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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Ripple Effect: An Examination of Surfing as a Force for  
Positive, Lasting Personal and Societal Change

Honors Thesis Submitted in partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of HON 420 Spring 2018

By

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Mentor

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Department of Sociology

## **Abstract**

### **Ripple Effect: An Examination of Surfing as a Force for Positive, Lasting Personal and Societal Change**

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This study aims to demonstrate how the spiritual, sacred, and metaphysical components of surfing empower the activity as a force for positive, personal and societal change in a community. While many surfers are drawn to surfing for its spiritual attributes, traceable to its roots in ancient Polynesia, there are many others who embrace the sport for purely non-spiritual reasons. Quantitative data was collected by the research team to show how the differing views of these two groups of surfers affect three main areas: environmental ethics, personal growth and maturation, and general community outreach. The results of the study proved all three hypotheses regarding the three main areas of focus above with statistical significance. The results will hopefully improve perceptions of the sport by those outside of surf culture, and demonstrate to local, state, and national government and civic leaders how the implementation and promotion of surf-related organizations, programs and philanthropies can greatly benefit the communities they represent. This study will hopefully inspire further study into the effects of surfing into local communities and economies.

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All others who promoted the survey and offered to post the results.

## Introduction

This study aims to demonstrate how the spiritual, sacred, and metaphysical components of surfing empower the activity as a force for positive, personal and societal change in a community. Surfing comes from deep spiritual roots in ancient Polynesia with sacred festivals, prayers connected to the shaping of boards, praying for good waves and giving thanks for surviving a big wipeout. Bron Taylor tells how “...surfing fosters self-realization, [and] that commercialization is a defiling act, that even such threats cannot obviate its spiritual power— have been expressed repeatedly, in various ways and venues, within surfing subcultures.” (Taylor, 925).

Despite the growth of commercialization in surfing, its spiritual nature still has a powerful impact, and that’s what this study aims at proving quantitatively. According to Bron Taylor “...there is no...empirical study that quantifies the ways in which religion becomes intertwined with surfing, or that documents the proportion of surfers whose spirituality can be characterized...” (Taylor, 925). This is precisely where I got my inspiration and precisely what my study examines.

In order to accomplish this, I conducted an online survey of surfers and specifically looked at their views on the spiritual nature of surfing, their involvement in community outreach, their individual growth due to surfing and their view on environmental ethics. Overall, the results proved my three hypotheses: that as a surfer’s view of surfing as spiritual, or metaphysical for the sake of the study, increased, so too would their individual growth from surfing, involvement in community outreach, and environmental ethics. As the response on the metaphysical scale increased by 1 the environmental scale increased by 0.379, the individual growth scale increased by 0.662, and the community outreach scale increased by 0.484 (all showing statistical significance). So, as surfers view surfing in the true spiritual sense, rather

than just a hobby, it has a positive effect on all three of my hypothesis which I consider key when trying to better local communities; therefore, surfing, when viewed correctly, is a medium that can increase the potential for community growth.

### **Literature Review**

A passion like none other, a history full of ambiguity, and profoundness unique to itself, surfing doesn't only fulfill a person's desires in a recreational sense, but surfing has the potential to impact one on a deeper, spiritual level. Surfing, from its roots in Hawaii and the Polynesian region, has carried a sacredness which has allowed the sport to act as a vehicle for positive growth in other areas outside of surfing alone. Growing from its simple foundation, surfing saw a decline in the spiritual aspects of the sport; but, has experienced a revival of this perspective in the modern era. When it comes to examining something like surfing—an activity experienced by an individual, on an individual basis—is difficult to define its mystical nature. A philosophical and theological approach must be taken when dissecting such personal components; when this lens is utilized, surfing is seen to have a maintained sacredness that shifts perpetually as the limits of societal and individualistic pressures do. Persons who participate in surfing and experience it as more than just recreation—spiritual, therapeutic, sacred, profound—learn much about themselves, leading to positive self-change; then, this positive self-change leads persons to think and act outwardly with a more positive perspective and lifestyle; increasing also, their participation in community outreach and improving their environmental ethics.

The context with which this study fits in the greater realm of surfing research is such as one completes a puzzle: the boarders have been done first by others, and the middle is slowly being filled in by research such as this to eventually create the beautiful picture of what surfing really is in its most profound sense. Historically, surfing can be seen through its earliest beginnings as

a propulsion system for cultural, individual, and economic growth; for instance, Duke Kahanamoku was boosted to global fame initially by surfing and later by Olympic swimming. In Hawaii, he acted as the crossing between two poorly defined cultures of the time; the old ethnic-only-Hawaiian— “dark-skinned savage”—and the new “twentieth-century Hawaiian”— the “safe exotic” (Nendel, 36) who could teach someone to surf. Historian Eric Hobsbawm argues the sport’s importance for rallying communities and specifically how Kahanamoku became key for Hawaiian nationalism giving validity and realism to the Hawaiian community (Nendel, 35). Among the ancient sports of Hawaii that perished with this cultural shift, surfing barely held on—almost disappearing in Hawaii in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It declined to the point of even the techniques in which surfers enacted had changed, lessening the quality of the previously intricate past time (Finney, 317). Surfing stemmed out from its sacred traditional beginnings to diffuse into the world as something different—at least on the surface. Like water itself, the surface doesn’t begin to encapsulate the vast depth, beauty, and mystery of surfing. Surfing was regarded as sacred, and it surrounded much tradition in Hawaiian culture because surfing is mystical, and ecstasy filled; therefore, it deserves a sacred place surrounded by tradition. It deserves a centerpiece at the table of Hawaiian culture and perhaps now it is ingraining itself to retake the centers of other cultures. This study grasps the components of surfing history, which give the audience only the minimum amount of background to make sense of why surfing can be any more profound than the act of just riding a wave.

Surfing’s sacredness, and its ability to teach individuals about themselves has been the topic of moderate amounts of research; research that, if stood alone, shows a component of surfing that has missing connections—what does it yield. Meaning, what the spirituality of surfing does to people, for people, for society, and for the world has yet to be established, which is what this study aims at accomplishing. Some specific evidence of how surfing acts as a transcendent



practice—how it goes beyond itself to further other facets of life, culture, and individualism—is shown in Kristen G. Congdon’s study. Congdon asserts surfing acts as a medium for youth to find belonging, togetherness, and overarching similarities between one another through surfing culture and it should be viewed as something beneficial for youth, which allows them an avenue to express their creativity in a culturally unique way—which should be put into its proper positive light. Surfing in and of itself is about progressing forward along the wave, to what’s next. Regardless of how it changes, one must proceed onward; something that has, at its center, a character of progression therefore, must bring with it progression in its subparts. In Bron Taylor’s study, Taylor asserts the spirituality of surfing lends the surfer to develop a sense of connection and belonging with nature generally, and specifically with the sea; he argues there is an emergence of reverence toward nature which directly relates to environmental ethics. Taylor challenges that participants and non-participants observe the practice and subculture of surfing as resembling a religion through many facets; and, convictions regarding relationships with community are shifted. Taylor asserts that all surfing culture isn’t “good”, or positive. The “good” surfing culture corresponds with a surfer who participates in surfing with a spiritually geared mind, or sacred focused mind—the opposite is true. The spiritually minded surfer is involved in an extremely intimate connection to “Mother Ocean” (Taylor, 944) and the purpose surfing fulfills in this instance is one of connection; it provides a means to gain fulfillment, a sense of belonging, and a path to a deeper spiritual life. The non-spiritual surfer isn’t covered in this text; however, it seems those who neglect the spiritual aspect of surfing misunderstand it all together. This may be influenced by the over-commercialization of the sport and the spirituality is lost in the mess. Taylor has touched on many of the points I have come to discover on my own prior to reading his study; which, to me, says something striking about surfing: how surfing is viewed largely affects what purposes it

fulfills—those that are beneficial and those that aren't—yet what surfing is doesn't change; the “right” way to view surfing is one that lends itself to positive, progressive outcomes because that is the nature of surfing; to see the “right” way one should view anything, one must analyze the facts and the common trends. Surfing fulfills purposes outside the practice that lead to betterment of the individual and society—otherwise it's not really surfing.

The way this profound, spiritual nature of surfing has traversed its way into the modern era has been a slow road; in that, it hasn't taken full hold of the surfing world yet. In Lauren Hill and J. Anthony Abbott's study on representation, identity, and environmental action among Florida surfers asserts interesting data in which it is presented “surfers generally self-identify as ecologically aware and socially active for environmental protection, reflecting the popular representations of the surfing community...”; however, in certain analysis of the responding parties' lifestyles, they failed to reflect the environmentally progressive ideologies and practices they so avidly support (Hill & Abbott, 157). It is deduced by the researchers when being environmentally progressive conflicts with self-interest, surfers allow themselves to fall into hypocrisy. The authors take note of a general trend in surfers, the desire to act to protect the environment only comes when a certain break is threatened rather than having an overall care for the betterment of the environment—surfers are dormant environmentalists until something they have value in is threatened; however, I think this isn't exclusive to surfers and this is a trend that arches across many other global subcultures. The authors demonstrate through their research 93 percent of surfers who responded agreed or strongly agreed that “...‘environmental consciousness is an important part of surfing’...” and 100 percent who responded agreed or strongly agreed that a goal while surfing is to “connect with nature” (Hill & Abbott, 164). Despite the occasional hypocrisy, surfers who interact with surfing in a spiritual or profoundly reflective manner have a higher level of environmental protection than surfers

who don't interact with surfing. This is because surfing is just a means to experience *true* nature. It isn't surfing itself; it's what surfing gives one access to—a personal connection, if not for only a short moment—to the profound wonder that is our natural world. This is what gives surfers an innate desire to protect what gives them this gateway into an incomparable nature experience. Perhaps this explains why so many have tried, and failed, to put the experience of surfing into words; none can completely encapsulate the entirety of nature by words and by connection, none can convey surfing in expression; only by doing can one understand. The incongruity discussed above by Lauren Hill and J. Anthony Abbott stems from respondents who haven't truly experienced surfing, or who simply have a skewed view of surfing. Yes, surfing is an individual activity that benefits only you, but that's for only the moments in the water; many surfers are missing the part of surfing that comes with a more mature way of thinking, one that treads the road of selflessness. The idea that once something remarkable has been experienced, something that causes inner change, that person is burdened for others to have a similar change. Perhaps that's why some say surfing is like a religion, in that aspect I suppose it is. It is because of this incongruity, that isn't just an isolated incident, I assert the spiritual nature of surfing hasn't taken complete hold of the surfing culture.

Surfing has also been studied as a medium for which positive change can be enacted in the world. Researcher Chad Nelsen brings light to surfers as economically beneficial to a coastal area having a much higher frequency of beach visits per year versus the regular beach goer—being about 15% of total beach visits per year at Trestles Beach, California (Nelsen et al., 905). Nelson's research also shows annual economic impact to the local community at Trestles Beach in Southern California to range from \$8-12 million and an annual economic value of \$24 million (Nelsen et al., 905). Nelson also demonstrates the environmental protection benefits that surfing, and surfers contribute. Surfers contribute to environmental protection because surf

areas are threatened through mediums such as: beach access, coastal development, and, most serious, water quality impairment which can have health consequences for surfers; therefore, surfers will be more driven to protect the area in which they surf. In Nelsen's conclusion, he brings light to new, proactive and preventative tools surfers have developed to combat these threats to surfing and the environment. Among these tools are: "...establishment of protected area status for surfing areas, including world surfing reserves, inclusion of surfing in ecological protected areas (including marine protected areas) and recognition of surfing as heritage sites." (Nelsen et al., 908). Nelsen's work provides me of evidence to the growth of surfing in a non-distant frame, where surfers are becoming more organized to protect what they love, the ocean; and, surfers are more driven to bring persons outside of surfing with them—something that has been lacking among surfers. Another researcher, Robert J. W. Brewin, recognized, and utilized, surfing and surfers to conduct research. The results demonstrate high-quality sea surface temperature can be acquired by surfers utilizing low cost sensors; and the GPS tracking can motivate surfers to collect more data by showing performance. It is estimated if this experiment on one surfer is upscaled to a large percentage of the surfing population in the U.K., this research methodology could produce around 18 million measurements per year (Brewin et al., 16); and, if implemented globally, the data collection would be tremendously greater in the amount of measurements. This research shows surfing's application in a positive way to scientific research that could benefit the entire planet.

The survey, that has yet to be conducted, aims at identifying what experiencing the spirituality and sacredness of surfing yields. There has been no research, as far as I know, that correlates positive life actions and change, with experiencing surfing's mystery—something I intend to quantify. This idea came after reading Bron Taylor's study and Lauren Hill and J. Anthony Abbott's study; I had the presumption that all who experience surfing experience its

sacred parts—this isn't true. Taylor's study, and Hill and Abbott's study, bring light into the idea of there being persons who fail to succumb to the mystical effects of surfing which brought an interesting question to mind: Do those surfers who view their surfing experience as one of spiritual quality and sacredness live lives that show internal betterment as well as external betterment – respective to environmental protection and community outreach? I argue, yes; surfing has a sacred aspect that allows it to cross its commercially branded character with its mystically individualistic side; in turn, crossing much more with it. I am hoping to see participants of this survey indicate how they have *been changed* by surfing, and this can give some rigidity to my argument.

This research has application in this field of study because it can help push surfing into the positive light it deserves. Surfing often gets a bad reputation for those who treat surfing as something other than what it is—a mystical, healing, sacred, spiritual, enjoyable experience—and because of this unfair characterization of surfing, communities, and the world, are missing out on the benefits surfing has to offer. There are numerous outreach organizations that are centered on surfing with the goal to help the community; to name a few: Operation Surf, Surfers Not Street Children, Surfers for Autism, Surfers Healing, Christian Surfers, and countless surfers who devote their time, money, and efforts for some sort of philanthropy. The heart of surfing is a heart of selflessness; and that is the reputation that needs to be brought to the forefront in order for the benefits of surfing to be recognized and then magnified, because surfing has endless benefits for the entire planet. Surfing is so much more than just riding a wave.

**More specific source analysis lies below:**

In Ben R. Finney's *The Development and Diffusion of Modern Hawaiian Surfing*, it is contended surfing almost disappeared in Hawaii in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and amid this drastic

decline of the sport came a decline of numerous cultural aspects of the sport, too—such as: ritual practices, gambling, chiefly privilege, among other facets. Even the techniques in which surfers enacted had changed lessening the quality of the previously intricate past time. Finney argues that one reason there was such a decline in surfing was due to a drastic population decline of Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians, going from 300,000 in 1778 to less than 40,000, which was roughly 25.7% of the population at the time (Finney, 317). In the realm of internal culture shifts, Finney aims at the abandonment of the tabu system which was integral for the traditional culture of Hawaii. Finney points to the ending of the *Makahiki* festival which held many sports tournaments, including surfing, as perhaps the most crucial instigator of the cultural effects that caused surfing to decline. Finney also argues the Calvinist missionaries who came to Hawaii had a significant role to play in surfing's decline; but, it would be unfair to blame the entire wipeout of surfing on them. Finney then demonstrates the revival of surfing in the sporting sense, with it lacking all the traditional practices associated with "ancient" surfing. Surfing attained its revival from its potential to make money in the realm of tourism, and this regrowth in the public eye saw with it a diffusion far beyond the reaches of Hawaii and Polynesia. Finney and Nendel discuss a similar cultural shift in Hawaii and both recognize the importance of surfing in that intricate evolution.

Finney visits two sides of certain arguments to give fair view points and to show where he derives his opinions on certain topics. Specifically, he does this when discussing the missionaries' influences on surfing's decline; he references Ruschenberger, a visitor to the Hawaiian Islands during the first years of missionary influence, who stated Calvinism is to blame for the shift in culture despite this being the Calvinists intentions. Ruschenberger accredits Calvinism's impact on surfing's decline to the outspoken opinions of how the culture centered sports of the Hawaiians are against God, etc. Conversely, Finney cites Hiram Bingham,

the leader of the first group of American Protestant missionaries to introduce Christianity to the Hawaiian Islands, who lends the decline of surfing to other foreign pressures not associated directly with Calvinism, saying that if it were to have any affect it would be that of leaving little time for leisurely pursuits. Finney also references Handy—reviewed cultural manifestations more familiar to anthropological analysis—when Handy discussed the degradation of Hawaiian societal integration with the upheaval of inverse relations between commoners and chiefs. The chiefs became indebted to foreign traders and therefore forced heavy taxation and forced labor on the commoners; the system shifted to one of an exploitive nature. Ensuing was a lack of time for recreation and a shifting of priorities by the chiefs—from pursuing their traditional pastimes to emulating the habits of foreigners. Overall, Finney uses many primary sources to give strong validity to his arguments and fair representation of multisided topics; this allows for more credibility and believability in Finney’s work.

For my study Finney’s work yields the integral role with which surfing played in the massive cultural transformation of Hawaii and shows the history of surfing rests in inherently sacred traditions. Surfing stemmed out from its sacred traditional beginnings to diffuse into the world as something different—at least on the surface. Like water itself the surface doesn’t begin to encapsulate the vast depth, beauty, and mystery of surfing. Why was surfing regarded as something so sacred, and why was there so much tradition surrounding it in Hawaiian culture? Perhaps it is as simple as, surfing is something so mystical and ecstasy filled it deserves a sacred place surround by tradition. It deserves a centerpiece at the table of Hawaiian culture and perhaps now it is ingraining itself to retake the center of another culture. The question of what it is about surfing that makes it so important, special, attractive, etc., remains unanswered.

In Chad Nelsen’s (et al.) *Paradise Lost: Threatened Waves and the Need for Global Surf Protection*, it is argued “surfing areas are unique natural resources that provide not only

recreational opportunities, but also environmental, aesthetic, cultural, and economic benefits to the surrounding coastal area” (Nelsen et al., 904). Nelsen challenges surfing is more than just a popular cultural phenomenon; surfing provides a tangible and substantial economic impact to a community. Nelsen argues surfers’ avid nature allows them to make up for their small contribution in the overall percentage of beach goers by going to the beach much more frequently than the average beach goer to the point where surfers make up 15% of the estimated beach visits per year (Nelsen et al., 905). Nelsen demonstrates the threat to surfing as well in mediums such as: beach access, coastal development, and most serious water quality impairment, which can have health consequences for surfers. One study utilized by Nelsen indicates surfers ingest on average 170ml of seawater per visit, which gives them a high chance of sickness if water quality becomes too low (Nelsen et al., 905). In Nelsen’s conclusion, he brings light to new, proactive and preventative tools surfers have developed to combat these threats to surfing and the environment. Among these tools are: “...establishment of protected area status for surfing areas, including world surfing reserves, inclusion of surfing in ecological protected areas (including marine protected areas) and recognition of surfing as heritage sites.” (Nelsen et al., 908).

Nelsen references the only two known peer reviewed studies which address the economic values of surfing—one written by Oram and Valverde, the other by Chapman and Hanneman—to demonstrate surfing as an unstudied subject in the frame of economic benefits to a community. He incorporates his research which shows annual economic impact to the local community at Trestles Beach in Southern California to range from \$8-12 million and an annual economic value of \$24 million (Nelsen et al., 905). Nelsen pulls from a 2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment which found surfers on average visit the beach eight more times than a “regular” beach goer, and this number could be much higher for higher quality



surf areas. Surfers represent around 15% of the estimated 150 million beach visits per year (Nelsen et al., 905). Overall, Nelsen developed his case studies through participant interviews and review of legislation/policy documents, academic literature, and news media.

For my study, Nelsen's work provides substantial backing to my claim of surfing having more than a recreational purpose; surfing provides economic benefit and more fuel for the environmental protection argument. Surfing is what gives surfers a love for a particular location, and the love for that location gives them the drive to protect it. Nelsen's work also provides me of evidence to the growth of surfing in a non-distant frame, where surfers are becoming more organized to protect what they love – the ocean – and, what has been lacking the most, to bring people outside of surfing with them. This is evidence of how surfing can reach beyond itself to affect others in a positive way.

In Robert J. W. Brewin's (et al.) *On the Potential of Surfers to Monitor Environmental Indicators in the Coastal Zone*, he recognizes, and utilizes, surfing and surfers as an efficient and cost-effective means to conduct research. The results demonstrate high-quality sea surface temperature can be acquired by surfers utilizing low cost sensors; and the GPS tracking can motivate surfers to collect more data by showing performance. It is estimated if this experiment on one surfer is upscaled to a large percentage of the surfing population in the U.K., this research methodology could produce around 18 million measurements per year (Brewin et al., 16). The author then goes on to argue how this sort of research technique could be transposed to other water recreation sports to provide massive amounts of data to be utilized when monitoring coastal wellbeing.

In this study, one surfer in the U.K. was outfitted with a GPS and sea surface temperature sensor in order to improve sampling coverage and to monitor sea surface temperature, an important environmental indicator for coastal management (Brewin et al., 3). In total, 85 surf

sessions were collected over the year in which the surfer utilized the measurement tools. Certain statistical methods were utilized to analyze the data and data was manipulated in a way not to skew results, but to make the data more useable. The researchers also pulled from two other data sources for comparison to the surfer's recorded measurements, the two places being the Western Channel Observatory and from satellite observations of thermal infra-red radiation (Brewin et al., 10). Many different studies were referenced to draw knowledge and information on specific details about coastal management to portray surfing appropriately as a potential tool to conduct research in coastal management.

This study, in terms of my research, can be utilized because this shows again the value of surfing for other applications. What these researchers have tapped into is nothing short of genius and it has massive potential for furthering their research. It causes me to wonder what other purposes surfing could be used for if persons were to only think of surfing as a possible solution for whatever their predicament. If it is related to the ocean, I'm almost certain surfing may have some way to be of help in solving said issue. This provides a practical example of surfing benefiting in the realm of scientific research that helps protect arguably the most important resource the planet has, the ocean.

In Joseph Weinberg's article, "Surfing the Shifting Boundary between Sacred and Profane: Confluence, Dwelling, and Crossing," he first establishes the frame of religion from which he intends to scrutinize the central argument; the frame utilized is one of religion "...as a personal experience that is lived, and as a social experience that is shared" (Weinberg, 49). Weinberg takes this frame and examines "...the spacio-temporal dynamics of surfing as a religious phenomenon" (Weinberg, 49). Weinberg argues because "...soul surfing..." (Weinberg, 51) is experienced by an individual, on an individual basis, it lends to difficulty when attempting to define this mystical nature of surfing. Attempting to tackle this, he employs a two-dimensional

argument, surfing as dwelling and surfing as crossing. As a dwelling, religious, spatial, and political practices intertwine, creating limits which selectively include and exclude. This exists in an individual nature where it alters the sacredness of the surfed body; also, localism is enforced when protecting a sacred space. As a crossing, surfing highlights the ways previously established boundaries are negotiated; these limits continue to be redefined individually and collectively.

Weinberg utilizes Thomas Tweed's perspectives and theoretical contributions in order to validate his attempts of moving away from "...reductive theorizing that has taken as given an omni-perspective of religious phenomena" (Weinberg, 47). He also wields Tweed's work to acknowledge his perceptions of surfing are no more authoritative than a non-participant, nor that his perspectives are universal. Weinberg takes an approach to theory similar to Tweed's because Weinberg sees the approach as necessary, and of the type with which it is the most effective. According to Weinberg—drawing from Tweed—theory is fluid and everchanging, yet it has a focused nature; this is to accommodate its paradoxical nature of being both flexible and focused. Weinberg addresses this issue to poise his argument in such a way to explore the points of intersection between these two characteristics, within the confines of surfing. Weinberg then references Manuel Vasquez to point out a blind spot in Thomas Tweed's stand, "...a failure to give widespread dynamics of exclusion and closure their proper epistemological weight" (Weinberg, 49). Weinberg also pulls from Bron Taylor to set the foundation of arguing surfing as a religious phenomenon to which Weinberg builds. Overall, Weinberg pulls from a wide variety of sources to first, validate his arguments' standpoints and secondly, deepen his arguments with supporting sources.

For my study, this article gives a deep theological perspective on surfing; having a maintained sacredness that shifts perpetually as the limits of societal and individualistic

pressures do. Surfing's sacredness is due in large part of it being an ocean ritual, something I have yet to inquire about. Can the essence of surfing exist independently of the ocean? Does the ocean follow surfing culture, lifestyle, ideals, etc. once surfing has departed the waters with which the surfing had occurred? This article gives a solid argument to this question being answered, 'yes.' Surfing has a sacred aspect that allows it to cross its commercially branded character with its mystically individualistic side; in turn, crossing much more with it. Which can be then connected to the community outreach side of surfing and how it literally changes a person's ethics.

In a more detailed look at Bron Taylor's article, "Surfing into Spirituality and a New, Aquatic Nature Religion" we see Taylor asserts the spirituality that surfing lends the surfer to develop a sense of connection and belonging with nature generally, and specifically with the sea; he argues there is an emergence of reverence toward nature which directly relates to environmental ethics. Taylor challenges that participants and non-participants observe the practice and subculture of surfing as resembling a religion through many facets; and, convictions regarding relationships with community are shifted. Surfing is presented as a new aquatic nature religion that can exist independently of other religions while still giving meaningful spiritual existence; but, at the same time it can blend with other religions to enhance them in a way, connecting the person to nature and in turn to God. Taylor captures the essence of spirituality in surfing and how it translates into tangible changes of individuals and their actions.

Taylor begins his article referencing others who have written similar works on the spirituality of surfing and works about surfing culture in order to frame up his central argument and narrow the focus of the certain subset of surf culture he is scrutinizing. He references others who have pondered the origin of surfing's sacredness to dive into the complex religious

dimensions of surfing. Taylor employs references to religious scholars to give substance to the “new aquatic religion” he claims exists; he also pulls from others’ personal accounts of the ocean, and surfing, fulfilling a healing and spiritual roll. Overall, Taylor pulls from religious scholars, those with personal surfing experience, and historical sources to form his arguments.

For my study this article gives the philosophical, if you want to call it that, approach to surfing my current research pool has lacked. Taylor offers an idea that I more or less knew was present, yet opted not devote thought to, the culture of surfing isn’t all good. Taylor references a study done on Australian surfers which presents them as anything but “good” and Taylor, in acknowledging this, validates himself as a more unbiased researcher. I, therefore, am forced to acknowledge the same; this will lead to further inquiry into the multiple subsets of surfers: those that approach it in a spiritual sense and those that don’t. I see the other multi-subsets as branches from the first two I mentioned. Observing the first, the spiritually minded surfer, it can be pulled from Taylor’s argument they are involved in an extremely intimate connection to “Mother Ocean” (Taylor, 944) and the means to which this occurs is surfing. The purpose surfing fulfills in this instance is one of connection; it provides a means to gain fulfillment, a sense of belonging, and a path to a deeper spiritual life. The non-spiritual surfer isn’t covered in this text; however, it seems to me those who neglect the spiritual aspect of surfing misunderstand it all together. Perhaps this is influenced by the over commercialization of the sport and the spirituality is lost in the mess. Taylor has touched on many of the points I have come to discover on my own prior to reading his article; which, to me, says something striking about surfing: how surfing is viewed largely affects what purposes it fulfills—those that are beneficial and those that aren’t—yet what surfing is doesn’t change; the “right” way to view surfing is one that lends itself to positive, progressive outcomes because that is the nature of surfing; to see the “right” way one should view anything, one must analyze the facts and the

common trends; surfing fulfills purposes outside the practice that lead to betterment of the individual and society—otherwise it's not really surfing.

### **Methodology**

Data from this study were collected via online survey (see Appendix A). As this study examines latent variables that have not been measured among surfers in previous work, I created four Likert item matrixes with the end goal of creating scales measuring my concepts. The study also included common demographic measures, such as sex, age, and income.

Respondents were recruited for this study via Facebook, emails to surfing organizations, and a placement in *The Inertia* magazine. *The Inertia* magazine allowed me to write an article advertising my survey on their website—this brought in the most respondents. The survey was also released by Facebook messaging or emailing surfing organizations, magazines, and pro-surfers asking for their help in getting other surfers to respond. The survey was released on 2/1/2018 and closed on 3/2/2018. In all, 201 respondents participated in the survey.

After closing the survey, I prepared the data for analysis. The first step was to create the four Likert item scales. My individual growth scale included 11 items, and a Cronbach Alpha check indicated inter-item reliability of .887, which is more than adequate for a scale. Likewise, my other scales also passed a minimum inter-item reliability of .7. The environmental ethics scale (12 items) had an alpha of .796, the community outreach scale (11 items) had an alpha of .899, and the metaphysical scale (12 items) had an alpha of .851. Further statistical testing indicated no value in dropping any items from the scales, so all items were included. Each scale was coded intuitively, with an increase in the score indicating a higher value of that attribute in the respondent. As the analysis uses OLS regression, most demographic variables were recoded as categorical variables with dichotomous dummy coding (where 1=the trait and 0=the absence of the trait).

<b>Table One: Descriptive Statistics</b>					
Variable Name	N	Min	Max	Mean	St Dev
Individual Growth Scale (scaled q6 1-11 items alpha .887)	191	1.27	5.00	4.21	0.57
Environmental Ethics Scale (scaled q9 1-12 items alpha. 796)	188	1.67	5.00	4.22	0.41
Community Outreach Scale (scaled q11 1-11 items alpha .899)	175	1.27	5.00	3.53	0.63
Metaphysical Scale (scaled q18 1-12 items alpha .851)	168	3.00	5.00	4.25	0.52
Individual identified as becoming more religious because of surfing (dichotomous dummy)	167	.00	1.00	0.37	0.48
Individual identified as becoming less religious because of surfing (dichotomous dummy)	167	.00	1.00	0.04	0.19
Individual identified as becoming same religious because of surfing (dichotomous dummy)	167	.00	1.00	0.59	0.50
Individual identifies as Christian (dichotomous dummy)	169	.00	1.00	0.44	0.50
Have you ever participated in surfing outreach or outreach programs with other surfers? (dichotomous dummy)	177	.00	1.00	0.48	0.50
Would you consider starting or leading a surfing outreach program in your community? (dichotomous dummy)	177	.00	1.00	0.45	0.50
Person identifies as beginner (dichotomous dummy)	189	.00	1.00	0.17	0.38
Is average (dichotomous dummy)	189	.00	1.00	0.45	0.50
Is advanced (dichotomous dummy)	189	.00	1.00	0.34	0.48
Is expert (dichotomous dummy)	189	.00	1.00	0.04	0.19
How many years have you been surfing? (Continuous)	192	.00	56	19.10	15.18
Sex is male (dichotomous dummy)	161	.00	1.00	0.69	0.46
What is your age? (Continuous)	164	18	71	41.37	13.00
Income \$0-\$19k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.14	0.34
Income \$20-\$29k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.07	0.25
Income \$30-\$39k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.09	0.28
Income \$40-\$49k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.07	0.26
Income \$50-\$74k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.19	0.39
Income \$75-\$99k (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.15	0.36
Income \$99 and up (dichotomous dummy)	163	.00	1.00	0.20	0.40

**Table Two. OLS Regression Hypothesis 1: Metaphysical and Individual Growth Scales (dependent variable) (Standard Error in Parenthesis)**

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Metaphysical Scale. Scaled q18 1-12 items alpha .851 none dropped, intuitive coding	0.662*** (0.72)	.614*** (0.79)	.612*** (.082)	.628*** (.083)	.662*** (.090)
Individual identified as becoming more religious because of surfing.	-	.097 (0.85)	.090 (.087)	.063 (.090)	.054 (.095)
Average religious (OMITTED CAT)					Omitted
Individual identified as becoming less religious because of surfing.	-	.128 (.197)	.113 (.200)	.114 (.203)	.148 (.217)
Individual identifies as a Christian.	-	.147† (.075)	.139† (.076)	.133† (.079)	.191* (.086)
Have you ever participated in surfing outreach or outreach programs with other surfers?	-	-	.060 (.078)	.020 (.082)	-.051 (.090)
Would you consider starting or leading a surfing outreach program in your community?	-	-	-.019 (.080)	-.002 (.083)	.001 (.088)
Individual describes themselves as a beginner level surfer.	-	-	-	-.092 (.117)	-.087 (.129)
Individual describes themselves as an average level surfer. OMITTED CAT			-		Omitted
Individual describes themselves as an advanced level surfer.	-	-	-	.022 (.095)	-.009 (.104)
Individual describes themselves as an expert level surfer.	-	-	-	-.098 (.200)	-.138 (.225)
How many years have you been surfing?	-	-	-	.004 (.003)	.007 (.004)
What is your age?	-	-	-	-	-.002 (.005)
Individual is male.	-	-	-	-	-.134 (.098)
Individual is white.	-	-	-	-	-.195 (.137)
Income 0-19k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.110 (.143)
Income 20-29k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.130 (.182)
Income 30-39k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.162 (.161)
Income 40-49k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.017 (.169)
Income 50-74k (before taxes) OMITTED CAT	-	-	-	-	Omitted
Income 75-99k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.056 (.130)
Income 99k up (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.047 (.123)
R Squared	0.342	.368	.370	.387	.428
F	85.784***	22.819***	15.181***	9.282***	5.074***

\*\*\*p=.001 \*\*p=.01 \*p=.05



OLS regression **Table Three. OLS Regression Hypothesis 2: Metaphysical and Environmental Ethics Growth Scales (dependent variable)**  
(Standard Error in Parenthesis)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Metaphysical Scale. Scaled q18 1-12 items alpha .851 none dropped, intuitive coding	.379*** (.047)	.375*** (.052)	.337*** (.053)	.337*** (.053)	.379*** (.056)
Individual identified as becoming more religious because of surfing.	-	.006 (.057)	-.028 (.057)	-.024 (.058)	-.052 (.059)
Average religious (OMITTED CAT)					Omitted
Individual identified as becoming less religious because of surfing.	-	.127 (.132)	.082 (.130)	.072 (.130)	.070 (.135)
Individual identifies as a Christian.	-	.084 (.050)	.082 (.050)	.086† (.050)	.107* (.053)
Have you ever participated in surfing outreach or outreach programs with other surfers?	-	-	.100* (.051)	.095† (.052)	.083 (.056)
Would you consider starting or leading a surfing outreach program in your community?	-	-	.094† (.053)	.070 (.054)	.055 (.056)
Individual describes themselves as a beginner level surfer.	-	-	-	-.051 (.074)	-.051 (.080)
Individual describes themselves as an average level surfer. OMITTED CAT					Omitted
Individual describes themselves as an advanced level surfer.	-	-	-	.041 (.061)	.037 (.065)
Individual describes themselves as an expert level surfer.	-	-	-	.033 (.128)	-.016 (.140)
How many years have you been surfing?	-	-	-	-.001 (.002)	.000 (.003)
What is your age?	-	-	-	-	-.004 (.003)
Individual is male.	-	-	-	-	-.033 (.060)
Individual is white.	-	-	-	-	.020 (.085)
Income 0-19k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.115 (.089)
Income 20-29k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.037 (.113)
Income 30-39k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.203† (.104)
Income 40-49k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.124 (.106)
Income 50-74k (before taxes) OMITTED CAT	-	-	-	-	Omitted
Income 75-99k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.096 (.081)
Income 99k up (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.061 (.076)
R Squared	.280	.303	.337	.352	0.426
F	64.252***	17.049***	13.144***	7.984***	5.038***

\*\*\*p=.001 \*\*p=.01 \*p=.05

OLS regression **Table Four. OLS Regression Hypothesis 3: Metaphysical and Community Outreach Scales (dependent variable) (Standard Error in Parenthesis)**

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Metaphysical Scale. Scaled q18 1-12 items alpha .851 none dropped, intuitive coding	.600*** (.078)	.519*** (.082)	.421*** (.075)	.427*** (.076)	.457*** (.082)
Individual identified as becoming more religious because of surfing.	-	.161† (.090)	.056 (.081)	.051 (.083)	.047 (.088)
Average religious (OMITTED CAT)					Omitted
Individual identified as becoming less religious because of surfing.	-	.516* (.208)	.351† (.185)	.370* (.186)	.455* (.200)
Individual identifies as a Christian.	-	.321*** (.079)	.276*** (.070)	.285*** (.072)	.314*** (.079)
Have you ever participated in surfing outreach or outreach programs with other surfers?	-	-	.454*** (.072)	.419*** (.076)	.396*** (.084)
Would you consider starting or leading a surfing outreach program in your community?	-	-	.155* (.075)	.162* (.077)	.172* (.082)
Individual describes themselves as a beginner level surfer.	-	-	-	-.217* (.107)	-.282* (.119)
Individual describes themselves as an average level surfer. OMITTED CAT					Omitted
Individual describes themselves as an advanced level surfer.	-	-	-	-.055 (.087)	-.084 (.096)
Individual describes themselves as an expert level surfer.	-	-	-	.030 (.184)	-.048 (.207)
How many years have you been surfing?	-	-	-	-.001 (.003)	-.005 (.004)
What is your age?	-	-	-	-	.006 (.004)
Individual is male.	-	-	-	-	.038 (.090)
Individual is white.	-	-	-	-	-.097 (.129)
Income 0-19k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.004 (.134)
Income 20-29k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	.012 (.167)
Income 30-39k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.100 (.148)
Income 40-49k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.239 (.156)
Income 50-74k (before taxes) OMITTED CAT	-	-	-	-	Omitted
Income 75-99k (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.143 (.121)
Income 99k up (before taxes)	-	-	-	-	-.079 (.112)
R Squared	.263	.361	.513	.524	.547
F	58.492***	22.029***	27.034***	16.075***	8.130***

\*\*\*p=.001 \*\*p=.01 \*p=.05

## Analysis

In **Table 1**, the descriptive statistics are shown including the means, responses per each variable, and the standard deviation. For data that is dichotomous, such as the “Sex is male” variable, the mean represents the percentage who marked yes, or ‘1’ for that variable. For example, the variable “Sex is male” showed a mean of 0.69 which means 69% of respondents identified as male. All the Likert scales were coded intuitively with no exclusions having to be made for an inconsistent scale and the Min and Max values are given indicating the highest score a respondent gave and the lowest score a respondent gave. Respondents indicated 59% of the time as surfing having no effect on their religiosity while 37% they said that surfing has made them more religious. The mean years of surfing experience was about 19 years, and this was coded as continuous. The variables also show that almost half of the respondents have participated in surfing community outreach and would consider starting or leading surfing community outreach.

In **Table 2**, I examine how my metaphysical scale shapes my individual scale across five models. In all five models, increasing the respondents’ metaphysical scale score correlated with an increase in their individual scale scores. For example, in model one (the bivariate model), increasing the metaphysical scale by one point correlates with over a half point increase in the individual scale ( $p=.001$ ). Adding additional variables in models 2-5 did not change the significance. However, as the coefficient increased in the last two models (surfing experience and demographics) there is likely some kind of interaction occurring. In **Table 3**, I examine how my metaphysical scale affects my environmental ethics scale across the same five models used in **Table 2**. In all five models, increasing the metaphysical scale score by ‘1’ correlated to an increase in the environmental ethics scale scores. For example, in model one (the bivariate model), increasing the metaphysical scale by one point yields a .379 increase in the

environmental ethics scale ( $p=.001$ ). The addition of other variables in models 2-5 did not change the significance; however, the value changes with the addition of other variables in models 2-4 so there is most likely some interaction occurring.

In **Table 4**, I examine how my metaphysical scale shapes my community outreach scale across five models. In all five models, increasing the respondents' metaphysical scale score correlated with an increase in their community outreach scale scores. For reference, in model one (the bivariate model), increasing the metaphysical scale by one point indicates with over a half point increase in the community outreach scale ( $p=.001$ ). Adding additional variables in models 2-5 did not change the significance. However, the value of the coefficient decreased in models 2-5 so there is likely some kind of interaction occurring—maybe due to the significance of the religiosity variables and community outreach variables that were added.

### **Discussion**

The data provided above in the tables proves the three hypotheses stated. Now that there is quantitative data proving there is at least a percentage of surfers who view surfing as metaphysical and that viewing surfing in this way matters, it can be used to help draw communities around the practice of surfing for its benefit.

Considering my first hypothesis, my metaphysical scale relating to my individual growth scale, the results can be used to encourage skeptical individuals of surfing's benefit for their lives and hopefully get more people involved in surfing's life changing capabilities.

Within the confines of my second hypothesis, my metaphysical scale relating to my environmental ethics scale, the results can be used to encourage local governments to invest attention and monetary efforts in the surfing community so that the byproduct of their investment will benefit the environment of their beaches. This can be an indirect way of preserving the coastline for a government that would be far cheaper than other options.

In regard to my third hypothesis, my metaphysical scale relating to my community outreach scale, the data can be implemented in a similar fashion to the second hypothesis. It can be used to influence local governments to invest more into the surfing community, and to take more into account the voices of local surfers that are truly having an impact in the community. The government would be more inclined to hear how they can help the surfers make a difference when presented with hard data.

This data can and should be used to carry surfing to its full potential of being a force for causing change. Data changes minds, predispositions, and false beliefs held for nonsensical reasons because it is cut and dry; this data, if presented properly can be given to local governments to promote stronger support of surfing-based organizations in the community thus bringing about the change the data proves can happen.

There are many examples to date of people who have benefited from surfing's mystical nature; take Operation Surf for example, a surfing group that helps break soldiers free from their PTSD. There's the "Surf Your Way Out" organization that meets weekly for stressed adults who long for more and connects them to surfing as the means for putting their lives into motion once more. Surfing has been helping thousands of people find meaning in this life, help others out of tough situations, save children from a life of trouble (Surfers not Street Children) and now these organizations have data to promote themselves beyond just qualitative testimonies and questionnaires. Surfing can save the world. According to Peter Kreeft, "Surfers spend more time waiting for waves than riding them. This gives them great patience. This is one reason no war in history has ever been started by surfers. If surfers ruled the world, there would be universal peace" (Kreeft, 12). This may be a bit extreme as I can tell you no surfer is a perfect-peace-maker, however there is an amount of truth here that connects to my data. Surfing can change an individual for the better when surfing is viewed more spiritually—the

true view of surfing—and this is shown in **Table 2**. This individual change can ripple over into greater change in the community as environmental protection and community outreach programs.

### **Conclusion**

This study found all three hypotheses being proven by the data collected. The hypotheses are as follows: **H1**: As surfers view surfing as more metaphysical, they will have increased individual growth, **H2**: As surfers view surfing as more metaphysical, they will have better environmental ethics, **H3**: As surfers view surfing as more metaphysical they will be more involved in community outreach. With these hypotheses being proven by the data we can take it a step further and apply this to a larger sample pool and see if the same data holds true.

Further studies of interested based from my study could include an intriguing that takes this survey to multiple different locations and compares the results from those different locations to begin to describe characteristics of different subcultures of surfing in regard to this spiritual view of surfing. Understanding the different subcultures' views on spirituality we could then use this data as a template to gage how much the data holds true in each subculture; and, we could see maybe why the surfers in this subculture are, or are not, having the positive impact they should have—this could at least be a way of explaining they're impact and could lead to potential solutions.

My survey and method used in evaluation of the data can be applied to many different types of outdoor recreation in which individuals are being connected to nature through a sport or hobby in a spiritual way. This is a unique study that quantifies one's spiritual view of an experience and connects it to more quantitative data on what this view can do. Essentially, two points of study that are difficult to quantify have been quantified in a way that connects them. Perhaps this could inspire future studies on the effect of spiritual experiences and their effect

on individuals within sports/hobbies. This study could be modified to explain the passions of individuals such as rock climbers—who will live out of their cars without a job for months just to climb certain locations.

A study on resource-attachment rather than place attachment could be pulled from the literature review. For example, one may be attached to eastern Kentucky because of the rock climbing in the Red River Gorge—attachment to the place—while with surfing it seems surfers are attached to the waves which are considered a resource—and to many surfers a scarce one. It would be a fascinating study to see how this “wave attachment” could affect certain economy, environment, community, etc. That maybe if a local community invested in improving their resource of waves that they could also improve their economy and furthermore their community livelihood. If a community invested in their surfing community by pushing money into bettering the surf break they could save their economy.

I reference an economic impact study above in the literature review and I could see a way in which an economic impact study could be paired with a study such as this to see if the increase in metaphysical views on surfing effected the amount of economic impact a certain area gained because of the sport of surfing. For example, rock climbers keep going to the Red River Gorge, despite it lacking in many types of infrastructure such as grocery stores, local restaurants, etc. they continue to come back to climb. Why? Is it because of their spiritual attachment to climbing? This study paired with an economic impact study could maybe provide the answer. This could give freedom to locals who are maybe afraid to take business risks because they know they can't “scare” off the climbers with failed attempts.

Personally, I see a study like this saving my hometown from economic ruin. Daytona Beach are torn between what they want their destination to become and it is creating political havoc between locals, business owners and the county and city governments. A study like mine could

shed light on a possibility that could save the coastal parts of the cities. If I can show them the data in this study and convince them that investing in surfing—bettering the breaks, supporting local outreach programs, etc.—could be a way to bring people to the area for something that will bring in people who won't give the area a bad name, I think this could really change the trajectory of my hometown.



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