



## Trouble at the Beach: Direct Observations of Beachgoers

At the very beginning of this research, in June and July 1975, over one hundred hours were spent on Southland Beach in informal observation and conversation, which was intended to provide a record of differences and similarities among beachgoers all along the beach. By the use of traditional ethnographic procedures such as participant observation and informal interviews, we sought to determine for each portion of the beach when crowds arrived, how they were typically constituted, how they ordinarily behaved, and what kinds of things happened that annoyed or alarmed them. Casual conversations on many topics were also held with lifeguards, fishermen, parking lot attendants, merchants, and passersby on the promenade.<sup>1</sup>

After these preliminary investigations, three observers (the author and two women assistants) began more focused observations along the beach in order to refine observational methods and make certain that inter-observer reliability could be achieved. The purpose of these observations was not to record subtle features of interaction, such as exact distances between beachgoers on the sand, details of their non-verbal behavior, or the precise nature of their conversations. For one thing, the noise of the surf and the sea breeze usually made it

impossible to overhear conversations unless voices were raised, but even had it been possible and ethical to eavesdrop, the purposes of this study made a fine-grained record of conversation or behavior unnecessary. Instead, our interest was in more obvious, easily observed aspects of behavior, the kinds of occurrences that stood out so clearly that they could be seen at a distance and agreed upon by independent observers.

Accordingly, we began our systematic program of observation by defining a study area, usually a rectangle of some 30 to 50 yards along the beach front and as many yards inland as the observer was able to monitor given the conditions of crowding. On days when the beach was only sparsely crowded it was often possible to see everything of relevance all the way from the waterline to the rear wall of the beach; on crowded days, there were so many beachgoers to be watched that it was difficult to record behaviors farther than 30 or 40 yards inland. Once the study area was set, we recorded the location, sex, age, ethnicity, and pairing of people in the area (for example, "male alone," "male-female couple," "parents with two four- to six-year old children"), then watched to see what kinds of rule violations might occur. We also recorded the reactions of beachgoers to these violations. We were not concerned with recording everything people did—sitting, sleeping, talking, playing cards, and the like. Instead we were interested in two classes of phenomena: first, obvious rule violations, and second, trouble, whether the trouble was related to an obvious rule violation or not. Trouble, as defined earlier, is the term we used to refer to evidence that one person visibly took offense at the behavior of another.

We recorded violations of three kinds of rules: (1) commonly understood laws (for example, laws against theft, assault, and indecent exposure); (2) municipal ordinances governing beach behavior (no fires, no alcoholic beverages, and no dogs, for details see Chapter Two); and (3) certain "beach rules" that seemed to be widely understood by beachgoers (such as not placing one's towel too close to another party, not throwing frisbees too close to sleeping per-

sons, and not kicking sand on others by running past them). It was not difficult to record all or almost all rule violations of general laws or beach ordinances. On a crowded day, however, it was sometimes difficult to record all the violations of the presumed beach rules. Inter-judge reliabilities regarding violations of laws and ordinances ran well above .90, but the agreement concerning the violations of beach rules could fall as low as .50 depending on the size of the crowd and the nature of the rule.

The second category of interest was "trouble" which was observable when someone displayed obvious anger, complained loudly or asked for an account ("Watch it," "What do you think you're doing?" "Can't you be more careful?"), quickly picked up personal belongings and moved away, engaged in open confrontation (shouting, shoving), or made a formal complaint to a lifeguard or a police officer. It was only sometimes possible to determine to what extent someone was upset, offended, or annoyed, and such judgments were not regularly attempted. Thus a number of offenses that did not lead to clearly visible signs of trouble but did produce fear or annoyance undoubtedly went unrecorded. When trouble was visible it was usually, but not always, possible to determine what rule violation had triggered it, or at least what rule violation ostensibly did so.

Conditions at Southland Beach allow observations such as these to be made with considerable accuracy. The behaviors being recorded were clearly visible, and because it was possible to observe on the beach for long periods of time without exciting anyone's interest, there was little reason to fear that the process of observation was itself affecting the behavior being observed. This point is important. Our preliminary ethnographic investigations indicated that someone who dressed like an ordinary beachgoer could sit or lie on the beach, look around discreetly, and take notes without arousing curiosity. Glancing at others is a common and acceptable feature of beach life, and many beachgoers, especially men, glance at other people on the beach continually. Writing is also common, and many people on the beach write letters,

pausing from time to time to look around. It is even possible to take photographs of others on this beach without anyone seeming to take notice.

Throughout hundreds of hours of observation and recording we received no complaints. There were only a handful of queries about note taking, and since these were invariably made to a female observer by a male beachgoer, it is reasonable to assume that the note taking was merely a convenient topic chosen by men in order to initiate a conversation with an attractive woman. On no occasion was a beachgoer noticed to move away from an observer, nor were there any complaints about us which we overheard, or which were passed on to us by lifeguards. The process of observation, then, was a natural part of the beach scene. The result of these observations appears to be an accurate, non-reactive record of observable violations of beach ordinances or well-known laws, and of the visible kinds of trouble that sometimes follow. It is a less accurate record of violations of various beach rules, and it is an unreliable record of how beachgoers felt about the behavior that we saw going on about them.<sup>2</sup>

The accuracy of these observations will be more easily evaluated when the observations themselves are presented and discussed, but a few examples here may be helpful. On a warm, sunny weekday observations were made by two persons for two hours. The area studied was 65 yards wide, from the berm to a point about 100 yards inland. The study area contained 63 people as observations began. This number remained steady throughout the period of observation; some people left the beach, but a similar number of new arrivals replaced them. There were 10 single men, mostly in their twenties or thirties, three single women in their early twenties, and five couples; there was one group of two men, two of two women, another of four women, three of three women, and one of six teenage males. There was one woman with a child, another group of three women with one child, a group of two young men and two young women, and another of two teenage males with one teenage girl.

During two hours of observation the following rules were

violated: (1) several dogs ran on the beach; (2) a frisbee almost hit a young woman, landing between her legs while she sat writing something; (3) a young woman who took her toddler to wade in the water had both breasts fall out of her bikini top, and she made no effort to replace them for about 30 seconds; (4) this same woman later breastfed her child while talking to passersby at the waterline; and (5) the necking of a teenage couple became so passionate that sexual intercourse was almost consummated on the sand.

While both observers agreed in recording these occurrences as rule violations, it was also noted that only two of the violations led to anything that could be considered even mildly annoying. First, the girl who was almost hit by a frisbee looked startled, but handed the frisbee back without obvious anger or comment. Second, the teenage couple's necking became so passionate, and involved such overt petting, that several nearby beachgoers stared in open amazement, then looked either embarrassed or angered. No one left the area, however. We would conclude that one beach ordinance (the dogs) was violated several times, and four common beach rules were also violated; we would also conclude that only very slight "trouble" was seen.

As this two-hour period illustrates, rule violations themselves are usually reasonably easy to observe—there is a dog on the beach, someone is drinking beer, someone is exposing himself. "Trouble," on the other hand, is a gloss for a complex process which often can be observed only in part. For example, in response to some kind of an offense, anger may be felt but not expressed; and if it is expressed its initial flare-up may be missed, or the outcome may be lost altogether because the participants move away. The following example illustrates this problem. At a location on South beach before 11:00 A.M. on an exceptionally hot sunny day, an observer recorded, among other things, a sequence of drinking behavior that lasted over an hour and a half. When the observer arrived and defined a 35 by 45 yard study area, she noticed a group of seven males aged 13-15 who were engaged in drink-

ing vodka or gin out of plastic cups. The violation was obvious: alcoholic beverages are illegal on Southland Beach, and these boys were clearly under age. As time passed, several of the boys became boisterous, shouting obscenities and throwing sand at one another. The sand almost hit several people nearby, but only one of these looked up in annoyance and no one said anything. Indeed, a nearby group of adults laughed, apparently amused by the youngsters' increasingly drunken antics. After an hour and a half, one of the boys lay prostrate on the sand, apparently quite intoxicated. Two lifeguards then approached the group of youngsters and told them to take showers and get off the beach. Whether the order reflected a concern for the law or for the danger of heat stroke on such a hot day could not be determined. After giving their order, the lifeguards left but the boys neither took showers nor departed. After a few minutes the lifeguards returned and ordered the boys to put water on the intoxicated boy's face. They then joined the boys in dragging the most intoxicated boy into the shade under the lifeguard tower. Another 45 minutes passed and the police did not arrive, a delay which means that no call to them was placed. The heat of the day forced the observer (who had to remain in the sun) to leave before the boys left the area.

The problem here is that while the occurrence of a rule violation was obvious, trouble was not. Only one person seemed to be annoyed. No one actually complained, and the lifeguards were apparently more concerned with the health of the teenagers than with law enforcement. Yet due to the forced departure of the observer, the outcome of the episode was not determined. We can only surmise that while the law was flagrantly broken, no one was particularly bothered by it. We cannot be certain, however, that some more serious trouble did not occur before the boys finally left the beach.

We rarely interviewed either participants or witnesses concerning the rule violations or trouble that we witnessed during these periods of observation because we were primarily concerned with recording the frequency of occurrence of rule

violation and trouble, not with details concerning process, and we felt that by stopping to interview people we would lose sight of everything else that might occur while the interview was taking place. We also avoided such interviews because we did not want to risk influencing anyone by suggesting to them, however inadvertently, that they should be upset by something that they might otherwise have taken lightly.<sup>3</sup>

### Results of the Observational Study

It was the consensus of police and lifeguard opinion as well as our own ethnographic investigations that the highest frequency of trouble on Southland Beach occurs in the area just south of the pier around lifeguard tower 16, and just north of it at tower 15. For this reason, we centered a series of observations on these two areas as well as on various so-called "Anglo" areas on the beach, where trouble was said to be less frequent (for example, County Beach, towers 8-11, and towers 24-27). Following the procedures discussed before, in 1975 three observers made 30 hours of observation; half of these focused on areas 15 and 16 with the rest being divided among the other areas. All observations were made between 10 A.M. and 4 P.M., with the majority centered in the peak crowding hours of 11 to 3. The periods of observation never exceeded two hours, and usually lasted only 45 minutes to an hour. Each of the beach areas was observed both on warm sunny days when crowds were large and on cool foggy days when there were very few people at the beach. On a crowded day, there would be approximately 150 people in a given study area; on an uncrowded day about 35; and on an average day about 75. Since all three degrees of crowding were selected for each beach study area, the overall average was 75 people observed per hour. In 1976, the same three observers were joined by four additional observers. Following the same procedures in the same locations, 130 hours of observations were recorded on 70 separate days during July, August, and September. The 130 hours of observation were distributed equally among the same beach areas studied in 1975.

### The Frequency of Rule Violations

In 1975, when only 30 hours of observations were made, there were some differences in the frequency of rule violations, which varied from 1.5 per hour on South beach to over 3 per hour on County Beach. However, in 1976, when 130 hours of observation were conducted, there were no statistically significant differences at all between areas, with each averaging about one rule violation per hour (the highest frequency was 1.2 per hour, the least .9 per hour). Since the degree of crowding was controlled in the various areas, as was weather, and weekend or weekday crowds, it is unlikely that any of these factors affected the frequencies that were recorded. On the average, then, a population of approximately 75 beachgoers was observed to commit about one rule violation each hour. On crowded weekends this average is somewhat higher (about 1.6), and it falls below 1.0 on weekdays when the crowds are smaller. But we never observed more than four rule violations per hour under any conditions, and on several crowded days, no rule violations at all were seen during two hour-long periods of observation. In general, then, for a patch of sand roughly 35 by 50 yards containing some 75 people, the range of observable rule violations per hour is zero to four. We cannot be certain that additional days of observation would not yield slightly different frequencies, but the rate of rule violation observed was sufficiently constant that we believe it would alter only on special occasions or under special circumstances. Whether this rate of rule violation is interpreted as being high or low depends, of course, on the seriousness of the violations. An average of one murder or rape per hour would be intolerable for any set of beachgoers, while an average of one misdirected frisbee throw per hour would imply something altogether different.

### The Seriousness of Beach Rule Violations

It is difficult to estimate the seriousness of rule violations; one beachgoer may be outraged by frisbee throwing, but another may wink—literally—at a man who masturbates. Nevertheless, some differentiation of violations can be made.

For example, there are some violations that typically bother no one on the beach. Thus, drinking beer is a common violation that rarely bothers anyone, even the police. But there are other violations that do bother some people, such as the use of loud, obscene language, and the throwing of sand or balls. Finally, there are serious violations such as theft, assault, or indecent exposure that bother many beachgoers. In any case, the seriousness of a violation is most meaningfully determined by the reaction of the offended party.

Table 1 lists the relative frequency of violations separated into two categories: offenses that bothered a beachgoer, and those that did not. We see that 170 of the 192 total rule violations recorded in 1975 and 1976 led to no trouble of any kind; only 22 rule violations produced any sort of troubled reaction from an aggrieved party. To provide a better understanding of these rule violations and their apparent seriousness, it may prove useful to have a brief description of those that evoked no troubled reaction as well as those that did. Because there were no qualitative differences between violations seen in 1975 and 1976, only the violations seen in 1975 will be discussed here.

Fifty-two of the sixty-nine violations observed in 1975 pro-

**Table 1**  
The Seriousness of Rule Violations on Southland Beach in 1975-1976

	Area 15-16	Area 8-11	Area 24-27	Area County	Total
Violations that did not produce a troubled reaction	45	33	25	67	170
Violations that did produce a troubled reaction	11	5	4	2	22
Percentage of troubled reactions	20%	13%	14%	3%	11.4%

duced no visible negative reaction. Twenty-eight of these violations involved dogs, drinking beer, or smoking marijuana. Although these are offenses against the municipal beach ordinances, rather than offenses against people, they do have some potential for evoking negative reaction from some beachgoers; however, in these 28 cases, no such reaction was seen. The following 26 rule violations had a somewhat greater potential for troubling other beachgoers, but once again, no negative reaction was observed.

1. A young woman with a male escort was hit by a frisbee; they both smiled wanly and the man threw it back without comment.

2. Two twelve-year-old boys undressed clumsily on the beach; one of the boys dropped his pants in the sand and stood naked for a few moments laughing embarrassedly. No one reacted.

3. A brother and sister, aged about six and seven, threw sand at one another, shouting angrily. No outsider was hit by the sand. The mother led the now tearful younger brother to the shower, saying loudly and for effect, "Having children is one of life's greatest experiences." No one responded.

4. A group of nine male and female Anglo teenagers talked and shouted loudly and obscenely, not only using four-letter words in abundance but mocking one another with threats of sexual conquest or physical combat. Adults all around them paid no apparent attention.

5. Three Chicano men, all fully dressed, plunked themselves down on the sand only four or five feet from four teenaged Anglo girls. The men stared openly and made sexually insinuating comments in Spanish; the girls did nothing to acknowledge the men's presence. When the men left, as they soon did, the girls laughed to themselves, but expressed no apparent alarm or indignation.

6. A teenaged couple began to pet heatedly despite the presence around them of several children and elderly people. No one appeared to object to this display of overt passion, and indeed, one man of about 50 seemed to enjoy the display.

7. A large Chicano family group moved onto the sparsely

settled beach, setting down their blankets and paraphernalia within a few feet of an Anglo family group; the Anglos neither moved nor gave any sign of displeasure.

8. Two large, athletic German-speaking men in their early thirties acrobatically kicked a soccer ball back and forth in a crowd of people along the wet sand near the water. Although the ball almost hit several people and the hurtling men almost trampled other people, no one gave any sign of annoyance.

9. A thin Anglo teenager sat down next to four Anglo teenaged girls whom he did not know before and asked for a match. After some initial nervousness and coolness by the girls, the one closest to him struck up a conversation and after about 30 minutes these two were engaged in obvious flirtation and even some very mild petting.

10. A teenaged Anglo girl played her radio so loudly that it was quite difficult to hear anything else within a distance of 15 yards or so. Although several people were within this range, no one moved away or said anything to her.

11. Four Anglo teenaged boys shouted obscenities back and forth despite the proximity of children and adult couples; no one moved away or spoke to the teenagers or appeared in any way to be distressed.

12. A small Spanish-speaking girl ran away from her family, refusing to return when called to in Spanish; an older woman of about 60 ran after her, shouting and kicking sand lightly on two couples. When the child was finally caught, she was spanked severely and dragged back crying through the sand to her family group. No one within sight reacted visibly to this sequence.

13. Two small boys kicked sand on several people as they ran by; no one reacted.

14. A teenaged girl near the water lost one breast out of her bikini top; a pre-teenaged girl nearby mentioned the occurrence to her mother, but both seemed amused rather than upset.

15. A fully but shabbily dressed man of 50 or so staggered along the sand apparently quite drunk; he veered away from

most people on the sand as he approached them, but he came quite close to several; no one moved, stared at him directly, or said anything to him.

16. Two young men who were engaged in horseplay in the shallow water threw wet sand at each other, accidentally hitting a young woman and her male escort as they passed by; no apology was given, and the couple moved on without comment or backward glance.

17. Two men in their twenties sat together talking when one reached into his own trunks as if to rearrange his genitals, then reached over to the other to squeeze first his thigh, then his genitals. The first man then walked over to a nearby young woman who returned with him to the second man, who seemed quite amused by the exchange. No one else appeared to pay any attention.

18. A teenager throwing a football to another boy almost hit a passing child of eight or so; there was no reaction by the child or anyone else.

19. A group of men in their twenties were playing catch with a football when an errant throw landed near a family group, spattering sand on them and their food. The ball was tossed back politely; no account was asked for and no apology was offered.

20. Two teenagers playing catch with a softball hit a sleeping man on the leg, waking him; he tossed the ball back to them without any visible annoyance.

21. A girl sitting alone on the beach was hit rather hard in the leg by a frisbee thrown by a man. She threw it back without a glance or comment; the man did not apologize.

22. A woman had both breasts fall out of her bikini while in shallow water up to her knees, and she made no effort to cover herself for almost a minute. A man noticed with apparent pleasure.

23. A young French-speaking man and two young French-speaking women wrestled in the sand for over five minutes; although the wrestling was violent, and one of the women momentarily exposed one breast, there was nothing

overtly sexual about the behavior. Several people watched the encounter, but with apparent pleasure rather than annoyance.

24. A woman who was talking to several other people near the waterline began to breast-feed her infant; there was no visible reaction on the part of others.

25. A white male of 20 or so kissed and hugged a black male of the same age while the two lay together on a towel. Although the kiss and hug were sexual, there was no further sexual play and no one in the area reacted visibly.

26. Three pre-teenage boys threw sand at each other, hitting an older woman and her child as they passed by. There was no noticeable reaction.

There are several points to be made about these 26 incidents. For one thing, the rules being violated were sometimes, as in the incidents involving sexual behavior, by no means clearly defined, or presumably universally agreed upon. Because we felt that this behavior violated what we had come to understand from beachgoers as commonly accepted rules of beach conduct, these episodes were counted as rule violations even though no one in the area seemed to object. It is also true, of course, that even where clear rules or beach ordinances are violated, people often do not react. This failure to take offense will be considered in a later chapter in some detail. Moreover, even though these 26 rule violations *could* have given offense leading to a complaint or argument, anyone would agree, we suppose, that the violations were not terribly serious. To be sure, some could have been troubling, as in the obscene menace of the teenagers' language and posturing, or a thrown football hitting a sleeping person, or a drunken man accosting a small child. But most were not really serious, even potentially. There was no assault, no rape, no theft, no serious injury. Instead, we found people throwing footballs, ogling girls or trying to pick them up, shouting obscene words, or playing a radio too noisily—nothing really to call a lifeguard or the police about. Let us consider, then, all of the rule violation incidents during the

summers of 1975 and 1976—22 in all—that *did* lead to some kind of troubled reaction.

#### Rule Violations That Led to Trouble

Only 22 of the 192 rule violations observed in 1975 and 1976, less than 11 percent of the total, can be said to have involved a manifestly negative response on the part of a beachgoer. What is more, in most of these 22 instances, the negative response was far from being serious. Several of the violations that led to a reaction were both ordinary beach problems and rather trivial in themselves. Two of these involved kicking sand. In both of these instances, young boys kicked sand on an adult man who responded with an angry look and a yell such as, "Hey, don't kick sand." Nothing further was said or done and the children neither slowed down their joyous gallop nor looked back to see what had happened. Two instances involved one group moving too close to another on the sand. One of these instances involving a Chicano family illustrates a common sort of occurrence in which a sizable party of beachgoers settles down quite near another party of people even though there is unoccupied sand all around. Sometimes nothing happens, but in this case, the party whom the newcomers moved next to looked visibly distressed, then abruptly picked up their belongings and moved some ten yards away. Nothing further took place. In the other similar instance, four Chicanos, both men and women, left their towels on the sand to swim. While they were in the water a group of Anglos arrived, and even though the beach was not overly crowded, these people placed their towels within two or three feet of those of the Chicanos. They also then left for a swim. When the four Chicanos returned, they looked startled and then angry to find that other people had placed towels virtually on top of their own. Muttering to themselves in annoyance, they moved their belongings some distance away.

In another minor incident, several teenaged Anglo boys were happily engaged in throwing beer cans into the surf,



retrieving them, then repeating the sequence. The danger to swimmers and waders was obvious, but there was no obvious reaction from beachgoers until a lifeguard approached and ordered an end to the practice. In a final incident on County Beach, a dishevelled "bum" who is a "regular" at this beach panhandled a young man, who swore at him in anger and ordered him away, threatening him with a "punch in the face" if he were seen on the beach again.

A somewhat more troublesome set of violations had to do with sexual encounters. Eleven such encounters were observed which drew a troubled reaction from an offended person. For example, in one encounter, two quite attractive blond teenaged girls were lying on their backs quietly talking to one another. Two teenaged boys who were returning to their towels from a refreshment stand saw the girls and altered their course in order to walk by them. Approaching to within two feet they slowed almost to a halt and one of the boys said quite loudly, "Want a beer?" and then without waiting for a response added "Want to fuck?" The girl closest to them did not even bother to stop her own conversation as she casually raised her hand toward them and then insultingly elevated her middle finger. The two boys left hurriedly without another word, looking thoroughly squelched.

In another incident, a young Swedish-speaking couple walked onto the beach fully clothed. They sat close to the berm and the man quickly pulled off his clothes down to a pair of very small bikini briefs, then walked to the water. The young woman then began a ritual of changing clothes which is common in Europe, but rarely seen on Southland Beach. First she took out of her purse a black bikini top which she tied around her waist. Pushing the bikini under her white T-shirt, she fastened it in place and removed the shirt. By now, several people—men and women alike—were watching. She then stood up and tied a very small white towel around her waist. Balancing delicately, she tried to wriggle out of her jeans without losing the towel. She managed to remove her jeans while affording no more than occasional glimpses of her now naked posterior, but when she tried to

pull on her bikini bottoms, the towel fell altogether, and she stood nude for a long moment while she tried to catch the towel and pull on her bottoms, failing to do either. She finally abandoned the towel and simply pulled on her bikini, but by this time people were staring in frank amazement. Although the watching men hardly seemed to be offended by the spectacle, some women clearly were not pleased. One was heard to say with disgust, "That was really gross. Who does she think she is?" And another said to her female companion, "If you think that was bad, stick around for the next act; there's no telling what she'll do next." The first woman and her older female companion soon thereafter left the beach. Whether they did so as a result of the incident is not known.

In a third incident, an Anglo couple in their fifties lay on towels together on a crowded patch of sand. Both were quite pale, and from their clothing piled next to them, they could have been tourists. After some minutes of talking to one another they began to kiss and pet, quite avidly. Everyone in the area looked on startled; teenagers sometimes neck at the beach, but people in their fifties do so rarely, if ever. As the necking continued and became more intimate, several people looked embarrassed and one woman about 35 took her ten-year-old daughter by the hand and abruptly left the beach. Others may have wanted to do so, because one could feel the embarrassment in the air, and several beachgoers could be overheard discussing this couple's behavior in disapproving terms.

As we will learn when we discuss our interviews with beachgoers, quite a few women are offended by the necking that sometimes takes place on the beach. In four instances that we observed, teenaged necking evoked considerable displeasure from older people nearby. The most common response to necking on the beach is for other people to look momentarily startled, then look away as if embarrassed. Sometimes a solitary man, frequently hidden behind sunglasses, stares with voyeuristic pleasure. One seldom observes obvious indications that people are upset by what is going on, but people *were* upset by the following episodes.



First, at County Beach, a pretty teenaged girl began to neck with one of her two male companions. After ten minutes of moderately zealous necking, the male got up and left, presumably to go into the water farther down the beach. As soon as he left, the other boy began to neck with the girl and their passion was well beyond that usually seen on the beach. He put his hands under her bikini top and inside her cut-off jeans. She caressed his genitals, and they alternated in lying atop one another while making copulatory motions. Two nearby couples were embarrassed to the point of obvious anger by this display. No one said anything that could be overheard, but one couple quickly left the area, glancing back in what appeared to be disgust.

A similar sexual display was presented by a blond girl in a see-through bikini and her teenaged boyfriend. What appeared to be a family grouping of a mother, grandmother, and two small children first attempted to ignore the sexual behavior, then picked up their belongings and moved about 100 yards away. A nearby teenaged couple ignored the necking for about 15 minutes, then they too picked up their gear and moved, this time about 50 yards away. In two similar episodes, passionate sexual embraces on the beach led nearby beachgoers to express their annoyance verbally, then to move away.

Two other troubling incidents involved fully clothed, elderly voyeurs who meandered along the beach ogling young women. On two occasions such men came so close to a woman and stared so openly that the woman reacted with obvious annoyance, grimacing, and turning away. One appeared to say something that could not be overheard. When the voyeurs finally left, both of these women stared after them with murderous looks.

Another cause of troubled reactions was attempted "pick-ups." On one such occasion two young black men in street clothes approached a young blond woman who was alone on the sand. After many suggestive remarks they asked her to go with them "for a drink." She ignored them. When she continued to ignore their increasingly suggestive comments and

questions, one of the men bristled and angrily called her a "honky bitch." After that, the men walked away. As soon as they did so, the woman grabbed her possessions and moved away in the opposite direction. In another episode, two attractive blond girls about 16 years old had just arrived on the beach and were lying on their stomachs with their bikini tops fastened. They had done nothing provocative when a quite handsome man of 35 or so, who happened to be a volleyball player and a "regular" at this part of the beach, walked by. He paused, then flopped down on the sand behind the girls. As if he knew them, he reached out and grabbed one girl by her ankle. She was clearly startled, even angry, and pulled her leg away; she refused to turn over to look at the man or talk to him. Her girlfriend, whom he had not grabbed, did roll over. Hesitantly and with a look of profound awkwardness, she modestly exchanged words with him for about five minutes while he continued to lie on his stomach in the sand. He renewed his attempts to talk to the first girl, but she ignored him, quite insultingly. After five minutes, he left and the girls discussed his "pick-up" attempt with obvious annoyance, gesturing in a ridiculing manner. Among snatches of their conversation that were audible the girl who had been touched said that it was very "uncool" for a man to "come on to them" that way.

In these sexually tinged episodes, some people were annoyed, perhaps even quite upset, but the resulting "trouble," if it can properly be called that, was slight. In five other episodes, physical harm was threatened, and more fearful or angry reactions were evoked. Two of these instances had to do with roughhouse games in the shallow water. It is commonplace for young men to play roughly in the water, throwing footballs, wrestling, or running at top speed despite the presence of women, children, and elderly people all around. As we have seen, usually no one complains, but in two instances that were observed, people were clearly alarmed. In the first, four Chicano men, all fully clothed, took turns carrying one another into the water, then dumping the victim and running away. The victim pursued his tormentors heedless of

people around him. It was all good fun, but recklessly done, and people in the water quickly moved aside, giving the men ample room for their frolic, and evincing fear and anger as they did so. As some of the displaced bathers returned to the sand, one man was heard to say, "You'd think they owned the beach," and another woman said "Why doesn't the lifeguard do something? They could really hurt somebody running around like that."

In the second instance, five Anglo men in their early twenties were playing a game of football in the shallow water despite the fact that the water was already occupied by children and women who were quietly wading and splashing in the water. The men threw the football hard and when the ball went astray, as it often did, it became a dangerous projectile, especially where small children were concerned. They also ran at top speed, mindless of the people around them. People moved away to give them room, but one woman who was in the water with her small child said something angrily to one of them, and glared with obvious displeasure at a man who ran by almost hitting her. She then took her child and left the water glaring back angrily as she did. The young man continued the game for only a minute or two after that and then returned to the sand, apparently chastened by the woman's rebuke. In both of these instances a lifeguard was close at hand but he did nothing and no one complained to him. In a third instance a man playing catch with a frisbee hit a girl who was lying on the sand with another young woman. She did not appear to be painfully hurt, but she did glare at the man and then spoke to him in clear annoyance. He apologized with apparent concern and moved away to continue his game elsewhere.

In a fourth encounter, several teenaged Anglos were playing a rather listless game of catch with a football when two ten-year-old boys, who were fully dressed, passed by them as they left the beach for the day. Without warning, a large teenager unleashed a Tarzan yell and roughly tackled one of the smaller boys, rolling him in the sand and knocking his possessions out of his hands. The small victim of the surprise

tackle was clearly frightened, and while he was helped up with a sort of apologetic grin, he was near tears and yelled, unoriginally but sincerely, "Leave me alone, you big bully." The "bully" looked somewhat abashed, as did his friends, and as the smaller boy walked quickly away, brushing sand off his clothes, the bully said plaintively, "People who feel like that shouldn't come to the beach." None of the other teenagers said anything to confirm this opinion, however, and it was apparent that they shared the smaller boy's view that the surprise tackle was uncalled for.

A final incident serves particularly well to illustrate what appears to be the typical response of beachgoers to behavior that suggests physical menace. At a spot about 10 yards from a lifeguard tower and only a few yards from the observer's towel, two 15- or 16-year-old Anglo boys who were walking along the beach stopped and began to yell at each other. Both wore jeans but no shirts, and each appeared to have been drinking, one staggeringly so. Their conversation, which was already loud, quickly led to a shouting match with one boy—the less drunk of the two—teasing the other and playfully pushing him. The drunker of the boys took great offense, saying "Man, I'm serious, man, don't do that or I'll kill you," and similar things. All the while he was clenching his fists and raising them as if to strike, while the other boy continued to giggle and push him teasingly. After a few minutes of this sparring, the drunker of the two ran to the water, doused himself thoroughly, then wet and shivering he ran back, kicking sand all over the observer and others nearby, none of whom reacted. When he returned, the argument continued—obscene shouts were exchanged, both boys balled their fists, and an actual fight appeared to be imminent. Two nearby couples quickly grabbed their towels and moved away, but just at the point where serious blows seemed to be inevitable, the two boys walked off parallel to the water, stopping every ten yards or so to square off, to threaten mayhem, and to exchange loud obscene insults. As they moved along, people on the crowded beach parted like the Red Sea, grabbing their possessions and children, and

retreating out of the boys' path to a safe distance. It was not only women and children who scuttled away; young men did so as well. Neither of the combatants was particularly large or well-muscled, yet groups of larger and stronger men moved away from them. No one attempted to intervene in the dispute, and no one spoke directly to them about their obscene language, their scuffling which kicked sand onto people, or their threatened combat. People simply moved out of their path and the boys eventually staggered out of the area. After their departure, the beach buzzed with critical and annoyed comments as people returned their towels to the places they had just vacated. Almost everyone seemed quite disturbed, but no one had done anything to confront the boys directly, nor did anyone complain to the nearby lifeguard.

This pattern of avoiding confrontations is characteristic of the beach. Most potentially troublesome rule violations evoke no response whatsoever. For the most part, people appear to ignore behavior altogether. As a police officer said, they seem to "tune out" one another. When a rule violation does provoke some reaction, the most common one is for the offended party simply to move some distance away. Words are not usually exchanged and accounts are seldom demanded, but when a complaint is uttered, or a "dirty look" is given, that seems to be as far as the offended person cares to go, since the next step tends to be away from confrontation and almost always involves an increased physical separation between the parties involved. We will discuss this pattern of avoiding conflict in more detail later, after more evidence has been presented.

### Conclusion

Up and down Southland Beach during the summers of 1975 and 1976, rule violations seldom occurred, and when they did they were for the most part inconsequential insofar as the well-being of beachgoers was concerned. Almost half of all rule violations that were seen involved beer, marijuana, or dogs, and although such offenses could conceivably have led to interpersonal conflict, these did not. Indeed, more than

half of the violations that had a potential for interpersonal conflict produced no reaction from beachgoers. When a reaction did occur, it usually seemed calculated to avoid further trouble, not to make an issue of the trouble that had already been experienced.

As we knew from the police, from lifeguards, and from our ethnographic observations here and there on the beach, serious trouble can indeed occur, and beachgoers sometimes do confront one another with anger and sometimes with violence. However, in 192 hours of systematic observation—during which all rule violations, even the most trivial, and beachgoers' reactions to them, were recorded—we saw little trouble, and none that we saw was really serious. We saw no serious injuries on the sand or in the water, no theft, no assaults, no men exposing themselves, no children being molested sexually. No one complained to a lifeguard, and no one called the police. Furthermore, the supposedly troublesome areas just south and north of the pier were not very different from the other parts of the beach. Rules were violated no more often in these areas than anywhere else, and even though there was a somewhat greater likelihood that a rule violation in these areas would lead to a troubled reaction (see Table 1), the trouble was a long way from being serious. It seems reasonable to conclude that during peak crowding hours (10 A.M. to 4 P.M.) in the summer, the trouble that beachgoers experience on the sandy beach is both relatively infrequent and inconsequential.