist & Parker, 2014). Given these findings, I was interested in garnering an intersectional understanding of the experiences of equity-owed lifeguards at Canadian aquatics facilities.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework rooted in feminist theory and developed through the scholarship of women of colour in response to the limitations of a single-axis approach to oppression (Windsong, 2018). This framework is employed by researchers to examine how multiple, overlapping forms of oppression shape social positions, providing a nuanced analysis of privilege and marginalization (Clarke & McCall, 2013). Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality conceptualizes identity as a set of interconnected social categories, including race, gender, class, religion, and ability, which collectively influence patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Researchers use intersectionality to adopt a multi-axis approach to analyzing identity and oppression, addressing the limitations of linear, single-axis frameworks in social justice research (Windsong, 2018).

In the context of sport and leisure studies, intersectionality is frequently employed to analyze disparities in access, participation, and experiences, offering a framework for understanding how individuals are positioned within broader social structures (Lenneis & Karen, 2024). Those who identify with multiple equity-owed groups often navigate intersecting identities that shape their experiences of exclusion and marginalization in sport (Norwood, 2019). An intersectional approach is crucial for understanding the complex identities of equity-owed individuals and avoiding fragmented research (Clarke & McCall, 2013). Intersectionality is thus a robust approach for the examination of workplace experiences, systemic barriers, and interlocking oppressions faced by equity-owed lifeguards.

Methodology, Methods, & Analysis

Methodology

In this study, I employed qualitative description methodology (Sandelowski, 2000) to provide a detailed account of the experiences of 14 Canadian equity-owed lifeguards. Qualitative description is widely used to examine the who, what, and where of experiences while gathering insights into lesser-known phenomena (Kim et al., 2018). This methodology also aligns with my constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998) as the core tenants in both include an emphasis on meaning-making, the subjective nature of knowledge (Bradshaw et al., 2017), recognizing shared and diverse perspectives, and acknowledging the interactive nature of human experiences (Willis et al., 2016). Those who employ qualitative description value knowledge that is produced directly from participants, facilitating nuanced and meaningful findings (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). As qualitative description is not bound to a specific theoretical framework (Neergaard et al., 2009), researchers have the flexibility to integrate various theories, including my selection of intersectional theory.

Methods

After receiving approval from the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board, I recruited individuals for participation in semi-structured, online interviews through posting a digital poster on social media and sending the digital poster to various aquatics facilities. My inclusion criteria were as follows: Participants needed to be over 18 years of age, work as a lifeguard or worked within the past five years and identify as a member of an equity-owed group. Interested individuals then completed a demographic survey to confirm their eligibility for participation. Semi-structured interviews are co-created conversations where researchers use open-ended questions and follow-up prompts to elicit detailed, contextually rich responses (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I interviewed 14 equity-owed lifeguards for this study, with interviews ranging in length from 45 – 60 minutes. Sample questions included, “Have you ever experienced discrimination as a result of being a part of an equity-owed group?”; “In your workplace, have you experienced any exclusion?”; and “Do you feel your identities played a role in being excluded?” I also shared personal, reflexive stories with participants to demonstrate understanding and empathy (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Name	Age Range	Identities	Organization	Years Worked as a Lifeguard
Alex	40-44	Gay, Older, Man	Municipality A	2000-2006, 2022- Present
David	18-19	Indigenous, ADHD, Man	Private Facility A	2014-Present
Emma	20-24	Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility B	2017-2022
Kevin	25-29	Asian, Gay, Man	Municipality A	2016-2021
Kiara	25-29	South Asian, Woman	Municipality D	2015-2019
Lucy	30-34	Latina, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility C	2016-Present

Maggie	20-24	Indigenous, ADHD, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility A	2021-Present
Marin	25-29	South Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Water Park	2014-2019
Matt	20-24	Trans, Gay, Man	Municipality A, Private Facility C	2017-Present
Mia	20-24	Deaf, Bisexual, Woman	Municipality B	2018-2021
Rachel	25-29	Asian, Woman	Municipality A, Private Facility B	2015-2020
Sarah	30-34	Lesbian, Type 1 Diabetes, Woman	Municipality A	2010-2020
Taylor	20-24	Bisexual, Dyslexia, Woman	Municipality C, Private Facility C	2020-Present
Tess	20-24	Indigenous, Woman	Private Facility C	2018-2022

Note. this table depicts participants' equity-owed identities and their places of work.

Analysis

I transcribed the interviews using Zoom's automated transcription and then verified each transcript before returning it to participants. Once each participant approved of their transcript and removed any information they wished to keep confidential (Mero-Jaffe, 2011), I manually coded the interviews following Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to create themes reflecting their experiences. Researchers who employ RTA emphasize reflexivity, prompting them to critically reflect on their assumptions, biases, and positionalities that may influence data interpretation. Notably, in RTA, researchers engage in ongoing critical reflection (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). As such, it is important to outline my positionality. I am a first-generation Canadian graduate student of Portuguese and Italian descent who identifies as a woman who is queer, neurodivergent, living with a learning disability, and cisgender. My identity as a lifeguard intersects with my identity as part of multiple equity-owed groups, giving me an important vantage point on the lifeguarding workforce.

RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021) follows six iterative phases: familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, theme refinement, defining themes, and writing the report, all of which I informed with intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989). Establishing the theoretical perspective before the data collection allowed my RTA to be influenced by deductive and inductive approaches to analyzing the data (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). I followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of RTA throughout my research process. I engaged deeply with the data by listening to and re-reading transcripts, noting patterns and unique experiences. I clustered initial codes, such as privilege, exclusion, sexual harassment, and team dynamics into themes, which I refined to ensure distinctiveness and resonance with participants' experiences. I then defined and named the final three themes, which I elaborate on below, and connected them to existing literature and theory in the final report.

Results

I produced three main themes regarding equity-owed lifeguards' experiences in the workplace: (a) white heterosexual men are considered legitimate authority figures in lifeguarding; (b) young women lifeguards experience sexualization and sexual harassment; and (c) race- and ethnicity-based exclusion in the aquatics workplace. Throughout the results I weave my own experiences as an equity-owed lifeguard.

White Heterosexual Men are Considered Legitimate Authority Figures

Numerous participants reported instances in which white heterosexual men were considered the legitimate authority by patrons, coworkers, and supervisors. For example, Leah recalled,

[I had] to swim test a child, and the parent didn't necessarily agree with the outcome. ... I had a dad say, "If you don't let him retry the test again and see that he can pass, I will rip

the glasses off your face since your eyes clearly don't work." And it was sort of scary. I was 16 at the time. I called over support, and it was a male coworker, and he told the dad the same thing I did, that the kid was unsuccessful, and [the dad] accepted it. So, I think that was the first time I really witnessed first-hand that my decision meant a lot less unless I had a man back me up.

Similarly, Maggie stated:

As a woman, you don't get taken seriously...especially with some of the older men and adults in general, because they see you as a younger person who is a woman, and they just treat you completely differently. They don't take you seriously in the slightest bit, especially compared to the boys... as soon as I get one of my male co-workers to come over and essentially say the exact same thing I just told them, they actually respect it because it came from a man.

I faced a similar experience when reinforcing the rules of a lane swim. I told by a patron, "It is better if you just stand there and look pretty. Let one of the boys decide how the swim should run." This objectified me and undermined my ability to keep the swim orderly.

The participants' supervisors also reinforced perceptions of who is legitimate authority. Rachel noted, "I had an issue with my [recreation] supervisor, who would only prioritize head guard positions to male counterparts, and I heard that she had been flagged numerous times for inappropriate behaviour like that."

Importantly, despite Alex being head lifeguard and a white man, his authority was undermined because he is a gay man:

I found, particularly like the straight men didn't really love that a queer person was the head guard for the shift. It's challenging. I remember there was one day where like, it was

super-hot out, and we're working outdoors, and there was like one staff that was refusing to put on the hat that we all were required to wear... And it like it was just like a standoff [between us] about wearing a hat.

On the other hand, Matt, a trans gay man noted, "I was pretty lucky that there were other trans lifeguards when I started, I felt seen and pretty comfortable knowing that I wasn't alone." He continued, "being trans didn't really cause me any issues at work, which honestly was shocking." These are two examples demonstrate how the participants experienced privilege and oppression at the same time.

Young Women, Sexualization, and Sexual Harassment

Seven of the ten woman-identifying lifeguards reported experiences of sexualization and sexual harassment in the workplace from patrons and/or coworkers. Swimming attire can place individuals in a vulnerable position as Western swimsuit standards for women typically include high-cut hips and low-cut tops. Unwanted comments about the uniform caused Maggie frustration:

We have had some clients, especially older females, complain about how our guards look naked, and it's, like, this is our uniform. And it just upsets me because I am like, "I don't know what else to tell you, I did my training in a bathing suit, and I work in a bathing suit, like what do you want me to do, wear a wetsuit?"

Furthermore, some participants also expressed their frustration with supervisors who singled them out and encouraged them to change their uniform. Taylor described,

I had an issue last year with my coordinator. She had come over to me, and she was like, "You need to put on shorts [over your swimsuit]." And I was initially... "Oh, okay. Guess it is new dress code." But then I found out it was just targeted at me, and she was saying

things like my suit is too small, but... I have a really long torso, so I can't really do anything about that... It was kind of weird really singling me out... It just sucks because I can't help that I have a muscular build and a long torso... If my coworkers can wear the same suit, why can't I?

Tess shared a similar experience with a supervisor: "A head guard told me that I, 'should wear shorts to not have unwanted attention.' Looking back, it's like, why is that my responsibility? But at the time I went with it." I, too, was singled out by a head lifeguard who asserted that my bathing suit was "too small," and that my "butt was distracting fathers from watching their children swim." I was told to wear a larger singlet and shorts to 'be appropriate.' Interestingly, Sarah, a head lifeguard and participant in this study, reported that she felt she was protecting her staff by offering the very advice that troubled Tess and me: "I always encouraged female staff, to like, wear like shorts and not just wear like, their bathing suit and a pinny, because there was definitely creepy men."

Going beyond comments and unwanted attention, women-identifying lifeguards reported being put in uncomfortable positions when managing patrons who engaged in sexually inappropriate behaviours. Sarah stated,

There would be the odd, weird old man who would be essentially jerking off in the hot tub or the pool... and now you have to go and say something... The head lifeguard at the time was a man, too. He just made the young new girls talk to the patrons about it. Sarah also stated that having older men stare at her while working made her feel uncomfortable.

Importantly, women-identifying lifeguards were not the only ones to report harassment. Alex, a gay man, faced sexual harassment from his coworkers. His subordinates mocked his identity after a staff party: "They had literally printed off photos from the party and put them on

the on the wall in the staff office. Someone had had drawn fairy wings on me [in the photos], which didn't feel great."

Eight participants expressed feelings of desensitization to sexual harassment. Echoing other participants, Emma noted, "Just being a young woman in the role as a lifeguard, it's almost like automatically part of the job that you are going to be sexually harassed by patrons...I got immune to it all quick."

Race- and Ethnicity-Based Social Exclusion

Eleven of the 14 participants observed that the majority of staff members at the facility at which they worked were white. The lack of diversity left staff members of colour feeling excluded from work culture. Rachel, who is Asian, expressed,

I feel like there's an unspoken culture of White people behaviour that they would partake in outside of the pool – that I didn't necessarily vibe with... the partying...was just something I didn't care for, so I was just sort of left out of the social things.

She then continued to expand on her experience as an Asian minority in the workplace stating "the fact I was the only Asian person on my lifeguard team just made it quite awkward and honestly unappealing."

When members of equity-owed groups feel isolated, it not only risks job effectiveness, but it can also influence worker retention. Marin, who is Indian, discussed her experience at her workplace:

If you don't look a certain way, you won't be included. If you don't like to party, you're not like included or even spoken to. I found it hard because culturally my parents are much stricter [than other staff members' parents]. I couldn't hang out with them ...Even if I didn't have another job already lined up for the next summer, there was no way I would ever go back there. I always felt like the odd one out... Having such a white staff

and the pressure to conform? Never again.

David, an Indigenous lifeguard, experienced racism when interacting with his coworkers:

“People who I don’t even really know – oh they’re all white too, will say stuff and like joke about the rez, but I didn’t even tell them I am Native...It’s just such white people shit.”

Similarly, two participants discussed the discomfort they faced when white coworkers would try to guess where they are from. Maggie, an Indigenous lifeguard stated,

I also don’t get it when people try to guess “where I am from.” Like, I am proud to be Indigenous, and I would love to educate others on the history, but it’s so strange. I had a coworker once say, “Oh I love how tan you are. Are you Mexican or Spanish?” And I was taken back – like, why are we playing a guessing game? When I told her, “No, I am Indigenous,” she was, like, “Oh.” Her tone completely changed. White people don’t get asked, like, “What part of Europe are you from?”

Lucy also discussed patrons trying to guess her ethnicity. She stated, “I usually get asked if I am Indigenous or Asian, which I am not really bothered by it, but it’s like, if I was white would I get the same question?” Despite Lucy being unbothered by the interaction, it nevertheless demonstrates how those who do not present as white are singled out in the lifeguarding workplace.

Discussion

While previous research has highlighted that members of equity-owed groups often face in workplace discrimination, below, I demonstrate how my findings extend existing research and reveal the previously overlooked intersectional dimensions of the challenges equity-owed lifeguards experience. I then provide suggestions on how to improve the workplace experiences of equity-owed lifeguards.

Legitimate Authority Figures in Lifeguarding

Human resource and management researchers have shown that dominant understandings of leadership perpetuate the idea that leaders are white, heterosexual, and male. These individuals are perceived as more effective leaders and more likely to succeed than racialized individuals, queer folk, and women (Bierema et al., 2016; Rosette et al., 2008). This ideal is rooted in broader systems of patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity, which shape who is granted authority and leadership opportunities in society. My findings align with existing literature but extend it to lifeguarding. Alex, a white, queer man, faced disrespect as a head lifeguard despite fitting the visual stereotype of an ideal leader, illustrating how queer identities are excluded from dominant leadership norms (Collins, 2012). His experience shows that whiteness and masculinity do not shield against systemic homophobia (Fassinger et al., 2010). In contrast, Matt, a trans man, described positive experiences working alongside other trans lifeguards, suggesting that representation may protect against discrimination (Baptista et al., 2023).

The participants demonstrated the ways in which race/ethnicity and gender also intersect with perceptions of legitimate authority figures. Rachel's experience with her recreation supervisor's preference for promoting men to head lifeguard positions reinforced the notion that women, and particularly those who are racialized like Rachel, are not considered fit for leadership roles (Beaupre, 2022). This pattern reflects how systems of gendered racism operate to uphold white male authority in public-facing leadership roles (Sewpaul, 2013), which perpetuates the cycle of prioritizing (typically white) men for promotion. Notably, despite identifying as a woman and holding a position of authority herself, Rachel's supervisor reinforced this pattern by exclusively promoting men into leadership roles. Despite young

women expressing greater interest in leadership roles than their male counterparts, their ambition for leadership roles is typically seen as controlling, bossy, and unprofessional (Beaupre, 2022), contributing to the metaphorical glass ceiling that limits women's advancement in the workplace (Chisholm-Burnst et al., 2017), including lifeguarding.

Importantly, discriminatory behaviour is not limited to supervisors or co-workers. Six out of eight of the women participants reported that their gender and race/ethnicity intersected in ways that contributed to them to be being disrespected as authority figures by patrons. Kiara and Maggie highlighted cases when patrons disregarded their authority when enforcing pool rules, with the patrons only complying when a male coworker reiterated the same directives. This reflects broader social ideologies in which authority is associated with whiteness and masculinity, and where racialized women, particularly young women, are not recognized as legitimate authority figures in the workplace (Ridgeway et al., 2022).

Sexualization and Sexual Harassment

Extensive research has been conducted on women's workplace experiences, with sexualization and sexual harassment being highlighted as consistent challenges. While much of the existing literature has focused on the physical dimensions of sexual harassment (Thurston et al., 2019), in this study verbal comments were the most significant form of sexualization and sexual harassment experienced by participants. Eight of the 10 of the women participants, including six who self-identify as members of racial or ethnic minority groups, reported that sexual harassment and sexualization from patrons was normalized amongst staff members as "just part of the job." Lifeguarding workplaces are typically comprised of young employees (Dillon, 2023). Growing up in the digital age, contemporary young women are frequently exposed to pervasive sexualization through social media, influencing how they perceive and

respond to such issues (Mellgren et al., 2017), taking action only when harassment escalates to physical abuse (Hlavka, 2014). The normalization of sexualization and harassment in lifeguarding minimizes their seriousness. Despite the *Alert Insert* (Lifesaving Society, 2012), which is additional information added to the National Lifeguard textbook outlining what is considered workplace harassment and violence, how to prevent it, and workplace violence prevention legislation, it is not frequently used as part of lifeguard training (Lifesaving Society, 2012). In my eight years as a lifeguard with the initial training, three recertifications, and also having completed National Lifeguard Instructor training in 2024, I had never encountered this document until my research for this thesis. This omission reflects a systemic failure to educate staff, reinforcing the idea that harassment is just part of the job or undeserving of attention.

Unlike previous studies in which scholars have focused on corporate work environments and have emphasized women's experience of sexual harassment and sexualization from men coworkers (Burczycka, 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2017), I found that harassment and sexualization primarily, though not exclusively, came from patrons and supervisors in the lifeguards' work environment. Eight of the ten women participants, including six from racial or ethnic minority groups, experienced sexual harassment and sexualization in their workplaces for the first time when they were young and new to the job. In Canada, lifeguards can begin work at 15 or 16, depending on the province or territory in which they work (Lifesaving Society, 2024). While the participants noted that most of the inappropriate behaviour came from patrons, supervisors also contributed to the sexual harassment and sexualization of employees. In some cases, supervisors suggested women lifeguards wear shorts to "cover up," implying that their bodies or uniforms, not the patrons' behaviour, was the issue. Such instructions and control indicate that staff members are responsible for policing their bodies (and the bodies of their

subordinates) to prevent harassment, which reinforces harmful workplace and social norms, such as the accepting sexualization of women in the workplace (Guillén et al., 2024).

Additionally, several participants reported incidents of sexual harassment and sexualization that further highlighted a lack of support from supervisors in the workplace. For instance, Sarah shared that when an older man was masturbating in the hot tub, she reported it to her male supervisor, and he instructed her to confront the patron directly. This placed Sarah in what she experienced as an uncomfortable and unsafe position. Instead discussing the inappropriateness of the behaviour with the patron in his capacity as Sarah's supervisor, he made it Sarah's responsibility. This finding supports research that has shown that when women try to report sexual harassment and sexualization instances to male supervisors, these supervisors tend to lack empathy and understanding of the incidents, dismissing the seriousness of the experience (Lawrence, 2020).

The literature on workplace sexualization and sexual harassment often centres women's experiences, neglecting the experiences of men, including those who identify as gay or trans. In our study, Alex, a white gay man, shared his experiences working in a predominantly cisgender and heterosexual environment. He faced anonymous acts of sexualization and harassment when coworkers drew fairy wings over of him photos in the office. These altered photos, mocking his sexuality, were left on display for all staff to see. The anonymity of the perpetrator heightened Alex's vulnerability. Burczykca (2021) found that compared to their heterosexual male coworkers, gay men are twice as likely to experience sexualization and harassment and are four times more likely to face targeted harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Despite reporting the incident to his supervisor and expressing that it "sort of felt not great," the photos

were not removed, implicitly signaling the supervisor's tolerance of such behaviour. This situation exemplifies the normalization of the sexualization of gay men (Van Laer, 2018).

Contrary to existing research in which sexualization and sexual harassment influenced job retention (McLaughlin et al., 2017), participants in this study indicated that these experiences did not lead to them resigning from their jobs, which may exemplify the degree to which this behaviour is normalized in a lifeguard workplace. Overall, the experiences of equity-owned lifeguards in this study revealed that sexualization and sexual harassment are embedded in lifeguards' workplace culture and are often treated as unavoidable aspects of the job rather than a behaviour requiring systemic change.

Race- and Ethnicity-Based Social Exclusion

Race- and ethnicity-based social exclusion in aquatics has gained prominence in recent years (Rich & Giles, 2014); however, there remains a lack of research examining how exclusionary workplace dynamics in lifeguarding impact employees from equity-owned communities. When asked about the demographics of staff and patrons at their respective facilities, all 14 participants noted that racialized staff members were underrepresented. Some participants observed that the staff members were "obviously" white, highlighting the pervasiveness of whiteness in the lifeguarding workforce.

Exclusionary workplace interactions regarding race and ethnicity further contribute to feeling welcomed in lifeguarding. Racialized lifeguards in this study described instances when white colleagues displayed inappropriate behaviours, such as assuming or guessing the ethnicity of non-white colleagues and making insensitive comments, such as those directed to David and Lucy. Such interactions can leave racialized employees feeling undervalued and defined solely

by their race or ethnicity, rather than their skills (Orsini & Magnie-Watanabe, 2022), and like outsider who feel unwelcomed and undervalued (Bohonos, 2019).

In workplaces that are predominantly white, individuals from ethnic and racial minority groups can often face social exclusion (Pfundmair et al., 2015). Marin shared how she was excluded from workplace social activities due to cultural differences. Similarly, Rachel noted that workplace culture centred on partying and drinking, and she was often left out because she did not want to conform to these cultural practices. These experiences highlighted how lifeguarding workplace social dynamics are shaped by white culture, reinforcing white norms as the default and acceptable way to socialize (Straka et al., 2020). The lack of effort to diversify social activities to foster inclusivity further reinforces pressure to conform to dominant cultural practices (Hardy, 2024) and underscores the need for more inclusive approaches to team-building and socialization in lifeguarding workplaces.

Beyond social exclusion, the lack of diversity in lifeguard workplaces can affect employee retention and overall workforce sustainability (Orsini & Magnier-Watanabe, 2022). In our study, seven out of nine participants who are members of a racial or ethnic minority expressed that the lack of diversity did not affect their job retention; however, two participants discussed their unhappiness with the work culture. Marin stated that she would not return to lifeguarding, citing the lack of cultural diversity and persistent exclusion. Similarly, Rachel explained that the challenges she faced as an equity-owed lifeguard who is Asian made continuing in the field unappealing. These examples illustrate how exclusionary workplace dynamics can have an impact on lifeguard retention. While researchers in the management field have recognized the impact of limited diversity on employee retention (Cloutier et al., 2015), its specific effects on lifeguarding, a predominantly white profession (Yonan, 2021), have been

underexplored, which underlines the importance of this study. A lack of inclusivity negatively impacts the size and sustainability of the lifeguarding workforce and exacerbates staffing shortages. In lifeguarding, these shortages have led to pools reducing operations, ultimately impacting community access to aquatic programs (Yonan, 2021).

Recommendations

Below, I propose evidence-based strategies to address the three themes discussed in our research.

Shared Leadership

Lifeguarding, like many industries traditionally dominated by white, heterosexual, able-bodied men (Beaupre, 2022), lacks diverse leadership, largely concentrating decision-making power within a homogenous group. This imbalance reinforces the perception that white heterosexual men are the sole legitimate authority figures in lifeguarding. Shared leadership, whereby multiple individuals share responsibility and decision-making, offers a more inclusive, multi-perspective approach to workplace governance (Wart et al., 2023). To ensure a diverse shared leadership, in this model employees nominate representatives that they feel reflect the staff as a whole (Hoch, 2014). By distributing leadership responsibilities, shared leadership can promote diversity, collective learning, and social inclusion (Kang & Svensson, 2023) within lifeguarding organizations.

Education Surrounding Sexualization and Sexual Harassment

The lifeguards in this study described the near ubiquitousness of sexual harassment. Women, especially women of colour, and gay men face higher rates of workplace sexual harassment than heterosexual men (Allison, 2014). Instead of relying solely on reactive discipline (Alasmari & Althaqafi, 2024), lifeguarding workplaces should implement proactive

training to prevent, identify, and address harassment. As lifeguarding is often a first job for young employees (Butson et al., 2021), they may be unaware of workplace standards and their rights. In-person staff training that defines harassment, outlines reporting procedures, and reinforces a zero-tolerance culture (Buckner et al., 2014) can help mitigate these incidents. Establishing clear expectations helps prevent employees from unintentionally perpetuating harmful behaviours while emphasizing the importance of workplace safety (Yonan, 2021). Intersectional education on sexualization and harassment can emphasize the ways in which certain groups are made vulnerable (Allison, 2014). Moreover, educating the public about what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour in a pool setting can further protect lifeguards from patrons. By prioritizing education, accountability, and a culture of zero tolerance, aquatic facilities can create safer, more respectful workplaces for all lifeguards.

Equity-Owed Community Outreach and Barrier Reduction

The lifeguarding profession remains predominantly white, with limited outreach and barrier reduction efforts to increase minority representation and diversify the field. To address this, organizations that hold lifeguard training must implement targeted outreach and reduce barriers to entry. In existing literature, researchers have highlighted the positive influence that community engagement can have on programs targeted to increase equity-owed individuals' participation (Koon et al., 2023). Shifting lifeguarding culture requires redesigning training programs to prioritize accessibility and representation (Koon et al., 2021). Mandating EDI training in lifeguard and supervisor certifications would promote foundational knowledge before employment. Effective, equity-driven programs rely on meaningful community engagement to address barriers to participation (Koon et al., 2023), driving a more inclusive lifeguarding profession.

Limitations

This current study was conducted with a particular set of participants: 14 equity-owed lifeguards who live in southern and eastern Ontario, Canada. There are limitations with a small number of participants who come from the same geographical region such as eastern Ontario, and the GTA. In addition, it is important to highlight that despite five participants identifying as experiencing disability, they did not link the discrimination and discomfort they reported experiencing in their lifeguarding workplace as being related to disability. Rather, they linked it to other facets of their identities. Thus, while I had anticipated that, based on the literature, that those who experience disability would be viewed as being less capable or authoritative (Friedman & Owen, 2017), this was not the case. Further research that focuses specifically on lifeguards who experience disability would strengthen the existing body of literature.

Conclusion

In this qualitative descriptive study, I illuminated novel insights regarding the intersectional experiences of equity-owed lifeguards. As workplaces continue to prioritize EDI, the lifeguarding sector demonstrates a pressing need to commit to inclusivity efforts to improve the experiences of equity-owed staff. Further research on cultivating inclusive aquatic spaces is essential to enhancing equity-owed lifeguards' experiences, which will help to promote a more diverse lifeguard workforce.

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Chapter 4: Conclusion

Throughout my Master's of Arts, I have come to understand that, despite being an equity-owned lifeguard and experiencing sexual harassment and sexualization in the lifeguard workplace, there are numerous experiences in aquatics and lifeguarding that I have not personally had. When choosing a research topic for my Master's, I knew I wanted to focus on aquatics and the experiences of members of equity-owned groups. Reflecting on my experiences, two comments shaped my thesis's direction: being told at 16 to change my lifeguard uniform because my body was "too distracting for dads," and my coworker being told she wasn't "Asian enough" by patrons. These personal experiences, combined with ongoing conversations about the national lifeguard shortage, led me to explore the experiences of members equity-owned groups in aquatics.

In this conclusion, I provide a brief overview of the existing research on equity-owned lifeguards in Canada and the US. Given the limited Canadian scholarship on this topic, I draw on insights from US-based research to offer relevant context. I then summarize the findings from my two articles, situating them within the broader literature, and putting both of my manuscripts in conversation with each other, demonstrating the contributions that they make both separately and together. Lastly, I outline the limitations of my research and propose directions for future researchers to address the ongoing underrepresentation of equity-owned groups in lifeguarding.

Existing Research

Researchers have noted that the demographics of lifeguards have historically mirrored broader workforce inequities, with equity-owned individuals remaining significantly underrepresented due to systemic barriers (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). This underrepresentation not only limits access to lifeguarding roles but also contributes to ongoing retention challenges (Yonan, 2021). In the US, approximately 57% of Americans identify as white and able-bodied in

2022 (US Census Bureau, 2022), while in 2022 77.2% of lifeguards in were white and able-bodied (Data USA, 2022), underscoring the profession's limited diversity The absence of diverse role models can lead to reduced engagement in aquatic programming and lower rates of certification among members of these groups (Rich & Giles, 2015). Indeed, in lifeguarding specifically, a lack of representation contributes to disparities in swimming proficiency, participation, and water safety outcomes among members of equity-owed communities (Gilchrist & Parker, 2014). Researchers have also identified financial and structural barriers, including high certification costs and minimal targeted outreach, as significant constraints to diversifying the lifeguard workforce (Butson et al., 2021; Irwin et al., 2009).

Researchers from other sectors have shown that employees from equity-owed groups are more likely to leave their place of work when they lack mentorship, inclusion, and supportive professional networks (Brown, 2018; Grissom & Keiser, 2011). Those who have studied workforce diversity have consistently demonstrated that increased representation of members of equity-owed groups in the workforce improves overall employee satisfaction and retention outcomes (Baptista et al., 2023; Grissom & Keiser, 2011). Reflecting on the current demographic of lifeguards, the current lack of diversity is particularly concerning due to the influence a lack of diversity has on employee satisfaction and retention outcomes, and the links between low participation in swimming programs and increased drowning risks among populations that experience marginalization (Giles et al., 2014; Meddings et al., 2021; Moran & Willcox-Pidgeon, 2010; Quan, 2013; Willcox-Pidgeon et al., 2021). Addressing underrepresentation is therefore not only a matter of workplace equity but also a public health imperative.

My Effort to Address the Gaps

In the first publishable paper in this thesis, I examined archival documents from the aquatic industry in Canada and the US. I then extended my search to data published online through organization websites or online newspapers to gain insight on pilot programs and ongoing initiatives designed to engage members of equity-owed communities. The programs I identified through the search primarily followed a single-axis approach to identity; for example, initiatives targeted 2SLGBTQ+ lifeguards or those from racial or ethnic minority groups. However, a single-axis approach to equity-owed lifeguards' representation in the workforce overlooks the complexity of identity and the unique challenges individuals face due to the intersections of various aspects of their identity (Burton & Weiner, 2016). Through my archival research I was able to find only a handful of programs that employed an intersectional approach, such as the free lifeguarding training at Queen's University for those who identify as having low financial means and are transgender or gender diverse. Based on the archival research, I identified three promising practices for which there was evidence of their effectiveness in increasing the representation of equity-owed lifeguards, thus contributing to workforce retention and mitigating surface-level inclusion strategies: i) accessible programming, ii) inclusivity and equity in the lifeguarding workplace, and iii) culturally relevant programming.

In my second paper, I used the qualitative descriptive methodology (Sandelowski, 2000) to examine the experiences of 14 equity-owed lifeguards from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and eastern Ontario, Canada, and to gain insight on the unique experiences and challenges that they face or previously faced. Based on the data collected and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), I produced three themes: i) white heterosexual men as legitimate authority, ii) young women and sexualization, and iii) race- and ethnicity-based social exclusion. Following the discussion, I provided three key recommendations for management, employers, and

organizations to improve the workplace experience for equity-owed lifeguard that were influenced by trying to limit the gap between policy and practices: i) shared leadership, ii) education surrounding sexualization and sexual harassment, and iii) equity-owed community outreach and barrier reduction.

Taken together, through these two papers, I was able to offer both similar and contrasting insights. The archival data in the first paper led me to believe that participants in my semi-structured interviews would emphasize systemic barriers such as limited accessibility, financial and geographic constraints as the major barriers that they experienced. Notably, none of participants in my study referred to personally experiencing these barriers. In contrast, eight of the participants highlighted the normalization of sexual harassment and sexualization and the lack of support in addressing it. In my archival research, sexual harassment was rarely mentioned and, when it was, it typically referred to inappropriate behaviour from patrons. In contrast, interview participants described harassment from co-workers and even parents of child participants as a routine, often unspoken part of the job. Many participants in my research did not see the point in reporting such incidents as they assumed that nothing would be done to address them – they were just part of the job. These firsthand accounts from equity-owed lifeguards underscore the importance of moving beyond surface-level inclusion efforts, addressing the absence of firsthand experiences in literature, and addressing deeper cultural issues within the lifeguarding workplace.

These contrasts highlight the limitations of relying solely on archival data to understand workplace equity and the importance of engaging directly with those most affected. Although one resource published by the Lifesaving Society, a 2012 *Alert* (which is the lifeguarding manual for the Lifesaving Society) insert, offered strategies for addressing workplace violence and

harassment, this insert is inconsistently distributed and rarely discussed. I completed my National Lifeguard instructor course in November 2024, and there was no mention about *Alert* inserts or information regarding workplace violence and harassment. In addition, when I originally took the course in 2017 as well as four recertifications – which were once every two years, this information was not discussed. The lack of discussion surrounding this document and the information contained in it reinforces a key insight from the second paper: lived experiences must be centred to drive meaningful, equity-oriented change in lifeguarding workplaces. Taken together, through these two studies I have emphasized the need to ensure accessible and inclusive pathways into lifeguarding and to challenge workplace norms to improve lifeguard diversity.

While increasing diversity among lifeguards is often framed as a matter of access, my research revealed that equity-owed individuals face intersectional barriers tied to workplace culture, identity, and belonging, challenges that current inclusion efforts too often overlook. From the archival research, I established that those who do not fit the traditional image of a lifeguard - white, cisgender, male - face compounded barriers to entry and retention (Peel et al., 2024; Yonan, 2021). The interviews that informed my second paper confirmed that while systemic barriers persist, the lived realities of equity-owed lifeguards include a broader, more complex set of challenges, particularly around workplace culture. With frequent mentions authority led by white-heterosexual-men, harassment, and the normalization of partying and drinking to socialize with coworkers, equity-owed lifeguards continue to report feel out of place. These challenges are not experienced in isolation but are shaped by the intersections of their identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, which influence how they are perceived and treated in the workplace. By in large, the programs created to increase the representation of members of equity-owed groups in lifeguarding employ a single-axis approach, focusing on one

aspect of identity in isolation. This can inadvertently exclude members of equity-owned groups who may feel that they are outside the target criteria due to their other aspects of identity.

Ultimately, the findings from both papers led me to emphasize the urgency for aquatic organizations to adopt intentional, intersectional EDI strategies that not only increase access to training and employment but also transform the environments in which equity-owned lifeguards work.

Limitations

While this research provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study focused on participants from a single geographical location, which may limit the transferability of findings to other regions. Additionally, participants were employed by different organizations, each with distinct workplace practices and policies that may have influenced their experiences. Further, all participants identified English as their first language, meaning potential language barriers were not explored. Finally, there was a limited range of intersecting identity categories among participants, which may have restricted the breadth of perspectives captured.

One limitation in the second manuscript was the geographic location of the participants. As an equity-owned lifeguard from eastern Ontario, I was most successful in recruiting participants from my personal networks. As a result, most of my research participants currently work or have worked in Eastern Ontario, while the remainder work or have worked in the Greater Toronto Area. Only focusing on two locations, both in Ontario, limits the opportunity to include a greater variety of perspectives. Since all participants were from either two geographic regions, developing recommendations based on a limited area may present challenges when applied nationally (Briesch et al., 2014). Although the participants in this study are employed in Canada, cultural norms and workplace experiences can vary significantly across provinces and

smaller geographic regions (Taras et al., 2016). Geographic and regional cultural differences may shape the barriers and challenges lifeguards may face (Taras et al., 2016); therefore, while participants worked for different municipalities and organizations, the experiences of equity-owned lifeguards in eastern Ontario and GTA are not necessarily representative of those across Canada.

On the other hand, the participants in my research worked for eight different organizations, including municipalities and privately-run facilities, highlighting the variation and similarities in workplace practices and policies. As a result, comparing their experiences enabled a more heterogeneous sample, as differences in organizational policies and practices shape work environments (Barakat et al., 2016). Thus, their experiences likely varied depending on their employer, specific managers, and organizational culture (Schmidt, 2007). While in many ways this is a strength of my research, it may also serve as a limitation. Some participants may have worked for organizations that prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion, which could have contributed to more positive experiences as equity-owned lifeguards (Garakani et al., 2023). However, this also means that other participants may have been employed by organizations at which EDI was not a priority, potentially resulting in more challenging or exclusionary experiences. Therefore, while the diversity of organizational contexts enriched the data by offering a broad range of perspectives, it also introduced complexity, as the variation in institutional commitment to EDI may influence the experiences shared.

Another potential limitation to my research is that all participants in this study spoke English as their first language, eliminating potential language barriers that individuals with English as an additional language might face. Only including participants who speak the dominant language in Canada may have resulted in me overlooking the barriers that some equity-

owed lifeguards may encounter if English is not their first language. Canada is a settler colonial state (Greer, 2019) in which people from diverse origins, backgrounds, languages, and cultures live (Kaushal & Lu, 2016). In 2022, 25% of Canadians reported speaking a first language other than English, French, or an Indigenous language (Major, 2022). Immigrants who do not speak English or French as a first language often face workplace barriers (Dagenais, 2013). For example, individuals who do not speak English as a first language may struggle to grasp the nuances of workplace conversations and culture (Douglas et al., 2020). Since all participants in this study spoke English as a first language, no insights were gathered on the workplace difficulties faced by those with a different mother tongue.

A further limitation of this research is the limited range of intersecting identity categories among participants, which constrained the diversity of experiences represented. While individuals may share the same aspects of identity, such as age, gender, or race, their lived experiences are shaped by the intersections of these identities, as well as by broader systems of power and oppression. As a result, they may have entirely different experiences and perspectives than those they share aspects of identity with, highlighting the need for greater participant representation of shared identity categories (Garrison, 2018). For example, in my second paper, there was only one older participant who was outside the lifeguard average age of 16-18 (Butson et al., 2021), and one transgender participant. Without multiple voices reflecting the complex and intersecting identities of all those working in aquatics, there is a risk of oversimplifying or overgeneralizing the challenges, or lack thereof, faced by individuals identifying with specific aspects of identity.

Future Research

In the future, researchers should prioritize the development and evaluation of lifeguarding programs that account for intersecting identities. Existing initiatives aimed at supporting equity-owned lifeguards often rely on single-axis frameworks and remain limited in scope and reach. To address this gap, researchers should investigate strategies for designing and implementing intersectional programs that reflect the complex and overlapping realities of participants' identities. For example, programs that centre the experiences of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth, culturally relevant training for newcomers with disabilities, or initiatives that consider how gender, class, and race/ethnicity shape access to lifeguarding and employment opportunities. This includes piloting such programs, evaluating their effectiveness, and making necessary adaptations based on participant feedback and outcomes. Longitudinal approaches are also essential; tracking the experiences of individuals who participate in intersectional programs can provide insight into how these initiatives influence representation, engagement, and retention within the field (Audulv, 2022).

The research I conducted about equity-owned lifeguards' experiences led me to realize the need for a training reform in lifeguarding both during the qualification process and in the workplace. Future research should include equity-owned lifeguards whose first language is not English; to better understand the additional barriers and challenges they may experience in the workplace. Additionally, it is vital that future research conducted highlights the importance of firsthand experiences of equity-owned lifeguards, and values the co-creation of policies, training, and recruitment to respond to firsthand experiences (Blair et al., 2022). Given the nature of the field of lifeguarding, researchers that gather data from firsthand experiences must continue to employ an intersectional perspective when examining equity-owned lifeguards' experiences and

during the creation of targeted initiatives. Consequently, for research to progress within this field, firsthand experiences must be at the forefront to see organizational and job experience change.

Furthermore, future researchers must investigate the training required for both current and future lifeguards to foster inclusive and supportive environments for equity-owned staff. In Canada, lifeguard training is standardized through the Lifesaving Society; however, because lifeguards work for a range of organizations, there are differences in how workplace training is delivered. Training that addresses issues such as workplace sexualization and sexual harassment is essential for creating safer environments for equity-owned lifeguards. Future studies should compare the effectiveness of training embedded within certification courses to that of standalone workplace training to determine which approach is most beneficial. Furthermore, researchers should also explore strategies for educating the public on appropriate conduct at aquatic facilities, including respectful engagement with lifeguards. Overall, there is a critical need for research that examines what makes training effective and how it can be optimally delivered to both equity-owned lifeguards and the communities they serve.

Final Thoughts

In my thesis, I have highlighted the need for future research that centres the first-hand experiences of equity-owned lifeguards in the workplace. To increase diversity in lifeguarding and improve lifeguards' workplace experiences, it is essential that organizations employing lifeguards implement promising practices and suggestions created from the data of first-hand experiences of equity-owned lifeguards. From my research, I concluded that programs that are meant to increase the diversity of lifeguards must adopt an intersectional approach in their design and meaningfully engage with the voices of those who have faced systemic barriers in the field in the hope of improving the diversity in aquatics and equity-owned lifeguards experiences. I

believe my research not only contributes to the aquatic sector but also offers insights applicable to other recreation and leisure contexts, ultimately enhancing the experiences of equity-owed workers in these roles. Drowning does not discriminate; regardless of identity, everyone should have access to swimming and the opportunity to pursue lifeguarding if it aligns with their interests.

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Appendix A: Contributions

Sofia Pantano developed, designed, and conducted this thesis, the theorization, analysis, and writing. Dr. Audrey Giles supported all parts of the dissertation's development, theorization, and analysis, and provided editing, assistance, and input into writing and reviewing the final product. Both papers will be published with Pantano as first author and Giles as second.

Appendix B: Ethics Clearance

25/06/2024

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-06-24-10479
Titre du projet / Project Title	An Intersectional Exploration on Lifeguarding and Job Retention
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	25/06/2024
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	24/06/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Sofia PANTANO	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Audrey GILES	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

25/06/2024

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Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Riana MARCOTTE

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

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