

# Social Groupies:



## How Different Groups Use Urban Parks

## Meet the Scientist



**Dr. Gobster:** ◀ My favorite experience as a scientist is talking with people. As a social scientist who studies how people think about and use *urban* parks, I get to visit some very nice places and talk with people about what they like to do best when they spend their free-time out of doors. I hope that the information I get from them helps *managers* to make parks even better for people.

Photo by Savanna Dickhut



### Thinking About Science

Scientists study a lot of different things. Usually, people think about the kind of science that is concerned with things like Earth, or diseases, or space. There is another category of science known as the social sciences. The social sciences are concerned with the things that people think, feel, believe, say, or do. The social sciences may also be concerned about the behavior of groups of people. Groups could include American families living in South Africa, 12-year old boys in Oklahoma who play soccer, middle school science students in Tillman Middle School, or just about any group of people.

Pretend that you are a social scientist. Name three different groups of people that you might like to study. Any group that you identify should have a common characteristic. You should also limit the group by identifying a *geographic* limit. Use your imagination!

### Glossary:

**urban** (ūr bun): Living in or having to do with cities or towns.

**manager** (ma ni jūr): A skilled person who directs or manages something.

**geographic** (je ō graf ik): Having to do with Earth's division into areas such as continents, seas, countries, States, etc.

**resources** (re sōr sez): A supply of something to take care of a need.

**public land** (pub lik land): Land that is owned by the people as a whole; land that is taken care of for the good of all of the people.

**ethnic** (eth nik): Of or describing a group of people who have the same language, culture, etc.

**survey** (sūr vā): A method used to ask questions to collect information.

**interviewer** (in tūr vyū ūr): A person who asks another person about his or her opinions, activities, etc.

#### Pronunciation Guide

a	as in ape	o	as in go	ü	as in fur
ä	as in car	ō	as in for	oo	as in tool
e	as in me	u	as in use	ng	as in sing
i	as in ice				

Accented syllables are in **bold**.



# Thinking About the Environment



Have you ever planned how you are going to spend your weekend? Do you plan how you will spend your allowance? Planning is an important tool that helps people and communities to use their

*resources* more wisely. Resources include things like money, time, or even school supplies. If you plan ahead about how you will use your resources, you will have a better chance of identifying future opportunities or problems.

People are not the only ones who plan ahead. Groups of people living in communities can also plan how they will use their shared resources. One of the resources they plan for is how they will use *public land*, including urban park land.

## Introduction

People visit parks to do many different activities, such as play basketball, baseball, sunbathe, swim, walk, picnic, or go bicycling. If park managers know what people like to do in a particular park, they can do a better job of providing the opportunity. In the past, social scientists studied what some people like to do in parks. The scientists learned more about what White visitors liked to do in parks than people of other *ethnic* backgrounds. Because it is important to learn about all park visitors, the scientist decided to conduct another *survey*.

The question the scientist wanted to answer in this study was: What activities do people of different ethnic backgrounds do while visiting an urban park? This information could then be used to help park managers develop a plan for the park's future. That plan would provide better opportunities for people of different ethnic backgrounds.

## Reflection Section



- What is the question that the scientist wanted to answer?
- If you were the scientist, how would you learn what kind of activities people of different ethnic backgrounds do when they visit a park?

## Method

The scientists conducted a survey of park users in Chicago, Illinois (**figure 1**). Most of the people they talked with were White. The scientists wanted to learn about all of the people who visit the park, including people of different ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, they conducted another survey that focused on Latino, African American, and Asian visitors. The scientist trained people, called *interviewers*, to ask these people questions about their park use.



**Figure 1.** Location of Chicago, Illinois

The scientist trained interviewers from different ethnic backgrounds. African American interviewers asked questions of African American park visitors. Latino interviewers asked questions of Latino park visitors. Asian interviewers asked questions of Asian park visitors. All interviewers asked the same questions and recorded the answers. In total, the interviewers talked with 500 African

American, Latino, and Asian park visitors. The scientist compared all of the answers with each other, including the answers given by White park visitors in the earlier survey.

## Findings

All visitors, regardless of their ethnic background, liked to do some of the same activities. The activities everyone liked to do included (**figure 2**):

- walking
- swimming
- beach sunning
- picnicking and barbecuing
- visiting the zoo
- sitting and relaxing
- bicycling

There were also some differences between the ethnic groups. Latinos picnicked and watched sports more than other groups. African Americans got together more often

## Reflection Section

- ✿ Why do you think that it was important to ask all of the visitors the same questions?
- ✿ Based on your own experience, do you think that people from different ethnic backgrounds like to do the same things or different things when visiting an urban park?

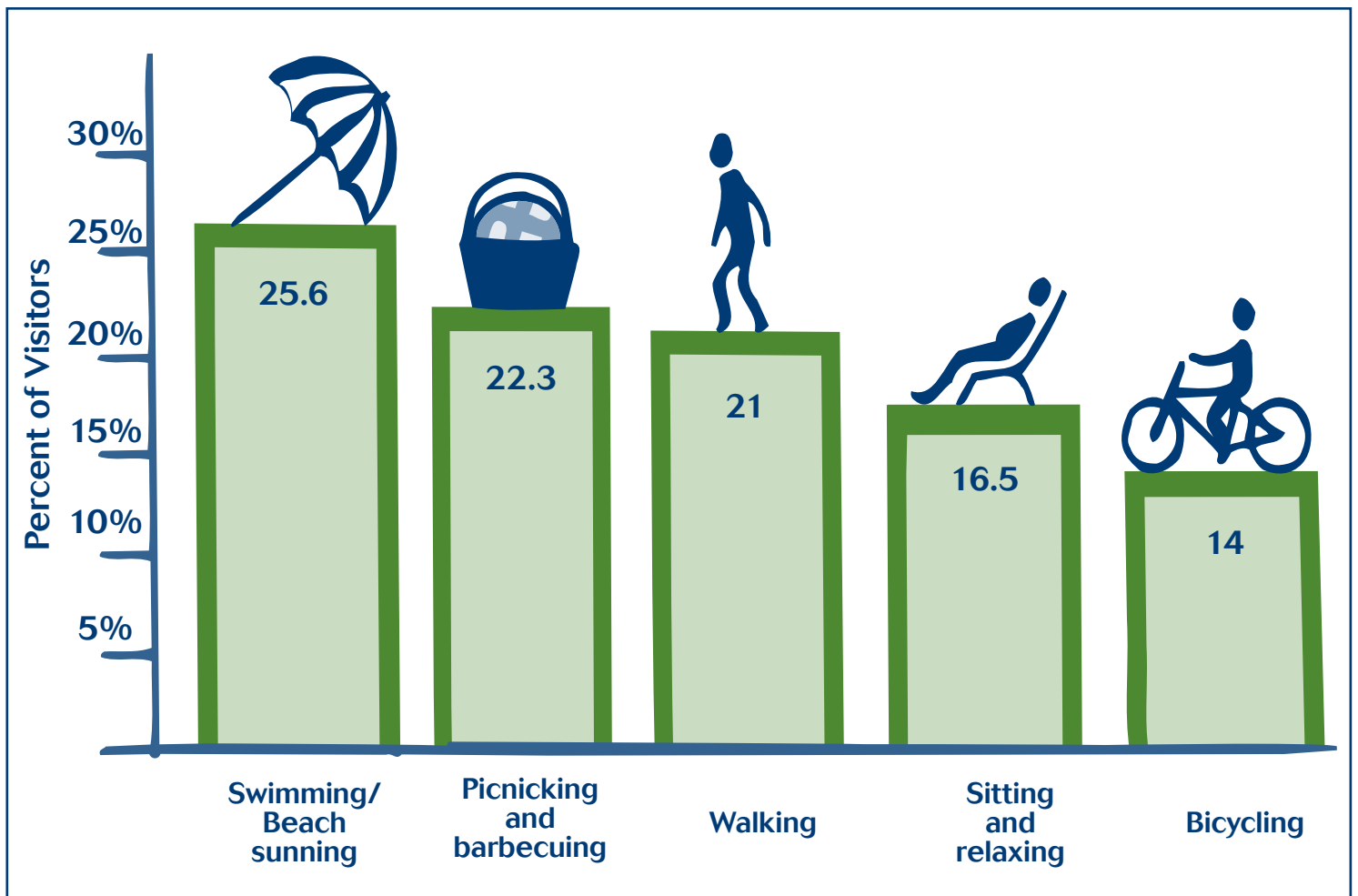
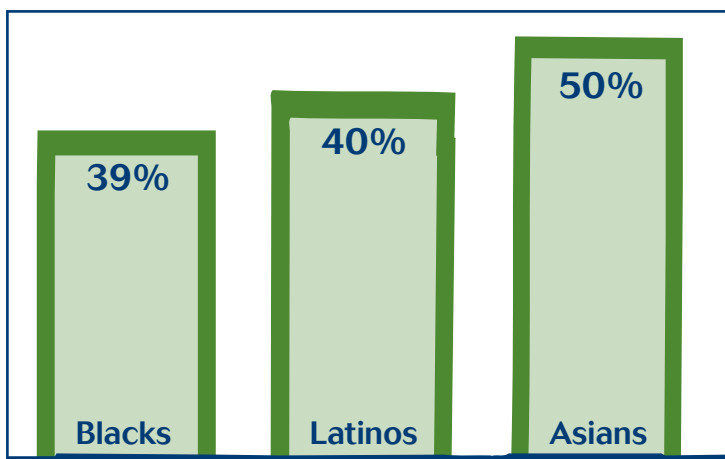


Figure 2. The percentage of visitors participating in the five most popular activities



with family and friends. Like Latinos, Asians picnicked more; and they also participated in festivals more than other groups. Whites bicycled, walked, jogged, and walked their dogs more often.

The scientist also discovered another difference between Whites and other ethnic groups. Whites usually came to the park alone or with one other person. African Americans, Latinos, and Asians came more often with a larger group that usually included family members (**figure 3**). More than 10 percent of the Latinos and Asians who visited the park came with groups of more than 10 people.



**Figure 3.** Percentage of park use by families for African Americans, Latinos, and Asians.

## Implications

There were some similarities in all of the visitors' activities in the urban park, regardless of their ethnic background. There were also differences. This study tells park managers what different groups might like to do. Information like this helps managers to consider the choices of people who come from different ethnic backgrounds. When managers are making plans for improvements to their park, they can use information like this to do a better job for all park visitors. ■

## Reflection Section



Why is it important to think about all of the users of urban parks?

From: Gobster, P. H. (2002 ). Managing parks for a racially diverse clientele. *Leisure sciences*, 24: 143-159.

## Reflection Section



Are you surprised by the similarities and differences between the groups? Why or why not? Discuss with your class about whether you have observed the same things in your local parks. If your observations are different, how are they different? Why do you think that they are different?

When you visit a local park with others, how would you describe your group? Do you go with your family? With friends? What kind of things do you do when you visit a park?



## Thinking About Ecology

You've probably heard the saying, "Diversity is the spice of life." It is not only the spice of life, diversity is a property of all living things. When you think about Earth, you will realize that Earth has a great diversity of living things. There are insects,

microorganisms, plants of all sizes, small and large animals living in the wild, and humans. Within each of these groups of living things, there is also a great amount of diversity. This idea is demonstrated in this research by the diversity of people and

the diversity of their choices when visiting a park. When you think about it, you may realize that while there are similarities among living things, diversity helps to keep our Earth and its living things healthy. ■

## FACTivity



In this FACTivity, you will use the findings from this research to design a picnic area. The picnic area must be suitable for park users from different ethnic backgrounds. After your teacher divides the class into groups of four, each group will design a picnic area.

First, list the ways different ethnic groups use the park. (Hint: Re-read the Findings section.) Beside this list, describe the kind of picnic area and equipment that could be used to make this picnic area an enjoyable place for all different types of ethnic groups. You can use the example on the next page to get you started.

You should now have a list of items that you might want to include in your picnic area. Unfortunately, you do not have enough resources to provide for all of the items. (What are resources? In this case, your resources are land and money.) You must set priorities for the types of items that you will provide in your picnic area. Each team will design a picnic area for .5

acres. You will have \$10,000 to complete your picnic area.

In the table on the next page, list the items you would like to buy, how many of each item you would like to buy, and how much they will cost.

As a team, decide on how you will set priorities for the activities you will provide in your picnic area. Your team should consider providing activities for all ethnic groups. Also, think about things like—is your picnic area accessible to people with disabilities? The team should strive make the picnic area the most accessible and user-friendly area for all ethnic groups.

The picnic areas should be designed on a large sheet of paper with all items and areas identified. Design the picnic area from a bird's-eye view or draw an "artist's concept" of the picnic area.

After completing your design and budget, your teacher will have you present them to class. The class can vote on the best design.

Ethnic Group	Number of Individuals in Groups That Use Park	Description of Picnic Area Needed
Latino	Larger groups, sometimes 10 or more people	Large picnic pavilions, extra picnic tables, large trash cans

Item	How Many You Would Like To Buy	How Much the Item Costs
Picnic Tables	5	\$300 each