In 2008, the researcher completed their master’s thesis titled, Girls Don’t Surf: The gender inequality of women surfers. The study explored gender inequality for women surfers in southern California and the participants’ experiences. The subjects were selected for inclusion into this study because they were the original research participants in the 2008 study, Girls Don't Surf. The central questions that guided this study were: How have the women’s surf experiences in regards to inequality changed over the past decade? What social and/or institutional practices exist to maintain inequality in women’s surfing?

Using postmodern feminism as a theoretical framework, the purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore why women surfers in Southern California still experienced inequality, 10 years after the original study was conducted. The literature reviewed—including research on the gender roles in action sports, media representation of women in sports, and women surfers—indicates that women surfers are still regarded as something other than the norm.

In the past decade since the original study was conducted, huge strides have been made for women surfers. In November 2016, Sarah Gerhardt became the first woman to surf Maverick’s, a famous wave in northern California which can produce waves has big as 60 feet tall (Gerlach, 2018). The Agadir Open held in Morocco every June also just added a women’s division for the first time in 2017, and the average prize purse for a women’s contest has increased from $10–15,000 to $25,000 on average (Fuchs & Mathis, 2017). The 2012 London Olympics reflected a turning point in women’s participation at the elite level. According to Senne (2016), 44.3% of the athletes at the games were women. Title IX has had a huge impact on the increased participation in women’s athletics, but issues such as gender marking and lack of equal media representation have been continued barriers. Gender marking represents the idea that men’s sports are the norm while women’s sports are still thought of as nonnormative (Senne, 2016).

Although this study is to be one of the first of its kind to examine women surfer’s experiences over a 10-year period, it is important to understand the narrow scope of this study. The scope is narrowly defined to the experiences of seven women in Huntington Beach, California. There have been other studies on surfers and the sport of surfing, particularly on the subculture of surfing, but there are no current studies that have analyzed women surfers’ experiences surfing the same beach for a decade.

Data for this study is currently being collected and consists of in-person qualitative interviews. Each participant will only be interviewed once, but the researcher will ask each participant to verify the accuracy of information in the analysis and interpretation. The interview questions were crafted to examine whether or not gender inequality exists in surfing and how such inequality impacts the surfing experience of women. The utilization of grounded theory design will allow the researcher the opportunity to develop an abstract theory based on the views of the participants.