



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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December 9, 1970

Memorandum

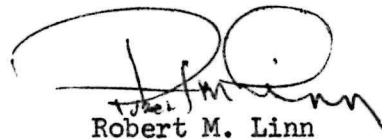
To: Directorate and All Field Directors

From: Chief Scientist

Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

The Office of Natural Science Studies conducts, from time to time, sociological studies to determine the characteristics of people who go to our national parks. The purpose of these studies is to obtain baseline data necessary for additional studies which will be undertaken later. While these data are obtained as an integral part of the scientific work being carried out by the Office of Natural Science Studies, they may also be useful to other divisions for any number of purposes.

Periodically, ONSS will issue short reports similar to the enclosure, in which some information about people in the parks will be presented. These will be technical reports presenting the information and explaining it. How it may be useful to each division will, of necessity, be decided within the division. ONSS will be available, of course, to answer any questions about the information contained in these reports. The reports are provided for administrative use only.



Robert M. Linn

Enclosure

PEOPLE IN THE PARKS

Students of animal social behavior have noticed for some time that there appears to be associated with a particular species a given physical distance which is maintained between individuals whenever they come into the presence of each other. If this distance is reduced either one or the other turns and flees or a fight ensues. The distances which individuals maintain between each other appear to be different, depending upon a number of factors. For example, the calf or the cub may approach its mother more closely than does another adult of the same species. We usually ascribe this observation to maternal behavior patterns or some such, but when we later notice that once the offspring attains adult size and no special approach distance exists, it is not clear whether young approach mothers more closely because of the biological relationship or because of their diminutive stature. Among those species which tend to form social groups, the distances maintained between members tend to remain constant in varying circumstances. Thus observations concerning herd formation and movement are well known to students of animal social behavior. Some anthropologists have observed that each human culture also regulates interpersonal distances among its members. Edward Hall has termed this branch of study proxemics and has written several informative articles and books on the topic. These considerations have a bearing on human behavior as it occurs in parks and suggest implications for park management and planning.

Social Spacing

In previous reports we noted that most adults who go to parks do so as members of closed social groups (see Report #12). These social groups were comprised of persons with whom the respondents had previously existing social relationships, such as ties of kinship or friendship. We know from studies in proxemics that the interpersonal distances which hold among persons who participate in these kinds of social relationships are different from those among persons in other types of relationships, such as merely being acquaintances. Not only do such persons approach each other more closely, but additional rights are exercised by them, such as touching each other, which are not sanctioned in less intimate social relationships. Recall your own displeasure at being patted or slapped on the back by a person whom in your eyes did not have the right to do so. The source of your displeasure usually stems from the fact that the person used a gesture of intimacy while you felt your relationship did not warrant such a show of affection between you. The point is fairly straightforward. Among members of this culture, those who participate in

closed social groups are more likely to approach each other more closely and engage in bodily contact than is true among persons not in similar groups. Edward Hall, in his book The Hidden Dimension, notes that distances between persons also vary during conversation depending upon how intimately they know each other. In short, those persons with whom you may come into near physical contact are specified clearly by the culture. (The conditions under which you may approach or touch those with whom you do not share an intimate social relationship will be discussed in a later report.) Based on these observations we wanted to ascertain the extent to which the social groups in the parks remained together during the time at the park or instead dispersed. The results obtained are shown in Table 1 (see Table 1).

It is clear from these data that the groups do not disperse during their visits to the parks. In both local and non-local parks approximately ninety percent (90%) of the groups remained together while in a park. This finding was expected in light of our knowledge of closed social groups. It may also have implications for other previously reported findings.

In Report #10 we observed that approximately seventy percent (70%) of the respondents in non-local parks did not perceive themselves as having been crowded while at the park. We now know that these adults were members of closed social groups while at the park, and that their groups had remained physically together throughout most of the time at the park. This suggests that the perception of crowding in a park may be directly related to the nature of the social relationships shared with persons physically near one.

Apparently the social norms (or rules) governing interpersonal distances in this culture tend to draw those persons who are members of kinship and friendship groups together (physically closer). This nearness is socially approved and expected, thus is not perceived and defined as crowding. Simultaneously these social norms tend to regulate intergroup spacing through contact avoidance between strangers. In fact, the spatial distribution of members within a group tends to place certain members where, if physical contact with nongroup members does occur, it can fall within the range of acceptable body contacts among persons not intimately known to each other. In general the social-psychological mechanism employed is to treat the contact as an accident and to apologize or to not acknowledge the contact by treating the person as if it was an object. The precise nature of the mechanisms which are available to regulate such intergroup avoidance are not well understood. Research in progress will expand our understanding of these factors.

To summarize, the reports that social groups stay together while in a park and that comparatively few persons perceive crowding while in parks are both related to the observation that people go to parks as members of closed social groups.

Now let us turn to a further naturally occurring aspect of social group behavior which can increase our understanding of the processes of social control as they occur among persons in a park.

Social Support

A concern with the reasons why people behave as they do is perhaps common to all of us. Indeed we predicate much of our response to the behavior of others upon our assessment of their motives. The sources of motivation for human behavior are very diverse - some cultural, some social, some psychological and some physiological. One of the matters we wished to examine was the intragroup process by which the group came about going to a park on its last visit. In our attempts to obtain data on this process, we asked the respondents for information as to whom in the group had suggested that a trip to the park be taken. The results are shown in Table 2 (see Table 2).

Most of the groups went to the park at the initiation of some member other than the respondent, although as can be seen the largest single category of initiators of the action were the respondents themselves. These data refer to the nonorganized groups only. Recall that such groups are primarily kinship and friendship groups. Within the general category of others who suggested that the group go to a park, the data are distributed additionally in terms of the nature of the social relationship holding between the respondent and that other person. Perhaps the most interesting observation which can be made is to notice the comparative equivalency among the categories in terms of the frequency of initiation of the action of going to a park. While there appear to be some differences in frequency of occurrence, in general there is a good degree of similarity. Thus each seems about as successful in initiating the group's activity - the spouse, the child, the friend and the relative. This is an interesting observation when we recall that in Report #11 it was noted that a part of the "costs" for a group to go to a park was the coordination of the activities among its members. All social groups usually exhibit a distribution of authority among the members. It is unusual to find such a degree of openness within closed social groups with respect to the initiation of action. Apparently going to a park is the kind of activity in which being a member of the group itself, rather than holding a particular social status within it, is a sufficient basis for being an initiator of the behavior. This suggests that the activity may have a special function to perform in maintaining intragroup cohesion. (This will be considered in a later report.)

The initiation of social behavior for a group requires the validation of that action by others in the group. We attempted to gain some information about this factor by asking if the respondents had gone to the park willingly, irrespective of whom had made the suggestion

to go. The results are shown in Table 3 (see Table 3). As can be readily seen, more than eighty percent (80%) of the respondents reported they had wanted to go. Only a small proportion reported they felt they had to go. In short, while the group had gone to the park more often at the suggestion of someone other than the respondent, these suggestions had received the social support and validation of the respondents. Moreover this social support was apparently given willingly. This finding further strengthens the observation that the openness to suggestability previously noted is a social structural characteristic of these groups with reference to the activity of going to a park. The meaning of this property is that persons participating in such groups are likely to be oriented towards the other members as an important part of the social behavior. This is again a common property of kinship and friendship groups. The activities in which they engage are incorporated into their common experiences in a unique manner. Whatever they do together is perceived and defined in terms of their previous experiences together. Since these are unique to the group, the meaning of the trip to the park is also likely to be unique. This does not mean that there are no common elements shared with other groups, because there are. But what it demonstrates is the nature of the intimate character of going to the park for the members of the group. In short, such experiences should tend to increase intragroup cohesion. Thus we can expect that the members of such groups will be strongly oriented towards the behavior of each other and less oriented to those outside the group.

Discussion

In this report we have considered several factors which taken jointly help to enlarge our understanding of the observations that social groups in parks tend to remain physically together most of the time. We have also noted how cultural factors (such as spacing norms) and social structural properties (such as the openness to suggestability within a group) act to complement each other in such a manner as to reduce individual perception of crowding in the presence of many other people. We now want to consider some of the implications of these observations for park management and planning.

First, it should be recognized that these properties of human social groups and human cultures are natural and characteristic of many such groups in situations outside of the parks. As such, while we may become aware of them through our studies and can develop our actions taking such factors into account, it is unlikely that they can be changed, if so desired, solely by appeal to rational faculties. For much about these properties is not rational (but not irrational) and cannot be easily influenced through such appeals. Second, mechanisms of social control are operating in many aspects of the behavior of humans in the parks. The data and interpretation in this report

suggest that large gatherings of humans in parks or elsewhere are unlikely to be disorganized or unruly in and of themselves. To the extent that we learn more about mechanisms governing intergroup spacing, we may reasonably expect to be increasingly imaginative and efficient in managing such large gatherings whenever they occur in the parks. Third, wherever it is possible we can also utilize knowledge about social group spacing in the design of future transportation systems, visitor centers, self-guiding interpretive trails, campground layout, etc. Such considerations will of course never be the final design factor. It is merely another variable which can aid in the creation of facilities which will enhance the enjoyment of the parks, while also contributing to their continuation as unique areas set aside for their many important characteristics - historical, natural and recreational.

Neil H. Cheek, Jr., Research Sociologist
Office of Natural Science Studies
National Park Service
December 9, 1970

Table 1. Distributions Among Social Groups In: Percentage

Group Remained Together	Non-Local Park	Local Park
Yes	91.4	89.5
No	6.4	9.2
Don't Recall	2.2	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 2. Person Suggesting Going To: Percentage
(Non-Organized Groups Only)

Type of Person	Non-Local Park	Local Park
<u>Self</u>	36.5	35.0
<u>Others</u>	46.8	52.6
Spouse	13.9	12.5
Child	7.3	14.8
Relative	14.5	12.2
Friend	10.7	11.4
Other	.4	1.7
<u>Don't Recall</u>	16.7	12.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Distribution Among Social Groups In: Percentage

Type of Social Support	Non-Local Park	Local Park
Wanted to go	86.0	80.0
Felt had to	5.9	8.6
Ambivalent	6.8	11.0
Don't recall	1.3	.4
Total	100.0	100.0

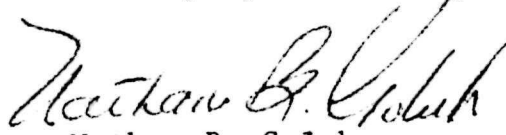
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19106

In reply refer to: November 13, 1970
N26-NER(PS)
NER-75

Memorandum

To: Superintendents, Northeast Region
From: Assistant Director, Park Support Services,
Northeast Region
Subject: Office of Natural Science Studies Reports

Enclosed is a memorandum dated October 27, 1970 from Chief,
Office of Natural Science Studies Linn, transmitting a
short technical report about people in the parks.


Nathan B. Golub

Enclosure

This memorandum will remain in effect until further notice.