

Surfing- counter culture

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In order to successfully understand the inexplicable surfer's lifestyle as a counter-culture to main society, we must first have a greater knowledge of the ingredients that make this culture so different in the views of the social norm. A counter-culture as described by Professor Chad Smith in the second week of class is, " When subcultures specially stand in direct opposition to the dominant culture of the society in which they are located, rejecting it's most important values and norms and endorsing their opposites. As surfers began to express themselves more and more freely throughout the 1950's and 1960's, the surfing sub-culture that was portrayed by the media, with retrospect to Gidget and Beach Part, began to diminish in the eyes of society; as a new breed of antisocial surfers stood in opposition of the culture that was created around them. With America fighting a World War across seas, the youth of this era were fighting themselves in order to establish a " distinction" from the normality that society was classifying by, in the Post World War II era.

With capitalism increasing and the ideology of the worry free leisure lifestyle that the surfing subculture was radiating, many of the current surfers of this time would have a great influence in this ever so fragile transformation from surfing as a subculture to it's rejection as a counter-culture. The emergence of the surfing lifestyle to the Southern Californian coastline was indeed a subculture that was not viewed heavily on gangs and deviants but on " clean-teens" that were having fun. This view along with the involvement of the US in World War II began to change as surfing became more popular, and with the uprising of a new crop of youth surfers. The image of the surfer also began to change as more and more newcomers to the sport felt it could be

as an escape from school and ordinary social values. These newcomers “ entered surfing and which they generated the behavior patterns which they displayed conspicuously and which, in so doing, they carried to new extremes”(Irwin 21). Thus meaning that the new breed of surfers to feed into the sub-cultural lifestyle where becoming more radical than the few that were in absence due to the war. In order to better understand why the newcomers to the sport of surfing began to change the values and way of life, we need to understand that these newcomers or “ kooks” were in search of invidiousness and the label of authentic.

As in many other cultures in this world, one must prove him or herself in order to be considered acceptable by the masses. Surfing was no different as its intrinsic appeal began to mold newcomers into a search for their very own usurp authenticity. Many newcomers, in their attempt to establish their authenticity, made considerable effort to display immediately what they thought were the scene attributes [..] this resulted in the surfing scene to take a radical turn towards the bizarre and deviants” (Irwin 20). Many surfers today have seen this kind of bizarre and deviant attitude in surf movies, and of the community of Windensea, where in 1960 a group of surfers dressed in Nazi uniforms, began to direct traffic in the streets of Windensea and La Jolla, California. This is just one example of what surfers were beginning to do in order to antagonize outsiders, labeling themselves, and further express the surfer’s attitude of alienation toward conventional norms.

The surfer’s attitude toward society continued to grow as their image became more and more rejected from beach goers and society as a whole. Feeding off what was being said of them and the classification of them as a

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counter-culture only continued to make the surfers want to continue to show their abandon of normal society. They would create little gimmicks that would further classify themselves as authentic and a bizarre breed. The “Brown-eye” became a common sight to be seen around beach cities and surf spots, as surfers would intentionally pull down their trunks and show their backsides to fellow surfers and the onshore crowd. This however spread to the inter cites and by “ 1959 & 1960 in beach towns and the L. A basin, cars passing by with a youth’s bare posterior framed in the side window were a common sight” (Irwin 22). Although their attitude was indeed a huge aspect in labeling the surf community as a counter-culture, it did not stop there.

Their personal image changed as they began to dress in a way unconventional to society thus creating a distinction from others. Now at this point of the paper, we need to look at another view of the surf counter-culture in order to examine both sides of its complexity. Kristin Lawler believes that the thriving capitalism that came post WWII had a huge effect on the growth and direction in which the surfing counter-culture took place. “ The counter-culture of the 1960s was welcomed by capitalist, who had already been getting pretty hip and countercultural themselves” (Lawler 6). With the surfing community identified as rebels to surrounding society, capitalism saw a need to supply these groups of radical individualists with products that were suitable to their lifestyle. She states that “ once an oppositional style inevitably gets diffused, counterculture becomes mainstream culture and the rebel consumer is forced continually to buy a new set of products to maintain his or her distinction” (Lawler 6). With this being said, one can assume that the society that was utterly rejecting the

surfing counter-cultural lifestyle could in fact be the driving force that helped sustained surfing as a denial towards normal society.

While the counter-cultural image of the surfing community was being displayed up and down the coast of California it did not serve as a blockade from the outsiders. Their obscured behavior and mentality attracted many newcomers to the sport that wanted their own taste of what it felt like to be a so called “ rebel” toward conforming society. The threat of localism began to plague surf spots up and down the coastline and is still apparent today. Localism is a best described as a territorial group of surfers that confine themselves to the ideology of the “ first come first serve” basis. Old school surfers were like a street gang asserting dominance over a section of territory. The phenomenon of the “ localism” has been well documented in surfing-orientated publications, as it continues to be an ongoing factor in the surfing world today” (Barilotti 2006). With more and more “ kooks” or newcomers traveling into in water to surf, the old school locals became frustrated for they had put in their time and work to “ come up” the ranks of the surfing hierocracy, by showing respect, patience, practice, and deference. These newcomers did not know anything of this nature that was so important to the traditional social context. “ Large numbers of new unknown surfers, of varying skills, were at the breaks, trying to catch the limited amount of surf able waves [...] the locals felt that the newcomers were oblivious to the fact they were treading on a valued way of life” (Daskalos 9). The lack of respect of the newcomers toward the old school locals and the importation of landed valves to the water often made a good day of surfing a frustrating and angering endeavor. Becoming a clear and noticeable alteration to the surfing <https://assignbuster.com/surfing-counter-culture/>

community that their way of life was being diminished by newcomers, they acted upon it with force and violence. “ The old school surfers would make sure that those judged un-worthy would have a frustrating and aggravating surfing experience by taking every wave possible and through ridicule” (Daskalos 2006). At most breaks up and down the coast one could see signs of warning such as “ Locals Only” in attempt to rid of those who did not follow the surfing rule of thumb. Often ending in violence and harassment, localism started to frighten surfers to stay out of the water until found worthy to surf.

As we have seen throughout the surfing history, society has labeled those that are different, as radical delinquent individuals whose purpose in life is to spread greater difference among its peers. With society and the media bringing about surf films such as Gidget and Beach Party they were the starting factor that drove the surfing community to alter its very own cultural status from a sub-culture to a counter-culture in the 1960s. The appeal of surfing that was brought to mainstream society by themselves was the same appeal that transformed the surfing culture into a counter-culture through the masses that were inclined to try the radical sport. Without the engaging of the newcomers to the sport, we may had seen a decline in the counter-cultural outlook of the surfer, for the attitudes towards antagonizing the outside society may had never been perceptible.