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Surfing with sharks: a survey of Australian non-fiction writing about surfing and sharks

Abstract:

This article surveys published narratives about surfing and sharks in Australia over the past century, mapping representations across various genres and forms of writing. These narratives include works of non-fiction (including for younger readers), memoir, travel writing, humour and other long-form creative nonfiction. This writing has been analysed using thematic analysis to provide an Anthropocene-informed reading of changing attitudes to both human-shark interactions and to sharks themselves.

Biographical note:

Donna Lee Brien, PhD, is Emeritus Professor of Creative Industries at Central Queensland University, Australia. Author, co-author and editor of 23 books including *Writing the Australian Beach: Local Site, Global Idea* (2020), *The Shadow Side of Nursing: Paradox, Image and Identity* (2020), *Publishing and Culture* (2019), *Offshoot: Contemporary Lifewriting Methodologies and Practice* (2018) and *Recovering History Through Fact and Fiction* (2017), Donna co-edits *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*. In 2021, Donna began studying for her second doctorate at Australian Catholic University, writing a biography of Bondi Beach.

Keywords:

Creative writing, surfing, sharks, beach writing, surf writing

Introduction

Sharks function as powerful images and metaphors in language and art (Ellis, 2012; Westbrook et al., 2018). A vivid example is found in Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). This artwork, commissioned by advertising mogul Charles Saatchi, consists of a 4.3-metre-long tiger shark suspended in preserving formaldehyde encased in a framed glass vitrine. The original shark was hunted off Queensland's Hervey Bay in Australia and killed to order for this work (Sitko, 2016, p. 132). After this shark began to decay and the work was sold to another collector, a second shark was caught off the Queensland

coast as a replacement (Vogel, 2006). Hirst has explained that his intention in this work was to prompt viewers to confront and explore their greatest fear, that of death (Hirst, 2011), and much of the commentary around this undoubtedly arresting and immediately controversial work (Kennedy, 2004) has focussed around discussions of its representation of ideas about human mortality. The work also spurred discussion on the natural versus the artificial, as well as how value in art is calculated. Agata Sitko has recently questioned such anthropocentric attitudes, asking: ‘We may wonder why the commentaries always refer to us – human beings thinking about their death, and not the death of the animal so boldly placed in front of our eyes’ (2016, p. 132). While animals have appeared *in* art since its beginnings, the use of animals *as* art has, in recent decades, raised such commentary, with artists, scholars and animal rights groups noting the large number of deaths that Hirst’s career has involved (see, for instance, Hughes, 2015; Goldstein, 2017).

In retrospect, what is remarkable is how, over the thirty years since Hirst’s work was first exhibited, it has provoked a consequence the artist did not apparently intend – feelings of sympathy and even empathy for the sharks in his work; majestic creatures, once roaming the oceans freely, but now not only dead but also objectified. This is notable as, while the risk of being injured by a shark is minute (Chapman, 2017), the few studies on this topic show that most people report at least a moderate fear of sharks and associate sharks with danger (Denness, 2019; Le Busque et al., 2021) [1]. Whether or not this fear is based on inaccurate stereotypes about sharks transmitted via the media and popular culture (Panoch and Pearson, 2017; Ostrovski et al., 2020), at a time when human actions such as finning, fishing, hunting, culling, beach netting, pollution and habitat change are threatening many shark species, persuasive appeals continue to demand a review of how sharks, and any real danger they pose to humans, are understood.

Australian waters are home to a large proportion of the world’s shark species and Australia also has responsibility for the conservation and management of a significant number (some 25 per cent) of those species (Allam, 2015). At the same time, Australia is a world-recognised location for surfing and is, and has been, home to many surfing champions and other major figures in surfing as a competitive sport, leisure activity and an industry. Although some of the most memorable images of surfers picture them riding waves alongside sharks, and there is a literature of surfing and one of sharks, little academic study has connected the two or sought to investigate their shared representations in more expressive writing. This investigation, therefore, provides a survey of published book-length narratives about surfing and sharks in Australia over the past century, mapping representations across various genres of non-fiction and creative non-fiction writing.

Research method

From August to November 2020, and in March 2021, I surveyed the major deposit collections of the National Library of Australia, State Library of New South Wales and Sydney’s Waverley Library (which collects coastal- and beach-related material), focusing on locating published book-length Australian-related representations of both sharks and surfing. Only books written in English were included. While not aiming to be exhaustive, the narratives located include

works of non-fiction (including for younger readers), memoir, travel writing, humour and other long-form creative nonfiction. While examples of interactions between surfers and sharks were serendipitously found in works of fiction for younger readers, fiction was not a focus of this search, and the results do not include the numerous examples of representations of surfing and sharks in adult fiction. Due to restrictions on library use and travel due to COVID-19, this research was conducted using online library catalogues, Google Books, Kindle and other digital editions of texts, and my personal library.

After identifying the relevant volumes, I used thematic analysis – a method for analysing and describing themes found within a data set (the identified publications) – and specifically, Carolyn Ellis’ definition of ‘treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories’ (2004, p. 196) in order to explore both the explicit and implicit meanings (Guest, McQueen and Namey, 2012, p. 11) of these representations of surfing and sharks. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that many creative writing researchers use versions of thematic analysis in their work, few name it as such, with a search of *TEXT* journal revealing only six articles naming thematic analysis across more than twenty years of general and special issues (Pace, 2012; Brewer, 2014; Crimmins, 2017; Ryan et al., 2017; Brien et al., 2019; *Tofler and Pechenkina, 2019*). The use of thematic analysis as a named method is more common in studies of other popular media such as films and television series (Fridlund, 2006; Knobel and Lankshear, 2007; Cooper-Chen, 2011; Lemish and Muhlbauer, 2012; McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2012; Pehlke et al., 2009), but was very useful in this context. Using Braun and Clarke’s definition of a theme as a ‘pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept or idea’ (2019, online), this analysis has utilised their six-phase process [2]. My identification of themes has been inductive, directed by the books located and my reading of them, rather than fitting the data into a pre-existing theory or framework (Boyatzis, 1998), meaning this analysis is necessarily subjective. It identified six themes with, in many cases, single volumes containing more than one theme. These themes:

- Indigenous narratives and mythology
- sharks as fishes
- fear of sharks
- likelihood of injury or death from sharks
- interactions with sharks while surfing, and
- shift from exploitation to conservation

are discussed below, the findings contextualised with a selection of other available information about surfing and sharks in Australia. At times, material related to the experiences and accounts of divers and fishers are included to shed light on the information relating to surfers.

Alongside studies of how our two species have related through history (see Peschak, 2014) are appeals to change the way these interactions are described. As early as 1949, C. Bede Maxwell (who also wrote extensively about dogs) suggested that deaths and injuries involving interactions with sharks should be described as ‘accidents’ (1949, p. 182). In 2013, Christopher

Neff and Robert Hueter suggested replacing the common but highly emotive and inaccurate phrase “shark attack” with an escalating terminology of ‘sightings, encounters, bites, and the rare cases of fatal bites’ (2013, p. 70) to more precisely describe the range of human-shark interactions. This is suggested for reasons including that such language more accurately reflects ‘the true risk posed by sharks’ to humans (70) which, as noted above, is very small. This terminology will be used in this analysis.

Indigenous narratives and mythology

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, sharks are part of the world and a wider cosmology; they are ‘creator beings, ancestors, totems. Their lifecycles reflect the seasons, the landscape and sea country. They are seen in the movement of the stars’ (Allam, 2015). In considering the series of Indigenous carvings, including of sharks, on the rocks at Sydney’s North Bondi overlooking the surf, Bundjalung curator and art historian Djon Mundine explains that saltwater people commonly see sharks both as manifestations of, and a ‘homage to the power of God in nature’ and, at the same time, think of them as having ‘human characteristics and ways of acting’ (qtd. in Allam, 2015). Karin Gerhardt adds that the roles sharks ‘play in the lives of saltwater people are bound in the Indigenous knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation’ (2018, p. 1) but, as narratives, the stories these carvings may possibly tell are many and diverse. Some sources propose that these carvings refer to fishing, feasting and other parts of daily life that were lived on various sites in, and around, Bondi Beach (Meadows, 1998), while others propose that they represent more complex associations with the ocean and its creatures. Others suggest these carvings represent an injurious interaction with a shark.

What is clear, however, in such worldviews is that sharks are recognised as an integral part of the environment and are not viewed in the wholly negative way that many in Australia and elsewhere do. The recent Sydney exhibition of the touring exhibition *On Sharks and Humanity*, built explicitly around the theme of fostering shark protection and conservation (Huang, 2018), featured works by Australian Indigenous artists which proposed a series of human relationships with sharks beyond fear or their exploitation (ANMM, 2020). Eric Clua and Jen Guiart’s study of the important role sharks play in Melanesian mythology similarly reveals how, for Kanak ni-Vanuatu and other Pacific Islander peoples, sharks are a component of a coherent world view of Nature that includes natural and social perils alongside other parts of life. Such understandings, their study suggests, are important to consider more widely as these could ‘help change the globally negative perception of sharks, and support shark conservation efforts in Oceania and worldwide’ (2020, abstract).

Sharks as fishes

Ichthyological narratives focus on studies of Australian sharks as fishes who largely display no interest in surfers or other human users of the sea. These narratives include Gilbert P. Whitley’s foundational study, *The Fishes of Australia: The Sharks, Rays, Devil-fish, and Other Primitive Fishes of Australia and New Zealand* (1940). Curator of Fishes at the Australian Museum in

Sydney from 1922 to 1964, Whitley authored many original and defining volumes outlining and furthering scientific thought on this subject including the still-important volume, *Australian Sharks* (1983), in which he notes that although Australia had the reputation of being ‘one of the most shark menaced countries in the world’ (8) an excessive number of sharks are wrongfully killed, condemning the ‘slaughtering’ of grey nurse sharks, for example, as ‘indiscriminate’ (10) because they are of little danger to people. This is a theme shared with more recent volumes on this topic including the CSIRO’s *Field Guide to Australian Sharks & Rays* (Daley et al. 2002). The first pages of this text stress not only that a number of shark species are under threat (and protected) (8-9) but also that sharks individually are themselves very fragile creatures – ‘often thought of as being incredibly tough; in reality, they need to be handled carefully to maximise their chance of survival following capture’ (9). I did not find the word “attack” in this volume, its focus being the identification of, and safe and respectful interaction with, these creatures. Tony Ayling’s *Sharks & Rays* (2008) similarly includes such information as how critically endangered and generally harmless grey nurse sharks have been killed en masse as it was wrongly believed they preyed on surfers and swimmers.

A feature of these narratives is the writers’ sense of wonder at how perfectly sharks are adapted to their environment. Sharks are prehistoric animals, with many having changed little over the past some 350 million years or more, and are described in these texts as models of evolutionary resilience. These writers are also fascinated with how diverse the group of fishes classified as sharks is, with Australia possessing the greatest range of sharks globally (Last and Stevens, 2009). The shark as a remarkable marvel is evident in mainstream titles such as *Australia’s Amazing Sharks* (Australian Geographic, 2020). The writers of these types of volumes also detail the wide range of qualities and abilities possessed by sharks; that they are agile and swift swimmers, possess a keen sense of smell, and are extremely sensitive to motion and vibration. These books also underscore the central role that sharks play in the marine ecosystem.

The vibrantly illustrated *Baby Shark: Adventures Down Under* (Kear, 2020) is similarly educative, using the phenomenon of the viral Baby Shark dance video (Pinkfong, 2016) to introduce very young readers to a number of Australian sharks. Each double page spread of this volume includes the catchy song lyrics on one page and the featured shark’s name (including scientific nomenclature), conservation status, size and an interesting fact on the other. The goal of this text is to disseminate information about sharks to young children, informing them (and presumably the adults who are reading it to them) about both sharks’ place in the ocean and their threatened status. This is in common with many international texts written for children, both fiction and non-fiction (see, for example, Strong, 2007; Wolf, 2013).

Fear of sharks

Despite the minute, and decreasing, statistical chance of being injured by an unprovoked shark (Fletcher et al. 2019), there is, undoubtedly, a real and widespread fear of sharks, with some texts suggesting that even some surfers fear sharks to phobic levels (Everline et al., 2011, p. 207). In 1962, in his surfing memoir, Desmond Muirhead called ‘the fear of sharks’ a feature of Australian surfing (26), however, as early as 1949, C. Bede Maxwell noted that surfers (along with scientists and fishermen) knew that sharks do not deliberately hunt humans (183).

In *Sharks: A History of Fear in Australia* (2019), journalist and television producer Callum Denness suggests that a fear of sharks is understandable in Australia where a large proportion of the population live close to, and often swim and surf in, environments where there have been multiple reported shark-related injuries and fatalities. This fear is mirrored by international visitors with Bill Bryson, for instance, recounting his reticence about swimming in the surf (at Sydney's Manly Beach) in his travel memoir *In a Sunburned Country* (2000), due to his apprehension regarding encountering a shark.

There has been some discussion that the human fear of sharks is in part due to an inherent and primal fear of painful death and predators. This is apparent in Robert Reid's assertion that the fear of sharks is a 'primeval fear – an echo of our distant past – the fear of being eaten alive by a predator ... none more so than a killer shark' (2010, p. 126). The marketing for Denness's book begins, 'For as long as people have lived in Australia, the shark has loomed large in our fears ... sharks occupy the dark recesses of our national psyche unlike any other predator' (Affirm Press, 2019), while others explain this in terms of the human brain working to 'fear first and think second' (Ropeik, 2010, p. 2). Shark scientist Blake Chapman deconstructs this psychologically as a 'fear of the improbable' (2017, p. 95-106), offering surfers and others sound advice on conquering their fears, including how to mitigate the risk of encountering a shark. In contrast, works that sensationalise stories of shark encounters such as Reid's *Shark!: Killer Tales from the Dangerous Depths* (2011, Kindle version) frequently use highly emotive terms such as 'terror' in relation to encountering a shark (see, for instance, 47, 178, 200, 218, 244, 319).

Other recent literature posits that any natural fear of sharks (creatures which, after all, so few of us will ever encounter in the wild) has been significantly inflamed (some use expressions in line with "whipped up into hysteria") by their representation in art and literature and, more latterly, in filmed narratives, media reporting and stories shared on social media. Steven Spielberg's film *Jaws* (1975), which was advertised in posters and trailers with the tagline 'None of our fantasies of evil can compare with the reality of *Jaws*' is often cited in this context as the

single most influential event in shark-human history ... [playing] on our innate fear of the unknown and uncontrollable ... [the film] simplified an entire ... complex group of animals into a single terrifying body part. (Chapman, 2017, p. 4)

This simplification, and inaccurate imaging of, sharks for frightening effect is especially evident in how *Jaws* posited that a shark would mindfully mount a revenge attack on humans [3]. As Valerie Taylor writes, in relation to how *Jaws* plays on people's minds when surfing or swimming: 'I have seen possibly hundreds of great white sharks. They are very big, powerful, well armed and amazingly beautiful... [R]evenge is not part of their thought process' (2019, Kindle version).

Denness himself, indeed, takes responsibility for consciously whipping up fear to attract readers when he was a young journalist with such headlines as 'Monster shark' (2019, Kindle version). There are, however, many earlier examples. While, as above, Indigenous representations depict sharks as an integral and valuable part of the natural world, Western art from the 18th century largely presents images of sharks as menacing and violent aggressors

(Ellis 2012). An article for general reading of the late nineteenth century, 'About Sharks', asserts sharks are the 'most rapacious and abhorrent of sea animals' to be sensibly feared for their 'determined fierceness' and for being 'cruelly famished' with a 'ravenous appetite' (Anon. n.d. [c.1875], p. 244, 245).

The complexity of this fear can be mapped in the writing about it. Denness describes his own fear of sharks as 'never ... crippling ... [but] a constant and silent companion' (2019: Kindle version). In his memoir *No Time for Fear* (2011), surfer and Royal Australian Navy diver Paul de Gelder offers a unique take on the fear of sharks, describing how he grew up loving the sea but fearing sharks. He still went surfing, diving and swimming, but did not conquer this fear until the worst (in his mind) occurred, and he was bitten in 2009, as a result of which he lost part of one arm and a leg. Once this occurred, his focus had to be on, first, escape, then survival and, finally, recovery and, in this process de Gelder found there was, as he titles his memoir, no time to be fearful. In *Sharks Never Sleep: First-hand Encounters with Killers of the Sea* (2016), surfer and surfing journalist [4] Brendan McAloon writes of becoming 'addicted' to surfing as a teenager and then how, for the next two decades, 'I arranged my life around the friction of wind on the water, chasing the perfect waves of my dreams' (Kindle version). Then, faced with what seemed to be escalating shark sightings, injuries, deaths and beach closures in Australia, his anxieties about sharks rose despite never himself encountering one while surfing. His book, which features a series of stories of encounters with sharks, is his 'attempt to exorcise the fear with facts' (Kindle version), although the title and tone may instead work to instil or encourage fear in readers. The updated edition carries the cover sticker 'The shark attacks continue' (McAloon, 2018).

Likelihood of injury or death from sharks

Recent research and other narratives confirm that tales of killer sharks are largely mythical, encounters with sharks in the wild are extremely rare and there is little likelihood of injury from interactions with sharks while surfing (or otherwise). Most injurious encounters with sharks are, moreover, not fatal, although surfers do comprise a significant proportion of both less serious and fatal injuries from sharks (Woolgar et al., 2001). In Australia, there have been some 280 recorded fatalities from sharks since 1791 (Taronga Conservation Society Australia, 2021), although not all historical examples have been confirmed and Sean Brawley notes that some encounters with sharks may have been reported as drownings to protect both the beach's reputation and the local economy (2007, p. 317, note 58). In comparison, there were 1,195 documented road deaths in Australia in the single year of 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available (BITRE, 2020). It has also been recently reported, sensational media accounts to the contrary, that when the increase in the world's human population and numbers of people surfing, swimming and otherwise using the ocean is taken into account, the global trend in terms of numbers of shark bites is decreasing (Fletcher et al., 2019). There is also considerable evidence, including in memoirs by surfers who have written about such interactions, that sharks usually swim away after the first bite (see, for instance, Hamilton, 2004; de Gelder, 2011; Orgias, 2012).

Research suggests that, instead, two-thirds of injuries suffered while surfing are board-related and most of these involve the surfer's own board (Everline et al., 2011, p. 75). For surfers, there are more deaths annually from jellyfish stings and many more from being swept off rocks or drowning than from interactions with sharks (Everline et al., 2011, p. 15, 218), while driving to the beach is usually significantly statistically more dangerous (see, for instance, NSWCRS, 2020). *Ruby Ashby Orr's Death by Coconut: 50 Things More Dangerous Than a Shark and Why You Shouldn't Be Afraid of the Ocean* (2015) enlists humour to educate readers about these statistics, listing interactions with cows, falling coconuts and champagne corks among the many everyday activities more likely to lead to injury and death in Australia than encountering a shark.

Yet, despite these statistics and the data behind them, there are a series of *texts that present sharks as principally, and overtly, dangerous*. Although produced by reputable nature publisher Australian Geographic, *Australia's Most Dangerous Sharks* (Riley, 2013) features the tagline 'Open with care' on the cover and perpetuates in its title an overall idea of sharks as threatening. This is also vividly apparent in other Australian volumes such as *Shark!: Killer Tales from the Dangerous Depths* (Reid, 2010) with its terrifying, horror film styled cover featuring a shark leaping out of the water, jaws wide open. Although the introduction to *Shark!* states that its aim is 'not to portray sharks as monstrous killers' (Reid, 2011, Kindle version), the marketing for *Shark!* is telling:

SHARK! The cry that strikes fear into the hearts of beach lovers ... carries a chill of terror, that death is nearby and waiting. Or injuries so shocking that the mind recoils from the thought ... these fearsome predators ... "rogue" sharks, those that stalk and kill humans ... have ruled the oceans with ruthless efficiency for more than 400 million years. They are the silent killers of the deep. (2010, cover)

Although noting that sharks have as much to fear from humans as we do from them and are much more hunted than hunter (1), this text also describes sharks in such terms as 'the world's most feared sea creature' (47), 'the most feared killer of the ocean' (240) and even 'the world's most feared creature' (218). In line with this book's title, sharks are frequently described as killers (63, 126, 239, 325), including as 'highly efficient killing machines' (iv, see also 127, 129) and predators (for example, 168). This volume describes a series of surfers and surf swimmers who suffered shark bites as well as the 'death toll from shark attacks' (177, 241), with the terms 'fatal' and 'attack' appearing often across the volume (see, for instance, 47, 203, 207, 221, 240, 244, 273, 305, 314, 315, 319, 331, 341).

Interactions with sharks while surfing

Interactions with sharks while surfing or surf swimming in Australia are rehearsed in early as well as contemporary narratives. Describing sharks in his travelogue, *Peeps at Many Lands: Australia* (1911), as 'quite the most dangerous foes of man in Australia' (23), Frank Fox, for instance, offers the cautionary tale:

On a New South Wales beach two brothers were bathing... One was attacked by a shark. The other went to his rescue, and actually beat the great fish off, though he lost his arm

in doing so. As a rule, however, the shark kills with one bite, attacking the trunk of its victim, which it can sever in two with one great snap of its jaws. (23-24)

Despite the numerous narratives describing surfers fearing sharks (see above, Muirhead, 1962, p. 26; de Gelder, 2011; Everline et al., 2011, p. 207; Denness, 2019), it has also been suggested that surfers are, as a group, less likely to heed warnings from lifeguards regarding the risks from sharks than swimmers (Carrier et al., 2010, p. 561). Riley Elliot sums up the feelings common to many surfer memoirists when he describes:

When you're surfing, you're pretty much doing everything wrong when it comes to avoiding a shark attack. But the risk is so small and the reward of surfing so great that the best (and only) thing you can do is to try to put the whole idea out of your mind. (2014, Introduction)

While survivalist guides list a shark encounter alongside such natural and other disasters as chemical warfare, fire, flood, nuclear blast and terrorism (see, for instance, Fleeman 2020), a number of surfers have not only encountered sharks but have survived to write detailed, first-person reflections on these meetings. Paul de Gelder, for instance, begins his memoir with the encounter that cost him his limbs. Taking part in a counter-terrorism exercise in Sydney Harbour early one overcast February morning in 2009, he writes:

I felt something smack me hard on the leg. I rolled over and looked down – straight into the cold black eye of a massive bull shark... I peered closer through the murky water and could see it had something in its massive jaw between its teeth: my leg... [T]he shark had clamped its jaws over my wrist too. (2011, Kindle version)

De Gelder describes punching the shark and then being twice shaken and pulled under the water. Suddenly free, he began swimming away and saw 'my hand was no longer there' (Kindle version). The day after de Gelder was bitten, Glenn Orgias went surfing at South Bondi in the evening dusk after a day at work in the city. In his *Man in the Grey Suit: A Memoir of Surfing, Shark Attack and Survival* (2012), Orgias relates that he never saw the shark who bit him that evening:

It came from behind, and below. My left arm was shoulder deep in the ocean. I was pulled backwards... In that first instant, I thought another surfer had grabbed me ... I wrenched my arm away. Something massive, much more powerful than me, pulled me under. It shook me with an impersonal aggression ... [B]efore I could really understand what was going on, it was gone. (2)

His arm was 'ripped apart' (2), his hand almost severed, 'hanging by a thread of skin' (125), yet Orgias describes how he got back on his board and, once he calmed himself, was able to catch a wave to shore where another surfer used a leg rope around his arm as a tourniquet and, together with a doctor and others on the beach, saved his life. Both these memoirs then continue to recount these men's lives before these interactions and their recovery from them, these narratives pivoting around their shark encounters and how they have dealt with the resulting injuries.

A significant number of memoirs which involve injury from interactions with sharks while surfing are not Australian, but rehearse similar narrative arcs – suffering shark bite as a pivotal

life moment, turning back to the pleasure of surfing and learning to surf to, post-bite, the effort and pain involved in physical healing and, finally, the triumphant return to the surf as both a metaphor for the surfers' return to the world and a means to enhance their personal emotional wellbeing. This is coupled with musings on the authors' respect for sharks and, for many, their subsequent work as conservationists. This includes memoirs such as Kenny Doudt's *Surfing with the Great White Shark* (1992) which described his encounter with a shark off the Oregon coast in 1979 and the bite to his side and back he suffered. Surfing again two-and-a-half months after his injury, Doudt later moved to Hawaii where he drowned while surfing in 2010 (Anon., 2010). Another prominent example is Bethany Hamilton's *Soul Surfer: A True Story of Faith, Family and Fighting to Get Back on the Board*, first published in 2004 and then in various editions and reprints. This memoir details how teenager Hamilton returned to surfing only one month after a shark bit her arm off just below the shoulder while she was surfing in Hawaii. Hamilton is keenly aware of how 'a shark story fascinates people', admitting that 'before I was attacked, I liked to watch programs about sharks and all the *Jaws* movies' (Kindle version). Adapted into the biopic *Soul Surfer* (McNamara, 2011) in which her character is played by AnnaSophia Robb but Hamilton herself performs the one-armed surfing scenes (Verrier, 2011), this film includes local fishers catching and killing the shark that bit Hamilton, much to her father's (played by Dennis Quaid) satisfaction after he tests the size of its mouth against the size of the bite on his daughter's surfboard. This scene has, however, been subtly altered from the memoir wherein Hamilton relates that the fishermen provided investigators with photographs of a 4.3-metre-long tiger shark they had caught and killed about one mile from the site of her injury, and which had surfboard debris in its mouth. When measurements of the shark's mouth matched the marks on the board, police confirmed it was the shark that had injured Hamilton. But it was not hunted as in the film. Hamilton won her first national title two years later and followed *Soul Surfer* with a sequel memoir, *Be Unstoppable: The Art of Never Giving Up* (2018) and biographical documentary *Bethany Hamilton: Unstoppable* (Lieber, 2018), in which she relates how this injury and her subsequent recovery shaped her resilience and tenacity.

Other surfers have written about less traumatic encounters. In *Alone: Lost Overboard in the Indian Ocean* (2016), lifelong surfer and South African businessman Brett Archibald describes in hourly detail the time he spent alone in the ocean after falling overboard from a Sumatran surfing charter boat. He included his feelings when a shark bumped into his lower back:

Fear and desperation bubble up like vomit... You've got to see what this is, I tell myself. You can't wait for an attack to come from nowhere, for jaws to crush your body. You have to face it! I sink below the surface... Through the deepening gloom I see it. It's a few metres away. Sleek and ... silvery. A shark is coming straight towards me. It's the size of a bus. (Kindle version)

The shark, however, just looked at him after the bump and then swam away, and the only damage Archibald suffered from it was bruising to his lower back. He wrote how the constant nibbling of shoals of tiny silver fish at his salt-water tender flesh was much worse. After more than twenty-eight hours in the ocean, he was located and saved by an Australian charter boat.

In her memoir, Valerie Taylor, the first person to be filmed swimming with great white sharks without a cage or other protection, describes her interactions with sharks in compelling prose which captures her sense of wonder about these massive creatures:

I see sharks scarred, mottled, silver, grey, white; hulking behemoths and svelte dancers. The animals hunt and feed and migrate and mate... A pregnant bull shark sees a fish next to me and charges. The shark feeds and banks away. (2019, Kindle version)

She also describes being bitten, 'I feel something; not pain, but something else: pressure, cold... I reach down and feel through my wetsuit, through my skin and flesh all the way to the bone' (2019: Kindle version). An avid conservationist with decades of oceanic experience, she is philosophical about this injury:

This is not the first time I've been bitten by a shark, nor the last... I'm calm. If we are to be bitten, then we are to be bitten... One must choose a life of adventure, and of mystery and discovery, but with that choice, one must also choose the attendant risks. (2019, Kindle version)

This is in marked contrast to the way most surfing memoirs describe injuries from shark encounters as life-changing and which are duly given central positions in both the narratives themselves and the marketing of these volumes.

Shift from exploitation to conservation

A further theme identified in these texts is a notable shift from the exploitation of sharks to their conservation. The exploitation of sharks is exemplified in popular adventure writer Zane Grey's travel narrative *An American Angler in Australia* (1937). This details Grey's visit to Australia and New Zealand to fish 'big game' including the mako shark in New Zealand. This features many accounts of killing sharks, grisly, gore-filled encounters which are justified with explanations about how dangerous the creatures are. Included are illustrations labelled with such emotive captions as 'Whaler Shark ... A Vicious Man-Eater' (Fig. 22) and 'Showing Jaws and Teeth of the Terrible White Death Shark, Fiercest and Deadliest of all Man-Eaters' (Fig. 35), descriptions which are representative of how sharks are portrayed in the volume.

Valerie Taylor (whose memoir is cited above) and her late husband, Ron Taylor, are well known in Australia and internationally as shark experts, principally in terms of their still photography, films and books that recount their own close encounters with sharks. The Taylors filmed live underwater shark sequences for many films including *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975), *Orca* (Anderson, 1977) and *Jaws 2* (Szwarc, 1978). Champion spear-fishers who were initially associated with the hunting of sharks (Taylor, 1965), the couple moved towards understanding and then actively educating others about the importance of shark conservation. This is evident in the shift from films such as *Shark Hunters* (Cropp and Taylor, 1962), a bloody documentary about killing sharks, and volumes such as *Great Shark Stories* (Taylor, Taylor and Goadby, 1978, 1986, 2000) which includes both more benign and more violent interactions, to the far more sympathetic portrayals of sharks in the biographical film *In the Realm of the Sharks* (Dennison 1986) and documentary *Sharks: Silent Hunters of the Deep* (Taylor and Taylor, 1990). Valerie Taylor, who now passionately campaigns against the killing of sharks, charts

her own and her husband's changing attitudes to sharks in her memoir. This includes how, when they began their work, they were applauded and lauded for killing sharks although this was without purpose:

Fisherman killed them [Great White sharks] for what purpose ... for their jaws, which might sit on a mantlepiece for a while ... for a photograph, with the killer grinning alongside the corpse? Or in our case one shot in one film [*Orca*] ... and [which] was possibly forgotten afterwards by the people who saw it? (2019, Kindle version)

Her later interactions are much more respectful and driven by a desire to understand sharks.

Describing sharks as 'misunderstood creatures', author *Ruby Ashby Orr* is clear in her resistance to killing sharks to "protect" surfers and others:

each year only around 10 people are killed in shark attacks worldwide, while around 73 million sharks are killed by humans. Sounds unfair? Of course it is, but when an attack is all over the news and the people are baying for shark blood, it's easy to lose perspective. But culling them? Seriously? (2015, back cover)

Surfer, shark researcher and conservationist Riley Elliott authored *Shark Man: One Kiwi Man's Mission to Save Our Most Feared and Misunderstood Predator* (2014). This has one chapter on Australia, 'The Western Australian Shark Cull', an action of which he writes most disapprovingly:

It seems to me that this cull involved no science or logic, just waste and politics. It's sickening that the people behind this cull were the Fisheries department, which prior to this was the very department responsible for setting up the world's best acoustic tagging system for sharks. (Kindle version, Chapter 7)

Many recent books about sharks for younger readers convey this conservation message, underscoring that, how instead of fearing or killing sharks, humans need to assist these fascinating, although vulnerable, creatures to survive. This is clearly seen in *Shark Surf Surprise* (Foxe, 2020), produced as a tie-in volume to an episode of the *Super Wings* pre-school children's animated series (Jung and Kim, 2013-2020). Jett, a jet plane, delivers a surfboard to a girl named Clara who lives on Queensland's Gold Coast and is then joined by a small team of other aircraft that can transform into robots, to teach Clara to surf. Once in the surf, they are, they think, chased out to sea by an aggressive shark. It soon transpires, however, that the shark is suffering with a painful tooth and, after this is removed by one of the team, it gratefully and happily swims away, shark and surfers able to share the vast ocean.

Although among the most bitten of those who swim in the ocean, surfers (Peschak, 2014, p. 83) are among those who most support shark conservation when they write about them [5]. This is evident in Jonathan Kathrein's *Surviving the Shark: How a Brutal Great White Attack Turned a Surfer into a Dedicated Defender of Sharks*, co-authored with his mother Margaret Kathrein (2012). This memoir describes how, after learning to swim in inland lakes, Kathrein developed a love of the ocean. The volume then offers a detailed narrative of the day he encountered a great white shark while surfing, was bitten, then made his way to the shore and his subsequent rehabilitation and recovery. The narrative then moves to how he becomes an active advocate for shark conservation. This volume includes significant information on sharks

and their behaviours and calls for an increased public awareness of sharks. The memoir component of the volume is followed by guidelines on how to avoid being bitten by a shark and a list of resources on ocean conservation. De Gelder's memoir (2011) similarly describes how he now champions sharks, promoting shark conservation in his work as a public speaker. Orgias also writes of how important the ocean, and all its creatures, are in his life. He also actively resists the public calls for shark culls which follow injuries from sharks. In the weeks following his ordeal, he told the press, 'I don't want sharks to be culled ... shark attacks are very rare ... I knew the risk I was taking when I went out and I accepted that' (Lamont 2009). In his memoir, he charts the life story of the shark who bit him alongside his own biography. At the end of the book, he describes how, on the anniversary of his injury, we went for a walk along Bondi Beach. A few days later, he went surfing there and mused, not about himself, but about the fate of the shark he had encountered:

Great whites are portrayed ... as pathological creatures, and as malevolent. That's rubbish... [T]hey are graceful, mighty beasts. I respect them, and fear them ... [but] [t]he thought of them fighting, dying, in a net upsets me. I hope this great white shark doesn't end up like that. (2012, p. 271-271)

Despite the rarity of the resulting injuries and death, human-shark interactions attract significant attention, even when no harm is incurred on the part of the human. Common across many of the published recent survivor and close family member accounts following shark injury and death is, in line with Orgias cited above, how few "blame" the sharks involved, which it is often suggested, have mistaken the human for a fish, seal or other prey. Some also mention the latest statistics on the toll sharks suffer from their encounters with humans – with an estimated 100 million sharks a year regularly now killed, and changes to their habitats driving many shark species to the status of threatened or, indeed, towards extinction (Dulvy et al., 2014).

Conclusion

While the focus of this review has been on non-fiction texts, a companion survey of surfers and sharks in Australian fiction would enhance the findings of this thematic analysis. An analysis of surfers' attitudes to sharks over time would also be instructive. This analysis found that the more recent published non-fiction narratives identified in this survey are in line with ongoing Australian discussions of the detrimental environmental effects of the netting of beaches to keep sharks at bay that are increasingly being raised by environmentalists, marine conservationists and others. At the same time, recent research suggests that although sharks have historically been understood negatively, this is beginning to change and at least some members of the public are beginning to view sharks in an increasingly positive, and less fearful, manner. While some writers for the popular press continue to malign sharks and press for their killing, recent research reports that 'opposition to lethal shark control and to negative shark framing is growing' (Lucrezi et al., 2019, online). This shift in attitude to these much maligned and misunderstood sea creatures is evident in some of the published narratives discussed above. Many of the more recent authors profiled above have indeed shared Chapman's goal in writing about sharks, which he states as two-fold: 'to encourage both the conservation of sharks and

the ability for humans to enjoy recreational water activities without the fear of being attacked by a shark' (2017, p. 4). While prompted by an interest in Australian writing, this survey has been prepared in the same spirit.

Notes

1. This is different to the phobic fear of sharks – galeophobia/selachophobia – when sufferers experience anxiety and fear of sharks despite being safe, as for instance, on the shore or a jetty, or in a boat or an aquarium.
2. These six phases are: 'Familiarisation with the data' (the books), 'Coding' (describing how any connection between sharks and surfing is identified in these texts), 'Generating initial themes' (identifying prospective themes across these codes), 'Reviewing themes' (checking these initial themes against the texts and refining them), 'Defining and naming themes' (analysing – including identifying the scope and focus – of each theme, which is then named), and Writing up, 'weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, online).
3. Peter Benchley, who wrote both the book the film was based upon (1974) and the film's screenplay later became an outspoken advocate of shark conservation, stating that when he wrote the book it was generally believed that sharks would both seek out human prey and attack boats, but he later discovered this to be untrue (Benchley 2000).
4. McAloon has written surfing-related feature articles for surfing, travel and lifestyle magazines, and produced surf biopic *Mick, Myself & Eugene* (Frank, 2005) and long-form television programming on surfing.
5. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this text who noted that not all surfers have come to a more nuanced and educated understanding of sharks and the risk of shark attacks. This can be seen in the wake of the recent spate of injuries from sharks in northern New South Wales and elsewhere in Australia in calls from some surfers for more aggressive interventions including shark culls. While this text is reporting on surfers' published narratives, not surfers in general (and as indicated in the Conclusion) a survey of these attitudes would make for fascinating future research.

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