

Chapter 18

MINORITIES AND THE DETROIT ZOO

Virgene Hanna and Patrick C. West
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

A major problem facing zoo administrators in major urban metropolitan areas is the relevance and attraction of urban zoos to inner-city minority residents. This study examines zoo visitation to the Detroit Zoo by white and minority residents of Detroit.

Method

The study was a phone survey of a stratified quota sample of residents of Detroit. A major problem in phone surveys in urban areas is the fact that low income households tend to be underrepresented because a greater proportion of these households do not have phones. Because of the importance of low income inner-city minorities to the purposes of this study, we designed a stratified quota sampling scheme to gain greater proportional representation of low income households in Detroit. We first examined census data on phone ownership by income and found that households under \$5,000 had a much lower rate of phone ownership. Then, using census data on income and race, we established a quota sampling goal for a typology of race and income categories.

Within this quota sampling scheme we then used the standard random digit dialing method of sampling households in Detroit. We were successful in achieving the quotas for a total sample size of 481 in all cells except whites with under \$5000 income.

The survey took place from February to October, 1986. Race was measured by a self-identification question with the following categories: "black, Hispanic, white and other." There were very few Hispanic and "other" respondents so the categories were combined into a "white" and "non-white" dichotomous variable for purposes of analysis.

Results

Visitation Rates

A visitor survey conducted in 1981 by Swartz and Nahan (1982) estimated visitation at the Detroit Zoo to be almost 80% white and just over 20% non-white. However, only 25% of all zoo visitors were from Detroit proper. While it would appear that minorities are underrepresented in these visitation rates, this may be due to the predominance of white visitors from Detroit suburbs and surrounding region.

In our study we examined visitation rates by race for Detroit proper. It is Detroit that is paying the bills for the Detroit Zoo, and thus, it is appropriate to ask how well the zoo is providing services to Detroit residents, including minority residents. Surprisingly, we found that 53% of minority respondents and only 46% of white respondents have been to the zoo at least once since 1980. These differences are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.1$, $df = 1$, $\Phi = .07$, NS), so the visitation rates for the full Detroit population can be estimated to be about equal. Of those who have been to the zoo since 1980, minority visitors from Detroit have been to the zoo just as frequently as white visitors from Detroit (again differences are not statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 3$, $df = 4$, Cramer's $V = .11$, NS). Thus, we conclude that the high proportion of whites to minorities in total zoo attendance is due to high visitation by the predominantly white suburbs of Detroit and other communities in southeastern Michigan, not by disproportionate visitation by whites from Detroit proper. The Detroit Zoo is servicing Detroit minorities just as much as its white Detroit residents!

These findings came as somewhat of a surprise to us, in part, because the economic constraints on visitation by minorities are greater than for whites. Low income Detroit residents tend to visit the zoo less ($\chi^2 = 22.9$, $df = 10$, Cramer's $V = .22$, $P < .01$), and minorities tend to have lower income ($\chi^2 = 23.5$, $df = 10$, Cramer's $V = .22$, $P < .001$) and higher unemployment rates than whites ($\chi^2 = 20.3$, $df = 7$, Cramer's $V = .21$, $P < .01$). Also, those who do not own cars visit the zoo less ($\chi^2 = 13.4$, $df = 1$, $\Phi = .17$, $P < .001$), and a greater proportion of minorities do not own cars. Thirty-five percent of minorities, compared to only 20% of whites, do not own cars ($\chi^2 = 11$, $df = 1$, $\Phi = .16$, $P < .001$). Yet despite these constraints, Detroit minorities visit the zoo just as much and just as often as whites from Detroit. One reason for this disparity may lie in the Biblical phrase, "a little child shall lead them."

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

It is clear from the patterns in our data that zoo going is regarded primarily as a child-oriented family activity. Analysis of zoo visitation by age, for instance, indicates that adults between 25 and 34, an age group more likely to have children, are the most frequent visitors to the zoo. In

general, those above age 44 visit the zoo less than those 44 and under (39% and 58% respectively). These differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.7$, $df = .19$, $P < .001$). The zoo attracts a full 70% of both white and minority Detroit families with children under 16 (compared to 51% of minorities and 44% of white among all age groups). For those who have not visited the zoo since 1980, we asked the question, "Are there any reasons why you don't go to the zoo?" For both white and minority respondents the lack of children or friends to go with or not having the "appropriate" family composition were the most frequent reasons given. This response was given by 17.4% of whites and 24.4% of minorities that do not currently go to the zoo.

Thus, those families with children living at home go to the zoo more often. But we also found that minority respondents in general were younger, and therefore, more likely to have children than were white residents of Detroit. These differences in age structure by race are statistically significant ($Tau\ b = .13$, $P < .001$). This is most likely due to "white flight" of white families with school aged children to the suburbs, leaving an older, more childless white population in the central city. Thus, while economic factors seem to mitigate against minority visitation in relation to whites, this seems to be compensated for by a greater proportion of minority families with children that are drawn to the zoo for the child-oriented family outings. While economic factors may suppress minority visitation *vis-a-vis* whites, family composition factors enhance their visitation in relation to whites. On balance then, Detroit minorities visit the Detroit Zoo just as much and just as often as do white Detroit residents.

Implications

It is clear from this analysis that Detroit minorities are not underrepresented in zoo visitation rates *vis-a-vis* white Detroit residents. One implication of this is that the city of Detroit can be assured that its funding of the Detroit Zoo is benefiting white and minority Detroit residents equally. Our findings also suggest ways in which both minority and white visitation from Detroit might be increased. Both low income minorities and whites could be benefited by policies that would reduce fees and provide better public transportation to the zoo from the central city.

Communications with respect to such programs should be "targeted" at low income, young families with children. The best way to do this would be to channel communications through the Detroit schools. To attract more visitors from older households without children, it might be possible still to draw on child-centered norms of zoo visitation by, for instance, sponsoring "grandparent days" in which grandparents bringing their grandchildren to the zoo would get reduced rates on those days.

Reference

Swartz, R. D., & Hahan, N. (1982). Final report of findings based on two visitor surveys at the Detroit Zoological Park. Detroit: Wayne State University, Dept. of Geography.

Acknowledgement

Funding for this research was provided by the US Forest Service, Office of Urban Forest Recreation Research, Chicago, Illinois, as part of a larger study of urban outdoor recreation in Detroit.