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Seeking 'Collective Solitude' in the Pacific:  
*An Ethnography of Wave-Riding in Encinitas, California*

By:

Laura Schaffer

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Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Departments of Anthropology  
and Sociology

UNION COLLEGE

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## ABSTRACT

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For centuries, the practice of surfing has mystified the novelist, the missionary, the thrill-seeker, and the proximate spectator, alike. Though it has its roots in Polynesia, this wave-riding eventually globalized – spreading to and adapted by coasts worldwide. Through observation, interviews, and participation, this study examines the co-existence of supposedly competing notions of individuality and community as they manifest in the Encinitas (California) surfer, their community, and their pursuit of the waves. The study finds that while the individual surfer inscribes their own personal meaning on the pursuit, they (in the context of a 'surf town') are tied to other local surfers and the larger community by their shared passion for the practice and the sense of primacy for the pursuit in their lives. This cooperative duality is also found to be present in the practice itself. This project attempts to shed light on the value of supposedly peripheral (and trivial) pursuits and implicitly argues for greater attention given to them in social science research. Further, it attempts use the practice of surfing to explore larger ideas of self, togetherness, and community cohesion.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Preface.....	1
Overview of Argument.....	3
Methodology.....	3
Overview of Content .....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	10
Individuality.....	10
Community.....	14
Social/Cultural Study of Sport .....	18
Chapter 3: Origins of the California Surf .....	22
History of Surfing .....	22
Establishment of ‘Surf City’.....	33
Chapter 4: Ethnography .....	36
The Surfer .....	36
Surf City .....	45
The Surf.....	55
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	65
References.....	67

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### PREFACE

As the unmistakable Southern Californian sunlight enters the window of Michael's makeshift home office, he checks his clock to confirm what he can already sense – the sunset is imminent. After finishing his last phone call of the day, he darts into the garage – navigating his way around the scattered plywood (that will one day become storage shelves) to locate the most suitable surfboard for this evening's conditions. He carefully maneuvers the board through the trunk of his car – re-positioning it until fits just enough to close the trunk. Quickly returning to the garage, he rummages through the luggage from his most recent competition-based excursion in France; locates a wetsuit and towel; carelessly throws them into the trunk and speeds off. Luckily, the homegrown Encinitas local can instinctively navigate the two-mile trip to the beach, which – with his surfboard extending past the passenger seat window – he has to at every left turn. With no desire to risk the uncertain hassle of finding a spot at the dependably crowded Swami's Beach, he parks by the train tracks. He hastily hops out of his car, pulls on his wetsuit up to his waist, grabs his board, tosses his sandals onto the passenger seat and runs across South Coast Highway 101.

Down the street from Swami's, Caroline is finishing up her shift at Surfdog's Java Hut coffee shop – taking advantage of the quiet late afternoon time to get a head start on the cleanup before her husband arrives. Soon, he pulls up the car and before Caroline can get in a quick hello, their daughter pops out from behind the car – surfboard in hand. Caroline then grabs her board and the two of them head down the street to the break. As they reach the staircase, they are greeted by friendly “hello” from a new regular Surfdog customer – Steve. Steve just completed a particularly exhilarating life coaching session and is ready to channel that energy into the waves.

He pauses to take in the remarkable landscape – though only momentarily – and proceeds to stride down the stairs toward the water.

In the water, Michael paddles fervently out toward the sun as it is inching toward the horizon – though he makes the time to greet Ted who is mounting his board after a successful wave. Close behind, Caroline – led by the youthful energy of her daughter – makes her way toward the break. The two are followed by Steve, who enthusiastically but cautiously paddles in from the outside. Naturally, as if directed by the ocean itself, the sunset wave-riders – wave-by-wave – fall into rhythm.

After a while, each wave rider finally admits to themselves that the sun is almost out of sight and they have lost feeling in their exposed appendages. One by one, they ride their final waves all the way into the shore, where they unstrap and remove the leashes from their ankles, rinse off, and ascend the stairs. As he reaches the parking lot, Michael runs into his wife walking their dog and recounts his surf. Caroline and her daughter make their way back to Surfdog's to claim the towels they had stashed out back. Ted disappears to find a place to hide his board and spot to sleep for the night. And Steve lingers by the lookout – entranced as he watches the waves until they are only identifiable by their crashing sound.

The sun has set on '*another day in paradise.*'

## OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENT

The practice of surfing is deeply integrating into the lives of the people and city of Encinitas California. Residents and visitors alike recognize that the practice is supremely special to riders and to the community as a whole. Even the most regular lifelong local wave rider cannot seem to fully articulate (to satisfaction) the nature of the practice or the reasons for its profundity.

Though Encinitas – like any singular city – is distinct in its particular manifestation as a surf town, this experience and sentiment of ‘surf’ is widespread. It was this zeal and sense of connectivity that I experienced from spending time in surf communities growing up, and later, came to consciously acknowledge as potentially academically noteworthy.

In the following pages, I seek to orient myself by and navigate from this vague special feeling not so much to try and explain it (if the most devoted surfers are unable to do this, then I certainly cannot), but rather to explain how life as a surfer, life in surf city, and the experience of surfing, is simultaneously deeply personal and deeply collective. Further, I attempt to use surfing as a lens/framework to explore sources of community cohesion and larger American cultural values.

## METHODOLOGY

I conducted my research in Encinitas, California (North County San Diego) over a one-month period beginning in late November 2016 and concluding in late December 2016. I selected this particular location as my research site for two main reasons: 1) its prime surf conditions during the winter season and 2) its reputation as a “surf town.” For the purpose of my research, I was primarily interested in speaking to dedicated surfers (‘dedicated’ in the sense that surfing was an integral part of their lives and not simply an activity they would try out if/when



they were in close proximity to a suitable beach). It is no secret that dedicated surfers are also relentless wave-chasers. Hence, the most promising way to find these types of surfers is to find locate the said-to-be best waves. The northern San Diego coastline does not exclusively harbor sought-out winter surf breaks. However, not every prime surf spot is necessarily situated in a ‘surf town’ – this is the draw of Encinitas. While I was certainly interested in understanding the surfers in the water, I was also curious about the environments where the surfing extends and exists (though in different form) ‘beyond the break’; communities in which surfing is deeply ingrained in its fabric. For this, I recalled and found a National Geographic article I had read in 2012, titled “World’s 20 Best Surf Towns.” This article was memorable not for its mention of Encinitas, but rather for the uproar and disgruntlement it caused among my own insular surf community (a small collection of surf zealous families), as the magazine had called unwanted attention to *our* surf spot. Upon revisiting the article in hopes of locating a research location that satisfied my two desired conditions, I found Encinitas – home of renowned breaks, wave-riding history, and a surf ‘energy’ that apparently could be felt from the freeway.

During my time in Encinitas, I stayed with a local couple (Michael and Selina) who resided about two miles from the major local surf breaks. While this was initially intended to be no more than a living arrangement, Michael’s identity as a homegrown surf local (and traveling professional), the couple’s joint position as seasonal surf camp organizers/instructors, and their developed interest in my project ultimately expanded their roles to (enthusiastically willing) key informants. Michael’s experience as a part of the surf and larger Encinitas culture proved incredibly valuable in contextualizing my research and general understanding of the community. Additionally, Michael’s accompaniment to and in the waves (which he kindly pretended was a mutually beneficial arrangement) eased potential logistical constraints of access to the waves,

provided esteemed insight about the inner workings of the local surf, and the accompaniment of a seemingly well-known and well-respected local surfer. In retrospect, without his assistance, my integration into the local break would have proven to be exponentially more difficult (and maybe impossible to the same extent).

In addition to speaking and surfing with Michael and Selina, I also developed relationships with another group of locals who served as secondary key informants – the employees and regulars at “Surfdog’s Java Hut.” I initially happened upon this local coffee shop during my first few days trying to familiarize myself with the local community. The Java Hut or “Surfdog’s” immediately presented itself as an integral local establishment – understated, but lively; filled with local regulars who were clearly well-acquainted with each other, the employees, and most notably – the local breaks. Intrigued by the endearing nature of and relevant surf-dominated conversations at the coffee shop, I returned regularly. Soon I learned that many of the employees at Surfdog (a collection of women between 20-60 years old) spent their off hours surfing. My now-regular status had granted me plenty of opportunity for dialogue with the employees and fellow regulars, which naturally exposed the purpose of my visit to Encinitas. Not only was I able to conduct informal interviews with dual coffee shop employees/avid surfers, but I also gained access into their peer networks – particularly surfing peers who visited the shop. Many a time I would be working at a table only to have an employee excitedly call my name, loudly urge me to talk to the customer (and presumably local surfer) who had entered, and then turn back to the customer and quickly explain my research. This proved to be invaluable research assistance – connecting me with individuals who were not only relevant to my research, but also seemed to trust my purpose from the outset as a product of their relationship with and respect for the Surfdog employees.

Additionally, I met a number of other Encinitas surfers on my own outside the coffee shop. Downtown Encinitas was very conveniently arranged for gathering my research. The mile-long stretch of South Coast Highway 101 contained a number of major surf breaks as well as community-staple surf shops and a collection of other local establishments. My days were spent almost entirely walking, observing, and engaging in this area. While I was only ever met with friendliness, presenting my research (to preface conversation/questions) was, admittedly and unexpectedly, somewhat awkward at first. I quickly found, however, that framing my research in a ‘surfer perspective’ was quite well-received. From prior and continuing research, I came to understand that the essential question for surfers seemed to be “*How can I surf?*” or more accurately “*How can I surf more than I already do?*” Thus, instead of introducing my research as “I’m doing a project about surfing,” I started to tell people that I was required to do a senior thesis project and had chosen surfing as my topic (and had convinced my school to permit and support my quest). It seemed that to them, I had not only ‘gypped the system’ in some sense, but I had also turned a typically non-surfing (academic) venture into an opportunity to surf.

In speaking with interviewees, I set out to learn about their ‘surf experience’ – an intentionally broad objective. At the least, I hoped to learn when and how they began surfing, how frequently they surfed (particularly – if they *surfed around working* or *worked around surfing*), and what kept them ‘indefinitely engaged’ – as most interviewees proclaimed with absolute certainty that they would continue to surf as long as they were physically able. Beyond this, however, I kept the conversation largely open-ended – in part because experiences were so varied and it was impossible to prepare questions for the unpredictably unique stories. More so, though, I found that *what* they chose to share as emblematic or remarkable when prompted about their ‘surf experience’ was telling in and of itself.

When my allotted research period concluded, I had spoken to Encinitas surfers of varying ages; men and women; homegrown locals and eager new implants. The enthusiasm for my research garnered the support and assistance of locals, who continued to orient me toward potential research sites even as I was departing for the airport – a triumph for my research but also an indication that this project could be continued and developed further. Before leaving, I also acquired local publications, documented examples of local public surf-related art (murals, mosaics, etc.), and visited the California Surf Museum (Oceanside, CA) to contribute to a greater understanding of the area and to take advantage of my proximity to sites potentially relevant to my research.

At times, conducting research felt unfairly easy. First and foremost, I happened upon excellent informants. Additionally, it was hard to find someone that did not have something to contribute – whether it be about Encinitas, surfing, or their own experiences. And – as it was said best by a Surfdog employee: ‘It must be so great to get to talk to people about the thing they love the most!’ This was certainly true. Even if people at times had their qualms about the Encinitas (which were typically about - unrelated to the community itself – centered on the influx of tourists), community members were grateful to live in this “paradise” – with its comfortable weather, friendly residents, and most importantly – access to some of the most coveted surf breaks in the world.

## OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

Chapter Two is a literature review of notable and relevant works on individuality and community as well as social/cultural studies of sport. I review literature on individuality to situate the individuality of the surfer in a larger historical and (American) cultural context in

order to rationalize and describe the ‘environment’ in which this sort self-orientated and wave-rider can and does emerge. Additionally, I review sociological and anthropological literature on community to substantiate the discussion of Encinitas as place in which these surfers are comprehensively bound to one another – both by locale and shared pursuit (and passion for it). Further, I consider literature discussing the concept of *communitas* to emphasize particular type or notion of community defined by a spirit or sense of togetherness. Lastly, I review social/cultural studies of sport primarily due to its topical relevance – to frame the study of a sport. More so, however, this final section of literature (and the sections of literature as a whole) are meant to frame and contextualize the exploration of a sport as an arena in which both personal identity and collective community spirit are fostered, developed, and celebrated.

In Chapter Three, I outline the origins of surfing – tracing its spread from Polynesia to the coast of Southern California (specifically – Encinitas). The intent of this chapter is not simply to provide an historical background on the topic in discussion. Rather, while it intends to achieve this purpose, it also aims to illustrate the historically-rooted nature and spirit of the practice and of the surf culture – a culture which will subsequently be explored in depth as it has manifested and propagated in Encinitas California.

Chapter Four is the ethnography, which consists of the culmination of my research in Encinitas and my synthesis of this fieldwork. The chapter includes detailed accounts and analyses of the Encinitas wave-rider – their experience of and motivation to be a surfer, of ‘Surf City’ – the local community as a town infatuated with and connected by surfing, and the practice of surfing itself. This chapter intends to provide a detailed depiction of a community deeply entranced by and engaged in the practice of surfing, and how this reflects and fosters personal meaning and community togetherness.

In Chapter 5 I conclude the paper with a reflection on the research conducted. I review the implications of my ethnography and consider its relation to larger themes in anthropology and sociology. Further I consider implications of the project as a whole and suggest future directions for related research.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### INDIVIDUALITY

“... *When man is freed from everything that is not wholly himself, what remains as the actual substance of his being is man in general, mankind, which lives in him and in everyone else, the ever-identical fundamental essence that is merely empiricohistorically disguised, diminished, and distorted*” (Simmel, 1971:220)

Surfing is a practice with an inarguably integral *individual* component – a pursuit whose chase and limits are determined by the individuated wave-rider. Thus, in acknowledging this, it becomes important to consider the following: What circumstances – historical, political, social, philosophical and other – foster the being who values and seeks the self-determined, self-satisfying pursuit? Studies of the individual – or *individuality* – are situated both historically and across disciplines due to the topic’s ambiguity as well as its immediate and wide relevance. The subsequent review of literature on individuality seeks to locate the origins of individuality, understand the emergence and celebration of the individual in the context of American culture and values, and to characterize the contemporary individuated being.

#### Origins of Individuality

Georg Simmel, in his revolutionary pieces compiled in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (1971) frames and explores now-integral components and perspectives in sociology. In “Freedom and the Individual,” Simmel locates the origins of the individuality, claiming that the early individuated human emerged from the Italian Renaissance. Following a period of what he characterizes as coercing, homogenizing regulation, individuals sought to relish in the freedoms and sensibilities suppressed during the Middle Ages. He states, “The individual wanted to be conspicuous; he wanted to present himself more propitiously and more remarkably than was possible by means of the established forms” (Simmel, 1971: 217). He

argues that from the waning justification for and, thus, adherence to repressive institutions emerged the notion of the freed individual. This ideal of freedom, then, according to Simmel, “becomes the universal demand which the individual uses to cover his manifold grievances and self-assertions against society” during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1971: 218). If the individual could ‘free himself,’ then “what is common to all, man as such, can emerge in him as this essence” (1971: 220). The fully freed man is then the unspoiled man.

Simmel elaborates on individuality further in “Group Expansion and Development of Individuality,” where he further explains its 18<sup>th</sup> century characterization. He argues that at this time, individuality was associated with notions of freedom and self-responsibility. Once freed from restraints on their being, the “man in general” would emerge within the individual. Further, he states that once this freedom was secured “[men] would use it to rule or to become enslaved; to be better or worse than others; in short, to unfold the full diversity of their individual powers” (Simmel, 1971: 271-272). He contrasts this characterization of individuality with its eventual 19<sup>th</sup> century manifestation, arguing that the newly developed form is centered on the uniqueness of man. He states:

... Here, individualism means that the person assumes and should assume a position that he and no one else can fill; that this position awaits him, as it were, in the organization of the whole, and that he should search until he finds it: that the human existence is realized in this immutability of being, this intensified differentiation of performance (Simmel, 1971: 272)

In other words, Simmel claims that the pursuit of individuality became, for man, a personal quest for distinction from others (Simmel, 1971).

### Self Fulfilment & Finding Self: *Losing Others?*

In *Democracy in America* (originally published in 1835), Alexis de Tocqueville compiles his extensive observations and analysis of facets of 19<sup>th</sup> century America, including, notably,



individualism. Though separate from and preceding the characterization made by Simmel, Tocqueville expands on the characterization of individuality as a search for the unique self. He argues that this quest for self-sufficiency and the development of a unique identity, however, results in the isolation of the individual from others. He claims that ‘the threat of time is broken,’ in that men are no longer connected to their predecessors or descendants – only concerned with their immediate family. Similarly, he argues that men are only connected to their present fellow men through mutual interests (rather than tied by ideas). Further, as men theoretically become more equal to one another (through their newfound individuality and personal wealth), they simply do not need each other. Further, he states, “...They are always accustomed to consider themselves in isolate, and they readily imagine that their entire destiny is in their hands” (Tocqueville, 2012: 884). Of this developing perception, he cautions that this compels the individual inward and ultimately “threatens to enclose him entirely within the solitude of his own heart” (2012: 884).

Bellah et al. support this perception of individuality and reiterate Tocqueville’s fear of the fate of the individuated being in *Habits of the Heart* (1985). They claim that the ‘meaning of life’ for the (American) individual is finding oneself, which they equate to “finding the story... in terms of which one’s life makes” sense, and in some ways “[giving] birth to oneself” (Bellah et al., 1985: 83). Like Tocqueville, they believe that the natural result of this quest for self is the abandonment of other individuals with whom you are tied by familial or proximal (communal) relations (Bellah et al., 1985).

### The ‘Americanness’ of an Emphasis on Self

*Individualism lies at the very core of American culture... basic to the American identity... We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious (Bellah et al., 1985:142)*

Though already implied by the utilization of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, it is important to emphasize that there is something distinctly "American" about the individuated being. In other words, the manifestation and celebration of the self-sufficient, self-fulfilling individual is encouraged by American values. As Bellah et al. vocalize, "American cultural traditions define personality, achievement, and the purpose of human life in ways that leave the individual suspended in a glorious, but tarrying, isolation" (1985: 6). They argue that the fixation on the 'social unsituated self' emerged from and with the earliest shaping of American ideals. They note that notions of self-reliance predicate the American tradition. Though previously, this independence was promoted and existed in the context of collectivity. They argue that this later component was largely lost with the growth of individualism. In this truly individuated world, the individual being only had their self to rely on as a moral guide. As a result, they contend, "... then each individual must always know what he wants and desires or intuit what he feels. He must act so as to produce the greatest satisfaction of his wants or express the fullest range of his impulses" (1985: 77). This distinct responsibility, they claim, has grown, with the additional development of the anxious search for one's true self. This is the contemporary, American individual.

While not entirely dismissing the manifestation of the American individual as it exists today, Bellah et al. express concerns – couched in their conception of the individual as almost exclusively self-reliant and self-concerned – about the outlook for the American individual. They contend – "Our highest and noblest aspirations are linked to our individualism. Yet, some of our deepest problems as a society are also closely linked to our individualism (Bellah et al., 1985: 145). They note that they are not alone in their feelings of ambivalence toward this contemporary reality, as they are evident in many of our cultural expressions. Of this they state:

...There we find the fear that society may overwhelm the individual and destroy any chance of autonomy unless he stands against it, but also recognizes that it is only in relation to society that the individual can fulfill himself and that if the break with society is too radical, life has no meaning at all (1985: 144).

In response to this concern, they call for a necessary revival of *community*.

Bellah et al. were correct in their claim that they were not alone in their ambivalence toward community. In fact, their claim is neither unaccompanied nor novel. Alexis de Tocqueville, too, stated of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American: “After thus creating a small society for his own use, he willingly abandons the large society to itself” (2012: 885). This idea – that increasing modernity naturally results in hyper-individualization – is not uncommon. This belief also regular includes the implication the individual and the collective (society) are in opposition – that the (over) development of “I” sacrifices the maintenance of “we.” Though despite the whole-heartedness of this belief, not all scholars agree with this notion, and argue that community can persist even in a culture that celebrates the individuated being.

## COMMUNITY

*“Sociology is the study of man, not of his bodily nor of his psychical but of his social nature. His bodily and psychical being are considered so far as they condition his social nature. It is our purpose to study the sentiments and motives which draw people to each other, keep them together, and induce them in joint action” (Tonnie in Loomis, 1957: 237)*

While Tocqueville and others may argue that the condition of the contemporary American is that of the unattached, internally-focused individual, others contend that the (American) human condition and experience is more than this. Studies regarding contemporary society –while recognizing the reality of the individuated being, implicitly and overtly claim that this individuated state is not the exclusive state of man. In other words, the American being – both historically and currently – has been and continues to be equally defined by his/her relations with

others. Social scientists across disciplines situate these studies in the ubiquitous, diversified arena of human interaction and engagement – communities.

### Community as “Second Language”

In *Community: The Tie That Binds* (1991), Mary Rousseau responds to the claims made by Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart*. According to Rousseau, Bellah et al. focus on the ‘first language’ of Americans’ – individualism. In her piece, she seeks to shed light on the ‘second language’ – that of *community*. She prefaces her exploration with the notion that in this ‘second language,’ “persons are seen as innately connected to each other, naturally cooperative in pursuing a fulfillment dictated by the traits of our common human nature and dignity” (1991: vii). While she argues that this ‘tie that binds’ has not persisted with the same strength or in the same overt nature as it did during the pre-industrial age, it remains our ‘moral norm.’ She claims that “Community is our highest good, because nothing else increases our very being. Community, and nothing else, makes us more real than we are without it” (1991:47).

### Defining Community

Rousseau’s conception of community contains a romantic sentiment with implicit promising functions. Many scholars, however, (prior to singing its praises) point to the ambiguity of the concept itself. In *Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement* (1955), George Hillery assessed nearly 100 definitions of “community” only to conclude that the lone agreed upon element of the concept is the idea that people are involved in them (Hillery, 1955). Others, like Philip Selznick, address the vagueness of ‘community’ by characterizing it as multifaceted. He prefaces his argument by providing an intentionally imprecise definition of his own, stating that “A group is a community to the extent that it encompasses a broad range of activities and interests, and to the

extent that participation implicates the whole persons rather than segmental interests or activities” (1996: 195). Further, he claims that communities consist of a set interacting elements, the most important including: historicity, identity, mutuality, plurality, autonomy, participation, and integration (Hillery, 1996).

Similarly, Jessie Bernard in *Sociology of Community* (1973) recognizes that it is difficult to group such diverse entities into single concept, but recognizes that all communities seem to share *locale*, *common ties*, and *social interaction*. Bernard, however, draws a distinction between ‘*the community*’ and ‘*community*.’ In distinguishing the two, she claims that ‘the community’ refers primarily to community as defined by shared locale. ‘Community’ then is defined by “a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time” (1973: 4). This conception of community accentuates the elements of ‘common-ties’ and ‘social interaction’ of the more inclusive definitions of community. She notes that this notion of community predates ‘the community’ in that it characterized the group form prior to the establishment of local community. Today, this conception can continue to apply to groups that are united by commonalities but lack a set locale (Bernard, 1973).

### Communitas

In “Liminality and Communitas” (1969), Victor Turner states his preference for the Latin term ‘*communitas*’ to differentiate community as a means of social interaction from community as ‘an area of common living’ (or locale). He further illustrates what he means by communitas, employing Martin Buber’s definition of community:

Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves

toward one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens<sup>1</sup>

With this he argues that Buber is in fact describing *communitas*. He continues his discussion of *communitas* by characterizing it as an ‘intense community spirit’ defined by interactions that are ‘spontaneous,’ ‘immediate,’ and ‘concrete.’ He characterizes its ubiquitous and profound nature with:

*Communitas* breaks in though the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or “holy,” possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency (Turner, 1969: 372)

Moreover – as implied by the statement above – he believes that there is something existential about *communitas*, claiming that it “involves the whole man in his relation with other men” (Turner, 1969: 372).

Edith Turner, in *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (2012), builds off of (the aforementioned) Turner to elaborate the notion of *communitas*. *Communitas*, to Edith Turner, is what a collective of individuals feels when they, together, find meaning – a collective pleasure in partaking in shared experiences. Edith Turner – like Victor Turner – believes that *communitas* occurs where structure does not exist. Though she implies that structure does not exist as a result of a decision by the people to disregard it in order to “see their fellows as they are” (2012: 2). Further, *communitas*, to Turner, is magical and unexpected. Though she notes that *communitas* can arise out of a number of specific circumstances, such as the ‘direst moments’ amongst a community (or individual) or among oppressed individuals as they unite in the face of a common cause. Turner continues with an important clarification – though

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<sup>1</sup> See Buber, Martin, 1961. *Between Man and Man*. London and Glasgow: Fontana Library

communitas unites individuals deeply, it does not erase the individuality of those involved. Of this she states "... It does not merge identities; the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest" (Turner, 2012: 4). She summarizes with a simple notion: "*Community is togetherness itself. Why people like to be together is because of the bubbling up of communitas that comes with it*" (Turner, 2012: 4).

## SOCIAL/CULTURAL STUDY ON SPORT

*"Sports is the 'magic elixir' that feeds personal identity while it nourishes the bonds of community solidarity" (Lipsky, 1981: 5)*

### Origins & Development

Sport, despite its widespread global (and particularly – national) prominence, has struggled to prove its legitimacy as a serious focus of academia. As noted by Robert Sands in *Sport Ethnography* (2002), early social science explorations of sports emerged in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this early examination was far from comprehensive – more concerned with understanding larger social systems and treating sports as 'peripheral' and irrelevant to the study of human behavior. Further, he suggests "the avoidance of studying sport as an expressive and ritual behavior was perhaps a product of mental 'colonialism,' sport being too primitive to produce the right kind of cultural data (2002: 4).

Noel Dyck in alludes to similar troubles of an academic recognition of sport in *Games, Sports and Cultures* (2000). Like Sands, he notes that early ethnographic accounts of sports were "brief and incidental to concerns with other cultural issues" (Dyck, 15). He locates this avoidance in the tenants and objectives of anthropology. Here, however, he suggests (contrary to Sands) that sports might have been *too modern* for anthropology – a field historically fixated on

‘the primitive.’ According to Dyck, the gradual re-orientation of the discipline – away from “ethnological essentialism” in the context of a ‘post-colonial’ world – has permitted the acceptance of previously dismissed subjects. Further, he states “the practice of anthropology has increasingly been expanded to include ‘here’ as well as ‘there,’ us as well as ‘them’” (2000: 14). It is this widening of the scope of the discipline – both topically and in the novel emphasis on self-reflective ethnography – that paved the way for the introduction of sports into anthropological focus.

Delaney and Madigan in *The Sociology of Sports: An Introduction* (2015) applaud this inclusion – not necessarily as avid sports enthusiasts, but as social scientists. They state, “The institution of sport has become increasingly important and dominant throughout a large portion of the world. To ignore sport is to ignore a significant aspect of society and its culture” (2015: 8). Moreover, they note that sport is just as integral to U.S. culture as any other major institution – institutions that have been deemed worthy of academic review. Further, they claim that sports are not only a component of society, but also, they embody and exude its ideals and culture – an aspect that both promoted the development of a subdiscipline of ‘sociology of sport’ and was uncovered through this permitted academic focus. Scholars of the now-existent and active subdiscipline place much of their focus on the relationship between sport and society, and through this exploration have continued to prove the value of this study, as demonstrated by the following:

Nearly every element of sport has a sociological significance... Sports play a significant role in the culture of a given society. Sports help to provide historical continuity... and more important, sports have existed throughout recorded history. Sports help to provide continuity in life as sports allegiances formed in childhood generally preserve throughout adulthood. Sport often serves as a positive diversion from the negative aspects of life by providing a temporary ‘escape’ from the mundane, sometimes monotonous and painful elements in one’s personal or social life” (2015: 7)



### Study of Sport in U.S.

Eitzen and Sage in *Sociology of North American Sport* (2009) elaborate on the significance of studying sport in the U.S. They claim that sport – particularly in its modern-day manifestation – is emblematic of the ‘North American way of life’ – existing as a ‘microcosm of society.’ Reiterating other claims about the place of sport in the study of social science, they claim that like any other studies institution, sport can offer indicators about a society’s values, social structure, and issues. Beyond just an emphasis on competition and success, they argue that pertinent issues of inequity (race, gender, etc.) are both on display and are resisted in similar ways as they are in other arenas of society. Further, not only does sport reflect national values, but through its practice by individuals serves as a means of socializing young citizen-athletes to adopt celebrated American traits (which in themselves are emblematic of American values). Moreover, they note that the role of sport – and its meaning – has evolved with the progression of American society (and its values). Specifically, they claim that as society continues to modernize, individuals feel more and more isolated from each other and meaningless as individuals (not an unfamiliar trope). Engagement in sports, then, provides something to identify *with* and *by*, a source of meaning for their existence, and a way to connect with other individuals (Eitzen and Sage, 2009) (Cohen-Gewerc and Stebbins 2013).

### Sport & Community

Daniel Nathan, in “Sport, Community, and Identity” argues that American communities employ sport to develop and maintain their collective identity. While this piece is situated in a larger discussion of local sports teams, his implication of the arguably unmatched community-building function and outcome of sports is particularly pertinent in this exploration. He argues that

“rooting for local athletes and home teams often symbolizes a community’s preferred understanding of itself, and that doing so is an expression of connectedness. It’s an expression of public pride and pleasure, a source of group and personal identity. *It’s about sharing something, about belonging*” (2013: 2). Further, he claims that sport can and does become something shared – a ‘common reference point’ for communities – that helps promote community cohesion. He goes on to argue that sports – unlike other institutions – “have what seems to be or feels like a unique ability to enable disparate people to experience something approximating *communitas*” (2013: 3). He claims, further, that this form of *communitas* is not fleeting, as it continues to connect community members (across generations) to each other.

*“Sport is a place where community and identity come together” (Nathan, 2013: 8)*

## CHAPTER 3 ORIGINS OF THE CALIFORNIA SURF

### HISTORY OF SURFING

Surfing has a rich and complex global history. The following, however, is in no way a comprehensive history of the practice. Rather, the history of surfing presented is intended to do the following: 1) *To clarify and emphasize the true origins of surfing:* Popular Western perception – and cultural reinforcements of it – conveniently forgets and understates the role of the practice’s forbearers (native Hawaiians) in revolutionizing stand-up wave-riding. While surfing has been prominent in and characteristic of Southern California for decades – and has likely developed its own distinct qualities – it is important to recognize that it is not an American-born practice. 2) *To historically situate the ‘surfer spirit:’* An exploration of the sport’s history will reveal that the nature of the practice as well as its engagement and encapsulation by the surfer – despite generations and adaptations of the sport – has persisted among surfers, their communities, and the sport since its earliest manifestations.

#### ‘A Royal Sport for the Natural Kings of the Earth’<sup>2</sup>

In attempting to locate the origins of this practice, it is important to (loosely) define what is meant by ‘surfing.’ This distinction between surfing and other forms of wave-riding has proven important in settling debates surrounding the sport’s highly contested ‘true origins.’ While the practice is commonly associated with ‘Pacific’ or ‘Polynesian’ culture, a number of nations have made notable impassioned cases to claim the first surfers. One individual in particular – Filipe Pomar – was determined to prove that surfing in fact originated in Peru by citing ancient

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<sup>2</sup> Jack London in *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911) – a chronicle of his Pacific sailing excursion – used this phrase to describe surfing in Hawaii (London, 1911)

accounts of wave-riding in the country (a claimed that he spelled out in his article in *Surfer*).<sup>3</sup> In pushing for broad acceptance of the Peruvian prologue to the established surf history, he argued that fisherman and others responsible for feeding the community on *caballitos* (reed boats used to move goods along the coast) were in fact the original surfers. While affirming this history, many scholars clarify that the wave-riding in ancient Peru was likely practiced almost exclusively by fisherman as a necessity of their work – *not* as a separate, recreational endeavor (Warshaw, 2010). Historians distinguish the nature of the practice further to specifically locate surfing in Hawaii. They note that while many Pacific Islanders practiced wave-riding on wooden boards for the last couple thousand years, surfing as defined as ‘standing while riding’ – *he’e nalu* – was first practiced in Hawaii (and possibly Tahiti) about fifteen hundred years ago (Walker, 2011).

Much of what is known about the history of surfing originates from surviving written accounts from travelers (explorers and missionaries) as well as those from Hawaiians commenting on the practice amidst their descriptions of Hawaiian life (Finney, 1959). In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, William Anderson – in documenting his South Pacific travels on the *Resolution* with James Cook – remarked on early forms of wave-riding:

*He went out from the shore till he was near the place where the swell begins to take its rise: and watching its first motion very attentively paddled before it with great quickness, till he found that it overtook him... and [he] was carried along the same swift rate as the wave, till it landed him upon the beach (Anderson, Cook, 1784)*

Early nineteenth-century Hawaiian historian, David Malo, in (what he later compiled into)

*Hawaiian Antiquities* (1898) described:

*The surfers – riders having reached the belt of the water outside the surf, the region where the rollers began to make head, awaited the incoming of a wave, in preparation for which they got their boards underway by paddling with their hands in such time as the swelling wave began to*

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<sup>3</sup> See Pomar’s “Surfing in 1000 B.C. (1988) in *Surfer* for elaboration of Peruvian claim to original surf roots

*lift and urge them forward. Then they speeded for the shore until they came opposite to where wave moored a buoy (Malo, 1898: 293)*

The fact that surfing made its way into these early accounts proves its ancient existence – and notably in strikingly similar form to this wave-riding as it exists today. Further, those who wrote of surfing (to at least some extent) were intrigued by the practice – apparent in the prevalence of and intricacy in their descriptions.

These historic accounts did not just describe the widespread practice, but also exhibited a reaction of utter astonishment – or as widely regarded surf expert, Matt Warshaw, describes: ‘mild bombast and polite disbelief’ (2010). Visitors and residents alike remarked on this daring boldness of the wave riders and the practice itself, as travel companion of Captain Cook, Lieutenant King, noted in the ship’s log: “By such like exercises, these men may said to be almost amphibious” (1784). Further, Malo declared: “If any thinks it an easy matter to ride the surf on the board, a short trial will perhaps deceive him” (1898: 294). Amidst the disbelief was a noteworthy sentiment articulated by nineteenth-century Hawaiian scholar, Kepelion Keaukalani, stated: “For expert surfers going upland to farm, if part way up perhaps they look back and see the rollers combing the beach, they will leave their work... pick up the board and go... All thought of work is at an end... All day there is nothing but surfing” (in Stranger, 2011:18). Wave-riding dominated the daily lives and minds of in nineteenth-century Hawaiians.

Late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Hawaiians society indeed consisted of more than surfing, but there was little question that the practice was inextricably tied to life in the archipelago. As Warshaw explains, there existed a fluidity between different aspects of Hawaiian life – and surfing fit prominently into that, as he illustrates: “Priests whipped the nearshore waters with long vines in order to bring the surf up. Artists carved petroglyph stick-figure images of surfers onto flat lava surfaces. Laborers built terraced oceanfront shrines where surfers could

rinse off after exiting the water to pray for waves if the surf was flat” (2010: 23). Surfing was also incorporated into and played a key role in traditional Hawaiian songs, performances, and tales. Moreover, the practice in many respects embodied what it meant to be a Hawaiian. As historian, Scott Laderman, describes: “From the selection of a tree out of which a board might be shaped to the interactions of the wave riders and spectators... [surfing] represented a ritualized set of practices at the core of what it meant to be Hawaiian” (2014: 9). Surfing was not simply a pastime, but a cultural practice deeply embedded in the fabric of Hawaiian society (Walker, 2011).

While surfing was tied to and representative of ancient Hawaiian society, it also surpassed its structural social constraints. Evidence indicates that chiefs may have had certain special privileges in the water, such as access to better boards or breaks (Finney, 1959). Further, in recalling great surfing feats, it was often the chiefs who were valorized for their apparent exceptional capacity for wave-riding (Walker, 2011). Otherwise, however, surfing acted as Hawaii’s ‘greatest common denominator,’ as natives of all sexes, ages, and professions surfed – and commonly – surfed *together* (Warshaw, 2010). As Malo noted: “It was not uncommon for a whole community... to frolic in the ocean the livelong day” (1898: 293).

### Missionary Imposition & The Decline of Surfing

In jointly praising the work of enduring missionary activity and commenting on surfing, Nathaniel Emerson, president of the Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society, proclaimed: “there are those living, perhaps some present who remember the time when almost the entire population of a village would at certain hours resort to the sea-side to indulge in, or witness this magnificent accomplishment. We cannot but mourn its decline” (Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society, 1888:

40). Emerson, in this declaration, is referring to the tremendous decline in surfing at the end of the nineteenth century. While he claims to “mourn” this shift, inherent in his position is a careful exclusion of the not-so-natural causes of this decline – missionary activity.

One of the reasons for the decline in surfing was the decline of potential surfers. From as early as the late eighteenth century (upon Cook’s arrival), Hawaiians began encountering explorers, missionaries, and travelers and their foreign diseases. Disease ravaged Hawaii throughout the century – resulting in the rapid depopulation of native Hawaiians and wiping out surfers in large numbers. Those who did survive the disease-ridden era, however, continued to surf (Walker, 2011).

In addition to disease, travelers – particularly missionaries – brought with them religious ideals and a fervor for converting native Hawaiians. Surfing stood in opposition to life as prescribed by missionaries’ religious notions. Missionaries took great issue with nearly every aspect of the practice – from participation in it to what they perceived that it represented. In the view of the missionaries, the native Hawaiians could only achieve self-improvement through constant work and regular church attendance. As could be expected, this ‘nothing but surfing’ and ‘frolicking in the ocean the livelong day’ did not meet these expectations. Not only did the missionaries worry that surfing consumed too much of the native Hawaiians’ time (time that could be spent attending church services), but they also believed that the constant surfing developed and reinforced laziness.

Missionary conversion was not just concerned with the refinement of lifestyle practices, but also the introduction (imposition) of religious and Western cultural values. Imposed ‘missionary moral’ included modest dress, sexual propriety, and a general emphasis on religiosity. In the face of the face of these values, surfing was considered barbaric, evil, and

immoral (Laderman, 2014). As Walker notes, *haoles*<sup>4</sup> wrote of the sins of *he'enalu* (surfing) and related activities in articles of missionary-backed newspapers: "... Men, women, and children do this together in a single location like animals; they are like pigs that wallow together in the mire" (in *Ke Kemu Hawaii* in Walker, 2011: 27). And though missionaries never formally banned the activity, they made it clear that it would only 'hinder the heathens' moral progress' (Laderman, 2014).

While native Hawaiians had no intentions of simply renouncing their culture, they have real motivation to acquiescing to religious (Christian) precepts. Given the sweeping detrimental impact of foreign disease on Hawaiian society, Hawaiians were looking for some assurance of a stable future. The missionary promise of protection from disease guarantee of eternal life was understandably intriguing. As Laderman stated of the impending decision: "Wave riders thus faced a stark choice: immediate gratification – though with eternal damnation – or the immeasurable bounties of a heavenly future" (2014: 10).

However, despite missionary efforts and the enduring circumstances for natives, surfing never disappeared entirely. As Walker pointed out – the practice seemed to remain a problem for missionaries as evidenced by the existence (and persistence) of newspaper articles and letters that discouraged the practice – a sign that surfing was prominent enough to espouse ongoing opposition. Furthermore, the regular reference to surfing in Hawaiian-based newspapers indicates that it remained a topic of interest throughout the nineteenth century (2011). Simply but certainly: *Hawaiians surfed on*.

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<sup>4</sup> '*Haole*' is the Hawaiian term for a non-native (generally white) Hawaiian frequently used by Hawaiians to describe missionaries and other Western foreigners.



## 'Revival' & American Empire-Building

The extent of surfing's extinction (though notable in magnitude) is often overemphasized for the sake of introducing and *overstating* the Western role in its resurrection. While surfing did in some sense 'come back to life' and begin to grow at the turn of the twentieth century, it is important to note that it never *died* – and it was *Hawaiians* who kept it alive.

Warshaw exclaimed that the revival of surfing made sense, as it aligned with a time that writers and artists – through their expression – ignited the public sentiment for the ocean (2010). As romantic of a sentiment that is, there is something far less romantic that played a part in its revival: American imperialism. In 1898, against the will of the Hawaiian people (and the ideals/prescriptions of the Constitution), Washington annexed the island nation. As Laderman put it: "As Hawai'i became American, so, too did surfing" (2014: 17). As part of their imperial project, Americans worked to capitalize on Hawaii's economic potential as a tourist destination – and surfing, they believed, would be the perfect element to sell the island as exotic but still American.

Hawaii's intrigued visitors soon became advocates for the sport – urging others to pick up wave-riding. When Jack London sailed his boat, *Snark*, from San Francisco to Hawaii, he wrote volumes about the practice he both witnessed and attempted (Warshaw, 2010). London, however, was not the first to do so – preceded by Mark Twain in 1866. Twain, after trying (and failing) to master the basics of the sport, wrote: "None but the natives can ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly" (Twain, 1872). London – unlike his predecessor – was determined to dispel of that notion. The task was particularly encouraged by a man named Alexander Hume Ford. Ford – a South Carolina native – arrived in Hawaii in 1907 (just six months prior to *Snark*). He immediately took to surfing not just as a recreational activity but also as an opportunity, as he

saw surfing as a way to promote Hawaii to the rest of the world. London soon became his first project.

Alexander Hume Ford is commonly fallaciously lauded as single-handed exporting surfing to the rest of the world. A more appropriate description would be a key figure in advancing the Western imperial mission in Hawaii. Thus, Ford was not only interested in exporting the practice, but importing Westerners to the island nation. He believed that surfing would prove to be “one of the greatest assets toward bringing the confounded tourists to our hospitable shores” (1907). With imperialist tendencies came an unmistakable imperialist attitude, as Ford insisted that the territory “be redeemed from the Oriental, fortified and American as it should be (1907). This belief soon became Ford’s ultimate mission. As Laderman explained, “Peopling the island with his fair-skinned compatriots would become, for the restless mainlander, a personal crusade of the utmost necessity” (Laderman, 2014: 21).

Furthermore, Ford was determined to declare surfing as a sport of the *haoles*. In crediting them with revolutionizing the sport, he claimed: “The white man and boy are doing much in Hawaii to develop to art of surf-riding... Games and feats never dreamed of by the natives are being tried” (Ford, 1907: 17). To reify this notion, he formed the Outrigger Canoe and Surfboard Club – a de facto whites-only organization of surfers (Warshaw, 2010). The absurdity of this claim is substantiated alone by its falsity. However, Ford’s adamancy in the *haole* role in the development of the sport is more ludicrous in that he himself learned how to surf from native Hawaiians. In response to this claim and the forming of the Outrigger club, a group of talented Hawaiian surfers formed their own club – Hui Nalu (Walker, 2011) . Members of the club contrasted their club from that of Ford’s by claiming that unlike Outrigger, Hui Nalu is not for wealthy white men (Warshaw, 2010).

The attempted appropriation of surfing by *haoles* was not entirely contentious. Ford and others continued excluding native Hawaiians, claiming responsibility for the revolutionizing of the sport, and even asserting that whites were surpassing Hawaiians in surf expertise. However, according to Warshaw, the native Hawaiians did in some sense appreciate what Ford and others were doing to help develop the sport in their promotion of it. Of Ford and London's designation of surfing as the 'Sport of Kings,' Warshaw explained: "... Hawaiians no doubt appreciated the designation. It did nothing to make up for the fact that their culture had been stepped on and dragged around for more than a century... But everyone knew that 'Sport of Kings' meant *Hawaiian kings*" (Warshaw, 2010: 45). This recognition, though only implied, was deserved and appreciated.

To share the wonders of wave riding with the wider (Western) world, Ford turned to the press. He wrote articles for *Collier's*, *St. Nicholas*, *Travel*, and *Paradise of the Pacific* and eventually founded his own monthly publication, the *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, which he filled with stories and pictures of this thrill of the Pacific. Ford and others also drew on circumstances of time and place in attempting to draw Westerners to Hawaii. As Laderman explained, in addition to surfing, Hawaii itself could offer a much-desired escape from newfound (and overwhelming) modernity to a place of perceived pre-industrial authenticity. The promotional materials suggested that the "paradisiacal Hawaiian... knew how to relax, how to live in gracious harmony with the environment, [and] seemed to have an abundance of pleasure in a time of scarcity" (Laderman, 2014: 38).

## Spread & Americanization

As more and more native Hawaiians, *haoles*, and travelers alike picked up the surfing, the practice began to move beyond the Hawaiian shores. And though Ford initiated efforts to facilitate the practice's spread – and he and London are often falsely credited with its 'restoration' – he was in no way solely responsible for its spread out of Hawaii (Walker, 2011). As Laderman proclaimed, "Just as it was Hawaiians who spearheaded surfing's turn-of-the-century resurgence – a resurgence that has since been attributed to Hawaiians – it was Hawaiians who served as the most notable diplomats for their ancestral sport" (2014:33).

*"Shaking the water from my eyes as I emerged from one wave and peering ahead to see what the next one looked like, I saw him tearing in on the back of it standing upright on his board, carelessly poised, a young god bronzed with sunburn" (London, 1911: 293)*

Above is an excerpt from Jack London's account of his expedition on *Snark*, in which London recounts his first vision of George Freeth surfing Waikiki. Freeth was a Waikiki local who was known on the island primarily for his exemplary swimming and diving. However, he easily channeled his athleticism into wave riding – eventually coming the island's best surfer. As Warshaw explained, "Ford may have been early surfing's greatest organizers, and London its celebrity troubadour but Freeth was the one who actually got out there among the big smoking combers and rode" (2010: 47). Both Ford and London recognized Freeth's magnifying presence in the ocean and sought to harness it as part of their project of exporting the surfing. So, they purchased for Freeth a one-way ticket to San Francisco - exporting the practice in the form of George Freeth.

Upon arrival, Freeth soon realized that San Francisco would not be the breeding ground for American surf. Thus, after a brief stay he soon relocated south to the Los Angeles area. Upon

his arrival, Freeth was under the assumption that he would be the first surfer to grace the North American coast. However, he was in fact preceded by other ‘surf experiments’ – though none of them were successful. This is what would set Freeth apart. The same magnetism that caught Ford and London attracted Southern Californians near and far. Spectators would gather each day to watch the Hawaiian wonder demonstrate his surf riding. Warshaw describes the scene as follow:

*“In the summer and fall of 1907, twice each weekend afternoon, at 2 and 4pm, visitors were invited to the water’s edge in front of the Hotel Redondo, where a megaphone-wielding announcer introduced George Freeth as the ‘Hawaiian wonder’ who could ‘walk on water.’ Wearing a tight green two-piece woolen bathing suit, Freeth was already positioned beyond the surf line. As the crowd applauded, he’d wheel his heavy 8-foot redwood plank around, paddle back and out and do it again, Twenty minutes later, for an encore, he would ride in standing on his head. Finally, powerlifting his board into the crook of his shoulder as he exited the surf, Freeth crossed the sand to the Hotel Redondo changing room, acknowledging the whistles and cheers of approval with a quick self-conscious wave of the hand” (Warshaw, 2010:49-50)*

Freeth’s surf demonstrations and lessons were not just awe inspiring – they were also ‘student-inspiring.’ California’s younger spectators were curious and eager to try out wave riding for themselves. Freeth’s students and others began developing their own ‘surf colonies’ – forming the base of California’s early beach/surf culture (Warshaw, 2010).

### Early Development of the California Surf

*“Either a propitious beginning or a dismal end” (Laderman, 2014: 40)*

Whether the original surf communities liked it or not – surfing was taking off in all directions – eventually finding its way to every coast with a swell. One of these coasts was Southern California, where the surf scene was developing rapidly. The early development of the California scene coincided with the Great Depression. Financial insecurity and other conditions of the Depression did not seem to notably impede the development of surfing. Warshaw attributes this to the minimal or ‘cheap’ living inherent in the surf lifestyle. He explains “... They made their own trunks and surfboards, pulled lobsters and abalone from the sea, gathered wood for their

own fires, and could build an evening's entertainment around a ukulele" (Warshaw, 2010: 65). And although surfing did not provide any tangible compensation, it gave people something to do – an inexpensive and exhilarating distraction.

With time (and with the easing of uncertain times), more and more people – particularly those living by the coast – were being encouraged to try out wave riding. Magazines ran articles on how to construct your own surf board and many – especially California schoolboys – did just that. Once they were hooked to the sport, they found any way they could to get out to the ocean. Soon enough, this eagerness and experience developed into real skill – skill that rivaled that of some of the Hawaiian experts. Further, many of these young surfers began forming their own surf clubs. Unlike the Outrigger Canoe and Surfboard Club, these clubs were not necessarily centered on exclusivity. Rather, they were just about gathering groups of people (mostly college students) to surf together. Further, they served to help validate and familiarize a still novel and to nonsurfers – unusual – activity (Warshaw, 2010).

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF 'SURF CITY'

*"Surfing wasn't born here but it has surely grown up here" (Hartley, 1999: 137)*

Today, surfing has in some places retained that essence of counterculture, but in many places – especially places near big surfable breaks – it has spread and popularized, becoming a major part of local culture. One of these places is Encinitas, California. Though Encinitas was not always a surf town. Until 1881, the coastline at Encinitas was regarded as 'inhabitable.' At this time, however, the California Southern Railroad Company started building tracks that were set to run through now-Encinitas. It was this set of tracks that brought the area its earliest settlers – settlers to whom Encinitas was falsely advertised as a resource-rich 'Promised Land' full of hundreds of

inhabitants. In reality, Encinitas at this time was barren and its “hundreds of inhabitants” consisted of no more than eleven residents. Despite misleading promotions, many of the new families stayed. And after cooperatively combating the aftermath of a flood, the community started to grow – more residents were entering and more establishments were being built (i.e. a community center and a high school that brought together city and farm children together in the classroom). Eventually, just over a century later (in 1986), the city of Encinitas as it exists today was incorporated – joining together five local neighborhoods (of residents with roots in the first generation of inhabitants) of Leucadia, Old Encinitas, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, New Encinitas, and Olivenahin.

While Encinitas did not officially become ‘The city of Encinitas’ until fairly recently, it became defined as a surf site earlier on. Based on accounts of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Encinitas, it appears as though it was always a fairly active place – with residents making use of the type of space they had available to participate in whatever sport was most suitable. The dirt land served as sites for many a tennis match (played on a makeshift court) or baseball game. However, the biggest, most obvious and most exhilarating attraction was the vast ocean. As soon as the ocean was declared safe (and likely before that), residents took advantage of it as a recreational space. Local tales claim that young Encinitas teenagers were learning to surf on ironing boards in the early-mid 1900s at a little break now known as ‘Swami’s.’ Though surf activity was relatively quiet over the next couple of decades, quietly but suddenly, local surfers started to *get good*. Linda Benson – an Encinitas native – was considered *the* top female surfer in the 1970s. On top of that, she served as the stunt (surf) double in the popular (and profound for the popularization of surfing) Gidget movies. And it was just around this time when more and more people rapidly began picking up the practice and crowding the Encinitas beaches. Since then, the local Encinitas

breaks have only become more renowned and more populated – inhabited regularly by local surfers and visited by surfers worldwide. And while it is one of many towns to claim the title of ‘Surf City,’ it is certainly not an overstatement, if anything for the reason Mac Hartley (author of *Encinitas: History & Heritage*) states: “Encinitas is many things to many people but it holds a special meaning for surfers” (Hartley, 1999: 140).



## CHAPTER 4 ETHNOGRAPHY

### THE SURFER

From the earliest spotting of the ‘carelessly poised young gods’ dominating the swell on the shores of Waikiki to the young packs Californian lingo-ridden minimalists who inhabited the breaks, ‘the surfer’ has cultivated the reputation of a free-spirited, thrill-seeking nonconformist. And while the Encinitas wave-rider is ceaselessly drawn to the break – barefoot and mystified – he/she is no local anomaly – no rebel of the native ways. In Encinitas, it is unusual *not* to be a surfer (or at the very least live with one). Unlike earlier periods in surf history or in areas surrounding less popular breaks, surf culture here is no insular, marginal subculture – it is *the* culture. As such, the community is populated with countless wave-riders, each with their own surf narrative – the story of their first taste of the thrill, first encounter with the true danger of the break, and how they eventually learned to hold their own in the ocean. Each can only attempt to put into words the captivating insatiability of the pursuit. Below, are the profiles of three of these local surfer – how they came to be eternal wave-riders

#### The Encinitas Wave-Riders

*Michael*

*“I praise God that I can do this every day”*

Michael is a self-described “hack” when it comes to handiwork and “intellectual,” as he loves to read and contemplate difficult existential questions (often aloud). The “surfer” is simply implied. Michael was born and raised in Encinitas – living by and surfing the local breaks incessantly since he was young. He has only really left the local area twice (and both briefly and still

nearby). He first left for college, where he studied German literature at UC San Diego, though admitted he would mostly surf instead of attending class with the beach being so close. He also spent a brief period of time living just miles south of Encinitas on the shore of Del Mar. Today, he lives about two miles from Swami's in a modest home with his wife, Selina (from Switzerland). When he is not working from home as a practicing lawyer, he is – given the right conditions – surfing. Michael surfs both recreationally and competitively – the latter referring to his participation in competitions worldwide. And when he is not technically riding the waves himself, he (with the help of Selina) runs SoCalvry – a 'gospel surf camp' – a marriage of his passions: religion and surfing. Throughout the year, they rent out a room in their home to travelers– taking advantage of their prime location to make a little bit of extra money, to host their international visiting surf friends, and to meet and introduce new people (hopefully surfers) to Encinitas. Michael – though sometimes cynical about the shallow materialism of his fellow Southern Californians, is eternally grateful for his life – a life that revolves around the tides.

### *Caroline*

*“I feel like I'm on top of the world”*

Caroline is a locally beloved employee of Surfdog's Java Hut, where she works regularly serving coffee and meals, sneaking extra treats to canine regulars, and talking surf with customers. A San Diego native, Caroline first tried surfing when she was a kid. However, her first injury-inducing surf experience was so traumatic (she still has a scar from it), that she did not pick up a surfboard again for decades. Her fears were further propagated by a larger cultural Jaws-induced perception of the ocean as dangerous. Finally, on a family trip to Maui – at age 30 – she decided to give surfing another shot. After a little adjusting, she caught one wave and was “hooked.” Now, Caroline surfs every single day – though *only* 5-6 days a week in the winter (because the

water is colder). Her daughter picked up the practice just a couple of years ago and is breaking into the competitive scene. While she does not know whether her daughter is imbued with the fearlessness to advance as a competitor, she does not mind spending potential surf time traveling up and down the California coast to watch and support her. Though most of her daughter's surfing happens at the local Encinitas breaks, so Caroline gets to enjoy many surf sessions with her company. When she is not surfing with her daughter, she is surfing alongside her very good friends – one of her most cherished parts of the wave-riding experience. Although then there is of course the exhilaration of riding a wave – to which nothing else compares. No matter how long the day, how cold the water, or how many rides she has already had this week, the thought of catching *that* wave is ceaselessly exciting.

*Steve*

*“You have to give your whole soul to it”*

Unlike Michael and Caroline, Steve is new to the Southern California area. Until three months ago, Steve was living *and surfing* in Chicago, Illinois. Midwestern, ocean access-less Chicago is by no means a destination surf spot. However, with the right conditions (wind that produces an off-shore swell) waves can and do form on Lake Michigan. And where there are ‘surfable’ waves, there are surfers – approximately 50 in Illinois and the surrounding area according to Steve. In 2008, Steve happened to look out the window of his apartment overlooking the lake and saw some of those surfers. He had been windsurfing, skateboarding, and snowboarding but as soon as he saw those wave-riders, he thought to himself – *“I want to do THAT.”* He borrowed a board and some equipment from a friend and set off. He decided then that he wanted to be a surfer for the rest of his life. And from that day on he has been “on a mission” to keep surfing. Soon, Steve become part of the Chicago-area surf community, which he describes as more of a

‘brotherhood.’ Together, they endure the frigid conditions and enjoy the fairly unusual surf experience of competition-free waters, as there are so many waves even on the most crowded of days. Owing to the meteorology background of some his fellow Chicago-area wave-riders (who can predict an imminent swell at Lake Superior), he can join in on 8-hour adventures to partake in epic afternoons of wave-riding.

Steve ended up in Encinitas through what he describes as a ‘serendipitous turn of events.’ When he left Chicago, he left his entire life behind and almost entirely for surfing. Though as a life coach, he was able to take his career with him. With just a few months of southern California living under his belt, he is still getting acclimated – though he resonates with the ‘energy’ of Encinitas (which he attributes to the surf culture and the nearby Self-Realization Fellowship). Otherwise, little concerted effort was needed to adjust to the warm waters and endless surf. The caliber of surf expertise and large surfer population places him in a novel position – as a relatively inexperienced newcomer – but the opportunity to surf at these renowned breaks certainly compensates. In fact, there was recently a particularly good swell that lasted a few weeks. On one of his sessions during that period, he had one of the “most insane” rides of his life. His time upright on the board added up to no more than 30 seconds – and it took eight years of his life to get a ride like that. It was so remarkable that he got out of the water immediately after because it made his session more than worth it. In fact, those 30 seconds made the decision to move to Encinitas – to leave his friends, family, neighbors, and favorite local coffee shop – worth it.

### Who Is ‘The Encinitas Surfer?’

While the profiles of these local wave-riders are by no means fully illustrative of the entire Encinitas surf population, where their stories diverge and converge is telling. So, who are these Encinitas surfers? Are they single-minded, counterculture ‘thrill junkies?’ While each are deeply bound to and enamored by surfing, they each lead lives – unique lives – outside of surfing. And though the magnetism of the waves may compel them to seek the surf unconditionally, not all surfers embody this perceived careless fearlessness. Further, some do not even need a day of particularly big waves to leave the break feeling electrified and invincible. Yet, they all do – whatever their surf experience may be – they exit the break simultaneously fulfilled and mystified. Where they converge is in their perpetual quest for more surf and the primacy that surfing takes in their lives. Despite differences in their backgrounds, experience, or motivation, the Encinitas surfer – with infinite access to one of the best breaks in the world – sees nothing unreasonable in racing the daylight to endure a likely cold and certainly dangerous hour in the water – with only ever a *chance* of catching a wave. Thus, the question remains: What – besides or *behind* the vague allure of the waves – is motivating the Encinitas surfer?

### *The ‘One Wave’ & Chasing the Thrill*

In reality, nearly the entirety of a surf session is consumed with traveling to the site, preparing (equipment and self), waiting, and enduring often cold and potentially physically uncomfortable and inarguably dangerous experiences. Even catching just *one* good wave is not guaranteed. Yet, when asking a surfer to recall their experience in the water, these parts never seem to make it into their recollections. To many surfers, these consuming elements of the experience may be perceived as necessary steps and conditions in an important quest (catching a wave), and thus, not worthy of mentioning. However, this regular omission of all other components of the surf

experience also speaks to the seemingly unanimous significance of the *one wave*. The one wave that got them hooked to surfing in the first place the one wave that motivated them to get (and stay) back on the board after a near-death surf experience, the one wave that made leaving everything behind in their life worth it. Every surfer seems to have a single wave (or sometimes single surf session) that for them is paired with and more so – responsible for – a pivotal moment in their surf career. During that single wave (or session) and the thrill of riding it, they were overcome by a feeling of excitement, empowerment, deep connection to nature, or unmatched invincibility. This feeling – at that particular time and place – meant for them *whatever they needed it to mean*. In other words, the thrill may have been felt and understood as a mark of a newfound fearlessness if the respective surfer had previously been fearful of returning to the waves. Or, it may have established surfing as one’s purpose if formerly they felt aimless or without passion. Regardless of what exactly this wave signified for them, it produced a powerful connection. Once they experience it, they want to experience it again and indefinitely – they need to *chase it*. While most surfers don’t explicitly describe it as an obsession or addiction, they certainly characterize it as such. Michael, after a long day of listening to lectures as part of a Continuing Legal Education course, emerged from his office space for a short break. In characteristic fashion, he simultaneously contemplated and explained aloud – recalling a lecturer who spoke about rampant drug and alcohol abuse in the legal profession. After sharing the fact with me, he paused, and with an expression of simultaneous relief and gratitude stated: “Me? ... *I have surfing.*”

*“Just Being Out There”*

This sentiment was voiced more frequently by older surfers but not exclusively. For some, this element (and their appreciation for it) is bound up in the thrill of catching waves. For others, however, it is what compels them just as much or even more than the quest for catching the best waves. In addition to the general idea of simply being on a board in the water, wave riders pointed to two additional more specific elements of this concept. The less romantic of the two – but important in its relevance to a large portion of Encinitas wave-riders – is simply, exercise. Surfing – in addition to all of its other ‘majestic’ qualities is fantastic exercise. Further, many avid wave-riders noted that even when the surf is small or nonexistent, they will still go out just to paddle around just for the physical activity (and they genuinely enjoy this). For others, their decision to surf is dependent on at least the possibility of catching a wave. These surfers, Michael for example, feel as if they have to find some other way to stay active during any brief lull in good surf conditions and will look for local pick-up games (i.e. soccer) to compensate for the missing exercise. Additionally, in this area in particular, there are a number of surfers who partake in formal surf competitions. *For the most part, here is not exactly a distinction between competitive surfers and recreational surfers here, as ‘training’ and ‘just surfing’ are commonly not two separate entities. Moreover, as will be discussed in detail later, surfers’ participation in competitions does not determine their status as a surfer in these local breaks.* For these competitive surfers, the ‘exercise’ component is likely more pronounced than it is in the average surfer’s motivation – particularly for those whom competitive surfing is their livelihood.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the exercise, another element of “just being out there” is the social experience of it. As illustrated by Caroline’s surf experience, the shared passion translates into opportunities for

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<sup>5</sup> This is not an entirely far-fetched idea as a number of world famous surfers call Encinitas their home (i.e. Rob Machado) and a number of up and coming aspiring young surfers

shared experiences in the water. It is not uncommon to see parents surfing alongside their kids or peers of any and all ages arriving to the break together. The experience of surfing at the same spot regularly also creates opportunities for forging friendships. After just a few months of surfing at Swami's, Steve has already started to recognize and connect with other regulars – just based on their 'regular' status alone. Others who have been surfing in the area for longer emphasized (with gratitude) that they have made close friends in the water – friends with whom they can regularly share the surf experience.

### *A Lifelong Pursuit*

Proximity to the ocean – specifically an area with good waves and relatively warm waters – is often cited as the obvious basis for the widespread local surfer phenomenon. While this is certainly true and relevant, many surfers argued that everyone does surf because *everyone can surf*. The nature of the practice, the process of developing as a surfer, and (seemingly ironically) the difficulty of the pursuit contributes to the longevity of the 'surfer lifespan.' Surfers I spoke to all at some point emphasized (unprompted) the difficulty of the practice. While Caroline took an extended hiatus from the sport until she was an adult, other adults I spoke with noted that after decades of continuous surfing, they feel as if they are still learning. In fact, while Caroline was explaining her surf story to me, her co-worker – Kelly – chimed in, claiming that she has been surfing since she was a teenager but she just now – at 34 – feels like she is getting better at it. Many surfers seemed to recognize and internalize this notion of long-term continued progress. Steve believes that part of its zealous intrigue lies in the fact that it can never be perfected but you can continue to work at it – and that is why many of the surfers out at Swami's are in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. This is unusual for most sports where athletes hit a peak age some time



during younger adulthood – especially ones as continuously physically demanding as surfing (and here – constant surfing). Thus, surfing in Encinitas really is a lifelong pursuit. Children here – often accompanied by parents or peers – get to test the waters at a young age. And for those with whom the practice resonates (if and when they ride their ‘one wave’) can and typically do pursue it for as long as they can. And while there is no doubt that accumulated experience translates to increased ability, at some point, it does not seem to matter whether or not the surfer feels like they are improving. What matters is that they can keep waking up every day, putting on a wetsuit and paddling out to the break.

### *‘Your Entire Soul’*

An important element of the surf experience is its all-consuming nature. Sure, anyone can decide one day that they want to become a surfer. You cannot, however, do it half-heartedly – largely because it is too difficult (requiring a great deal of time to learn, get comfortable, and improve) and there is just too much involved (equipment, travel, uncertain/uncomfortable conditions). Thus, the nature of continuous engagement in the practice necessitates a certain dedication to and fervor for surfing. As one Encinitas wave-rider claimed, “You have to give your whole soul to it.” This giving of oneself not only develops a sense of purpose but almost naturally, an identity as a surfer. This identity is not only felt and perceived internally, but also, validated and reinforced by the surrounding surf community, as fellow surfers will engage with each other *as surfers*. Steve and others claim that there is a great respect that exists among most surfers – a respect that extends to anyone who is just ‘getting out and doing it.’ Further, this sense of self as a surfer is grounded in the shared acknowledgement that surfing is something special – beyond what anyone else can perceive. As Steve put it: “Surfing is the most amazing thing in the universe. *Only a surfer knows that.*”

## The 'Soul Surfer'

In conclusion, the Encinitas surfer though mystified – is not mystical. With no degradation to their commitment and pursuit, they are in essence 'regular' people who happen to (or choose to) live by one of the great surf breaks and are surrounded by people who have discovered and are openly fanatical about surfing. At some point in their lives – maybe after growing up watching the waves and their riders out the car window on South Coast Highway 101 –they tried out the practice. Whether they tagged along with an idolized parent, was persuaded by an enthusiastic peer, or were encouraged by an internal unrelenting curiosity, they found surfing and, at some point, it took on an invaluable personal meaning. It is the irreproducible thrill paired with this meaning that motivates the surfer's ceaseless chase. And it is this motivation that justifies the characterization of the Encinitas surfer as a 'soul surfer'<sup>6</sup> – one who surfs for the pure joy of surfing. This 'soul' of the Encinitas surfer may be locally bred, as a result of a growing up amongst other surfers of this nature or it may have been developed ways away, but seeks the breaks and 'energy' to live and be amongst other soul surfers. And for that, they find 'Surf City.'

### SURF CITY

*"We accept the wet money here!"*

Signs advertising "sod fertilizer," "soil amendments," "irrigation and drip products" grace the front window of Hydro-Scape Products on South Coast Highway 101. Below those signs, however, is a hand painted seascape – filled with animated palm trees, beach umbrellas, surfboards propped up in the sand, and rolling, occupied waves. In the corner, sits a billboard

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<sup>6</sup> The term "soul surfer" originated in the in 1960s to describe a surfer who "rides for personal enrichment" (Warshaw, 2005)

that reads “*Surf City.*” Formal or not, consensus or not – Encinitas undoubtedly feels like a surf city. The streets are filled with murals and mosaics (longingly depicting the activity possible just yards away), cars with surfboards mounted and wetsuits hanging out the window, and punctured by “Surf Crossing” signs to accommodate the countless roaming, barefoot wave-riders. While Encinitas surfers lead their own unique lives, have distinct motivations for and draw personal meanings from their pursuit, they are connected by their shared passion for surfing – and this collectivity is fostered and reinforced in a town of, by, and for surfers.

### Specialized Knowledge

One thing that all avid surfers share is a comprehensive knowledge of the ocean (of course with variation in extent). While the majority of surfers are not in fact trained or practicing meteorologists or oceanographers, they all, developed by necessity and experience have an impressive understanding not only how to work the waves, but also *how the waves work*. This knowledge includes (but is by no means limited to) a comprehension of the tides (not only when the tides are high and low but also when are how to surf in these tides) and the effects/manifestation of winds, rain, and big storms. As a result, they know where, when, and how to enter and navigate a break and have the ability to look at the water or hear about elements of the conditions and can predict where and when it might be good next or regrettably, how late they were in missing the good surf. In addition to their knowledge about the ocean, surfers are, not surprisingly, very informed about surf technology, including wetsuits, surfboards, and other equipment. Often, these two knowledge bases work in tandem as selection of equipment is determined by the particular conditions of the water at the time of the surf session. This aspect of surfing warrants and deserves greater attention and further exploration. For the purposes of this

research, however, it will be considered in the context of its place and relevance in this particular surf community. In Encinitas, this deep, specialized knowledge harbored by many of its residents (the surfers and even other locals – given their proximity to the ocean) serves not only the individual surfer in their quest to catch the best waves, but also the surfers as a collective. In and out of the water, the topics of surf conditions and surf technology dominate conversation. Both from my observations and from the input of some locals, this is in no way an exclusionary device. Rather, the ability to engage in a conversation seeped in this surf knowledge often sparks dialogue between individuals who otherwise may not have had a reason – outside of a general friendliness – to interact. Time and time again I witnessed a conversation initially among two people about off-shore winds or a debate about whether or not to bring out the short board become a store-wide conversation – with additional input more than welcomed. Additionally – with the seemingly infinite age range of Encinitas surfers – these conversations could be and sometimes were intergenerational.

### Surf Networks

As Michael noted plainly and others implied with their sense of obsessive urgency to surf, there exists a fear among avid surfers of missing good surf conditions. And while surfers certainly do not like crowds (which results in more competition at the break and fewer potential waves to catch), the desire to take advantage of every good surf day or session exceeds this aversion. This reality is illustrated by the regular formation, elaboration, and utilization of surf networks. These networks consist of surfers dispersed throughout the local area who have a particular base of knowledge – largely based on their proximity to particular part of the coastline. In other words, local surfers rely on each other to learn about the real-time conditions of the breaks – reaching out to contacts who live near or have immediate access to a specific surf break. While advances

in modern technology (likely prompted by this same urgency) have facilitated the creation of “surf cams” – cameras that are set up in view of the breaks and whose footage can be accessed in live time over the internet – surfers don’t rely on them entirely. This may be in part because the visual is not always available or spectacular and also because the word of mouth of an experienced wave rider may always prove more trusted.

Based on my observations and discussion with surfers, it appears as though these networks can manifest as either *set* or *spontaneous*. A set network, here, refers to an arrangement in which individuals regularly rely on each other in the planning a surf session. For example, Michael had learned that the surf was supposed to be good at a break a couple of miles south of Swami’s the following day. Early the next morning, Michael called his friend who lived and surfed at that break, who ultimately informed him that the conditions did not actually look as good as they were said to be. If and when the circumstances reverse (and word arises that the surf is about to be good at Swami’s), she could reach out to Michael and he could share the conditions at his break. Spontaneous networks, rather, are more informal and temporary – consisting of individuals who happen to cross paths and ultimately discuss what they know about the local conditions based on their own surf experience from earlier in the day or what they have heard from others about the conditions. Networks like these, though clearly present here, are actually more important in other disparate surf communities, like Steve’s Chicago area community, where most surfers (who are few and far between) do not have immediate access to a reliable break and often must travel long distances to reach surfable waves.

### Surf Spaces

If Encinitas was entirely devoid of people (a scenario limited to one’s imagination) – there would still be no question that it is a surf town – not just because of its access to surf breaks but because

of the ‘spaces’ of which it is composed. In addition to the public surf-related art, Encinitas is filled with surf shops, establishments that embrace surf culture, as well as other social and spiritual places where surfers tend to congregate and interact with one another.

### *By the Break*

Though not a formally designated or bounded area, an important set of spaces in Encinitas are those around the break. The nature of the landscape – the shore (about four flights of stairs worth) below the town itself creates an extensive natural onlooker zone. Built into these cliffs lining the shore are walking paths and ocean lookouts. The walking paths are almost constantly populated with walkers, runners and bikers. And while their objective may be just to exercise (maybe to exercise by the water), they are – intended or not – surf spectators. Though this aspect may be relatively trivial to those who are thinking nothing more of their daily morning run (or whatever other reason they may be utilizing the paths), the non-insular nature of the surf space and resulting access to regular public observation is notable. In addition to the paths lining the shore are the designated look out points. These are located intermittently along the shore – with some located right at the surf breaks themselves (generally next to/off of the parking lots and stairs to the water). These spaces are typically designed in a way that orients the onlooker out to the water. And while their intent may not be to permit passersby to watch surfers – that is generally what ends up happening and largely what people utilize them for in the first place. Thus, they play a similar role to the paths in that they permit the exposure of surfing, and further, allow viewers to take time and engage/purview the (surf) activity in the ocean. Many surfers will take advantage of these spaces to observe the conditions before and after a surf session (or in deciding whether or not to have one). An additional space, which is admittedly specific to one local surf break, is a grassy area adjacent to the Swami’s. The space would have been dismissed

as nothing but a small patch of grass adjacent to a parking lot if it was not consistently populated. Each day, groups and individuals would occupy a small space of the green area to practice yoga, or simply just lounge around. Sunday nights would bring upwards of 40-50 community members for what appeared to be a fairly informal but regular gathering, in which attendees would play or listen to music, make art, and lounge (or for young children – run) around in very close proximity to one another. And while this space was small and singular, it served as a area for both crowded community gathering and/or crowded solitude.

### *Surf Shops*



*Encinitas Surfboards*

Surf shops are unsurprisingly a staple in Encinitas – particularly lining the South Coast Highway and the surrounding ocean-side streets. On one hand, the purpose and relevance of these shops here is fairly obvious – surfers surf here and surfers need equipment. Moreover, surf shops offer rental services – making their (walking distance) proximity to the beach all the more important. However, these establishments also serve larger communal functions, including: maintaining a

sense of historicity, facilitating dialogue among community members, and making the ‘surf life’ viable.

*HISTORICITY* Many of the Encinitas surf shops have been established (both in the sense of their long standing presence and their high regard) the community for decades – serving generations worth of local surfers. One of the most notable of these shops is Hansen’s. Hansen’s is located almost as close as a shop could be to the entrance of Swami’s – a perk for store owners and customers alike. Hansen’s was started by Don Hansen in the in the early 1970’s. Hansen first arrived to the area in the early sixties (already an enamored soul surfer) after returning from a remarkable year of surfing in Hawaii. Although Hansen had been shaping boards for a number of years in the area, he realized that the local community was lacking a ‘quality surf shop’ to support the increasingly accepted (in the mainstream) and practiced local sport. Though among the largest surf shops in the county, Hansen’s has maintained its roots in Encinitas – remaining a single, family-owned and family-run surf shop. It is for this reason that Hansen’s truly considers itself a ‘heritage shop’ – rightfully recognizing its integral role in the community. Besides serving as a trusted shop for long-time residents (and an element to incorporate into their surf-related nostalgia), these sites arguably serve as sites of local history. Especially given that Encinitas was only fairly recently incorporated, these long-established, family-run shops have supported, represented, and connected the community for decades (generations). Moreover, many residents are aware of the role that many of their surf shops had in inspiring others like it all over San Diego County and beyond. Not surprisingly, Hansen’s and the local popularity of the practice have inspired a number of other shops of this nature. And while they may lack the



years of local service and place in surf history, they seem to recognize this valuable component as they incorporate into their store or sell (sometimes local) surf collectibles.

*DIALOGUE* While not all spaces have the value of being in the area for decades, nearly all surf shops – by the virtue of being surf shops (selling legitimate gear and run by knowledgeable surfers) – are a space for valued surf dialogue. Surfers – as it has been suggested – cannot get enough of the practice. So, when they are out of the water, all they want to do is be back in the water. And when that is not possible (bad conditions, logistical reasons, etc.), they will take advantage of any opportunity to talk about it. The primary type of conversation that occurs at surf shops seems to be technical/practical – about the best equipment to buy for the practice. However, many of the Encinitas customers are themselves very knowledgeable about the products there. Thus, the employee-customer interaction often turns into an exchange of knowledge about equipment, surf conditions, and all sorts of surf experiences. These shops are aware of and pride themselves in this value. Hansen’s boasts: “Hansen’s has become much more than a surf shop and *now stands as a pillar of the community*, offering a place for surfers, beach enthusiasts and travelers alike to shop, learn and talk story with a knowledgeable staff that lives and breathes the surf lifestyle.”<sup>7</sup> Another locally renowned shop is Encinitas Surfboards. Despite its convenient location on the main stretch of South Coast Highway 101, I did not actually step foot in Encinitas Surfboards for the first weeks of my visit. However, I had heard so much about it directly (and indirectly from seeing ‘Encinitas Surfboards’ apparel), I eventually decided I just had to go and see what the enthusiasm was about. To my initial surprise, the store was small, cramped, and fairly dark. But I soon realized that all that mattered was that it was ‘cramped’ with

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<sup>7</sup>See: <https://www.hansensurf.com/>

high-quality surf supplies and wave riders who had directed customers to the best gear and enlightened them with unmatched surf stories for over four decades. Other up-and-coming shops seem to value this element with similar primacy. The first thing a customer sees when they enter Concept Surf Shop is a world map with seemingly excessive and haphazardly placed push pins hold it to the wall. Upon closer look, and explanation by owner, Brett, the pins serve as markers, indicating the native countries of surfers who have visited his shop and exchanged with him surf narratives and sometimes even waves. Surfing Surf (a few minutes drive North of Swami's) even contains an additional social space. Their website states (with true "lax" surfer attitude: "We are literally a Mom & Pop shop. We are parents of young children. *We like Surfing Surf to have a family atmosphere.*" This last piece alludes another important point – while the topic of conversation is generally surfing, the discussion of surfing is not always the most important outcome of the dialogue. It is the 'family atmosphere' or sense of close-knit, engaged community that results from this interaction that is valued as well – and by surfers and nonsurfers alike.

*LIVELIHOOD* An important but unspoken function of these surf shops is that they permit surfers to make a livelihood out of surfing. The large, ever-growing local surf population and the increasingly influx of visitors (big-time surf tourists or tourists who want to engage in the 'local' way by taking a lesson or purchasing an authentic 'Encinitas Surfboards t-shirt) makes the local surf shop industry a decently lucrative pursuit. In other words, local surfers can take advantage of the potential consumption of surf gear to continue to engage in surfing outside of the water. Shops like Surfing Surf were created out of the pursuit among "longtime surf buddies." The shop can get away with listing their opening hours as "After we drop the kids off and check the surf" – partly because surfers appreciate this sort of logic and also because they can rely on their gig of

shaping surfboards for local big-time champions like Rob Machado. Down the street, Brett uses his shop to display the latest surf technology (his personal passion) because his business is largely supported by year-round surf lessons (for up to 800 students), which also support up to 15 full-time staff members and other part-time surf instructors. ‘Surf life’ is viable here – as a lifestyle and a *livelihood*.

### *Establishments that Embrace Surf Culture*



*Surfdog's Java Hut*

In addition to establishments whose primary function is surf-related, Encinitas is also full of shops whose primary purpose is generally unrelated to surfing, but they still bear surf imagery, attempt to establish a surf ‘feel,’ and not surprisingly, attract many local surfers. Surfdog’s Java Hut advertises itself as a “place to re-load after a grinding session at Swami’s.” (Though the shop in reality does not need to do much advertising for that, as many of the daily Swami’s-goers are also already regular customers here). The décor in Surfdog’s is meant to depict the interior of a

Hawaiian hut (a loose interpretation). Additionally, the walls bear surfboards and other surf imagery and a corner of the shop harbors a ‘Surf CD’ collection (which I imagine are no longer actually for sale and likely remain because no one felt the need to move them, but secondarily add to this sense of ‘surf feel’ and surf nostalgia). Moreover, everything from the logo, to the names of menu items, to the unique newspaper cut-out collages that cover each table top are surf-related. Regardless of whether or not establishments like these incorporate this imagery for the purpose of securing/boosting business, their pervasiveness in the community is notable. Similar to surf shops, many of these shops are staffed by long-time Encinitas residents (and often surfers). That, combined with their ‘surf vibe’ is likely what attracts surfers to these establishments in the first place – and the ability to listen, talk, and just think about surfing while being there is likely what keeps bringing them back.

Overall, these spaces speak *of* and *to* Encinitas. Meaning, their establishment, popularity, and growth reflect the clear unrelenting surf zeal of the community. Furthermore, they function (whether intentional or not) to keep surf culture alive outside of the water and to keep people engaged with the community and each other through the common bond of surfing.

## THE SURF

While much of my time in Encinitas was spent exploring and observing the local area, speaking with and listening to surfers, and surfing – a notable portion of my time was also spent at the break – both sitting at or near the shore and in the water surfing. My objective in these regular observational visits was to develop a sense of life at the break, but more so, how surfers engaged

with the break – With routine? With uniformity? With other surfers? Further, in the water specifically, I was interested in understanding any rules/norms and the ways in which surfers engaged with one another. Ultimately, I found the practice and experience of surfing itself to be emblematic of the ‘collective solitude’ of surf life. This duality – of the deeply personal and deeply collective pursuit was expressed in the components and intricacies the “the surf”

### Pre-Surf Routine

While each surfer may have their own distinctive pre-surf routine – in terms of temporal order of pre-surf activities or individualized rituals – most surfers engage in fairly similar practices before entering the water. Surfers in this area typically drive to the break. Though many of them may leave in walking distance (or otherwise fairly nearby), most surfers would rather not have to lug their board long distances (longer than from the parking lot or across the street to the shore). After parking near the break, the surfer then will – in some order – check out the surf conditions, make appropriate adjustments to their board (waxing it, adding or removing a leash), and – at least during relatively colder-water seasons – will put on wetsuit partially (enough to walk but not enough where it is constricting before it technically has to be). After taking care of everything that must be done at the car or in that general area, the surfer will head toward the shore. On the way (at Swami’s – on the way down many flights of stairs), the surfer may run into an acquaintance or stranger on their way out of the water who will report on the current conditions or will very briefly recap their experience – oftentimes in the form of an exasperated but excited “It’s fun out there!”

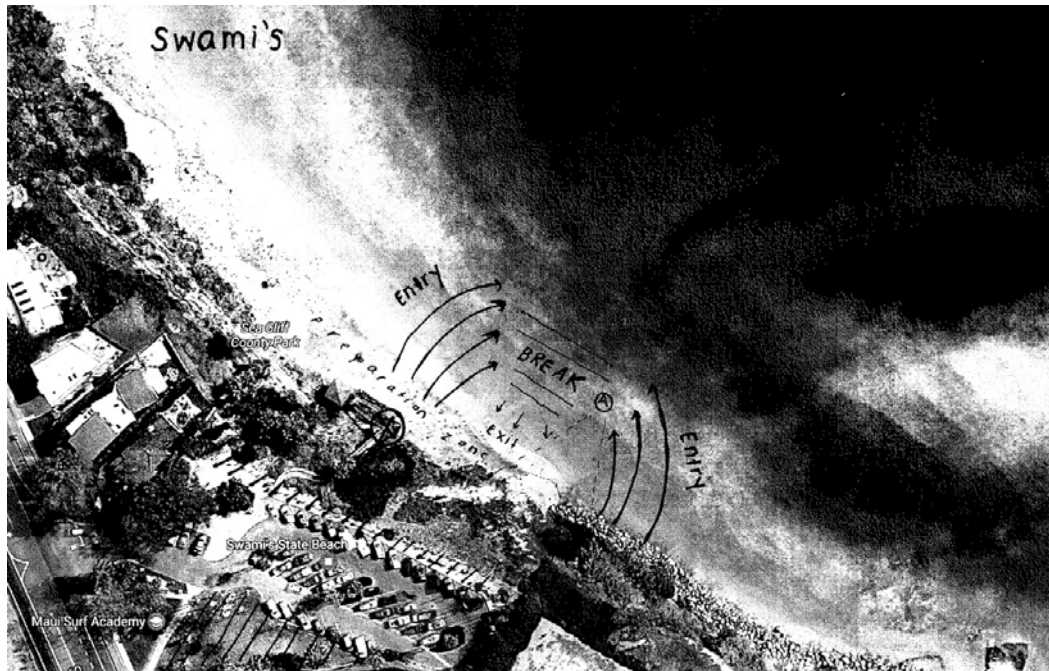
With the exception of the regular rotation of incoming and outgoing surfers, the shore itself is generally fairly empty. Occasionally there will be a few people walking down the stretch

of the shoreline, but, otherwise the it feels like it is dominantly a *surf spot*. While no one is lounging around on the beach, there are generally a few surfers preparing at the shore. Many surfers have their own individuated pre-surf routines or rituals. Each surfer, in some order, will examine the break, go through a series of stretches, and make the final adjustments on their equipment (zipping up their wetsuit, stashing their towels and/or now-undesired leashes). Occasionally, you will see someone incorporate a prayer into their routine.<sup>8</sup> Once the surfer has finished their routine, they will enter the water – walking with their board until they sense that they can start paddling (it is deep enough, they have passed the white water breaking by the shore). Interestingly, I noticed that even when people would arrive with other surfers, their entrance into the water seemed dependent on the completion of their routine – they go out on their own time.

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<sup>8</sup> Though unrelated to the research discussion, a note a made throughout my observation was the oddity of the prayer. The oddity does not refer to the spirituality (this in fact is not necessarily an uncommon trait of surfers) but rather that it – even as a natural part of someone’s surf routine – punctured the calm/confident air exuded by the surfer as they entered the water. It seemed in that all parts of the routine (and practice itself) prior to and after the prayer, the surfer exuded a calm confidence – demonstrating no hesitation as they were going to face the water. Yet, this prayer represented a rate admittance of the dangerous conditions of the ocean and an inability to ensure safety despite a well-established understanding of the ocean and much experience in it.

## Navigating the Surf



Where there are waves, there are surfers and where there are surfers, there is a 'line up.' In surfing, the lineup<sup>9</sup>, is the seriously adhered-to but ever-shifting hierarchy established at a particular surf break among surfers there. This hierarchy sets order for riders - dictating *how* they abide by surf etiquette and influenced by interactions between them. Any observer of a populated surf spot can recognize the almost seamless flow of waves breaking and riders setting off one-by-one - almost as if it was predetermined - which, in a sense, it is. As experienced surfers see or even 'sense' a wave coming from the distance, it is the lineup that dictates who gets to try and catch it.

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<sup>9</sup> "Lineup" also has another important meaning among surfers. Surfers "line up" between two stationary points on land to orient themselves in the water (typically the points correspond with the extremities of the break in the water).

### *Determining the Hierarchy*

Riders' status in the lineup is determined by both skill and experience (particularly experience at the specific break). Both of these components are important but localism (the latter) takes precedence - outweighing the value of skill. This significance is illustrated by a comment made by Michael, who emphasized that it does not matter if someone is a world champion - they still have to 'work their way up.' With this, he means that surfers – particularly those higher up in the lineup – will not automatically afford a very skilled surfer a spot high up in the lineup based on their talent alone. They must show respect to local established surfers, put in time and prove themselves at this particular break. *Note: This may not exist as strongly where the caliber of the average surfer is not so high (at a less renowned surf spot), as this remark by Michael was no exaggeration - not only do champion surfers frequent these local Encinitas breaks but also local surfers devote an extraordinary amount of time to the water here and are very skilled.*

### *Rules of the Line Up*

Surfers who are relatively 'higher up' in the lineup are permitted to linger on the inside of the break (where the waves are breaking - in prime position to catch them) and afforded preference to waves and thus waves at a greater frequency than surfers in a relatively lower position. Riders lower in the lineup, conversely, are expected to wait 'outside the break' - though may eventually be permitted to move in after waiting (at least until all of those higher in the lineup have caught waves). Higher frequency of waves and less crowding generally expedites this process of 'infiltrating' inside of the break. Once permitted to catch a wave, there is some pressure to perform. Riders must not only do well (make the best of the wave that they are taking) - as they are riding a sought-after wave, but also they must not appear as if they are trying to show off



(trying to outdo others in skill or trying skills of which they are incapable). Even if newcomer is very skilled, early waves are not the best time for experimenting in this way. Once this lower-seeded rider begins catching waves inside of the break, they still must give waves to more experienced riders.

### *Additional Surf Etiquette*

Many rules of surf etiquette are intertwined with explanation of hierarchy. However, some additional rules exist - and similarly - do not apply equally to all surfers. In other words, those higher up in the lineup do not have to adhere to them as strictly. In paddling out, surfers must be careful to stay out of the way of surfers to trying to ride a wave. This is especially important for inexperienced riders - largely because they are the most likely to accidentally get in the way.

Additionally, there exists the general rule of taking turns. Though as explained, surfers higher up in the lineup are permitted to more waves. Then there is the notorious act of 'dropping in,' which is in essence stealing a wave from someone else - particularly from someone else who was in better position to catch it. This is generally not accepted for anyone, as it is understood that the person who is there first (also in the best position to catch the wave) deserves to try and ride it.

Sometimes, positioning in the water makes it difficult for surfers to see that someone has already claimed the wave from the inside. A surfer adhering to proper surf etiquette should back off upon seeing that someone has claimed the wave first. An observer (from land) may be able to spot this if they see someone immediately/intentionally cease their attempt to get in front of the wave and turn around (which typically means they are giving up the wave or in some cases, it is because they realized they could not paddle out in front of the wave quickly enough). While dropping in on someone is, again, generally unacceptable, more established/experienced or just plain mean

surfers (this is a type) will do this to establish dominance or simply because they want the best waves and depending on skill/local status can *almost* can away with this. Though these surfers typically do not make a lot of friends in the water. *\*This etiquette certainly takes on localized forms but these rules widespread enough that a newcomer can follow this explanation as a guide to surfing in a new spot and as a result, navigate successfully*

### *Interactions*

From time surfing in Encinitas and discussions with local Encinitas surfers (further substantiated by other personal and anecdotal surf experience), I recognized three types of interactions that occur among surfers in the ocean. Surfing - even when practiced together - is largely a solitary activity. In practicing the activity, riders are often physically separated and otherwise on their own - as their ability to navigate the waves safely and successfully is dependent on constant (and immediate) individual decision-making. However, given the shared nature of the space (the surf break) - particularly popular ones in which you can almost always guaranteed to be filled with multiple surfers - interactions between surfers occur. Some are a merely reflective of established surf etiquette, while others can in fact influence the position of surfers in the lineup. The three interactions observed include: *protection, collaboration, and conflict/competition.*

*PROTECTION* In some ways, this is the most 'selfless' interaction in the water - in that of the three outlined interactions, this is the type in which the surfer instigating the interaction is least likely to be expecting something in return. Protection in this sense refers to the act of surfers looking out for each other. In a more typical case, this consists of one surfer (Surfer A) warning another (Surfer B) of an oncoming wave. Given the experience and thus, developed sensibility of

the water (particularly in Encinitas), this is not much of a common occurrence in that the surfers who frequent these breaks know how to predict, avoid, or co-exist with turbulent natural or other dangerous conditions. However, even the most experienced surfer may briefly be in a (physical) position where they cannot see an oncoming wave or surfer. In that case, Surfer A (who is sitting outside of the break or in a better position to see what may unfold) will yell out to Surfer B with no formal instructions (as they are not needed - the yelling is enough, as Surfer B typically just needs to know of impending danger and they already know how to navigate safely). A more serious incident (i.e. someone is hurt, caught in a rip tide) will also call the attention and attempted assistance of other surfers. The physical dislocation from immediate medical/other assistance and collective understanding of potential serious danger of the waves develops a sense of obligation to help a surfer in danger (though surfers know they must be careful not to also put themselves in the same harmful position while aiding). How surfers engage in this type of interaction is less dependent on their place in the lineup (with the exception of a more experienced surfer maybe taking more initiative in attempting to resolve the situation). Rather, it is a reflection of a component of surf etiquette - looking out for other surfers, respecting/protecting others in surfer community - not because they are any higher or lower in the lineup but because they are a fellow surfer.

*COLLABORATION* This interaction is generally positive (it can become contentious though this is not its primary objective) and compared to protection, there are strings attached. Collaboration in the water consists of surfers working together to help increase the chances of them all (in a group or a duo) get more waves. This type of relationship can exist among surfers who enter the water together (friends) or can develop in the water among strangers in the form of a more unspoken

alliance (it is not necessarily dubbed this but it exists in this way). In both cases, this collaboration consists of surfers 'giving' each other waves. In this case of strangers, one surfer - Surfer A - (in equally good position to catch the wave) will give some sign of their giving up the wave to let another surfer – Surfer B – take it. This sign can be verbal, gestural, or simply the act of them clearly not taking a wave they wanted to/were able to. If Surfer B recognizes this (a more experienced surfer will generally notice this even in more subtle form as long as they have spotted Surfer A), they may express their appreciation and in turn, reciprocate. If the surfers tend to start catching consistent waves like this, they may very likely continue this reciprocity. *Note: This kind of relationship likely exists mostly among surfers who are at a similar level in the lineup, as someone higher in the lineup would likely not give up a wave to a newcomer or someone clearly lower (unless they were particularly nice or had some relationship with that individual). Similarly, someone lower in the lineup giving a wave to a surfer higher up in the lineup would not be seen as commendable/especially generous as it is expected.*

*CONFLICT/COMPETITION* Conflict can occur in the water for two reasons (typically). First, conflict can occur as a result of someone seriously breaking/dishonoring the line up or other established surf etiquette. However, I only know this from anecdotal evidence, as I did not observe this in the water in Encinitas. The second reason that conflict may occur is in attempts by surfers to move up in the lineup. According to Michael, the entire hierarchy is based on conflict - individuals primarily move up in this way. Typically, this conflict manifests in the form of surfers (of a similar level/position in the lineup) competing for waves - the more successful surfer, in turn, establishing their place as relatively higher up in the lineup. Michael

explained that he had to engage in this sort of conflict consistently in order to gradually move up in the hierarchy upon his return to Encinitas.

### Post-Surf

The post-surf is noticeably drawn out. After exiting the water, the surfer engages in many practical activities – unstrapping their leash, removing and rinsing off their equipment and themselves at the shower on the beach. In addition to that, the surfer seems to linger between and during each minor post-surf activity – watching the waves longingly while they’re still on the shore, as they ascend the staircase, and again once they reach the lookout at the top of the stairs. As implied by Michael and others, it seems as though this continued wave watching is the result of both a fear of missing good waves (watching to see what they could be missing even though they were *just* out there) and a general lasting admiration for surfing, the breaking waves and beauty of the surrounding scenery.

## CONCLUSION

Encinitas, California is – as described by its inhabitants – a special place. Further, it is also objectively unique, in that it is a community both in the sense of a shared locale *and* a widely-shared passion for a particular pursuit – a collective quest that in its many expressions produces a sense of *communitas*. Yet, as scholars like Edith Turner clarify, this ‘intense togetherness’ does not erase the individuality of its participants. Rather, as evidenced through narratives of Encinitas surfers, the pursuit is adapted by each rider – taking on distinct meanings. Yet, despite developing personal reasons for surfing, surfers are bound in their shared zeal for the pursuit – a passion that they feel can only be understood by them – *all of them*. This fervor is reflected in and propagated by the surrounding community, and further, is expressed in the actual practice of the sport itself.

This study, though situated in a specific place and on a particular activity, sheds light on mechanisms of community cohesion. Through this exploration of surfing – and its dominant and integral place in the community – it becomes clear that seemingly peripheral or extraneous practices can serve as influential in their ability to give purpose and identity and to foster meaningful connections that exist and function outside of the water. Further, this notion and expression of “collective solitude” serves as an example of the co-existence of supposedly competing American values. Future sociological and anthropological research should consider the value in studying pursuits similar to surfing as a lens to explore larger concepts in social science.

*“For expert surfers going upland to farm, if part way perhaps they look back and see the rollers combing the beach, they will leave their work... pick up the board and go... All thought of work is at an end... All day there is nothing but surfing” (of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hawaii)*



*Encinitas, CA (2016)*

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