

BEYOND SPORT: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SURFING

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative research was to explore the apparent captivating nature of surfing by understanding surfers' subjective experiences of this behaviour, and the influence that surfing exerts in their lives as a whole. Essentially, this research aims to extend the scarce body of existing literature related to the activity. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were individually conducted with surfers (n=11) of various backgrounds. The heterogeneous sample included recreational surfers, as well as national and World Tour competitors of both genders. Data analysis took the form of three stages of thematic analyses, drawing on the Grounded Theory approach, which was carried out to code, compare, and categorize the interview material. Five integrative themes emerged and are discussed within the framework of the Hollander-Martens-Schomer (HMS) model of personality, as well as in relation to the relevant literature. They were: 'A Surfing Lifestyle?', 'The Addiction of Surfing', 'Competition: The Surfing Paradox?', 'Sharing vs. Crowd Control', and 'Tranquil Mind: Surfing for a Balanced Life'. The results suggest that surfing is indeed a uniquely captivating activity that extends its influence beyond the realm of 'sport'.

Key words: Surfing; Lifestyle sport; Captivating activity; HMS model of personality.

INTRODUCTION

"I could not help concluding that this man felt the most supreme pleasure while he was driven on so fast and smoothly by the sea" -Captain James Cook, logbook entry, Polynesia, 1777 (Warshaw, 2003: 11)

Surfing is captivating, possibly even 'addictive'. Those who get drawn into the sport are often unable to conceptualize it as a simple recreational activity. Surfers appear to derive central aspects of their self-concept and identity from surfing; it becomes a fundamental element that permeates every role of a person's life. Understanding the subjective experience of surfing and the apparent captivating nature of the sport presents an intriguing topic for psychological inquest.

Culver *et al.* (2003) indicate that there is a distinct lack of qualitative inquiry into sports-related phenomena. The same condition holds true about surfing, as any form of surfing-related scientific discourse appears to be scarce at present (Preston-Whyte, 2002; Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop, 2005). Those investigations into the construct that were obtainable are fragmented across various scientific disciplines. Psychology in particular has almost entirely ignored surfing as an area of interest, thus making this exploratory study important given the increasing popularity of the sport (Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop, 2005).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The aforementioned lack of scientific investigation related to surfing was suggestive of the need for a general exploration of the subject in order to ‘map’ the area of interest by surfacing inherent themes for further investigation. Written experiential accounts, being congruent with the researcher’s perspective of surfing, were suggestive of specific research foci. Duane (1996) notes that surfing becomes entrancing to the point that other imperative aspects of life become neglected. Farmer (1992) agrees with that notion, citing evidence for surfing as a central aspect of identity formation. Surfing appears to have unique experiential effects that strongly permeate life-roles that lie beyond the participation in a recreational ‘sport’. Therefore, the focus of the study was to attempt to reveal the subjective experiences of surfing and its impact on the lives of those who participate in it; rich in-depth experiential accounts identified subjective meanings within this specific context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to investigate how surfing influences “a person’s amalgamation as a social being” (Schomer, 2003: 15), i.e. what role surfing plays, and how the effects of the activity ‘spill over’ into other aspects of the individual’s life, the Hollander-Martens-Schomer (HMS) personality model (Schomer, 2003) (for a graphical illustration see Appendix A) was used to integrate the results.

The HMS model specifically addresses the identification of elements of personality, i.e. self-concept, values, beliefs and attitudes, and relates them to the individual’s interactions with the social environment across different roles in life. The model ‘dissects’ a person’s personality factors and modes of relating to the environment, into conceptually pertinent strata. The core concept and psychological core highlight internal, relatively static aspects of personality, i.e. the driving force in life and associated values and beliefs. Understanding the core-concepts of one’s personality will be most useful in establishing how deeply engrained surfing is in the life of the individual. The HMS extends outward in its layer-system by linking the internal, static elements to associated typical responses, i.e. reactions to frustration, humor or anxiety, which are characteristic to the person by virtue of his / her core. Here the interest lies with the investigation of the possibility of surfing-influenced core attributes and their effects on typical responses across social environments and life roles, i.e. the ‘spillover’ mentioned above.

Addressing the diversity of social contexts, the HMS model proceeds to layer the identification of the state of development of role related behaviour around the typical responses, i.e. how perceived social position and norms relate to response characteristics to produce interactive behaviour across social environments. The investigation of the centrality of surfing in the lives of those who participate in it will be understood by linking the subsequent interactive effects of core attributes and typical responses to the behaviours displayed, thus enabling exploration of possible spillover dynamics across social contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a scientific construct, ‘surfing’ has been largely ignored, thus rendering necessary explorative efforts in this regard. That research which does exist is fragmented across academic disciplines (Farmer, 1992; Preston-Whyte, 2002; Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop,

2005). Therefore, the integration of general surfing-related literature and non-scientific experiential literature (where conceptually applicable) was necessary to create a sufficient background

The art of riding waves can be traced back as far as 3000 B.C.; however, only in the past decade has surfing attracted an increasing number of followers world-wide (Warshaw, 2003). Mendez-Villanueva and Bishop (2005) note that the surf industry is witnessing unprecedented growth in turnover and that the sport is one of the most widely used advertising themes today. The traditional demographics within the activity, i.e. domination of (adolescent-) males, are beginning to fade as increasingly more female, as well as more maturely aged enthusiasts, choose to take up surfing (Spurrier, 2002; Rogers, 2005).

The recent world-wide upsurge of interest in "*He'e Nalu* (literally 'wave sliding' in Hawaiian)" (Ishiwata, 2002: 258) begs the question of why there appears to be such an increased interest in the act of surfing - what does surfing mean to those who participate in it?

Diehm and Armatas (2004) state that the attraction to, and persistence with, a particular activity is partially dependent on personality characteristics. Farmer (1992) notes that surfers' motivation to participate in their sport is different to those of other athletes, thus suggesting a unique setup of personality characteristics in surfers. Certain inherent aspects of surfing appear to resonate with the participants' self-concept, and its subsequent values, beliefs and motives. Farmer (1992) reports a strong central identification with the role of "surfer" as a source of meaning, suggesting that surfing is conceptualized as being more than a 'sport' to participants.

Alfred Adler's understanding of 'lifestyle' is applicable to the investigation of the centrality of surfing in the lives of surfers (Wolman, 1973). Adler used the term 'style of life' to describe the characteristic mode of living of a person, including the individual's goals and methods of pursuing them. He also believed that an individual's self-image and opinion of the world reflect the person's style of life (Aguilar-Cauz, 2005).

Ishiwata (2002) illustrates the significance of surfing beyond the realm of sport by drawing on its cultural significance in Hawaii, thus lending evidence for the possible conceptualization of surfing as a possible lifestyle choice for a significant number of surfers. He explains that surfing served a social function, viz. its meanings were associated with equipping the younger generation with necessary skills inherent to the Hawaiian way of life, i.e. to manage the ocean, keep physically and mentally fit, and to remain spiritually balanced (Ishiwata, 2002). It appears that Hawaiian culture regarded attainment of catharsis - through play and mental replenishment by means of surfing - as a basis for normal functioning. Murphy (2004) supports this explanation; he argues that contemporary surfing derives its meanings from being an opportunity to regress to the natural basis of human existence, i.e. dependence on physical ability, absolute concentration, connection with and understanding of nature, as well as time to relate spiritually to others.

Stone's (1970) analysis suggests that meanings derived from the surfing experience are associated with aesthetic and vertigo motivations for participation in the activity. Diehm and Armatas (2004), in their quantitative investigation of surfing, find similar conceptual evidence and conclude that sensation-seeking individuals, i.e. those with stronger orientations towards

fantasy, aesthetics, feelings, actions, strong values and ideas, will be complemented by the inherent properties of surfing. These individuals will find meaningfulness in surfing and hence, will be inclined to pursue surfing in a fashion that is reminiscent of Adler's concept of 'lifestyle' (Wolman, 1973; Diehm & Armatas, 2004). Farmer (1992) agrees that a sense of aesthetics, oneness with nature, and diversity of experience are central concepts of meaning that are shared by surfers, thus lending further evidence to the above.

Preston-Whyte (2002), in his investigation of social dynamics of surfing and the management of surfing space, notes that social structures, and their subsequent management in the water, differ significantly from those of normal modern life, viz. being more congruent with the Hawaiian context outlined by Ishiwata (2002) above. These structures appear to be essential to normalize surfers in their environment in order to create a space in which the aforementioned mental replenishment and a temporary regression to a less fast-paced lifestyle can take place.

Stone (1970) notes that catharsis through surfing represents a central aspect of meaning within the behaviour of surfing. Catharsis-related motivations are also implicated by Farmer (1992), stating that surfers seek the act as "a form of temporary freedom from life's hassles" (p. 4).

In light of the above arguments, Strümpfer's (2003) work on possible avenues of stress and burnout resilience in fast-paced modern society appears especially pertinent to a discussion of the attractiveness and captivating nature of surfing. For example, Strümpfer (2003) implicates the concept of "flow" (p. 74) in relation to activities that produce optimal experience and that are associated with, and elicit responses of, "vigor, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm and inspiration" (p. 70). Such activities are cathartic, resilience building and captivating to the point that participants "make concerted efforts to become significantly involved" (Strümpfer, 2003: 75) in them. In addition, the participation usually occurs in natural settings (such as in water and at beaches) that Strümpfer (2003) labels as "restorative places" (p. 74). The applicability of these concepts to the surfing experience are obvious; he thus illustrates that a "semi-search for now-ness" (Malloy, 2004: 10) through surfing, in an increasingly fast paced world, may be the central reason for the increased interest in the act.

METHOD

Design

Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) articulate that exploratory scientific inquiry is desirable in cases where the broad area of interest is marked by a distinct deficiency of conceptual insight. As indicated above, the focus of this research appears to be plagued by such a situation; the lack of a relevant and scientifically grounded basis of understanding was substantiated by the few diverse attempts to investigate the construct of surfing (Ishiwata, 2002; Nathanson *et al.*, 2002; Preston-Whyte, 2002; Diehm & Armatas, 2004; Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop, 2005).

Such unmistakable absence of scientific understanding of the act of surfing highlights the need to analyze the topic thematically, drawing on the subjective understandings of those participating in it. Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) note that research of this nature requires an approach that can generate contextual, insightful accounts and explanations, which are also relevant to those being studied, in order to generate rich data. To enable an adequate exploratory inquiry into the area of interest, aspects of the Grounded Theory approach were

chosen to map out surfing as a psychologically relevant construct. A process of detailed, systematic, but equally flexible investigation of initially scattered data, that have pertinence to the topic, is most suitable to generate results that address the lack of relevant literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Owing to the limited extent of this study, the development of a comprehensively applicable emergent theory in relation to the topic was neither feasible nor desirable. Thus, only those methodological aspects of Grounded Theory that appeared useful to generate the level of insight that this research endeavored to create in reference to the proposed scope were employed. Strauss and Corbin (1997) support the selective methodological application of aspects of Grounded Theory in this manner.

Sample

The sample for this study comprised a heterogeneous group of South African surfers ($n = 11$). The group of participants consisted of female ($n = 4$) and male ($n = 7$) surfers of various ages, ranging from 15 to 58 years within the female sub-sample, and from 16 to 59 years for male participants. This level of heterogeneity is comparably congruent with the changing demographics of surfing as outlined by Spurrier (2002).

In order to elicit subjective materials of highest quality, a minimum of five years continuous surfing experience was required for selection. In addition, since the available scientific and non-scientific literature was suggestive of differential systems of meanings for competitive versus non-competitive surfing, participants were purposefully selected to include surfers with professional competition experience ($n = 4$), committed amateur competitors ($n = 4$), and surfers of predominantly non-competitive orientation ($n = 3$). The categorical distinctions were made on a self-report basis.

Ethical Considerations

Issues of ethical nature were unproblematic; the ethical guidelines of the South African Psychological Association were adhered to in all respects.

Data Collection Materials and Procedures

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) indicate that, for the purposes of qualitative exploratory research, the use of semi-structured interviews provides participants with the necessary guidance, direction, and freedom to express their subjective insights into the phenomenon in question. A process of continual refinement of the data collection instrument accompanies the inductive development of understanding in this manner; the Grounded Theory methodology stipulates that the interview schedule be edited and updated in response to new insights, emerging from the data by use of comparative analysis, throughout the data collection process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Congruent with the exploratory nature of the study, a broad interview schedule, drawing on available literature in relation to the act of surfing, was constructed. Of particular centrality to the schedule construction was Stone's (1970) inquest into the present area of interest. Her inquiry into the subjective meanings of surfing relied on the exploration and thematic analysis of available surf-related literature at the time of her research. Her findings were most useful to

inform the focus of, and build a basis for, the collection of direct first hand accounts of subjective experience for the present study.

The annual SA Longboard Championship was selected as an opportunity to recruit participants and to conduct interviews. It was anticipated that a large number of selection criteria-congruent participants would come together at the event. It was assumed that mainly experienced surfers take part in national competitions, thus enabling access to surfers of the professional group, as well as to amateur competitors. Furthermore, a local surf club, drawing local non-competitive surfers as spectators, hosted the event. Six interviews were conducted over the course of the event. All subsequent participants were recruited and interviewed over a period of four months following the SA Longboard Championships.

All interviews were conducted on, or in close proximity, of the beach, frequently immediately before or after participation in surfing. This immediacy to the milieu of the area of interest was understood to enhance the development of rich, subjective experiential data (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002).

Analytical Procedures

As indicated above, Grounded Theory methodology prescribes concurrent data collection and analysis by means of constant comparison of the emergent material, subsequently shaping an increasingly focused understanding of the area of exploratory interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Using this approach for the purposes of this research, each individual tape-recorded interview was transcribed in full to allow for immediate analysis.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest using comparative analysis to verify the evidential strength of emerging data from one interview to the next. Again, considering the limited scope of this study, constant comparative analysis in that manner appeared to be protracted and inappropriate. Alternatively, interviews were analyzed in 'batches', i.e. comparative analytical strategies were applied to more than two interview transcripts at a time. This 'batch-analysis' proved to be a most appropriate tactic in relation to the research aim.

To conduct the analysis of the collected subjective experiential data in the above-described manner, open-coding procedures were employed to "capture the detail, variation, and complexity of the basic qualitative material" (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003: 136). Applying this analytic tool to a 'batch' of interviews allowed the capturing of a substantial amount of material. Corbin (1986) states that this intricate process of raw-data reduction into codes ultimately aims to crystallize categories that enhance a deeper understanding of the area of interest.

Continual coding of the raw data throughout the data collection period facilitated the continual revision of the interview schedule, which was adapted periodically before each batch of interviews took place.

Following the final capturing of materials from the last 'batch' of interviews, an amalgamated analysis of all data was initiated. Codes of all materials were extensively compared, sections

recoded, and the final selection of codes was conclusively merged into contextually pertinent categories and meaningful theme clusters (Corbin, 1986).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Coding of the materials was facilitated by the available literature. The researcher acknowledged his position, and made every effort to eliminate his biases from the analysis. The process resulted in the densification of 815 codes into 21 overarching categories (see Appendix B for categories, code frequencies and percentages). The categories of 'surf travel' and 'surfing etiquette' were disregarded in the process of theme cluster formulation. The decision to ignore these emergent categories was twofold; firstly, they only contributed marginally (surf travel = 1.1 %; surfing etiquette = 1.23%) to the coded body of categories. Secondly these information fragments were conceptually scattered, and therefore deemed irrelevant to the research. The remaining 19 categories were used to inform the refinement of the five conceptually relevant thematic clusters discussed below (Appendix C displays the theme clusters). Letters (A-K) will be used to identify different participants in the discussion that follows.

Themes

Final analysis suggested that, in relation to the five theme clusters, 'surfing lifestyle' emerged from the data as the overarching category and thus, has contextual relevance as a theme in its own right. In fact, the entire sample, without being probed, indicated their understanding of surfing as a way of life. However, in order to be able to draw on the HMS model (Schomer, 2003) to develop a contextually adequate explanation of surfing as a mode of being, subsequently representing the overarching theme of this research, the associated relevant theme clusters need to be discussed beforehand. It is crucial to understand what precisely creates the captivation that compels surfers to conceptualize surfing as a way of life. The following discussion and integration will reflect this understanding and discuss the 'surfing lifestyle' as a last integrative theme that is built upon all other emergent understandings of this study.

1. Tranquil mind: surfing for a balanced life

The greater majority of the surfers interviewed for this research stated that surfing is perceived to be a crucial anchor in life. Surfing was reported to be the one aspect that can return the individual's sense of balance in the face of stressful internal responses to external demands. **J** substantiates the comprehension of surfing as means to achieve personal balance; she explains that "without surfing, it's not there, there's just something missing...something big missing! It's my church, it's my therapist, it's absolutely...it's anger-management, it's...control, it's everything...everything, all in one!"

The experience of stress relief was the most commonly expressed anchoring property of surfing. **C** indicates that "at work you're under pressure the whole time to perform. So I find, if I go for a surf in the morning, I get to work, I'm ready for my day, I'm relaxed". Another important factor to this theme cluster is the experience of proximity to nature, as **F** explains: "you simply look at the mountains, look at the sky. And you're part of that whole thing!". Surfing associated health benefits were widely acknowledged among participants as part of the anchoring nature of the behaviour: "Your physical being, you...you become...you're on

another level, you know, your energy levels are really high and your...reflexes are much faster and it just makes you feel like a better person" (**H**). Participants described surfing as spiritually rewarding and rejuvenating, thus contributing to the perception of the activity as a life anchor. **D** emphasizes that "it [surfing] is without a doubt the most spiritual experience, I think, that anybody...could ever experience! Especially getting barreled [riding inside the breaking wave], you're in the green cathedral...". Furthermore, the social dimension of surfing appears to be essential to the experience: "I'm enjoying it because it is a shared experience for me" (**H**).

The above subjective experiential accounts clearly indicate that surfing displays 'grounding' or anchoring properties. The apparent cathartic function of the act was also found by Farmer (1992), and is conceptually supported by Schomer and Drake (2001), who indicate that physical activities, such as surfing, create a holistic sense of well-being. With regards to stress relief in particular, Schomer (2002) notes that engagement in 'play', the concept being applicable to surfing as demonstrated by Farmer (1992), is an important factor in burnout prevention. Furthermore, having quality ties with others, and sharing experiences, enhances personal well-being (Strümpfer, 2003). Both, Schomer (2002) and Strümpfer (2003), stress the importance of seeking "restorative places" (Strümpfer, 2003: 74), i.e. natural settings such as beaches and water, in order to attain a comprehensive sense of well-being and optimal experience of life, all of which are associated with a well-balanced mode of being.

The HMS model (Schomer, 2003) asserts that stable personality components form the basis for the maintenance of balance in one's life. Given the above evidence, it is feasible to argue that the grounding experiences derived from surfing run parallel to the psychological core of the individual and thus, will inform the person's dynamic peripheral personality dimensions, i.e. how the individual responds to demands from the social environment. It is apparent that the internalized 'grounding' nature of the surfing experience strengthens the 'buffering' capacity of the typical responses and role-related behaviours to accommodate and manage demands from the external environment in an adaptive manner. Acknowledging the experiential resonance of surfing with the psychological core, it can be concluded that the associated benefits, i.e. a holistic sense of well-being, transfer across all life roles.

2. The surfing 'addiction'

Building on the theme of the holistic benefits of surfing, the captivating nature of the sport commences to unfold. However, additional aspects of surfing appear to shape the 'addictive' dimension of surfing. To a significant number of the participants, surfing appears to be an act that creates extraordinary excitement: "it's just such a thrill every single time and...every single time you go surfing its completely different...it's never boring, it's never monotonous, there is always something new" (**B**). An intensely exhilarating element of surfing appears to be related to the somatic experiences of the act, and participants often struggled to verbalize precisely the degree of captivation they experience; instead the surfers drew on picturesque metaphors to allow insight into their 'addiction': "it is like licking cream!! Smooth and...and sort of delightful and surprising!" (**E**), illustrating her unique surfing experience. Equally important to this theme cluster is the aforementioned proximity to nature that is inherent to surfing. Its exhilarating effect on the participant contributes to the 'surfing addiction'. **G** explains his fascination with nature: "we've got dolphins and porpoises at sea with us...it's...it's a great feeling, it's...beautiful!". Participants indicate that surfing is

intrinsically rewarding to the point that the act takes on addictive properties: “there is no other mix in the world that...that quite produces the magic that you get from surfing” (H). In addition, the conditions of the surf such as the weather and the waves are irrelevant to the intense desire to surf as often as possible. A explains that he surfs “any day of the week, be it onshore, offshore, anything!” and that he is “not one of these people that only surfs when the surf is good. I...I surf in any of that stuff, it doesn't worry me!”.

The participants' vivid accounts of their perceptions are reflective of the captivating nature of surfing. Strümpfer (2003) notes that individuals “make concerted efforts” (p. 75) to get continuously involved in activities that produce optimal experience or “flow” (p. 75), are intrinsically rewarding, and are participated in for their own sake. Those acts are highly captivating, as they are stimulating to the degree that no extra attention is available to attend to stimuli beyond the act. Surfing is cited as such an activity (Strümpfer, 2003). This intense and exclusive focus on surfing may be used to explain the high degree of ‘emotional charge’ in the accounts above, as the surfer is highly perceptive of everything associated with surfing (somatic stimuli, vertigo, beauty of natural surroundings), and fades out any additional stimuli. Farmer (1992), as well as Stone (1970), indicates that surfers are ‘addicted’ to, and driven by, the desire to experience vertigo and the ‘rush’ that is associated with the perceived exertion of control in an unpredictable environment, executing desired ‘moves’ in interplay with the wave. Diehm and Armatas (2004), argue that surfers tend to be individuals of high sensation-seeking motivation and openness to experience, which makes them prone to ‘addiction’ to high-risk sports such as surfing, support this observation.

It was established above, integrating the previous thematic cluster into the HMS model, that surfing, as a comprehensive source of holistic well-being, becomes of central stimulating importance to attributes within the psychological core, thus informing the person's general style of interaction with the environment. Schomer (2003) explains that these interactions will reinforce the individual's core, if they are perceived as adaptive by the environment and the self. The result will be a personality core that is marked by high levels of commitment and dedication towards those factors that are essential to one's identity and sense of belonging within the adaptive style of environmental interaction (Schomer, 2003).

The dedication towards surfing is pertinent in the sample of this study. Surfing has been internalized, and the resulting sense of well-being, in interaction with the social environment, strengthens the role of ‘surfer’ in these individuals and thus, surfing is experienced as highly rewarding and emotionally exhilarating. Furthermore, well-balanced persons experience a high sense of control regarding their environment; individuals feel self-empowered and rewarded in situations in which they feel in control of challenging aspects of their environment (Schomer, 2003). The ability to execute ‘moves’ successfully on the unpredictable wave clearly mirrors such a situation. Therefore, the experiential aspects associated with the present theme cluster further reinforce the act as a central part of the person's life.

3. Sharing vs. crowd control

As demonstrated previously, participants expressed, and literature and theory substantiated, that sharing the surfing experience with others is an emotionally enhancing aspect of surfing. However, the data strongly suggest that, at the same time, surfers do not wish to universally

share the waves, but to limit the number of other surfers in the water. The general trend in the data indicates that sharing is usually limited to family members and close friends: “it [surfing] has kept the family together! That’s...something to do, something in common, which, I think, is missing in a lot of families...uh...out of surfing...uh...you know, it caters for everybody!” (F). B agrees that “[sharing] is a huge part of...what matters in the water, the crowd that you’re surfing with, your friends in the water!”. Whilst this sharing was indicated to be desired, participants voiced contradictory sentiments regarding the sharing of waves with other groups of surfers, such as beginners: “I mean everybody’s gotta learn...how to surf, but sometimes the guys who are learning to surf don’t have too much respect for the guys who can surf!” (F). Sentiments of undesirability towards novice surfers was contingent on these novices ability to guard against interfering with experienced surfers in the water; K states that “I’m not really bothered [by beginners], unless they get in the way!”. A more fundamental form of crowd undesirability is voiced by C: “you get guys coming up there [Durban] who’ll be like...just basically wanna take over and not respect the locals, not respect you...!”, implicating a territorial dimension in relation to sharing and crowd control. Although all participants reported awareness of, and in some cases involvement in, territorially and crowd-related instances of overt aggression among surfers in the water, agreement on the undesirability of such acts was universal, thus indicating contradictory sentiments around the issue.

Warshaw (2003) notes that crowd contingent non-sharing sentiments, and associated aggression, started occurring in the 1960s. The emergence of claims of local territorial rights to waves was concurrent with the first drastic upsurge of popularity of surfing at that time (Warshaw, 2003). Considering the practically limited access to surfable waves during that time period, it is well feasible that surf-beaches became overcrowded quickly, much to the ‘horror’ of local surfers. Given the more recent, and considerably larger, increase of the world’s surfing population over the last decade, it can be of little surprise that contemporary surfers’ subjective accounts of surfing include voices calling for crowd control and ‘localism’ (Spurrier, 2002; Warshaw, 2003). Ishiwata (2002) cites Hawaii as the most extreme context for such conditions. Generally regarded as the ‘promised land’ of surfing, The Islands are swamped with surfing tourists every year. As a result, the ‘surf space’, being of cultural significance, is heavily defended by native Hawaiians, often resorting to overt violence to retain their ‘rights’ (Ishiwata, 2002). Preston-Whyte (2002) finds evidence for the conceptualization of contemporary ‘surf space’, i.e. the beaches and waves, as a “scarce resource” (p. 320) for surfers. Learners of the activity may be especially salient in this dynamic, as they are the visible representation of the ever decreasing ‘surf space’. Therefore, the ‘sharing-crowd control’ contradiction appears to be a function of the attempts of surfers to maintain the ability to surf freely for the self and close friends and family (sharing), and to control access to those who limit that possibility (crowd-control).

Re-emphasizing surfing’s core conceptual pertinence to surfers in this sample, Schomer (2003) notes that threats from the social environment that frustrate the individual’s capacity to retain central aspects of personality, such as self-concept and goal orientation, at acceptable levels will ‘penetrate’ the psychological core of the person. As a result, the social environmental stressor will be perceived as a severe threat to the individual’s sense of well-being (Schomer, 2003). The present sample has been shown to construct substantial proportions of individual self-concept, values and beliefs from surfing. In essence, non-locals surfers are violating the local’s “restorative place identity” (Strümpfer, 2003: 74). Therefore,

experiencing perceived threats to the ability to engage in the activity, created by the increasingly crowded surfing environment, will evoke threat-related defensive sentiments in the surfer.

4. Competition: the surfing paradox?

Opinions surrounding the role of competition in surfing differed across participants. Diversity of that nature was expected, because the sample included non-competitive surfers, amateurs, and professionals. Bearing this stratification in mind, some of the data implications regarding this theme cluster were quite surprising. It was found that younger surfers tend to idealize competitive surfing. The adolescent/young adult participants all voiced aspirations to become World Tour Professionals. **B** explains her aspirations as follows: “If I get opportunities to go overseas for a longboarding contest, I probably will, I would like to.”, being noticeably captivated by the excitement of the competitive surfing world. However, a relatively young and successful World Tour competitor explains the effects of the element of pressure in competitive surfing: “If I’ve done badly in a contest or something...you always got this thing in your mind going ‘oh you did badly there, what’s gonna happen now?’”(G), indicating that this form of the activity has some experientially negative aspects. Interestingly though, other professionals in the sample, among them a former World Champion, conceptualize contest surfing as an entirely adverse experience, especially in a professionally unsupportive South African environment. **H** warns that “it [competitive surfing] burns you out and it takes away that enjoyment and makes you relate...you know, you relate your surfing to bad emotions!”, suggesting a general incompatibility of the ‘balancing’ surfing experience and competition.

Taking into account that surfing is one of the most widely used marketing tools today, with adolescents and young adults as a primary target market, it is of little surprise that younger surfers aspire to the professional lifestyles of their extensively advertised idols (Mendez-Villanueva & Bishop, 2005; Rogers, 2005). The voices of caution from seasoned professionals indicate that the contest surfing experience lacks sustainable meaning and fulfillment. This trend is congruent with Farmer (1992); his analysis goes as far as to suggest a general “competition taboo” (p. 12) among surfers. This study does not find an understanding of competitive surfing to that extent - there rather appears to be an age difference that is possibly related to the lack of experience among younger surf athletes.

The central feature of this ‘paradox’ is the introduction of stress to the surfing experience. Where surfers treat the act as core-psychologically important, it becomes crucial to the sense of life-balance of the person. Core-informed typical responses and role-related behaviours react to and accommodate external influences, thus protecting the psychological core and the subjective sense of well-being (Schomer, 2003). However, the apparent performance pressure and anxiety produced by the competitive form of surfing, forming a direct contrast to experiences of catharsis and rejuvenation from the pressures of modern living, violates the core conceptual understanding of surfing as a source of balanced living. It thus penetrates the core of the person, reintroduces stress, and denies the individual the feeling of being holistically balanced.

5. The integration: a surfing lifestyle

The overwhelming agreement between all participants, competitors and leisure surfers in relation to this theme leaves no doubt that surfing has to be conceptualized as a lifestyle, and

that it reaches beyond the realm of being a sport or a recreational activity. As was indicated above, all other categorically refined elements of information of this study are clustered around, and are derived from, the central theme of surfing as a 'lifestyle'. The entire sample indicated that the activity is essential to the maintenance of a positive self-concept and identity.

Explaining how surfing became a way of life for him, **D** recalls that "there are certain watersheds that you have in your life, and surfing was one of them, and...just, it was changed forever!"

Probing participants to contemplate any aspects of their life that could substitute surfing in its centrality, **G** explains: "I always sit down and think to myself 'what would I do if I wasn't surfing?', and it's...I can't think of anything!...or... 'what do other people actually do?' and...[laughs] to me this [surfing] is the only way!"

These accounts indicate that the act of surfing represents the foundation upon which the participants of this research construct their lives. Therefore, an understanding of surfing as a 'lifestyle' is indeed applicable. Defining 'lifestyle', in the original 'Adlerian' sense, as the characteristic, goal-orientated, mode of being of an individual, surfing's conceptual congruence, derived from the accounts above, is apparent (Wolman, 1973; Aguilar-Cauz, 2005). Farmer (1992) finds accounts similar to those outlined above, and concludes that surfers "brag that they have no job, no phone, no money and no address" in order to structure their entire being around the act of surfing.

Although the present research did not find any reason for such drastic measures as to pursue surfing as a central source of meaning in life, the results nonetheless support the participants' identification through, and perception of surfing as an element that permeates all aspects of a surfer's life. The HMS model clearly demonstrates that surfing, being engrained in all personality aspects of the psychological core, influences the peripheral personality dimension that informs interaction with the social environment across all life roles (Schomer, 2003). The subjective-experiential data of this research leaves little doubt that surfing is a conceptually valid 'way of life'.

CONCLUSION

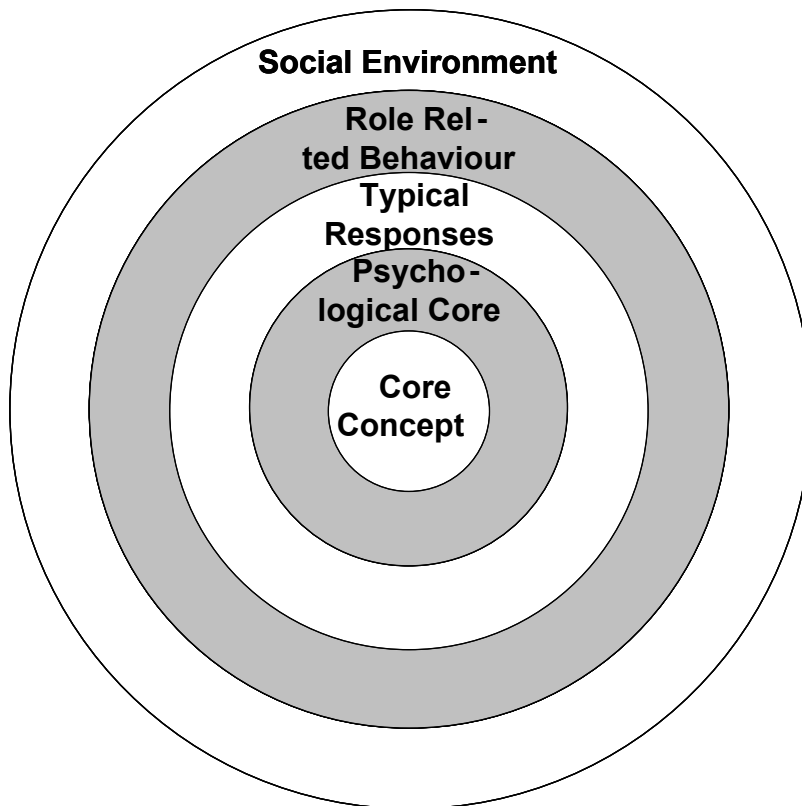
What has emerged from this study is that surfing is indeed an intensely captivating activity that has the capacity to ground and balance individuals in a demanding modern world. By conceptualizing the study as the beginning of a mapping process of the broad area of surfing, the author hopes to have surfaced areas of interest that are going to stimulate further, more specific investigation of surfing as a construct.

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APPENDIX A – The HMS (Hollander-Martens-Schomer) Model of Personality



APPENDIX B – Code Category Distribution

CODE CATEGORY	CODE FREQUENCY	FREQ %
EFFECT OF SURFING ON LIFE ROLES	121	14.85%
SURFING LIFESTYLE	112	13.74%
COMPETITION STRESS	87	10.67%
AGGRESSION IN SURFING	53	6.50%
RELAXATION/CATHARSIS	52	6.38%
COMPETITIVE EXPERIENCE	42	5.15%
SUCCESS/REWARDS	40	4.91%
EXCITEMENT	38	4.66%
FITNESS/HEALTH	37	4.54%
SHARING THE EXPERIENCE	35	4.29%
NATURE	31	3.80%

CROWDS	27	3.31%
FAMILY	25	3.07%
SURFING CONDITIONS	23	2.82%
SPIRITUALITY OF SURFING	18	2.21%
SURFER COMMUNITY	15	1.84%
DEMOGRAPHICS/SOCIAL DIVERSITY	14	1.72%
UNIQUENESS OF EXPERIENCE	14	1.72%
SUPPORT IN SA	12	1.47%
SURFING ETIQUETTE	10	1.23%
TRAVEL	9	1.10%
TOTAL	815	100.00%

APPENDIX C – Theme Clusters & Associated Code Categories

TRANQUIL MIND – SURFING FOR A BALANCED LIFE

- Lifestyle, Effect on life roles, Health, Catharsis, Family, Spirituality of surfing, Uniqueness of the experience, Excitement

THE SURFING ‘ADDICTION’

- Lifestyle, Excitement, Nature, Uniqueness of the experience, Rewards, Conditions

SHARING vs. CROWD CONTROL

- Sharing the experience, Surfer Community, Crowds, Aggression, Family

COMPETITION – THE SURFING PARADOX?

- Excitement, Competition stress, Conditions, Aggression, Crowds, Competition, Rewards, Lack of support in SA

THE INTEGRATION - A SURFING LIFESTYLE

- Effect on life roles, Catharsis, Health, Excitement, Family, Sharing the experience, Nature, Spirituality of surfing, Uniqueness of the experience, Surfer community, Social Diversity / Demographics