Queue Culture: The Waiting Line as a Social System[1]

Leon Mann
Harvard University

The long, overnight queue is seen as a miniature social system faced with the problems of every social system, formulating its own set of informal rules to govern acts of pushing in and place keeping, leaves of absence, and the application of sanctions. Cultural values of egalitarianism and orderliness are related to respect for the principle of service according to order of arrival which is embodied in the idea of a queue. The importance of time in Western culture is reflected in rules relating to "serving time" to earn one's position in line, and to the regulation of "time-outs." The value of business enterprise is expressed in the activities of professional speculators and queue "counters." Queue jumping is discouraged by a number of constraints, but, if social pressure fails, physical force is seldom used to eject the intruder. Principles of queue etiquette are illustrated with empirical and anecdotal evidence from the study of Australian football queues.

This paper deals with the kinds of formal and informal arrangements made in queues to regulate behavior, to recognize the priority of early-comers, and to inhibit the growth of conflict. The study of queues is an attempt to describe the patterns of behavior which attend waiting in lines where a great deal of time, discomfort, and risk of disappointment must be endured before the desired commodity is obtained. Our focus is on the forms of etiquette developed to regulate life in the queue and to minimize the amount of suffering experienced while waiting. The queue culture provides direction on such matters as place-keeping privileges, sanctions against pushing in, and rights of temporary absence from the waiting line. Evidence that the queue constitutes an embryonic social system is based primarily on the study of long, overnight lines for football tickets in Melbourne, Australia.

THE STUDY

Every Saturday afternoon in the month of September, over 100,000 spectators crowd into a stadium in Melbourne, Australia, to watch the "world series" of Australian rules football.

On August 15, 1967, approximately 10,000 people formed twenty-two queues outside the Melbourne Football Stadium to buy 14,000 sets of tickets for the four games. It was the last opportunity to get tickets because

[1] This study was supported by a grant from the Comparative International Program of the Department of Social Relations, Harvard University. The helpful suggestions of Thomas Cottle, George Homans, Alex Inkeles, Irving Janis, and Gerald Platt are gratefully acknowledged. I wish to express my gratitude to Ruth Chaplin and Frank Nordberg for their assistance in collecting and analyzing the data.

mail applications for the bulk of the tickets had been oversubscribed weeks before. A great many of the 10,000 faced disappointment because most queuers usually buy the full allotment of two adult and two children's tickets.

From 6 A.M. until 8 A.M., when the selling windows opened, a team of nine research assistants, male psychology majors from the University of Melbourne, conducted short, standard interviews with 216 people in ten of the twenty-two queues. Each interviewer was randomly assigned a queue. Starting with the first person in line, the procedure was to approach every tenth person. The request was brief and informal: "I am from the University, and we are doing a study of how people feel about the queues. Would you care to answer a few questions?" Only two refusals were encountered; with the exception of one queue, all interviews were completed by 8 A.M. when the lines began to move. Questions covered attitudes toward the system of queueing, evidence of pushing in and place keeping, arrangements to make the task of queueing more pleasant, as well as estimates of position in line and chances of getting a ticket. Interviewers also made notes on their observations of the physical shape of the queues and on their impressions of the mood and morale of the people in them. Data from the Melbourne stadium are the main source of evidence cited in this paper.

Members of the research team also conducted interviews and made observations in the club queues at suburban Collingwood, Carlton, and Richmond, each of which had allocations of 1,000 tickets for club members. Data gathered from the club queues provide additional evidence presented in this paper.

THE QUEUE TRADITION

The system of selling seat bookings for the football finals several weeks before the start of the series was first introduced in 1956. Before 1956, people queued outside the stadium on the day of the game, and "first in" took the best seats. Over the years, because of the large increase in the number of football followers, the queue system became accepted as the only workable method for selling tickets. Although there were complaints from the public, the great overnight queues became a regular event at the end of a Melbourne winter. And as the queues took on an institutional character, increasing numbers of veterans began to regard them as a kind of cherished tradition or ritual. For example, even during the regular season, although it was possible to get choice seats two hours before the commencement of most Saturday games, long queues formed outside stadiums on Friday, perhaps to train for the big one in August.

The queue of 1965 was perhaps the most remarkable, for in that year 25,000 people waited for 12,500 tickets, some of them for over a week, in mud and drizzling rain. Queuers erected a shantytown of tents and caravans outside the stadium, and conditions, according to the Melbourne town clerk rapidly became "squalid and unhygienic." In 1966, to prevent a recurrence of the shantytown, the Melbourne City Council banned tents and

camping equipment from the queues and prohibited the lighting of fires. Also, queues or assemblies were not allowed outside the stadium until twenty hours before ticket sales started. The city council regulations made the wait for tickets colder, but much shorter, and accordingly it was decided to retain them the following year.

In the 1967 queues, our interviewers noted that people improvised tents by tying tarpaulins to the side of barricades, and brought stretchers, sleeping bags, and supplies of liquor to make themselves comfortable during the wait. Even after a cold night in the open, 26 percent of the respondents claimed they were happy with the queue system. Only the aged and those who had to go straight to work felt very unhappy about their night out. In 1966, when a sample of 122 queuers were interviewed on a mild afternoon before the ticket windows opened, 47 percent reported satisfaction with this method of selling tickets.

At Collingwood, the Melbourne City Council regulations did not apply, and accommodations in the first part of the queue resembled a refugee camp. The first three families in line, numbering approximately thirty men, women, and children, pitched a bedouin tent on the sidewalk fronting the ticket box, and settled down to a six-day wait around a blazing camp fire. Some enthusiasts moved out of their homes and took up formal residence in the queue. Five days before tickets went on sale, the general secretary of Collingwood, Gordon Carlyon, received a letter addressed to "Mr. Alfred McDougall, c/o Queue outside Collingwood Football Ground, Collingwood, 3066." The *Melbourne Herald* of August 8, 1967 reported that Mr. Carlyon threaded his way through beds and tents on the sidewalk outside the stadium to deliver the letter. Melbournians had not only started to tolerate queues but actually seemed to be enjoying them. One woman outside the Melbourne stadium was heard to remark: "People are always knocking queues, what I would like to know is what people like myself would do without them" (*Melbourne Age*, August 16, 1967).

It seems that the means behavior, that is, lining up to get tickets for the event, almost becomes an end in itself, with its own intrinsic rewards and satisfactions. What does queueing mean, and why has it become an important occasion in the lives of these people? The answer lies partly in the publicity and recognition given to the queuers and partly in the challenge and excitement. For several days in August the attention of Melbourne and its mass media is focused on the brave queues outside its stadium. To be able to claim, in football-mad Melbourne, that one has stood through the night and obtained tickets earns the kind of kudos and respect that must have been given to those who fought at Agincourt. And there are other pleasures. Outside the stadium something of a carnival atmosphere prevails. The devotees sing, sip warm drinks, play cards, and huddle together around the big charcoal braziers. If he has come as part of a large group, or a cheer squad, the aficionado enjoys a brief taste of communal living and the chance to discuss and debate endlessly the fine points of the game. Above all, football fans regard the great queue as an adventure, an unusual and yet tradi-

tional diversion at the end of a Melbourne winter, as the football season approaches its exciting climax.

PROFILE OF THE QUEUER

The typical queuer is male, not yet twenty-five years of age, lives in a working-class suburb, and probably has absented himself from work to wait in line. Together with three friends, he has waited for at least fifteen hours to get tickets to watch his club play in the finals. He cannot explain why he likes football, but he has followed his team faithfully since childhood. He claims he would still be queueing even if his team were not playing, but the scarcity of supporters of nonfinals teams in the queue indicates that this is not likely. He has not counted the number of people ahead of him and has no real idea of the number of tickets for sale to the queue. He is fairly confident that he will get tickets, and he does not seem very unhappy about the queue system.

THE PROFESSIONAL QUEUER

When demand exceeds supply, it is inevitable that ticket speculators move into the queue in search of supplies for the flourishing market in hard-to-get tickets.

The Australian football queue contains two kinds of speculators: groups of highly organized people, hired at a fee to wait and buy tickets for large business concerns; and small-time operators, who resell their two tickets to the highest bidder. Often the speculators are university students, whose earnings help to pay tuition fees. Two days before ticket sales opened at the Melbourne stadium, twenty students flew from Tasmania to the mainland to join the queue. The airline company, which hired them to buy the tickets, also provided free return flights, accommodation at a leading hotel, and taxis during their stay (*Melbourne Herald*, August 12, 1967). An advertising agency engaged Melbourne University students to stand in line for one dollar an hour each, the tickets to be given away as prizes. Other students, operating as free-lance scalpers, asked an outraged public fifty dollars for $5.60 tickets, and had no difficulty getting their price.[2]

It is difficult to estimate the number of speculators in the football queues, as most people would be reluctant to admit to this kind of activity, but it was apparent from the number of advertisements for tickets in the "Wanted to Sell" columns of the Melbourne newspapers that a large proportion of queuers turned professional in the week following the ticket sales.

In the Melbourne stadium lines, very few people actually counted their position, perhaps because they believed there was no point in it since there was no accurate information available about the number of tickets available to each line (see Mann and Taylor 1969). In club queues, however, a different

[2] Speculation in the physical position itself is not found in Australian queues, as it is in waiting lines for Broadway hit shows. At smash hits it is not unusual for people to make a business of getting in line early in order to sell their advanced positions to latecomers for a large fee (see *Life*, September 24, 1956).

set of conditions obtained. There was usually a single mammoth queue (at Richmond it included over 3,000 people and ringed the perimeter of the stadium). More important, the number of tickets on sale was well publicized, and therefore it was possible to make a fairly accurate estimate of the chances of getting tickets, if the person had accurate information about his position in line. Accordingly, the estimates of position in the club queues were somewhat more accurate than at the stadium because people either had taken the trouble to count the number ahead or had consulted with a queue "counter." Queue counters are boys who count the queue at regular intervals, if it is long and winding. Queue counters, like ticket speculators, "invent" businesses to go along with what began simply as a necessary social act. At Carlton a group of boys went backward and forward during the night, counting the queue, and at Richmond the counters turned professional and, for a fee (ten cents), gave each customer up-to-date information on the number of people ahead and behind, as well as topical news and gossip.

THE PRE-QUEUE

A queue is a line of persons waiting in turn to be served, according to order of arrival. But the act of queueing involves more than the acquisition of a right to prior service because of early arrival. To validate this priority, the person must also spend time in the queue, not only to show latecomers that he occupies a given position, but also to demonstrate that his right to priority is confirmed by an unquestionable willingness to undergo further suffering to get the commodity.

If all that is required to reserve a place in a queue is the act of registering order of arrival, everyone would make an effort to be present at the time of queue formation. This would either lead to uncontrolled competition and hostility at the time of registration, or more probably, the formation of prequeues to establish recognition of the right to priority in the official queue.

The pre-queue is an unofficial line which forms spontaneously before the official, recognized queue is allowed to form. The Melbourne football queues were not allowed to form until 3 P.M. of the afternoon before the sale of tickets. To enforce this regulation, police erected a perimeter of barricades around the wall of the stadium. Nevertheless, hundreds of people gathered in the park hours before queueing was officially allowed to start and, without police direction or intervention, spontaneously formed lines outside the barricades. At 3 P.M., when the barricades were removed, they folded their chairs, and keeping the lines intact, filed in perfect order to the ticket windows to commence the official seventeen-hour wait. The formation of a prequeue, in this instance, almost certainly functioned to prevent an explosive situation which could have occurred had people failed to sort themselves into some kind of recognized order before the official line started. The lack of competition for positions among the early-comers can be explained in terms of the reward-cost structure in the first part of the line. There is little to be gained from being first, rather than twentieth or fiftieth (all are virtually

guaranteed a ticket), but there is much to be lost if aggressive competition leads to physical damage and general disorder.

SERVING TIME IN QUEUES

There is a curious dilemma in the overnight queue. If there is a unanimous willingness to respect the order of arrival, it is pointless to require everyone to spend an uncomfortable night in the open. But if large numbers absent themselves, those remaining to protect the queue from outsiders will feel that their greater inputs of time and suffering now outweigh the merits of early arrival and entitle them to priority of service. Also, they will feel no responsibility for minding the places of people who, by their absence, are in no position to offer reciprocal place-minding services. In recognition of the conflicting considerations of unnecessary suffering caused by continuous occupancy, and the necessity to validate one's position by spending some time in residence, various arrangements are made which function to lessen the ordeal while protecting the rights of early-comers. Usually the arrangements represent a compromise which allows the queuer to take brief leaves of absence while retaining undisputed rights of reentry.

In Australian football lines, "time-out" is accomplished by two informal arrangements. Early-comers, who usually come in groups of four or five, often organize a "shift system," in which members spend one hour on with four hours off. One person can hold up to four places until the relief reports back to take over as group custodian. In our survey, an average of 39 percent of respondents in the first 100 of every queue reported that they had organized a shift system; in the latter part of the queue only 24 percent reported participation in a shift system. Sometimes the system involves a large group of people who share not only place-keeping duties but also facilities for eating, sleeping, and entertainment. The *Melbourne Herald* of August 15, 1967 described a seventeen-year-old girl, one of twelve people who took turns to leave the queue to eat and sleep in one of the few trailers found outside the Melbourne stadium. The same newspaper carried a story of a young scalper who combined business with pleasure: "I was one of a group of 20 students who stood together all night in the queue outside the ground. We were well organized. A couple of us kept our positions, and the others went out on the town" (*Melbourne Herald,* August 22, 1967).

It is rare for queuers at the head of the line to come alone; 94 percent of the respondents questioned in the first 100 of every line reported that they had come with others (see table 1). However, a large minority toward the end of each line came alone; while their need for time-outs was less pressing, they also made arrangements to cover brief absences if necessary. It is an accepted practice to "stake a claim" in a queue by leaving some item of personal property. One can keep a place in a line with a labeled box, folding chair, haversack, or sleeping bag for quite long periods. The object stands for the person and his place, symbolism reminiscent of burial customs of the

ancient Egyptians.[3] During the early hours of waiting, when many people were enjoying a carefree game of football in the surrounding park, the queues often consisted of one part people to two parts inanimate objects. The norm in leaving position markers is that one must not be absent for periods longer than two to three hours. In the Collingwood queue of 1966, irate latecomers, who noticed that many people in the middle of the queue had not made an appearance for most of the day, spontaneously seized their boxes and burnt them. The latecomers were protesting the violation of the principle of serving time to earn occupancy of a position. In the ensuing melee, scores of people made significant advances in their positions. Because arrangements for absence from the football queue are of necessity extremely informal, inefficiency and abuse often occur. To ensure protection of their

TABLE 1

PATTERNS OF QUEUE-RELATED BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF POSITION IN LINE: MELBOURNE FOOTBALL QUEUES, 1967

Actual Position in Line	Member of an Organized Shift System	Came with Others	Observed Hostile Response to Push-in Attempt	Consider Place-keeping Permissible
10–100 ($N=95$).....	39% } $Z=1.91$, $P<.05$	94% } $Z=2.81$, $P<.01$	46% } N.S.	25% } N.S.
110–200 ($N=82$).....	23% } N.S.	78% } $Z=1.41$, N.S.	33% } N.S.	35% } N.S.
210–330 ($N=39$).....	25%	64%	27%	24%

NOTE.—Number of respondents varies slightly for each question.

valued positions, some do not trust the shift or marker systems but prefer to keep a constant vigil which lasts the entire life of the queue.

First come, first served, the fundamental concept of queueing, is a basic principle of the behavior referred to as distributive justice (Homans 1961). There is a direct correspondence between inputs (time spent waiting) and outcomes (preferential service). Generally, if a person is willing to invest large amounts of time and suffering in an activity, people who believe there should be an appropriate fit between effort and reward will respect his right to priority. We have seen, however, that the principle of distributive justice is elaborated to encompass the need for leaves of absence in marathon queues. In recognition of the fact that continuous residence in the line imposes great hardship, members come to an agreement on the minimum inputs of time necessary to validate occupancy of a position. It is reasonable

[3] Markers such as notebooks, coats, newspapers, and umbrellas are often used to defend a "reserved" space in public places, such as a crowded cafeteria or study hall (see Sommer 1969).

to claim that rules regulating time spent in and out of the line are the essential core of the queue culture.[4]

QUEUE JUMPING

Placekeeping and pushing in violate the principle of first come, first served. When people at the end of a queue feel certain that the violation does not jeopardize their own chances of obtaining the commodity, there is likely to be some irritation but no attempt to eject the offender. Stronger measures are likely, however, if people at the tail end believe that the lengthening of the line worsens their prospects of receiving service.

Since there is a great deal at stake, football queuers are especially annoyed by any attempt to jump the queue, and they adopt a variety of physical and social techniques to keep people in line. At certain times in the life of the queue when police supervision was minimal, queuers had to devise their own constraints. The most extreme constraint was physical force. During the early hours of August 15, five men were taken to hospitals after four separate brawls broke out in the ticket lines (*Melbourne Herald*, August 15, 1967). The strategic placement of barriers acts as a constraint against would-be infiltrators. It was observed that people in the middle of the queue worked together to erect barricades from material left in the park. Keeping close interperson distance also serves to maintain the "territory" in the face of would-be intruders. At times of maximum danger, and in the hour before the ticket windows opened, there was a visible bunching together, or shrinkage, in the physical length of the queue, literally a closing of the ranks. The exercise of effective social constraints depends on the capacity for cohesive action on the part of the queuers. At the stadium, whenever outsiders approached the head of the queue, they were intimidated by vociferous catcalls and jeering. Ordinarily, this mode of protecting the queue was successful during daylight, the pressure of concerted disapproval inhibiting all but the boldest. During the hours of darkness, social pressure proved less effective; the knowledge that one cannot be seen easily undermines social pressure and shaming as a technique.

Despite these constraints, many latecomers attempted to push in, and it was apparent that some succeeded. Letters to the newspapers by disappointed queuers testified to the activity of queue jumpers. One man who missed out in the Carlton queue claimed that he had been dislodged from 185th to 375th place in the span of two hours. When asked, "Has anyone tried to push in?" respondents in every part of each queue reported that they had witnessed attempts to jump the queue, but only in a minority of cases had the intruder been ejected. According to the reports of our re-

[4] Queue systems with inbuilt guarantees of distributive justice are to be found in both the United States and USSR. At the weekly line for tickets to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, an unofficial "keeper of the list" registers applicants in order of arrival, assigns numbers, and checks names when the queuers appear for roll call every three hours (see *New Yorker*, January 14, 1967). In Moscow, when scarce goods go on sale, a series of queue custodians take turns "standing guard" and list the names of interested customers as they arrive throughout the night (see Levine 1959, pp. 338–39).

spondents, the act of intrusion was usually met with passivity rather than a physically hostile response, especially toward the end of the line, where people came alone and were not organized for dealing with intruders (see table 1). Yet, when asked what they would do if someone tried to crash the queue immediately in front of them, respondents were almost unanimous in claiming that they would resort to physical force.

According to our respondents' reports, pushing in occurred most often near the tail of the queue. This seems puzzling at first, for, if someone is going to risk pushing in, it seems sensible to try at the front, where there is a greater certainty of getting tickets. However, we must bear in mind the more effective policing at the front, as well as the decreased risk toward the rear of the queue, where, in absolute numbers, fewer people are put out by the violation and hence there is less likelihood of concerted action. In brief, opposition to a queue jumper decreases as a function of the number of people whose chances of getting tickets are affected by the intrusion; at the end of the line there are very few such people. Ironically, however, it is these people, regardless of where pushing in occurs, who stand to lose most by the infraction because their chances of getting tickets are put in even greater jeopardy.

Why does the queue fail to act in unison to dismiss the queue jumper? To some extent, the varying interests of people in different parts of the queue provide an answer. People at the front of the queue do not care particularly about pushing in which occurs behind them because they do not suffer from the intrusion. Of course, if queue jumping becomes widespread, the early-comers show concern because their positions may be threatened by latecomers who realize that the entire line is vulnerable. But usually they have nothing to gain and much to lose from becoming involved in policing the queue. It is surprising, however, that people after the point of intrusion do not act together to expel the violator, since they all suffer equally by the loss of a place. It seems that responsibility for evicting a trespasser falls squarely on the shoulders of the person who is the immediate victim of the violation, that is, the person directly behind the violator. Those further back may jeer and catcall, but the immediate victim is expected to take the initiative in ejecting the queue jumper. The reasoning seems to be that the victim, either through his passive looks or careless surveillance of his territory, must have given some encouragement to the queue jumper, so he is now obliged to handle the situation without causing unpleasantness for other people.

The reluctance of queuers to exert physical action against queue jumpers may also be related to the nature of informal versus formal organization of the queue. In any informal queue, there are many signs of organizational control, role prerogatives, and orderly behavior, which are almost exactly the same as those in well-organized queues, where there is real policing and monitoring of the line. Therefore, people will assume that the informal queue will function in much the same way as the organized queue. When acts of pushing in and disorder occur, members of the queue realize they were mistaken and jeer spontaneously, exert informal pressure, and make

threats to preserve their positions. If verbal constraints fail, physical violence emerges as a last resort. At this point there is a reluctance to pursue the matter further because more may be lost from physical action than from a small loss in position. The person who jumps the queue could be desperate, and the immediate victim anticipates the possibility that a struggle could cause injury and damage. If the police action is unsuccessful, the person is made to look foolish in the eyes of the onlookers. It is also possible that, if the struggle sets off a widespread melee, he stands to lose more than face and position. Therefore, if verbal censure fails, members of the queue fall back on a conspiracy of silence to ignore minor violations. Resorting to physical violence seems to represent a kind of public acknowledgment that the queue is no longer organized and under control. Once this happens, a grave danger exists that people in less favorable positions, as well as outsiders, will take advantage of what is then recognized to be a helpless, unorganized queue. To prevent this, occasional minor infractions, if they are not met successfully by verbal threats and jeering, are seldom handled by physical threats and violence. The use of physical methods, especially if they prove unsuccessful, are a signal to others that the queue organization is about to disintegrate completely, and this may actually serve to encourage an epidemic of queue jumping.

One reason for the prevalence of pushing in, and the failure to exert effective action against it, is the confusion which exists between illegal acts of entry and the somewhat more acceptable act of place keeping. Because place keeping occurs fairly frequently, it is not always clear whether an individual who moves boldly into a line is attempting to crash the queue or is merely joining his group. Therefore many are reluctant to challenge the entry of outsiders during the early hours of the queue. Although the custom of place keeping is a cause of friction, only informal rules have been formulated to regulate its practice. Of the respondents, 29 percent believed that it is permissible to keep a place for someone, and that people behind would not care (see table 1). However, only a handful of queuers admitted to actually keeping a place for someone. People do not admit freely to place keeping because the newcomer usually makes his appearance only in the last hour before tickets go on sale, and people already in line are likely to be very resentful.

THE QUEUE AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM

The queue, although made up of numerous groups of strangers gathered together temporarily, emerges as an embryonic social system with a set of norms for controlling conflict.

Parsons (1951) maintains that social systems develop spontaneously whenever two or more people come into some stabilized, patterned mode of interaction. He lists three properties of any social system: (1) two or more actors occupying differentiated statuses or positions and performing differentiated roles; (2) some organized pattern governing the relationships of the members, describing their rights and obligations with respect to one anoth-

er; and (3) some set of common norms and values, together with various types of shared cultural objects and symbols.

The long, overnight queue has all three characteristics of a social system. While the queue may not directly allocate different statuses or roles to its members, the members themselves assume different roles. In and around every queue there is a host of people: professional and hired speculators, queue counters, custodians, vigilantes, police, and officials, performing a variety of queue-related tasks.

The other two properties of a social system—an organized pattern of relationships and a set of common norms—are readily identifiable in the queue. Order of arrival governs the relationship among members, while the shift system and the practice of time-outs controls the network of rights and obligations. Moreover, there are shared norms about the desirability of distributive justice, as reflected in the set of rules regulating place keeping and pushing in.

Interactive systems, such as the queue, develop within the matrix of a long-established sociocultural system which defines roles, normative standards, and goals. When a large number of people gather together and priority of service has value, a line is formed. All members bring to the new queue a host of ideas about the roles they should play, and develop firm notions about the way in which deviant behavior should be punished. Roles in the queue are drawn from and are molded by the institutional system of the larger society. The precise form of social organization, the sharing and division of labor inherent in the shift system, the preferred modes of policing the queue, the development of businesses and ticket speculation, the notion that one must earn one's place in line by spending time in it, even the very reason for queueing itself, reflect the character of the surrounding society.

The culture of the queue also draws upon and incorporates elements in the broader culture. The importance of time as a value in Western society is reflected in the emphasis placed on serving time, and restrictions on time-outs. The way in which people orient themselves toward a scarce commodity, their preference for cooperation, the entrepreneurial zeal they display in scalping tickets and charging fees for counting the queue, is a function of broad culture patterns, as well as the way society has taught them to behave.

The queue, moreover, is subject to sanctioning pressure from outside officials and onlookers, who try to bring it into conformity with societal expectations. Ultimately, of course, each queue has to work out its own final set of mutual adjustments in which socially prescribed rules about queueing are modified and embellished in various ways. A prime example of these adjustments is to be found in the various interpretations of the rules governing leaves of absence from the line.

While the queue system is embedded in a larger social matrix, it is also composed of many subsystems—groups, cliques, and coacting individuals—whose physical presence reinforces the very idea or concept of a line.

According to Parsons and Smelser (1957), there are four functional problems, or imperatives, faced by every social system: goal attainment, adap-

tation, integration, and latency. The queue, even though it is a relatively minor, short-lived social system, must confront these four problems.

The problem of goal attainment is to keep the system moving steadily toward the collective goal of its members, in this case, the purchase of tickets in an orderly manner with a minimum of unpleasantness. Before the system can move toward this goal, however, a host of instrumental and technical problems must be solved. Many of the problems are external to the queue, in the sense that they are not under the control of its members; for example, the seller (not the customer) must decide when and where people should be allowed to queue, how many lines should be formed, how many tickets will be made available, what limitation will be placed on the number of tickets sold to each customer, and so on. But the question of how to begin the queue, especially if people have gathered before the official starting time, is a problem left to the members themselves. As we have seen, the football fans solved this difficulty by forming a pre-queue, which became the officially recognized queue when the barriers to the ticket boxes were lowered.

Adaptation is the problem of bringing facilities and resources to the system which enable it to come to terms with the environment. One aspect of adaptation is the active manipulation of the environment. Thus queuers formed their line along concrete paths, constructed barriers out of material found in the park, erected shelters by tying tarpaulins to the barriers, built fires, and even brought in trailers, to make their temporary living quarters as comfortable as possible.

Manipulation of the system itself to blend with the environment is another aspect of adaptation. For the most part, the queue, rather than a single file of people, consisted of numerous knots of people, two and three abreast, who sat side by side to facilitate efficient communication and social interaction.

The integrative problem, perhaps the most distinctive in any social system, is concerned with the maintenance of appropriate emotional and social ties among members of the system. In order to achieve its goals, the system must establish and maintain a high degree of solidarity and cohesion. In the queue, cohesion is achieved by establishing informal rules which are kept sufficiently general to allow individual members to adjust to the normative pattern. Those who stay out too long, and therefore are unable to make the line viable, are sanctioned, or lose their place. In a sense this represents a form of turn taking; if the queue structure is to be preserved, only some members can be permitted to take leaves of absence at any one time.

The group or clique, by means of the shift system, regulates turn taking for its members, and this ensures continuity of the line. The group, since it is the carrier of queue culture, brings a high level of solidarity to the line.

At the head of the line, the group takes on the characteristics of a community. Large family groups share eating, rest, and recreational facilities, and time spent together serves to strengthen the feelings of community. It is likely that the major factor underlying the effective policing of the head and middle regions of the line is the presence of large, coordinated groups.

The breakdown of defense against intruders in the end part of every line can be attributed primarily to the fragmented, isolated nature of the membership.

But even in parts of the line where organized groups are less prominent, individuals trade on a mutual trust which allows them to ask one another to "mind my place" and feel confident that they will be vouched for when they return from a brief leave of absence.

The latency function is reflected in two related but different problems—pattern maintenance and tension management.

Pattern maintenance is the problem faced by an individual in reconciling the conflicting norms and demands imposed by his participation in the queue. Many members experience role conflicts arising out of their obligations to the queue and to their family or work roles. As we have seen, some queuers solve the problem by moving their entire family into the line. Others are faced with a different kind of dilemma: whether or not to keep a place for friends. The member who fails to commit himself to the queue norms is subject to considerable social pressure. If rules governing leaves of absence are not observed, the member is likely to find himself no longer part of the queue.

Tension management is the related problem of maintaining a level of commitment sufficient to perform the required role. To cope with tension and fatigue, members introduce a variety of entertainments in and around the line, such as pick-up games, story and joke telling, and beer parties. Time-out from the queue is, however, the major mode of tension management.

The queue system is mostly concerned with the problem of pattern maintenance and tension management because these are the most significant from the viewpoint of continuous participation and control. Of course, at critical times in the life of the queue, the other three functional problems require attention. Indeed, all four must be solved if the system is to continue in the state of equilibrium necessary for control and order.

CULTURAL VALUES AND QUEUEING

How do rules of etiquette develop in queues, and how do people come to recognize and respect them? To some extent, the answer lies in attitudes toward queues in general, which reflect broad cultural differences in sensitivity to queue norms, as well as the individuals' history of experience in waiting lines. Behavior in queues is a function of many variables: kind and length of queue; the importance of inputs and the value of the commodity; cultural and subcultural differences in respect for time, order, and the rights of others; and individual differences in such personality characteristics as aggressiveness and assertiveness.

The anthropologist Hall (1959) has suggested that a cultural value of egalitarianism is responsible for the manner in which queues and queueing are treated with deference in Western society. In *The Silent Language* Hall (1959, p. 157) writes: "As a general rule, whenever services are involved we

feel that people should queue up in order of arrival. This reflects the basic equalitarianism of our culture. In cultures where a class system or its remnants exist, such ordinality may not exist. That is, where society assigns rank for certain purposes, or whenever ranking is involved, the handling of space will reflect this. To us it is regarded as a democratic virtue for people to be served without reference to the rank they hold in their occupational group. The rich and poor alike are accorded equal opportunity to buy and be waited upon in the order of arrival. In a line at the theater Mrs. Gottrocks is no better than anyone else."

While there is merit in the thesis that a strain of equality in a culture is related to the orderliness of public behavior, it would seem that egalitarianism alone does not explain respect for priority in queues. Consider the English, a people famous for their strictly democratic queueing behavior. It is safe to say that the English have a more rigid social structure and are more class conscious than Americans, and yet their public behavior is probably more orderly. The relationship between cultural equality and public orderliness is attenuated in the area of queueing because waiting in line is not a habit of all social classes in Western society. It is reasonable to suppose that if Mrs. Gottrocks joined a theater or a football line in the United States, Australia, or England, she would not be treated differently than anyone else, but it would be a rare event for someone of Mrs. Gottrocks's status to use a line. Ordinarily, in both class-conscious and relatively class-free societies, the privileged classes circumvent the line altogether and get their tickets through agents or other contacts. Our point, then, is that queueing is confined largely to the less-privileged groups in society. It might be more accurate to speak of a subcultural value of equalitarianism in public behavior.

In his recent book, *The Hidden Dimension*, Hall (1964) continues his examination of the basis of public behavior and makes the assertion that respect for queues can also be attributed to a cultural value of orderliness. Presumably, culture patterns in different societies emerge on a continuum of order-disorder, and, like the value of equality, a strain of orderliness runs through life in a society.

One difficulty with the orderliness hypothesis is that the principle of queueing is not always maintained in situations where there are no officials or police present to scrutinize and control the outbursts of unruly behavior. Only if the principle is supported religiously under these conditions, can one speak of a culturally ingrained disposition toward orderliness.

In brief, to seek an explanation for organized cooperative behavior in queues, we cannot appeal only to cultural values of egalitarianism and orderliness. Answers must also be sought with reference to the queue as a social system in which these values often receive only token or symbolic acknowledgment. The main concern of the queue membership is maintenance of a state of control and order while the system moves toward its goal. Indeed, values of orderliness, egalitarianism, and distributive justice are invoked to help maintain that order, but they are primarily used and

modified to make life in the queue tolerable, rather than obeyed in a rigid and mechanical manner.

CONCLUSION

This paper described how patterned regularities in behavior and attitudes emerge to regulate life in an overnight football queue. Although arrangements made to control behavior in the queue are informal, they are clearly identifiable, and it is appropriate to regard them as constituting a kind of culture. The queue, which possesses the characteristics of a social system, attempts to solve the set of functional problems confronted by every social system.

Our major findings were: (*a*) the growth of a queue tradition in which large numbers of people return annually to share the experience of waiting for tickets overnight in the open; (*b*) an increasing professionalization of the queue, marked by an influx of speculators and middlemen who profit by the increased demand for tickets; (*c*) the formation of unofficial pre-queues to recognize the priority of people who arrived before the start of the official queue; (*d*) elaboration of the principle of first come, first served to control the amount of time spent in and out of the queue ("shift" and "marker" systems, which control "time-outs," were developed to regulate leaves of absence from the line); (*e*) social constraints, and less often physical constraints, used to control queue jumping and to govern the practice of place keeping.

It is appropriate to conclude that queueing behavior, a neglected area of social research, could be a rich source of ideas for students of crowd behavior, judgmental processes, cross-national differences, and the influence of cultural values on public behavior.

REFERENCES

Hall, E. T. 1959. *The Silent Language.* New York: Doubleday.
———. 1964. *The Hidden Dimension.* New York: Doubleday.
Homans, G. C. 1961. *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms.* New York: Harcourt.
Levine, I. R. 1959. *Main Street, U.S.S.R.* New York: Doubleday.
Mann, L., and K. F. Taylor. 1969. "Queue Counting: The Effect of Motives upon Estimates of Numbers in Waiting Lines." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 12:95–103.
Parsons, T. 1951. *The Social System.* New York: Free Press.
Parsons, T., and Neil J. Smelser. 1957. *Economy and Society.* New York: Free Press.
Sommer, R. 1969. *Personal Space.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.