

TERRITORIAL BEHAVIOR ON BEACHES*¹

DePaul University and Illinois Masonic Hospital

LEONARD A. JASON, ARNOLD REICHLER, AND WALTER RUCKER

SUMMARY

In a study of female territorial behaviors on beaches, 30 women were approached on beaches over a four-month period and asked some questions about their territorial behavior. The Ss reported that they generally tolerated male intrusions on their beach territory. They tended to employ passive, as opposed to active, protective behaviors in defending their territory. On the average, they reported being approached about once each time they went to the beach. Ten percent of the sample indicated that they were currently dating a man who had previously invaded their beach territory. The frequency of going to the beach and the use of assertive female behavioral strategies were significantly correlated with the number of times men approached the Ss, but female attractiveness and age were not significantly correlated with male territorial intrusions.

A. INTRODUCTION

Environmental psychologists have devoted considerable research to examining human interactions and encounters as a function of the distance or space separating individuals (11). Four types of informal space have been posited by Hall (10). These include (a) intimate space (i.e., close or direct contact is made with another person); (b) personal distance (i.e., the small protective sphere maintained in interactions with others); (c) social distance (i.e., impersonal behaviors which occur four to 12 feet away); and (d) public distance (i.e., events occurring more than 12 feet away).

Many environmental researchers have used the terms personal space and territoriality to understand characteristics of behavior, attitudes, and cogni-

* Received in the Editorial Office, Provincetown, Massachusetts, on February 14, 1980. Copyright, 1981, by The Journal Press.

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tions occurring within informal space (7). Personal space refers to an imaginary, invisible envelope surrounding individuals which represents unmarked, portable territory. If personal space is violated or invaded, as when a stranger sits on a bench near another person, the original occupant might either manifest signs of uneasiness or leave the bench entirely (16). Invasions of personal space are tolerated in some behavior settings (e.g., crowded subways); however, in these circumstances defensive behaviors frequently occur [e.g., avoiding eye contact, ignoring others (8)].

Personal space surrounds an individual's body; therefore its boundaries are neither visible nor fixed to a particular territory. In contrast, territoriality refers to stationary territory which has designated, marked boundaries (15). Altman (1) has conceptualized three types of territories: (a) primary, where an individual has exclusive rights to the use of space (e.g., a house owner); (b) secondary, where people informally interact with acquaintances in semipublic places (e.g., a neighborhood bar); and (c) public territories, where everyone is allowed temporary access (e.g., beaches). Several potential psychological benefits of territoriality include (a) increased economic power or status (13); (b) elevated perceptions of control over one's life (12), enhanced comfort (14), and greater privacy (5). The investment and advantages inherent in territoriality are related to the centrality or importance of the territory as well as the length of time the territory had been occupied (1). If a territory is not of central importance, as with study tables in libraries, both sexes are equally likely to flee the area when an intruder appears (2, 3).

Several studies have investigated behavioral and cognitive defensive strategies utilized by individuals in protecting their territory. For example, Sommer (16) found *Ss* adopting an active territorial strategy in a research library selected middle chairs on the side of a rectangular table, whereas those adopting a passive defense chose end chairs. There is a need to better understand behavioral strategies utilized in protecting territory, ecological characteristics of behavior settings facilitating or impeding territorial intrusions, and links between specific types of territorial behaviors and cognitions (6, 17).

The present preliminary study investigated female behavioral and emotional reactions to territorial intrusions on a beach. The study documented behavioral regularities on beaches, the extent of male intrusions on female beach territory, and the relationships between intrusions on one hand and female age and attractiveness on the other. Behavioral strategies for pro-

pecting territory, as well as tactics to allure males onto female territory, were also investigated. Finally, relationships between characteristics of invaders and female receptivity to intrusion were explored.

B. METHOD

The study lasted four months during the summer of 1979. On several beaches in the Chicago metropolitan area, 30 women were approached by a male interviewer; he was 32 years of age and of average attractiveness. Prior to approaching each person, attractiveness (based on a 10-point scale, 10 indicating very attractive, 1 unattractive) and age ratings were noted. Interrater reliabilities for these two dimensions were .58 and .64, respectively. Only moderate reliabilities were attained, perhaps because the ratings were obtained when the observers were 50 to 100 feet away from the target women. The average attractiveness rating was a 6.9 (range 3-10), and the average estimated age was 22.6 years old (range 17-35). Two observers also classified each beach as either crowded or sparse. Crowdedness was defined as a heavy to moderately populated beach, whereas sparcity was defined as a slightly to sparsely populated beach. Two observers reached 100% agreement in rating this dimension. When a male territorial intruder approached a woman, he said, "Do you mind if I sit down?" Next, the intruder said, "I am doing a study on beach territoriality; do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

C. RESULTS

Eighty-seven percent of the sample verbally or nonverbally indicated that the man could sit adjacent to them. All of them subsequently agreed to answer several questions concerning beach territoriality behaviors. In addition, two of the four women who did not give permission for the interviewer to sit down agreed to answer the questions.

When the women, in groups of from one to four, were approached, 52% of them were sunning, 32% were reading, and 16% were talking. When asked why they came to the beach, 26% indicated to obtain a tan, 19% said to be in a peaceful or beautiful location, 15% mentioned reading, 11% desired to be alone or to self-meditate, 7% indicated athletics (e.g., riding and jogging), and 22% offered a combination of reasons. Within this latter assorted category, three women (10% of the sample) indicated one of their reasons was to meet men.

During the past year, the women indicated they had gone to the public

beach an average of 35 times, and on each visit spent an average of 2.7 hours there. Each woman claimed she was approached by a male territorial invader an average of 1.1 times (range 0-5) every time she went to the beach. Furthermore, each woman saw an average of 1.7 male intruders twice on dates following the beach encounter. In addition, three women indicated that they were currently dating a man who had previously invaded their territory at the beach.

Each woman was asked to rank order five dimensions (i.e., humor intelligence, dress, attractiveness, and technique) influencing whether she would be interested in meeting an approaching male (lower numbers indicated greater interest). There was a significant difference between the ratings [$F(4, 116) = 3.67, p < .01$]. Attractiveness was most positively perceived (2.5), with slightly lower ratings given to humor (2.6), intelligence (2.7), and technique (2.9). While there were no significant differences between attractiveness, humor, intelligence, and technique, these characteristics were rated significantly higher than dress (4.3).

If more than one man approached them, 14% of the women indicated they would be more comfortable, 29% indicated they would be as comfortable as when one invaded their territory, and 57% indicated they would be less comfortable. In terms of intimidating tactics to dissuade a man from violating their territory, 42% indicated they would avoid eye contact, 12% would leave the beach, 17% would tell the man to leave, 12% would use two of the above strategies, and 17% would use all three stratagems. In regard to strategies used in order to entice men to invade their territory or establish contact (23 women admitted using enticing strategies), 50% said they would use eye contact, 21% would ask for the time or another piece of information, 8% would use both of these strategies, 13% would directly approach the men and indicate a desire to meet them, and 8% would use a combination of the above strategies and place a blanket next to the man they were interested in meeting.

When the interviewees were queried as to how they felt when the interviewer approached them, 33% indicated they were interested in meeting the intruder, 42% were neutral, and 25% were not interested. At the end of the interview, the women were asked if they wanted a copy of the study after the data were analyzed. Sixty-one percent gave the investigator their address in order to have the finished, written study sent to them.

In order to investigate relationships between the above variables, a correlational matrix was constructed. Several of the more interesting rela-

tionships are below. For example, rated female attractiveness was not significantly correlated with either the reported number of male approaches (.27), the investigator's success in being allowed to invade their territory (.03), or women's interest in having the investigator approach them (-.09). In addition, estimated age was also not significantly correlated with any other variable.

The number of times the women visited the beach was significantly correlated² with the number of times men invaded their territory (.49). As might be expected, the more often the women were approached, the more frequently (.78) and the longer (.63) they saw the men following the beach encounter. In addition, the women who used more direct strategies in meeting men were approached significantly more frequently (.48). (In order of increasing directness, strategies in enticing men include eye contact, ask for information, place a blanket next to the male, directly approach the male and indicate a desire to meet him.) The use of more direct approaches in meeting men was also significantly correlated³ with more direct use of intimidating strategies in discouraging men from invading their territory (.42). (Intimidating strategies, in order of increasing directness, include the following: avoid eye contact, leave the beach, and tell the man to leave.)

The higher the women valued attractiveness in male intruders, the significantly³ lower they valued either intelligence (-.42) or technique (-.41). In addition, the more women valued humor, the more direct their use of intimidating tactics (.47) and the more likely they desired being sent a copy of the study (-.37).

The dimension of crowdedness *versus* sparcity of people on the beach was significantly correlated to several variables. For example, sparcer beaches had women beach occupants who were older (.39), more likely to use intimidating strategies (.37), less favorable in being approached by more than one intruder (.39), and less interested in the investigator approaching them (.46). Finally, the number of women in a group (i.e., one, two, three, or four) was not significantly correlated with whether the investigator was allowed to invade the territory (-.13).

D. CONCLUSIONS

The principal finding was that in a public setting, 87% of women allowed a male intruder to violate their beach territory. This confirms the

² For all significant correlations reported in this paragraph, $p < .01$ except where otherwise indicated.

³ For all significant correlations reported from here to the end of this section, $p < .05$.

thesis that territory which has not been occupied for a long period of time or is not of central importance is highly susceptible to territorial invasions. The intruder did not elicit excessive defensive emotional reactions, as 75% of women were interested or at least neutral when approached. Finally, the fact that 61% offered their address in order to receive a copy of the study indicates an unexpectedly high degree of trust and confidence was established by the territorial intruder within a short period of time.

In regard to the crowdedness *versus* sparsity dimension, the sparsely populated beaches attracted older women and elicited more defensive behaviors (i.e., use of more direct, intimidating strategies, less interest in being approached by either the investigator or more than one male). Older women might be attracted to more peaceful, less populated settings. However, these unprotected areas leave women more vulnerable, thereby necessitating assertive, direct, defensive behaviors.

Women who used active, defensive strategies in guarding their territory also tended to use more direct strategies to entice men to approach them. Nevertheless, a large percentage of the women employed more passive strategies; 54% indicated they would dissuade a man from approaching through eye contact or leaving, 50% would only use eye contact to encourage a man to approach their territory. More than likely, role stereotypic behaviors still remain prevalent on public beaches, with men functioning as the active intruders and females using more indirect strategies to entice men to violate their territory.

Concerning territorial intrusions during the past year, the women indicated they were approached about once every time they went to the beach. These territorial violations resulted in the woman seeing 1.7 men for a date following the beach encounter, and 10% of the sample were currently dating a man they had met at the beach. It appears that at least some territorial intrusions lead to subsequent dates and the establishment of relatively enduring relationships. Given the above findings, it is somewhat surprising that only a minority of women (10%) indicated that they came to the beach to meet men. Some might have been reluctant to admit that they came to beaches to explicitly meet men. If women were interested in maximizing the number of male approaches and subsequent dates, the two most effective techniques were going to the beach more frequently and using more direct strategies to meet men.

Women's attractiveness and age were not significantly correlated with the number of male territorial intrusions. Conceivably, the men decided to

invade a female's territory when either the distance (i.e., too far away), position (i.e., lying on one's back), or activity (i.e., reading a book) precluded ascertaining either the women's attractiveness or age. Alternatively, males might select a matching as opposed to an idealistic strategy (i.e., preferring to approach women closer to their own level of attractiveness because they expect a greater probability of rejection from attractive than unattractive women) (4, 9).

Data from the present study suggest that male intrusions were generally tolerated by women on beaches which were not owned, of central importance, or occupied for a long period of time by its inhabitants. These public territories appear to have been dynamic settings where a moderate degree of interpersonal contact between sexes occurs. Both protective, defensive behaviors and enticing, attracting strategies were utilized. Specific behavioral tactics appear to have been more effective than physical characteristics in encouraging male intrusions on female territory.

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Psychology Department
De Paul University
2219 N. Kenmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60614

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