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The Development of Environmental Consciousness and Identity in Surfing Subculture

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The Development of Environmental Consciousness and Identity
In Surfing Subculture

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Abstract

Since the 1960's and 1970's, surfing has exuded the stereotype of a laid-back, environmentally conscious and left-wing culture, a connotation often spread through media outlets such as movies, television, and music that encourage the idea. While the stereotype is often known and widely accepted, no studies could be found that actually tested this view. Using a series of interviews and surveys of the New Ecological Paradigm, this study investigated the formation of environmental consciousness and identity in surfing subculture in order to examine the accuracy of such stereotypes, and analyse the effect that such generalized views have on the formation of surfing identity in coastal southern Queensland and northern New South Wales, Australia. The New Ecological Paradigm scale compared the environmental consciousness of surfers with that of non-surfers in the study area, finding significantly more pro-ecological views in the surfing population. These results suggest that while the stereotype of environmental conscious surfers developed during the environmentally-active age of the 1960's and 1970's, it is a form of identity still perpetuated in surfing culture today.

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Abbreviation Codes

DSP- Dominant Social Paradigm

NASSS- North American Society for the Sociology of Sport

NEP- New Ecological Paradigm

NSW- New South Wales

QLD- Queensland

Introduction- *Development of Ecophilosophy and Modern Environmental Thought*

In the nineteen sixties into the mid-nineteen seventies, Australia and the United States experienced a cultural revolution in terms of increasing environmental concern, growing distrust in government and authoritative bodies, and a growing generation gap between teenagers and their World War II-era parents. Beginning in the 1880's with the onset of urban sanitation concerns, the role of environmental consciousness was relegated to housewives on the assumption that they should protect a 'wider household' outside of their family home. (Clarke and Cortner, 2002.) As times and technology progressed, and additionally with the publishing of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, teenagers began to question the rights and current awareness of newly forming environmental concerns, and represented the new face of environmental justice, health, and civil rights. (Hay, 2002.) As Hay suggests, it was only with the growth of environmental concern in the 1960s that ecology became a *socially* significant science. 'This was, perhaps not coincidentally, also the period that marked the beginning of widespread disillusionment with modern science, technology, and authority.' (Hay, 2002.) The concept of ecophilosophy developed during the 1970's, a 'latent ecological unconscious' (Drengson, 1992.) of 'people who know that water, trees and soil measure the terms of their own existence, who have seen them and their wild creatures disappear and have found the world more empty as a result'. (Hay, 1985.) In addition, the concept of ecocentrism, "the belief that the earth and its bounty are not the sole preserve of a single species, *homo sapiens*, and that the key ecological insight of the interconnectedness of life should inform conceptions of what is 'good behaviour' (Hay, 2002.) juxtaposed previous views of dominant anthropocentrism, the view that the nonhuman world 'is considered to be valuable only insofar as it is *instrumental* to human ends'. (Fox, 1990.) The

development of theriophilia, the view that humans and animals are closely related or equal in a larger universal sense, also contributed to the decline of anthropocentrism (Rodman, 1974.), since many people were not placing themselves so apart from the natural world, and thus developed an ‘innately emotional affiliation to other living organisms’. (Wilson, 1993.) While previous views of environmental protection related to resource conservation and wilderness preservation, valuing resources for their future use to humans or aesthetic purpose, the combination of new environmental philosophies in the late 1960’s to 1970’s created a new category of environmental thought, what Rodman refers to as ‘Ecological Sensibility’. This view comprises of ‘a theory of value that recognizes intrinsic value in nature without engaging in mere extensionism ...and a style of coinhabitation that involves the knowledgeable, respectful, and restrained use’ of the environment. (Rodman, 1983.) This rapid expansion of environmental philosophies and ideas, coinciding with increasing distrust of government for the Vietnam War and other issues of the times, caused the baby-boomer generation of the 1960’s and 70’s to exhibit their alienation from authority in a variety of ways and the adaptation of alternate lifestyles. It was during this time that the newly recognized recreational activity (not yet a sport) of surfing began to spread across both nations. (Kampion, 2006.)

Study Aims- The Stereotype of Surfing Environmentalism

While surfing has existed in documented history for over a century and spread through Surf Live-Saving clubs in Australia in the early twentieth century, it was in the early 1960’s that the popularity, dedication, and designation of surfing as a ‘lifestyle’ began. (Kampion, 2006.) Over the decades surfing has developed into a widely-recognized sport in many nations, and through various portrayals in the media

from the Beach Boys to movies such as 'Point Break' and the comic strip 'Captain Goodvibes', it maintains a widely-accepted connotation of being a sport with an associated lifestyle and heightened level of environmental consciousness. While the popularity of surfing surged during a time of heightened environmental activism and concern, there have been few examinations on why that connotation still applies to surfing today. Why does surfing carry such a media-enhanced stereotype of a given lifestyle, political orientation, and opinion of environmental issues, while other outdoor sports such as skiing do not have any of those connotations? This study intended to investigate the development of environmental consciousness and identity in East coast Australian surfing culture in order to ascertain whether the decades-old stereotype still holds true today.

Methodology- Examining the Development of Surfing Identity

This study broke down into two parts; informal interviews examining the development of surfing identity, and a series of surveys studying the difference in environmental consciousness between surfers and members of the general population of East Coast Australia; namely southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. All studies were conducted during a one-month period in April 2006 travelling from Brisbane, Queensland along the coast down to Sydney, New South Wales. Forty two informal interviews (approximately 10 minutes – 1 hour) were conducted along this travel route, using a tape recorder to document quotes, in addition to approximately fifty four interviews lasting less than ten minutes. Locations of interviews varied greatly, from surf shops, instructors, Surf Life-Saving clubs and beaches all along the studied coastline to competition grounds in Kirra, a surf camp in Kempsey, a surfboard designing factory in Ballina, and many additional places. Methods of the

study of environmental consciousness are discussed in later sections of this paper. Due to the subject matter of this study, this paper was written as a combination of ethnography and sociological study; it is not a laboratory paper and thus was not written as such.

Birth of Surfing Culture- Rejection of Authority, Liminality, and Social Dirt

To begin my study of surfing identity I needed to investigate the roots of what distinguished surfing as having a particular connotation or lifestyle, which brought me back to the culture of the 1960's-1970's. While the development of the Malibu board design and the stabilization of foam in fibreglass made surfing more *feasible* (Kampion, 2006.), the popularity of surfing itself may have developed from other sources.

“Kids didn't have anywhere to go in the sixties... at least, not anywhere their parents would have wanted, but I wasn't a hippy either. Surfing was something to do- I didn't have anywhere else to be. It was nice, on my own, just the beach. A lot of other people started doing it, I think, because they felt the same way. There wasn't really a label for it at the time- slacker, maybe. But that's misunderstood. Just because I surfed instead of playing league [rugby], why's that so bad?”(Interview in Grafton)

Quite a few of the people interviewed who lived through the birth of surf culture in the 1960's felt the same way- surfing was looked down upon because it was not yet a recognized activity in which to spend free time. In fact, every 1960's-1970's era interviewee I spoke with said that they were attracted to surfing because it wasn't quite defined, and it's a sentiment they shared with their alienation from the culture of the times. Teens of this era experienced a more radical generation gap from their parents, who'd been affected by World War II and industrial-era depression, than had happened before, and were now facing a time of drastically changing priorities in

political and ecological arenas. This was a group of people who were no longer children but could not identify with the 'adult' generation of their parents, and the lack of definition caused from this began to manifest itself in many different forms. As many subjects agreed, the attraction to surfing came from that lack of definition- it wasn't a 'real' sport, it had no prior connotations of identity, and there were no regulations about what to do when it came to exploring such a new recreational field. In this way it was a sense of liminality (Turner, 1995.), a lack of belonging to either the traditional generations of their parents or the unusual tracks many other people were tacking, that attracted newly identified 'surfers' to a sport that had few rules and no form of authority governing what they did or how they did it.

"The freedom is what's so great about it, I think. I mean there are a variety of reasons I was attracted to surfing, but just being out there, being able to escape it all, I really liked that. There wasn't anything regulated about it; it wasn't a school sport, it wasn't something other people understood. I think that's actually why people came to hate it so much, think we were lazy out there surfing. Because they just didn't understand." (Interview in Coffs Harbour)

Since this non-described expression of self did not conform to any sort of identity that authority could understand, surfing began to carry inherent 'social dirt' (Douglas, 2002.), a negative connotation because it could not be classified within the dominantly accepted social structure. People were uncomfortable with the existence of an activity whose purpose could not quite be understood, and thus the negative connotations of surfers as 'lazy' or 'beach bums' labelled those who simply chose an alternative form of physical activity from the more widely-accepted sports of football, rugby, track, etc. Media outlets in the late 1970's and 1980's perpetuated the image of a lazy surfer in movies such as 'Fast Times at Ridgemont High' and 'Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure', although that became a stereotype from a minority, when in

fact a North American Society for the Sociology of Sport study showed that more than half of all surfers are university graduates. (NASSS, 2003.) Now that the popularity of surfing has spread and it is more commonly accepted as a proper use of recreational time, the negative connotation is less evident, although some sentiment remains (mainly in the aging ‘parent-of-surfers’ generation).

Surfing Lifestyle- Rebellion, Environmentalism, and Subculture Identity

While surfing was thus recognized as a new recreational activity, it did not fully explain the creation of a surfing *lifestyle* more so than that of a simple hobby. Why does surfing carry the stereotype of a given lifestyle and heightened level of environmental consciousness, while other outdoor sports such as skiing do not? That connotation developed from the initial culture that was attracted to it- surfing served as a form of rebellion, while most other sports were not created in such a way.

“I think [in the 1970’s, surfing] was a way of joining a socially acceptable group that could, as a group, show distaste for the way authority was running things- it was an escape from it all, the things we rejected. That includes government and the way people were [messing up] the earth, too. Even just having long hair at the time was a way of [rebellious authority]. I think it was government more than conformity that was being rebelled against, though they are related. But that’s why there’s a difference between surfers and [gothic kids]. It’s not rebelling for the sake of rebelling, or anti-conformity. It’s just not what they were used to, that’s all.”(Interview in Surfers Paradise)

In addition, the heightened environmental awareness and activism of the 1960’s-1970’s caused like-minded people to become attracted to the newly popularized activity.

“Surfing is different from skiing because skiers, like any other people, just find a resource that’s already there, already laid out, and use it. Surfers have a

relationship with nature because they experience the power of nature [in the waves] and are made humble by it. Once you have that... humility, when you're in synch with the power or spirit that made it, you're more likely to want to protect the environment so that beautiful spirit remains." (Interview in Surfers Paradise)

In addition to the 'rebellion' of 1960's culture to government, a stigma began to develop that environmentalism and environmental activism were rebellious as well. This developed the opinion often heard today of environmentalists as 'greenies', a term that has a negative connotation in Australia, and in addition many people began to regard environmentalists as 'tree huggers' or other 'wackos' while other types of political activists were respected for their dedication. Many people who identified as highly environmentally conscious in my study agreed that there is often a negative connotation to green politics, but most shrugged it off as ill-informed.

"[Environmentalism is perceived as rebellious] because it's pointing out and understanding that there's something wrong with the way things are now, and knowing that there needs to be a change. That's what rebellion is, anyway. Environmentalism- the mainstream kind anyway, not the 'let's go live in a commune kind', just tries to change certain practices, make them better, make them more efficient. But telling people that there needs to BE a change, not only in the way things are run but also in how people should prioritize the environment, well, to older folk, that's intrusive, telling other people how to live, even if you're just asking them to buy recyclables or prevent logging on some forest. It's perceived as rebellious to be the way we are because it rebels against the current way people live. And I definitely think older folk associate environmentalism with the hippy movement still too, and that has an effect on the [connotation] of environmentalism now. There hasn't been such a stereotyped decade of environmentalism, or rebellion, since then, so maybe in a few more years when the people who looked down on the sixties aren't around anymore, maybe that will change or end the link people had between the two. [Environmentalism and rebellion] But I don't think so- I think part of that has kind of embedded itself into

the way thing are. It's not necessarily a bad thing, because people who write us off would find a reason to anyway. And I think in youth culture, people are attracted to that sense of rebellion, even though it isn't really rebellion, and if that in some way gets them to stop complaining and learn a thing or two about politics and change, then it's a good thing in my book. ...Rebellion is a way to write people off because they're already prepared not to listen and they've already stereotyped who you are. Fine, their loss. People who aren't willing to see change are never going to be able to envision a better world, because they are only able to understand what they already know. That's too bad- I can see a way to live better, even if just by a little, to do my part, and if knowing that I'm living towards something makes me rebellious, then I'm damn proud of it." (Interview in Kempsey)

After the initial onset of surfing's increased popularity, people became attracted not only to the sport itself, but the beginning of a wider stereotype of lifestyle from those who started the 'movement'. Because of initial similar interests in left-wing politics, environmentalism, a 'laid-back vibe' and rejection of strong authoritative control all related to youth culture of the 1960's, surfing began to propagate an image of a certain type of person, and non-surfers were soon attracted to the sport because of the stereotype it held. Surfers began to identify as part of a collective 'culture' (or rather, sub-culture), and thus the identity of surfers became self-perpetuating; people were attracted to the activity because it was part of a newly found culture of ideas that they themselves already shared.

"It's in two parts now, though- you don't have to be part of the 'culture', you can just do it [surf], the way some people ride a bike every once in a while. But the people that are part of the 'culture'- for the most part it's preconceived. You already have that 'calm rebellion' thing, ...you already aren't interested in [other social scenes], you feel more laid back, and so you already have those interests when you get into the surfing scene. In some ways it is like a way for people with similar political interests to meet up, I think. None of that official political group crap for forty

year olds. This- it's all unofficial; you do it for whatever reason you already had. So you surf because you already felt a connection to the lifestyle surfing has. Some- most people are actually really bad surfers, you know. They just do it because they like it, and the people with it. ... primarily I do think it's preconceived, at this point anyway." (Interview in Surfers Paradise)

Many surfers agreed- they were attracted to the surfing subculture because of an attraction to aspects of the stereotype developed around it; they found within it certain things they wanted to emulate. Surfing, it appears, developed an associated lifestyle because its popularity surged out of a generational movement. In this way, the attitudes about social justice, environmentalism and the need for change cemented themselves in a new lifestyle born out of these movements, and while times have changed, these ideas grew latent in a newly specific surfing culture.

Place Identity, Individualism and Community

'In seeking to know a place, the key, I think, is to become vulnerable to a place. If you open yourself up, you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy may come a sense of belonging'. (Lopez, 1997.) While place identity is a highly interpretive concept, all surfers I spoke with had a high regard for 'the waves' that made them feel at home. 'Empathy with natural place ...conduces to environmentalism's stress upon living in accordance with ethical precepts: a specific and particular setting for human experience is critical to the development of a sense of morality and human identity.' (Lopez, 1997.) In a variety of ways, many surfers described what Norberg-Schulz calls 'genius loci', or the spirit of place. (Norberg-Schulz, 1980.) Their relationship to 'the waves' (interestingly enough, 'the waves', not 'the beach', denoting a relationship to *all* wave-bearing landscapes more than a given stretch of beachfront property) then creates a given phenomenology, or 'way of

viewing' other forms of place identity. According to Seamon, 'a phenomenological perspective enlarges the emotional range of feelings that attach to place to include care, sentiment, concern, warmth, love, and sacredness. Place ceases to be a mere backdrop for survival... it transforms it to a positive context for living that evokes affection and a sense of belonging.' (Seamon, 1982.) Nature itself, the lure of the 'wild' with which people feel the need to reconnect, calls to people in what Wilson dubs 'biophilia' (Wilson, 1993.), and surfer Drew Kampion celebrates in one of his 'surfing meditations'.

"The Wild is where we sprang from, eons past, and the Wild is what we spring from day by day. The Wild brings us fully into our eyes and ears and fingertips. Without the Wild, we are asleep in our lives. The Wild is the scrape of rock and shell on our cold bare feet. It's the chill sluice of brine down through our wetsuit; it's the early-morning offshore wind numbing our cheeks, even while the rising sun blinds our vision. The Wild is the approaching dark mass of an outside set, and it is the unseen possibility of a moving mass beneath the surface of the water close around us. The Wild is the ledging square section of surf sucking powerfully up and over a draining reef. To surf is to engage with the Wild, and there is nothing wilder than the lacerating hide and snaggle-toothed mouth of the shark, or the bottomless pitch of a grinding wall of swell for that matter. It is the Wild that makes surf culture such a rich subculture... Surf culture is born out of the Wild - of men and women who seek daily commerce with a morphing landscape of possibilities, of possible rewards and punishments, of long efforts made for fleeting gains. Contact and intimate interaction with ocean waves makes and keeps people alive like almost nothing else. Surfers are alive with the sea, with a crazy wisdom it takes them years to know they have." (Kampion, 2006.)

Other surfers are less indulgent of such strongly 'spiritual vibes', (those that profess such a relationship often associate with Taoist and neo-pagan philosophies of nature) but the sentiment of place identity and a relationship with the waves remains.

“Nowadays people attracted to the laid-back vibes of true surfing try to absorb the old sentiment. People talk about the ‘spirit’ of surfing, and the spiritual vibe of nature and stuff, because they want to get into it- maybe they go over the top at times about relationship they have with the Great Spirit or whatever, but it’s because they want to remember that feeling. And some people won’t admit it because they don’t want to sound stupid, but if you surf enough, and you love it rather than ‘hobby it’, you will develop a relationship with the waves, an awe of nature. So it’s a cycle in a way- you’re drawn to it and then it invests a further relationship into you. Once you have that invested relationship, or that appreciation, that’s why some surfers, not all, but definitely more than the wide population, really get into environmental causes. You have to know what you’re trying to protect, you need a reason to BE interested. ...Once you develop a relationship with something not man-made, then you have a reason to try to protect it. Surfing has an obvious relationship with the environment, [more so than skiing or other outdoor sports] because it’s a dynamic relationship with the beach, the currents, the waves- I think that’s what draws some people to care.” (Interview in Surfers Paradise)

Both these statements along with the general sentiment I gathered from surfers emphasized that their relationship with nature, their ‘connectedness’ to the natural world, directly related to their understanding of and need to protect the environment. This relates to Biggins’ interpretation of ecology itself, in that it suggests ‘not only how the world *is*, but how we *ought* to act in the world, because ‘natural’ knowledge is the soundest foundation for values- how else would we know how we ought to act in the world except by knowing the world?’ (Biggins, 1979.) Many surfers expressed pride in their identification with the waves, a sense of belonging built from the continuous relationship they have with a dynamic oceanographic nature. The waves are ‘felt’, and identity developed around what Relph refers to as place ‘insiderness’, or a deeper, profound understanding formed from ‘an ability to identify with and belong to place as part of your inner nature’. (Relph, 1976.)

“Being out there... it’s... it’s an experience I can’t really explain. I see the waves. I didn’t always; it’s something that happened because I was out here so much. I feel it. You know how you go in the water for long enough, and then you leave, and you can feel the ocean still pushing you back and forth, even when you’re back in your apartment a day later? It’s like that, but on a level of philosophy, I think. I’ve been here so long, and now the waves push me, all the time, in the way that I am. I belong here... this is me.”(Interview in Sydney)

This exhibits an ecosocialist perspective, in which, according to Jacobs, ‘people do not simply look out over their local landscape and say “this belongs to me”. They say, “I belong to this”’. (Jacobs, 1995.) Such a love of place, an appreciation for a specific area by a certain people, also relates to Tuan’s idea of topophilia, or the affective bond between people and place. (Tuan, 1974.) The connection surfers feel in place identity then bonds them together as a group, sharing in their identity a relationship with the waves. ‘Place-perceptions are constructed within social contexts... the character of a place is thus related to continuity in communal experience’. (Relph, 1976.) This then helps to turn a sport that is individualistic by nature into more of a community activity.

*“Well, yeah, surfing is an individual sport just in its nature; I mean it’s a solo activity, not a team thing. But just like people go rock climbing in groups, or meet up that way, surfers do too. The difference is that, as a general rule, we already tend to have a lot in common right to start with, going along with the whole stereotype, and so I think it’s easier to bond with other surfers. You’re only alone in surfing if you want to be- hell, I don’t even know if you could be if you wanted to. So many people are willing to give you advice, tell you about different rips, ask about how it went; you’re never alone in this. There’s a silent bond- you just ‘know’. Surfing is definitely a little community of its own. The people out here- they all bond with the waves, the waves we use. So we’re kind of grouped together by that, and we all know it.”
(Interview in Byron Bay)*

The relationship surfers have to the waves, different from that of swimmers, sailors, and other nautical sports, bonds them together because they have a shared appreciation for the same, specific aspects of the ocean. Like the interview above, most surfers were well-aware of the characterized surfer stereotype, and most found it a mildly amusing generalization of little importance. When it came to the stereotype of heightened environmental consciousness, however, the majority of surfers I spoke with acknowledged it as a general truth, and one that brought them great pride.

Methodology- Measuring Environmental Consciousness

In order to compare the environmental consciousness of surfing subculture with the media- enhanced stereotype that members of this group tend to be more environmentally concerned, first the phrase 'environmental consciousness' itself needed to be defined within given terms. Rolston describes the green movement as "a deep-felt consternation at the scale of destruction wrought, in the second half of the twentieth century, and in the name of transcendent human progression, upon the increasingly embattled life forms with which we share the planet. It is an instinctual and deep-felt horror at the maelstrom of killings and insensitivity to forms of life that characterises our times." (Rolston, 1985). However, the green movement is merely one form of environmentalism, and it itself can be broken down further into what Fox describes as the 'four pillars' of green politics- ecology, social justice, grassroots democracy and non-violence. (Fox, 1995.) Environmental activism, politics, attitudes, philosophies and passion all contribute to the vague term of 'environmental consciousness', and can be measured in a variety of ways. Due to the short time span of this study, the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap, Van Liere et. al, 2000.) was chosen as a single means to quantify environmental consciousness both

within surfing subculture and the general community in coastal Queensland and New South Wales, in order to compare the attitudes of surfers with those of the wider population. The 'New Environmental Paradigm' (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978.) focuses on beliefs concerning humanity's ability to upset the balance of nature, the existence of limits to growth for human societies, and humanity's right to rule over the rest of nature. These ideas are set in contrast to the economic-driven ideas of the 'Dominant Social Paradigm' (DSP), a summary comparison of which is listed below in Table 1.

NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PARADIGM

1 High valuation of nature

2 Environmental protection valued over economic growth

3 Generalized compassion for environmental and political issues

4 Science and technology are not always good

5 Limits to growth

6 An ideal society would have an emphasis on

- Participation and openness
- The public sphere
- Post-materialism
- Co-operation

7 A new politics, with an emphasis on participation, consultation, devolution and direct action

DOMINANT SOCIAL PARADIGM

1 Low valuation of nature

2 Economic growth valued over environmental protection

3 Political and environmental compassion only reserved for those 'near and dear'

4 Science and technology are a great strength for mankind

5 No limits to growth

6 Contemporary society is fine, as is its emphasis on

- Hierarchy and efficiency
- The market sphere
- Materialism
- Competition

7 Contemporary politics is fine, as is its emphasis on centralization and economies of scale and on decision-making by technical experts, and by delegation / representation

Table 1- Comparison of the values of the New Ecological Paradigm and the Dominant Social Paradigm (Hay, 2002.)

The New Ecological Paradigm scale consists of fifteen questions designed to tap 'primitive beliefs' about nature and humanity's relationship with it, studying perceptions in five categories; the reality of limits to growth, anti-anthropocentrism or the rejection of human-centered world, the fragility of nature's balance, rejection of exemptionalism or the idea that humans are 'above' other natural processes, and views toward the possibility of an ecocrisis. These questions from Dunlap and Van Liere's 1999 scale (Dunlap, Van Liere et. al., 2000.) were chosen for a series of surveys, although the exact wording was changed in order to make each of the questions more understandable to the general population. Each question was posed in the form of a statement, asking the subject to choose whether they strongly agree, mildly agree, are unsure, mildly disagree or strongly disagree with it. A copy of the administered survey is available in the appendix of this paper. 248 surfers and 283 non-surfers comprised the two study groups, and completed surveys along different beaches and areas from Brisbane along the coast to Sydney for a total of 532 completed surveys. Out of these, one survey was deemed inaccurately completed (in that the same answer was chosen for each of the twenty multiple choice answers) and removed from the total results, which yields a total of 531, or 99.998% of distributed surveys completed.

In addition to the fifteen New Ecological Paradigm questions, eight additional questions studied demographic information such as age, sex, level of education, political orientation, identification of surfing identity and a study of how each person would rate themselves on a scale of environmental consciousness and environmental activism. One final question examined each subject's opinion of the environmental consciousness of surfers, to test whether or not the stereotype of surfers as more

environmentally conscious was believed by either of the study groups. Surveys were administered on a printed questionnaire in person to each of the subjects by approaching them in public areas, namely beaches, shopping areas and town centers. This 'base population' is where many of the informal interviews took place, after surveyed people agreed to answer additional questions.

Results- Demographic Analysis

The sex ratio of study subjects turned out surprisingly similar between surfers and non-surfers; with a 71/29% male/female ratio for surfers and a 70/30% ratio for non-surfers. This exact ratio was not intended but does help to provide a more accurate comparison of attitudes between the two groups if factors such as sex are kept relatively constant in each study group. The age range of each group was also extremely similar, with approximately 45% of subjects aged 18-29 years, 25% 30-40 years, 20% aged 41-59 years, and 10% aged sixty or older in each group. The education breakdown of each group can be seen in Figure 1.

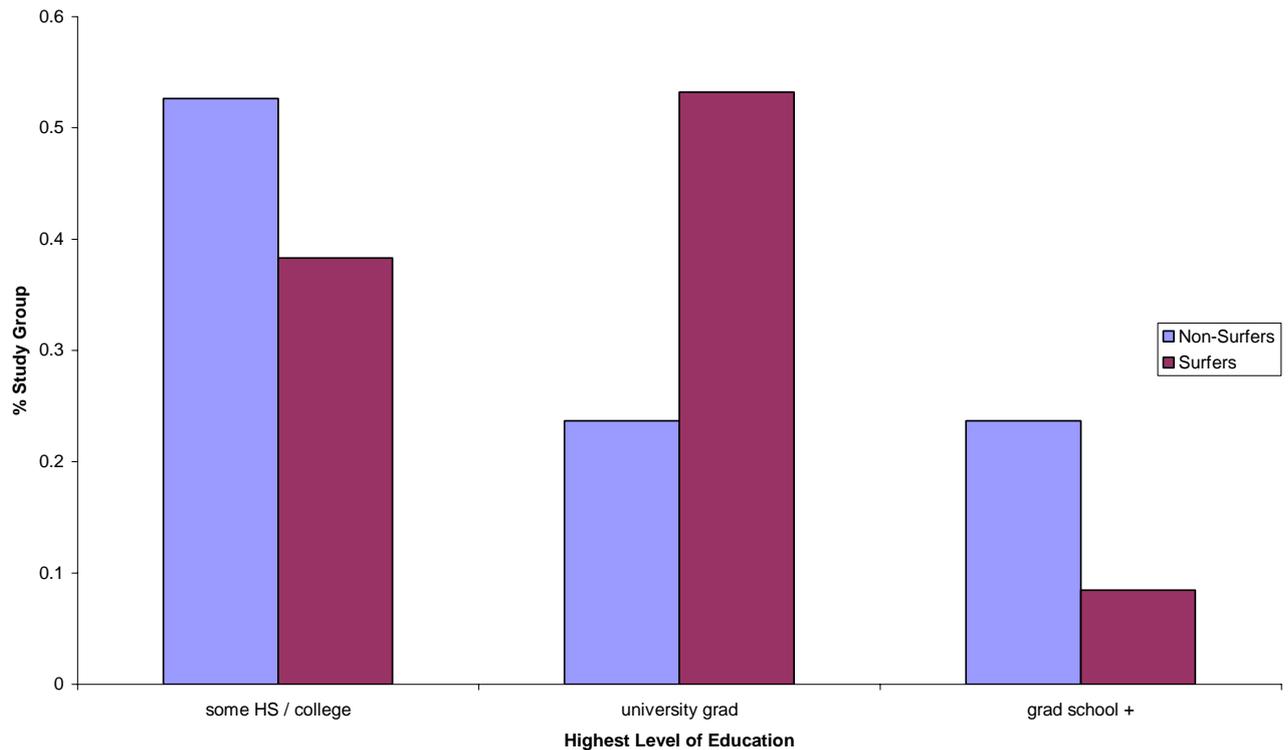


Figure 1- Highest Level of Education of Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

The percent of study subjects receiving a university diploma was similar for each study group, with more than half completing a university degree. (Those within the 'beyond graduate school' category would have received a university degree first, and thus it levels out the apparent deficiency of non-surfers in the university graduate category.) Since nearly half of all subjects surveyed were less than 29 years old, it is also possible that more subjects will continue on to receive higher degrees. Figure 2 illustrates the political orientation of each study group.

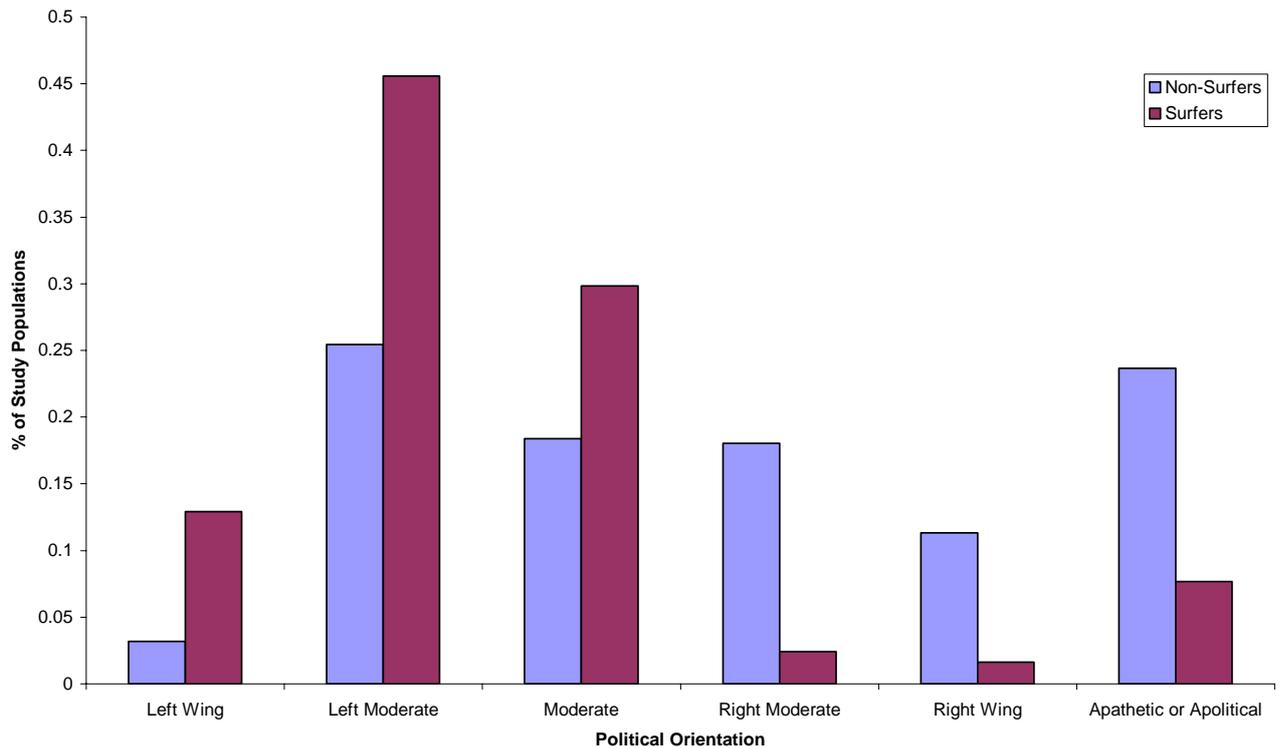


Figure 2- Political Orientation of Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

These results agree with the stereotype of surfers as more left-wing oriented in politics. The political breakdown of non-surfers demonstrated a traditional bell-curve shape leaning towards moderate political orientation, with significant representation on both sides of the political scale. Surfers, however, identified much more strongly with left-moderate political beliefs, with extremely few in the right moderate and right wing categories. In addition, significantly more non-surfers identified as apathetic or apolitical (approximately 24%), comparing with only 7% of surfers. This trend rebukes the 1980's-inspired stereotype of surfers as 'inactive' in the political or 'adult' world, a stereotype that has for the most part disappeared in modern times anyway.

Before assessing environmental consciousness with the New Ecological Paradigm scale, each member of the study was asked to rate their own environmental

consciousness and environmental activism on a scale that they could interpret however they wished. This would determine how people viewed *themselves* in addition to what the later NEP results suggest. The results are displayed in Figures 3 and 4.

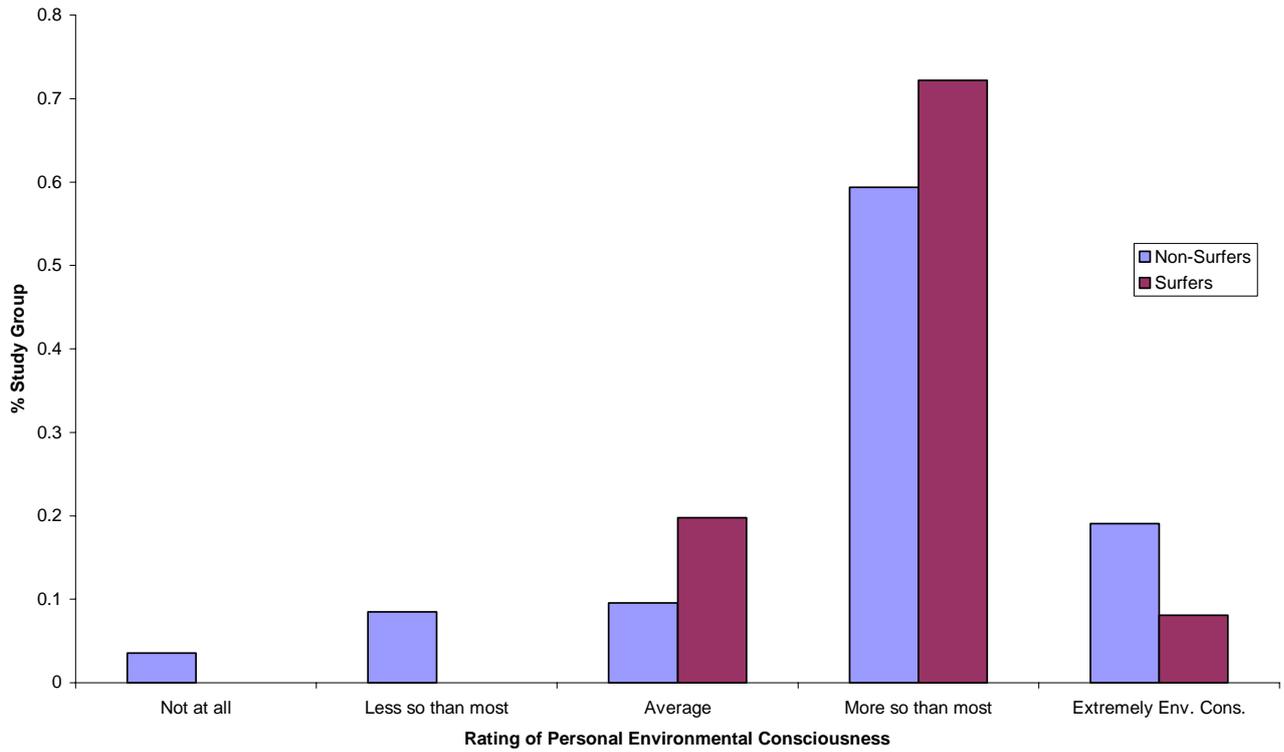


Figure 3- Personal Rating of Environmental Consciousness in both Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

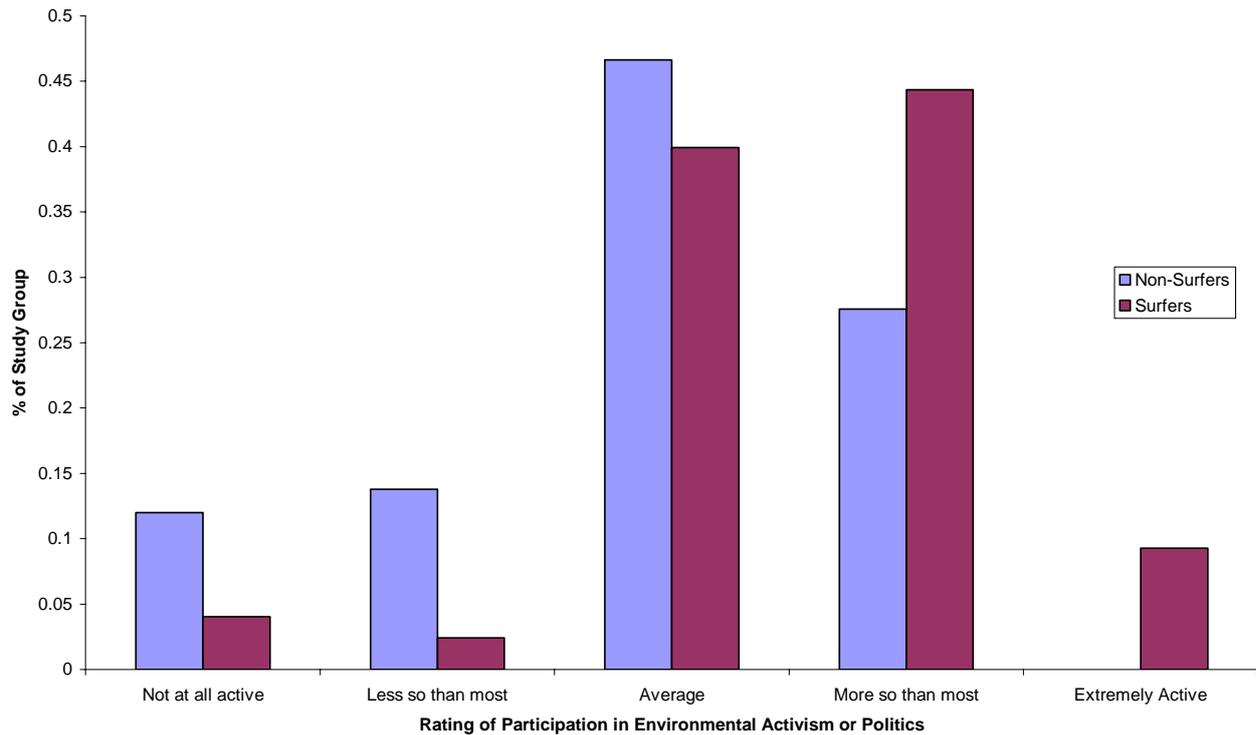


Figure 4- Personal Rating of Participation in Environmental Activism or Politics in both Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

While most non-surfers identified as being more environmentally conscious than the rest of the general population, most also associated as 'average' or 'below average' on the scale of active participation in environmental politics, and none identified as extremely active. In the surfing population, all subjects rated themselves 'average' or 'above average', coinciding well with similar ratings of their participation in environmental politics. However, these results are not directly conclusive, nor were they meant to be- environmental consciousness does not directly infer activism in environmental politics, merely a different state of mind. This was left open to interpretation by the subjects on purpose, in order to ascertain how they themselves would interpret the meaning of 'environmental consciousness' before the fifteen New Ecological Paradigm questions were answered. One last interpretative

question asked how each subject would rate the environmental consciousness of surfers as a 'subculture', the results of which are illustrated in Figure 5.

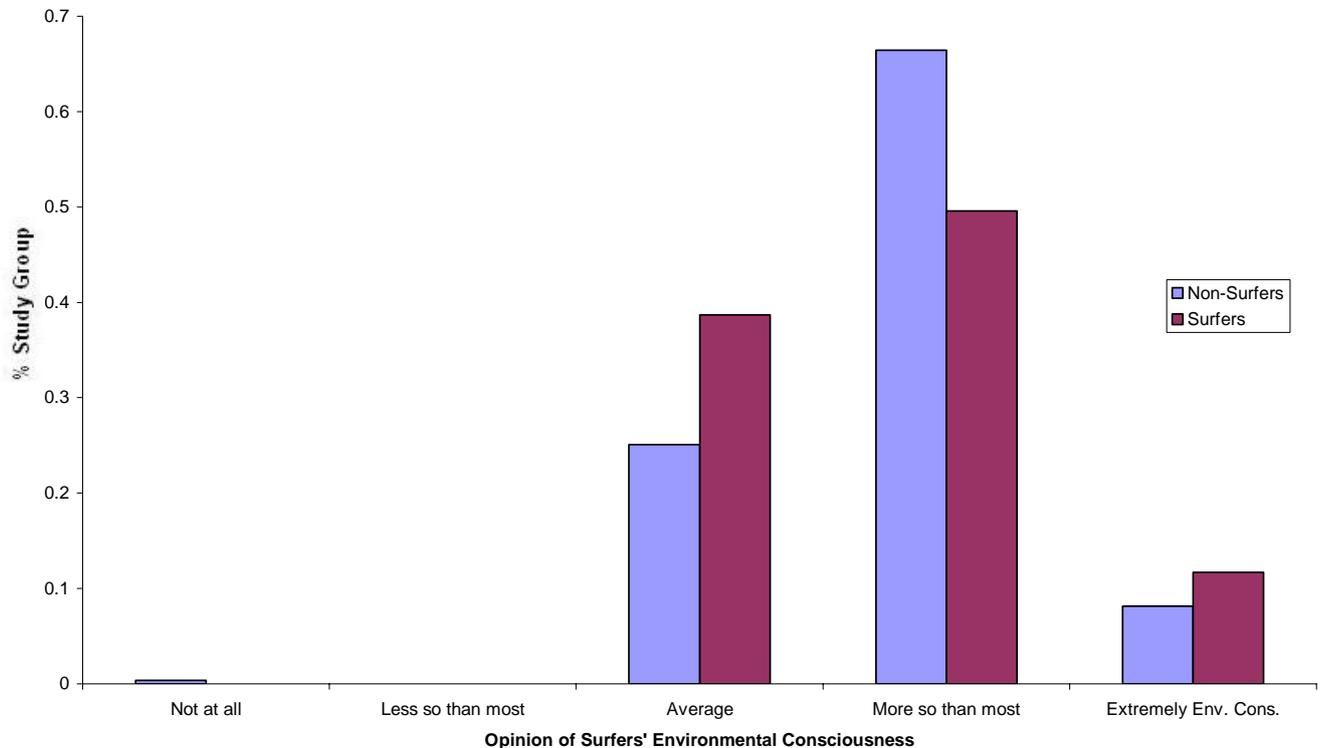


Figure 5- Personal Rating of the Environmental Consciousness of Surfers as a Subculture by both Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

These results suggest that there is indeed an accepted stereotype or assumption that surfers are more environmentally conscious than the general population. Only one non-surfer subject (out of 283) thought surfers as a group were not at all environmentally conscious, and no other member of either study population thought surfers were below average. The significant majority of both study groups seemed to agree that surfers, when classified as a subculture, tended to be more environmentally conscious than other people.

Results- Measurement of Pro-ecological Views Sustained by the New Ecological Paradigm

Results from the administered surveys were more conclusive than originally expected, and showed a drastic difference between the views of surfers and non-surfers studied. The percent of each study group that provided pro-ecological views to the NEP statements are displayed in Table 2.

Study Question (Re-organized by theme)	% Non-surfers	% Surfers	Change (+Surfers)
<i><u>Ecological Limits</u></i>			
1- We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support. (AGREE)	53	86.3	33.3
6- The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them. (DISAGREE)	8.8	65.7	56.9
11- The earth is like a spaceship in that it has limited room and resources. (AGREE)	71	94.4	23.4
<i><u>Human Domination and Anti-anthropocentrism</u></i>			
2- Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs. (DISAGREE)	61.8	93.1	31.3
7- Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist. (AGREE)	64.3	96.8	32.5
12- Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature. (DISAGREE)	61.1	84.7	23.6
<i><u>The Fragility of Nature's Balance</u></i>			
3- When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences. (AGREE)	55.5	93.5	38
8- The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations. (DISAGREE)	45.6	96	50.4
13- The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset. (AGREE)	70	90.3	20.3
<i><u>Rejection from Exemptionalism</u></i>			
4- Human ingenuity will insure that we do NOT make the earth unliveable. (DISAGREE)	34.3	80.6	46.3
9- Despite our ability, humans are still subject to the laws of nature. (AGREE)	70.7	83.1	12.4
14- Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it. (DISAGREE)	54.8	83.1	28.3
<i><u>The Possibility of an Ecocrisis</u></i>			
5- Humans are severely abusing the environment. (AGREE)	70.3	93.5	23.2
10- The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated. (DISAGREE)	44.9	72.6	27.7
15- If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe. (AGREE)	64.3	88	23.7

Table 2- Trends in Responses to NEP Items by Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and New South Wales, 2006

These results illustrate that surfers demonstrated significantly more pro-ecological views for all of the questions administered. The most drastic difference was evident in statements that questioned human ability to use ingenuity to overcome the potential problems of nature, namely statements 4, 6 and 8. While each of these statements was in a different category of ecological thought, each tested the faith that ecological problems will eventually 'level out' on their own. Members of the non-surfing population were *much* more confident that the earth has plenty of natural resources, that the balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the effects of modern industrial nations, and that human ingenuity will insure that we do not make the earth unliveable, while the surfing population had approximately 50% more of their study group disagree with each of the above statements. The general trend of pro-ecological statements for non-surfers was extremely varied, yielding results varying from 34-71% pro-ecological views, with one result (9%) below that range. In the surfing study group, all statements yielded pro-ecological results in more than 80% of the group except for statements 6 and 10, yielding pro-ecological views of 66 and 73% respectively. Only nine percent of non-surfers exhibited a pro-ecological view for statement 6, the idea that the earth has limited natural resources, making it the lowest pro-ecological view of both study groups. The results of each statement were averaged with the other statements in the same ecological theme in Figure 6 below.

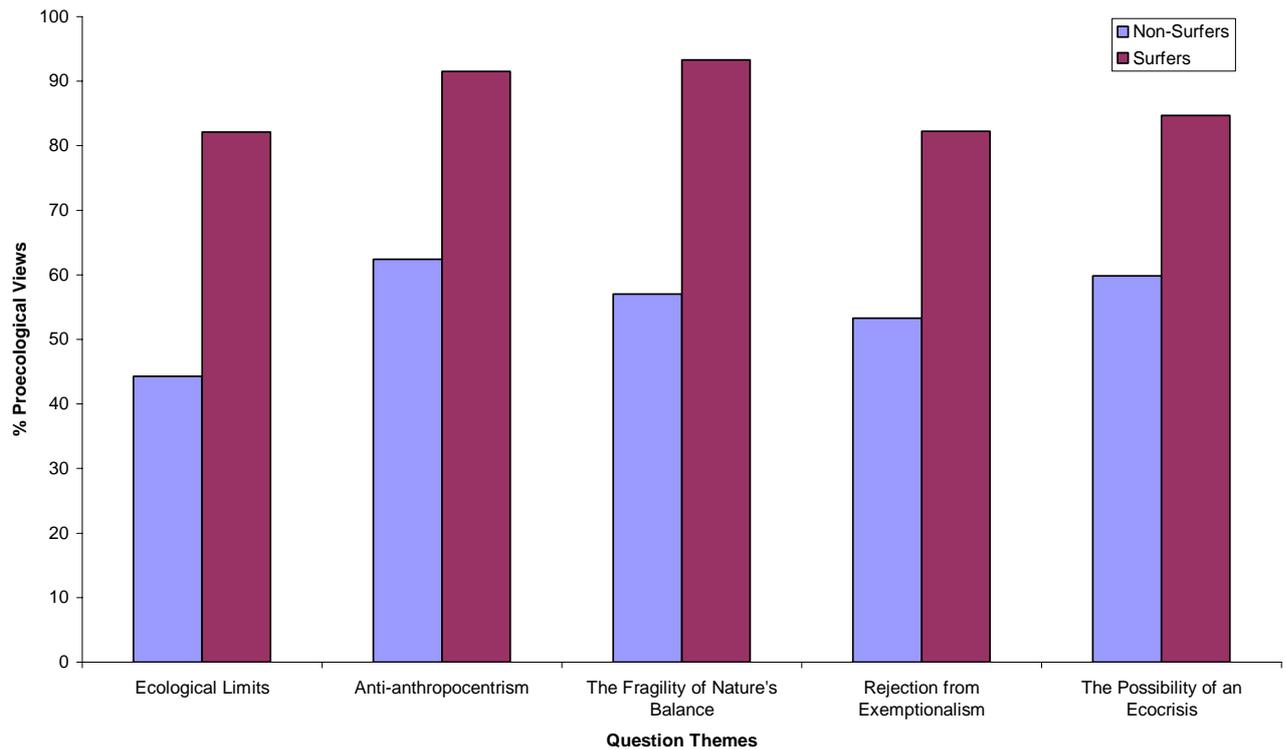


Figure 6- Pro-ecological Responses Averaged for Each Ecological Theme by Surfer and Non-Surfer Study Groups in Coastal Southern Queensland and Northern New South Wales

When averaged by ecological theme, these results show a relatively consistent rate of approximately 87% pro-ecological views for surfers, and 55% pro-ecological views for non-surfers. This is a dramatic difference of 32%, illustrating a higher level of environmental consciousness for surfers in every category studied.

Conclusions and Implications

While the activity of surfing has been practiced for more than a century across the Pacific, the stereotype and labels associated with surfing culture are much more recent. A 'lifestyle' born from a 1960's-inspired culture of liminality, surfing has evolved into a recognized sport with millions of participants over the globe. While various forms of media continue to portray the 'laid-back surfer' motif, the associated connotation for surfers to have a heightened environmental consciousness appears to

be true, and noticeably so. Through a self-perpetuated image, like-minded individuals are attracted to surfing both as a type of adventure and a means to express or share a similar political and environmental identity. Methods such as the New Environmental Paradigm scale are important in order to understand the way in which people view environmental issues, so that applicable models of conservation and education can then be communicated to different types of people. While additional research including a large-scale survey of environmental consciousness could examine or elaborate on attitudes towards environmental issues within various forms of sub-culture identity in Australia, this study suggests that surfers, as a collective group, still follow and identify with the attitudes that formed the birth of their 'culture' more than four decades ago.

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Appendix

Please see the following page (p. 34) for a copy of the New Ecological Paradigm-inspired survey administered for this study.

Note: the following survey is not to its appropriate scale. Its size was decreased in order to fit within the format of this paper.

Personal information (Please circle one)
 Sex- Male / Female Age (please fill in) _____ Nationality _____

Highest level of education- some high school or college university grad graduate school and +

How would you rate your political orientation?
 1- left wing 2- left moderate 3- moderate 4- right moderate 5- right wing 6- apathetic or apolitical

How would you rate yourself on a scale of environmental consciousness?
 1- not at all 2- less so than most 3- average 4- more so than most 5- extremely environmentally conscious

How would you rate your involvement in environmental activism or environmental politics?
 1- not at all involved 2- less so than most 3- average 4- more so than most 5- extremely involved

How often do you surf?
 1- not at all 2- I've tried it occasionally 3- I surf often 4- I'm obsessed

As a subculture, do you think surfers are environmentally conscious?
 1- not at all 2- less so than most 3- average 4- more so than most 5- extremely

Listed below are statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each one, please circle whether you Strongly Agree, Mildly Agree, are Unsure, Mildly Disagree or Strongly Disagree with it.

1) We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

2) Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

3) When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

4) Human ingenuity will insure that we do NOT make the earth unliveable.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

5) Humans are severely abusing the environment.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

6) The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

7) Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

8) The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

9) Despite our ability, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

10) The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

11) The earth is like a spaceship in that it has limited room and resources.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

12) Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

13) The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

14) Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

15) If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.
 Strongly Agree Mildly Agree Unsure Mildly Disagree Strongly Disagree

Thanks for participating in this survey!
