Agent-based simulation for reconstructing social structure by observing collective movements with special reference to single-file movement

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Abstract

Understanding social organization is fundamental for the analysis of animal societies. In this study, animal single-file movement data —— serialized order movements generated by simple bottom-up rules of collective movements —— are informative and effective observations for the reconstruction of animal social structures using agent-based models. For simulation, artificial 2-dimensional spatial distributions were prepared with the simple assumption of clustered structures of a group. Animals in the group are either independent or dependent agents. Independent agents distribute spatially independently each one another, while dependent agents distribute depending on the distribution of independent agents. Artificial agent spatial distributions aim to represent clustered structures of agent locations —— a coupling of "core" or "keystone" subjects and "subordinate" or "follower" subjects. Collective movements were simulated following two simple rules, 1) initiators of the movement are randomly chosen, and 2) the next moving agent is always the nearest neighbor of the last moving agents, generating "single-file movement" data. Finally, social networks were visualized, and clustered structures reconstructed using a recent major social network analysis (SNA) algorithm, the Louvain algorithm, for rapid unfolding of communities in large networks. Simulations revealed possible reconstruction of clustered social structures using relatively minor observations of single-file movement, suggesting possible application of single-file movement observations for SNA use in field investigations of wild animals.

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Significance statements

- An agent-based model was developed to test if animal single-file movement is informative for the reconstruction of clustered social structures.
- Single-file movement data sets were generated with simple bottom-up rules of collective movements.
- Simulations showed possible reconstruction of clustered structures for most combinations of parameter settings.
- Latent structures of clustered animal groups might be identified by collective movement observations, and single-file movement may be practically applied to wildlife investigations.

1 Introduction

Identifying latent structures underlying animal social organization is fundamental in animal ecology [1], as well as in the social sciences [2]. The recent update of computational models for social network analysis (SNA) enables quantitative evaluation of complex processes of social networks based using big data. The basic framework of SNA envisions multiple nodes as animals, viruses, people, or any other agents within the network and at its edges as a dyadic relation mathematically defined between the two nodes [e.g., 3, 4, 5]. The SNA aims to statistically link network structures with bottom-up rules defining dyadic relations, e.g., affiliations, friendships, proximities, co-occurrences, follower/followee, signal sender/receiver, or communications [6]. SNA provides a modern powerful interface for visualizing complex biological networks.

One major biological interest for SNA is statistical approximations of modular, clustered or hierarchical structures embedded in animal social groups [1, 7]. Doubtless, kinship is a basic concept in the theory of the socioecology [for a classical kickoff, e.g., 8]. A mother invests effort in her offspring, mother and offspring generally maintain proximity, and degrees of the social bonding are reflected by relatedness [9, 10]. Based on the cumulative effects of such relatedness, social structures are determined by additional social relations, such as male-female sexual interactions and male-male competition [11, 12]. For example, in primate societies — the most investigated animal society from both theoretical and empirical perspectives — usually display an "alpha" subject, the most dominant social rank, and are composed of the kin-based clusters, such as the female affiliative bonding [13, 14]. Consequently, the "core", "leader" or "influencer" of the animal group are recognized, and multi-layered clustered structures of the group emerge [15, 1, 16, 17]. Some metrics commonly implemented in the modern SNAs provide statistical indices for modularity, centrality or cohesiveness [e.g., 18], and have been applied to actual observational data of animals. These indices support the evaluation of clustered structures [for a recent application in wild chimpanzees, see 19].

For the practical applications of SNA to observational data, dyadic social interactive behaviors or distance-based proximities have been commonly used in ecological analyses of animal societies [3]. Allogrooming is a typical example of dyadic social interaction widely observed in social mammals. Allogrooming is an altruistic behavior and an appropriate behavioral metric to evaluate affiliative interactions [e.g., 20, 21, 22]. Likewise, agonistic interactions, where dominant animals show aggression toward subordinate animals, are also interpretable and countable behaviors to illustrate dominant hierarchy [e.g., 23, 24, 25]. Despite interpretable advantages of social relations, disadvantages of such data are "specializations" of social behaviors—grooming might not always be seen in the insects, or we may not know about the agonistic interactions in some animals—limiting the analysis. In contrast, distance-based data lack contextual information and are not perfectly linked to social relations [26]. These data are generally accepted to indirectly reflect social affiliations [27]. Affiliated individuals may maintain proximity as typically seen in mother-offspring pairs. The recent advanced tracking methods using high-precision GPS [e.g., 28, 29] or Bluetooth beacons [e.g., 30] have strongly influenced location-based proximity metrics due to dramatic expansion of data for interactions among "trackable" animals. Thus, a key analytical step for SNA is selection of appropriate data, which researchers record massively, easily, reliably and precisely.

In this study, another kind of testable data for the SNA is proposed, that is, "animal single-file movement" generated by bottom-up rules in the theory of collective movements. This topic is currently of great interest in animal ecology [for a recent review, e.g., 31]. Typically in fish schools, bird flocks, insect swarms, or ungulate herds, large numbers of individual agents show highly-coordinated collective movements [32, 33]. Theoretically, collective movements do not rely on decision-making of specific individuals, e.g., a "leader", but emerge in a bottom-up manner

such as iterated interactions between animals, either directly (e.g. via visual cues) or indirectly (e.g. via trail formation). Real-time distance-based proximities among all animal agents empirically reveal core mechanisms underlying collective movement emergences. Simultaneous tracking of multiple animals using wearable tags is technologically possible, but perfect tracking of suitable numbers of animals in groups/units for analyses of collective movement are still limited to laboratory-based animals [e.g., 34, 30] or capturable wild animals [35, 36, 37].

Animal single-file movement, defined as serially ordered patterns of animals that are indirectly determined by degrees of inter-agent relations, is a promising target for data collection for linking SNA linking with recent discussions of collective movement by social animals. First, single-file movements are observable in many free-ranging animal species. Classically, social animals moving in single file provided an excellent opportunity to count group members inhabiting dense forests with poor visibility, and further to infer social structures. Extensive historical fieldwork reveals that such events provide information on latent key factors underlying animal social organizations, e.g., dominance hierarchy [38, 39], kin relationships [40], and physiological status, such as breeding cycle [41, 42]. Recent studies focusing on single-file movement and social system structure have examined several animal taxa, e.g., wolves [*Canis lupus*: 38]; zebra [*Equus burchellii*: 41], buffalo [*Syncems cuffer*: 42], chimpanzee [*Pan troglodytes*: 43], mandrill [*Mandrillus sphinx*: 44] and spider monkey [*Ateles geoffroyi*: 45]. Second, animal single-file movement can be recorded without capture and release for attachment of location tags, simply by video-recording (e.g., camera-trappings). This advantage for studying collective movement avoids use of GPS collars that are a burden for free-ranging animals, and most cannot be used for threatened and endangered species [46]. Third, serial order patterns governed by collective movements allow behavioral ecologists to examine individual-based observation essential for documentation and measurement of animal behavior.

This study aimed to determine if movement order in single-file movements are informative and effective observations for the reconstruction of animal social structures using an agent-based computational simulation model [e.g., 47, 48]. An initial artificial 2-dimensional spatial distribution was developed using the simple assumption of clustered group structures. Animal agents in a group are composed of independent and dependent agents. Independent agents distribute spatially independently each other, while dependent agents distribute depending movements of independent agents. The artificial spatial distributions aim to represent clustered structures of agent locations —— a coupling of "core" or "keystone" subjects and "subordinate" or "follower" subjects. Collective movements were governed by two simple rules, 1) initiators of the movement are randomly chosen, and 2) the next moving agent is always the nearest neighbor of the last moving agents. These bottom-up rules allowed simulation of "single-file movement" data. Finally, we visualized social networks and reconstructed clustered structures using a recent major SNA algorithm, the Louvain algorithm, for rapid unfolding of communities in large networks [49]. The current idea —— that artificial agents are initially generated, collective movements are produced, and collective movements are used to evaluate social networks—— is similar to a previous computer experiment [50] that simulated a primate group. The current simulation is more generalized. Parameter assumptions are minimum and used mixed normal distributions. Parameter conditions were sought where single-file movement data work well for reconstruction of the latent clustered structures and further discuss possibilities for practical applications in field investigations of wild animal societies.

2 Methods

2.1 Aims of the simulation

The simulations aimed to examine if individual-by-individual serial ordered movements, i.e., "animal single-file movements", provide sufficient information to reconstruct cluster organizations that are typically assumed to exist in the animal social group, such as primates. Computer simulations used agent-based models that mainly involved four steps: 1) models generated animal agents to distribute in 2-dimensional space with latent cluster organizations, 2) generated agents were serially aligned following the simple collective movement rule (generating the "single-file movements"), 3) the social networks were computed using association index defined by serial orders of animal single-file movements, and 4) finally cluster organization based on the generated social networks was evaluate. Figure 3 is a schematic representation of the simulation process. The details of each step in the models are described below.

2.2 Generating agents of simulated animal groups

First, an animal group was assumed to consist of n_I *independent* animal agents (*independenter*), who move independently of other agents, and n_D *dependent* animal agents (*depender*), whose spatial locations always depend on each independenter. For the model simplification, n_D monkey agents are always assumed for each of n_I independenters. Accordingly, the total numbers of animal agents, N, were $n_I + n_D \times n_I$.

Locations of independenters were independently generated from bivariate Gaussian distributions:

$$\boldsymbol{x_i} \sim \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{0}, \Sigma_I),\ \forall i \in \{1, \cdots n_I\} \tag{1}$$

where $\boldsymbol{x_i}$ is the location— the coordination in 2-dimensional space— of the i-th independenter, and $\Sigma_I := \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_I^2 & 0 \\ 0 & \sigma_I^2 \end{pmatrix}$ is a covariance matrix (σ_I is the standard deviation of the independenter). The mean parameter of distribution is always set to $\mathbf{0}$.

OLocations of dependers were generated from bivariate Gaussian distributions depending on locations of independenters:

$$\boldsymbol{x_k} := \boldsymbol{x_{n_I + i \times j}} \sim \mathcal{N}(\boldsymbol{x_i}, \Sigma_D),\ \forall i \in \{1, \cdots n_I\},\ \forall j \in \{1, \cdots n_D\}, \tag{2}$$

where $\boldsymbol{x_k}$ is the locations of the generated j-th depender for i-th independenter, and $\Sigma_D := \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_D^2 & 0 \\ 0 & \sigma_D^2 \end{pmatrix}$ is a covariance matrix (σ_D is the standard deviation of the depender). The mean parameters set to each independenters' locations, $\boldsymbol{x_i}$. For model simplicity, we set $\sigma_D := 1$, i.e., $\Sigma_D := \left(\begin{smallmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{smallmatrix}\right)$. ccordingly, spatial distributions of N animal agents in 2-dimensional space using a mixture of Gaussian processes were determined by setting three parameters, n_I, n_D, σ_I. Figure 1 is a sample spatial distribution, where $n_I = 10, n_D = 5, \sigma_I = 100.0$.

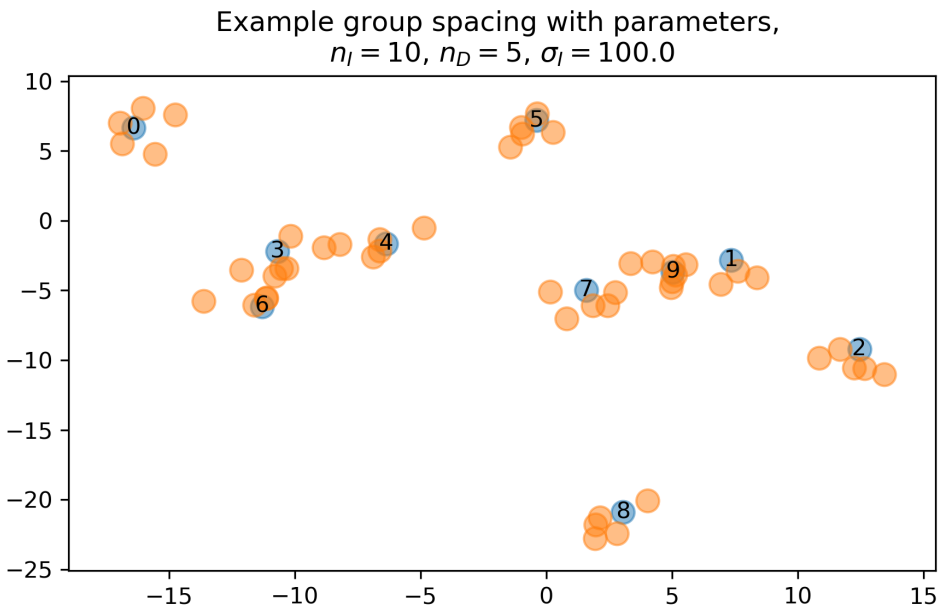

Figure 1: Example of the agent spatial distribution generated with model parameters, $n_I = 10, n_D = 5, \sigma_I = 100.0$.

2.3 Single-file alignments of agents using rules for simple collective movements

Subsequently, "animal single-file movement" —the ordered alignment set of animal agents— as generated assuming the rules of collective movements defined by distance between all possible combinations of two agents with the group. The agent who first moves (*initiator*) is randomly chosen, then the nearest neighbor for the last moving agent is always the next moving agent. Accordingly, the initiator was chosen from N agents:

$$A_1 = \{\boldsymbol{x_1} \cdots \boldsymbol{x_N}\} \tag{3}$$

$$\boldsymbol{y_1} \sim \mathcal{U}(A_1) \tag{4}$$

$$A_2 = A_1 - \boldsymbol{y_1} \tag{5}$$

where $\boldsymbol{y_1}$ is the location of the initiator, A_1 are agent sets before initiator is chosen, and A_2 are agent sets after the initiator is chosen by update to delete $\boldsymbol{y_1}$ from A_1. The next moving agent was the nearest neighbor agent from the last moving agent:

$$\boldsymbol{y_i} = \underset{\boldsymbol{x_l} \in A_{i-1}}{\arg\min} \|\boldsymbol{y_{i-1}} - \boldsymbol{x_l}\| \tag{6}$$

$$A_i = A_{i-1} - \boldsymbol{y_i}, \tag{7}$$

where $\|\cdot\|$ represents Euclidean distance between the last moving agent ($\boldsymbol{y_{i-1}}$) and agents included in the agent set who have not yet moved. The process of agent selection was repeated $N-1$ times. Consequently, a new ordered set was generated:

$$C := \{\boldsymbol{y_1}, ..., \boldsymbol{y_N}\}, \tag{8}$$

where C represents "animal single-file movement". Note that the C is operationally determined by stochastic processes from the mixture of Gaussian distributions and random choice of the initiator. Accordingly, C is generated by stochastic processes including the three parameters, n_I, n_D, σ_I.

Subsequently, n_{exp} iterations of C were generated with the same parameter settings. Here, n_{exp} aimed to simulate observation opportunities for single-file movement in the field. Accordingly, numbers were set to values that might be observed, that is $n_{exp} \in \{10, 30\}$. Consequently, we generated n_{exp} sets of $\boldsymbol{C} := \{C_1 \cdots C_{n_{exp}}\}$, where $\boldsymbol{C}$ is the set of multiple C, and $C_{i \in [1, n_{exp}]}$ is the i-th generated C. Finally, P was defined as a stochastic process:

$$\boldsymbol{C} \sim P(n_I, n_D, \sigma_I, n_{exp}), \tag{9}$$

where $\boldsymbol{C}$ is defined above.

2.4 Generating social networks using single-file agent data

2.4.1 Generating the adjacency matrix

A social network graph was generated using the single-file sequence set, C, with recent popular frameworks for social network analysis, `NetworkX`(`https://networkx.github.io/documentation/stable/index.html`), implemented on `python3`. One common approach to generating a social network graph requires an adjacency matrix that characterizes relations between two agents, $\boldsymbol{x_i}, \boldsymbol{x_j}$, of the group. The $N \times N$ adjacency matrix G of the animal single-file movements from the $\boldsymbol{C}$, was defined as:

$$\begin{aligned} G &= \sum_{k=1}^{n_{exp}} G_k & (10) \\ &= \sum_{k=1}^{n_{exp}} \begin{pmatrix} a_{11}^k & \cdots & a_{1i}^k & \cdots & a_{1N}^k \\ \vdots & \ddots & & & \vdots \\ a_{i1}^k & & a_{ii}^k & & a_{iN}^k \\ \vdots & & & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{N1}^k & \cdots & a_{Ni}^k & \cdots & a_{NN}^k \end{pmatrix} & (11) \end{aligned}$$

where G_k is the adjacency matrix computed from the k-th single-file movement set, C_k, of $\boldsymbol{C}$, and G is the summation of N_{exp} Gs. $a_{ij}^k = a_{ji}^k$ represents the relation of the two agents, $\{\boldsymbol{x_i}, \boldsymbol{x_j}\}$ of the k-th single-file movement set, is scored as:

$$a_{ij}^k = a_{ji}^k = \begin{cases} 1 \ (|c_i - c_j| = 1) \\ 0 \ (|c_i - c_j| \neq 1) \\ 0 \ (i = j), \end{cases} \tag{12}$$

where $c_i \in [0, N-1]$ represents the c_i-th element of C, equal to $\boldsymbol{x_i}$, i.e., $\boldsymbol{y_{c_i}} = \boldsymbol{x_i}$ holds. In other words, the relation of these agents was given a score of 1 for two adjacent agents in animal single-file movement.

2.4.2 Generating the social network

The social network graph was generated using the adjacency matrix, $\boldsymbol{G}$. The `from_numpy_matrix()` method (`https://networkx.github.io/documentation/stable/reference/generated/networkx.`

`convert_matrix.from_numpy_matrix.html`) implemented on `NetworkX` of `python3` was used. The option of *parallel_edges=False* was set; the entries in the adjacency matrix $\boldsymbol{G}$ were interpreted as the weight of a single edge joining the vertices, and obtained a social network graph corresponding to $\boldsymbol{G}$.

Finally, clustering the agents of the social network graph with the Louvain algorithm for fast unfolding of communities in large networks. The algorithm was implemented on the python module, `community` (or `python-louvain` on pypy) and its methods, `community.best_partition`(see, `https://python-louvain.readthedocs.io/en/latest/api.html`). This method automatically returns the estimated cluster size, n_{eval}. Figure 2 represents the social network graph with clustering.

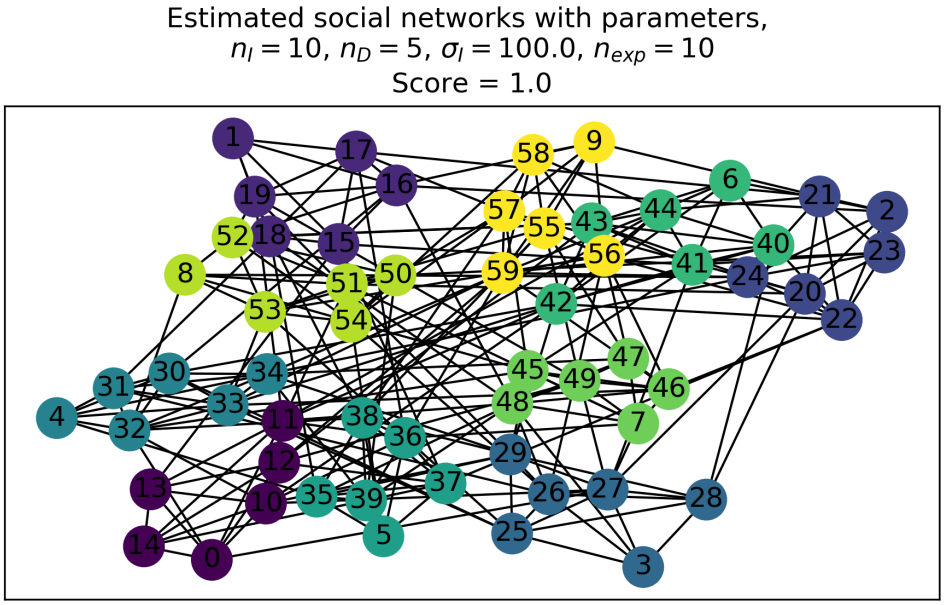

Figure 2: Example of a social network graph clustered by the Louvain algorithm. This graph was generated from the spacing patterns of animal agents shown in Figure 1

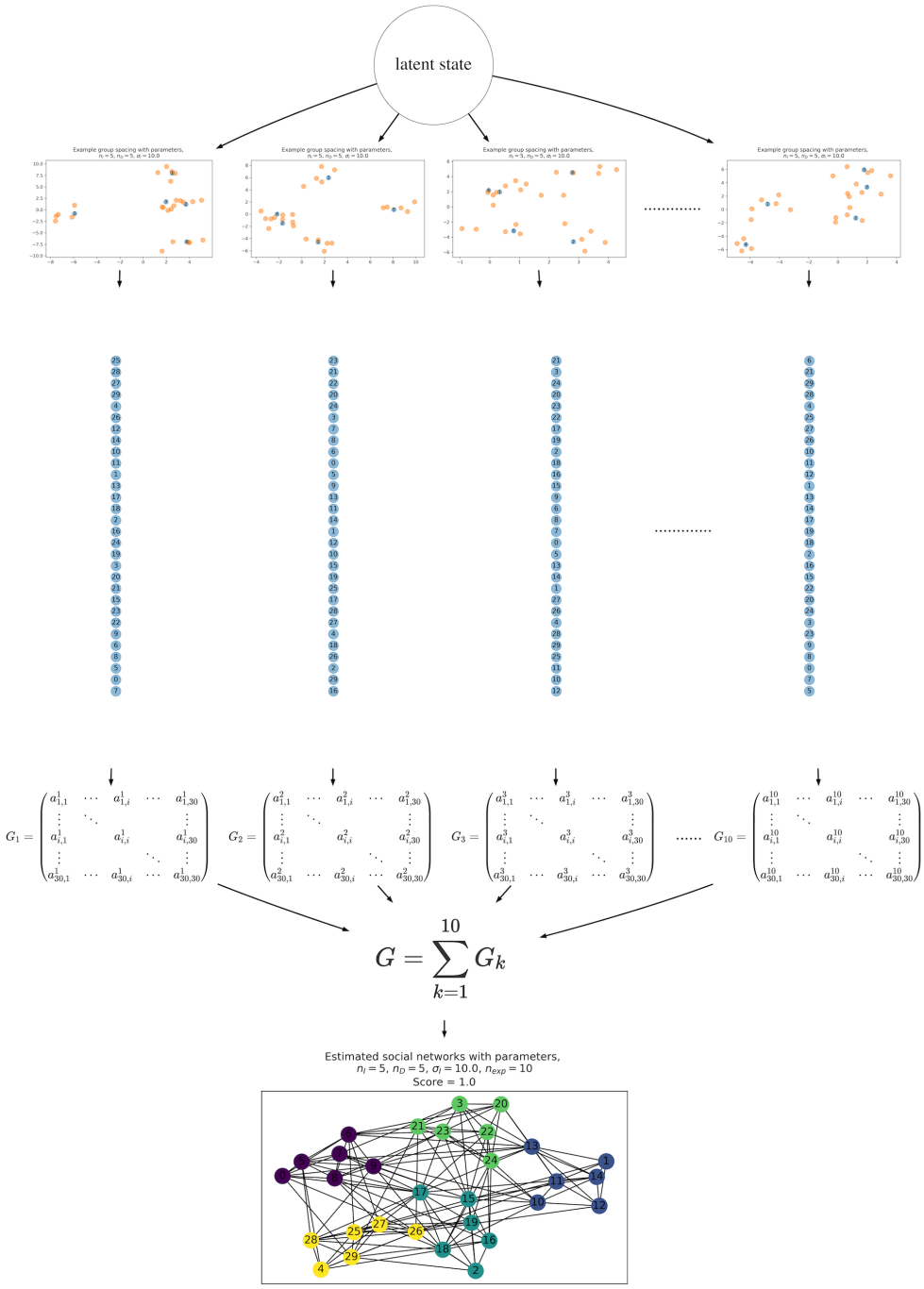

Figure 3: Schematic illustration of the simulation process. In this example, parameters were set as: $n_I = 5, n_D = 5, \sigma_I = 10, \sigma_D = 1, n_{exp} = 10$. The simulation started from spatial distributions of agents generated from one latent state of social group organization, determined by parameters of the mixed Gaussian processes, $n_I, n_D, \sigma_I, \sigma_D$ (The two top layers). Then, "single-file movement" data sets were generated by the process described in the section on ordered alignment of agents. The vertical chains of the 30 circles represents single-file movement (the number of each circle is the agent id). Adjacency matrices $G_{k \in \{1,2,\ldots 10\}}$ were generated from orders in the single-file movement data set, and were convolved to one adjacency matrix $\boldsymbol{G}$, which was passed to the social network analysis. Finally, the social network graph was produced, with clustering of the local community (bottom graph). This flow is the single simulation process, which is run 100 times.

2.5 Evaluations of the social network

Consequently, estimated cluster size, n_{eval} was obtained for parameter settings of n_I, n_D, n_{exp}. The social network graph was evaluated to determine if cluster structures originally generated were maintained. Accordingly, the ratio value, $r = \frac{n_{eval}}{n_I}$ is the performance of cluster estimations. Thus, $r = 1$ means that clustering performance is perfect, but $r > 1$ or $r < 1$ means overestimation or underestimation of clustering size, respectively. One hundred iterations for r for each of combination of parameter were run settings, $n_I \in \{1, 2, \cdots 20\}, n_D \in \{1, 2, \cdots 20\}, n_{exp} \in \{10, 30\}, \sigma_I \in \{1.0, 2.0, 5.0, 10.0, 100.0\}$, and mean values of r, $\bar{r}$, were reported.

3 Results

Figure 4 are contour plots of calculated $\bar{r}$ for each of set of parameter settings in the simulations. Scores of cluster estimations increased as parameters, σ_I and n_{exp}, increased. Scores of cluster estimations deteriorated as numbers of the independenter, n_I, increased. In contrast, scores of cluster estimation increased as numbers of the depender, n_D, increased. In summary, scores were the best with large σ_I, n_{exp}, n_D and small n_I (expect for the case of $n_I = 1$).In the cases of $n_{exp} = 30$ and $\sigma_I \geq 5$, scores were often perfect, i.e., $\bar{r} \approx 1$. Thus, cluster size estimations were often successful, if animal single-file movements were observed 30 times.

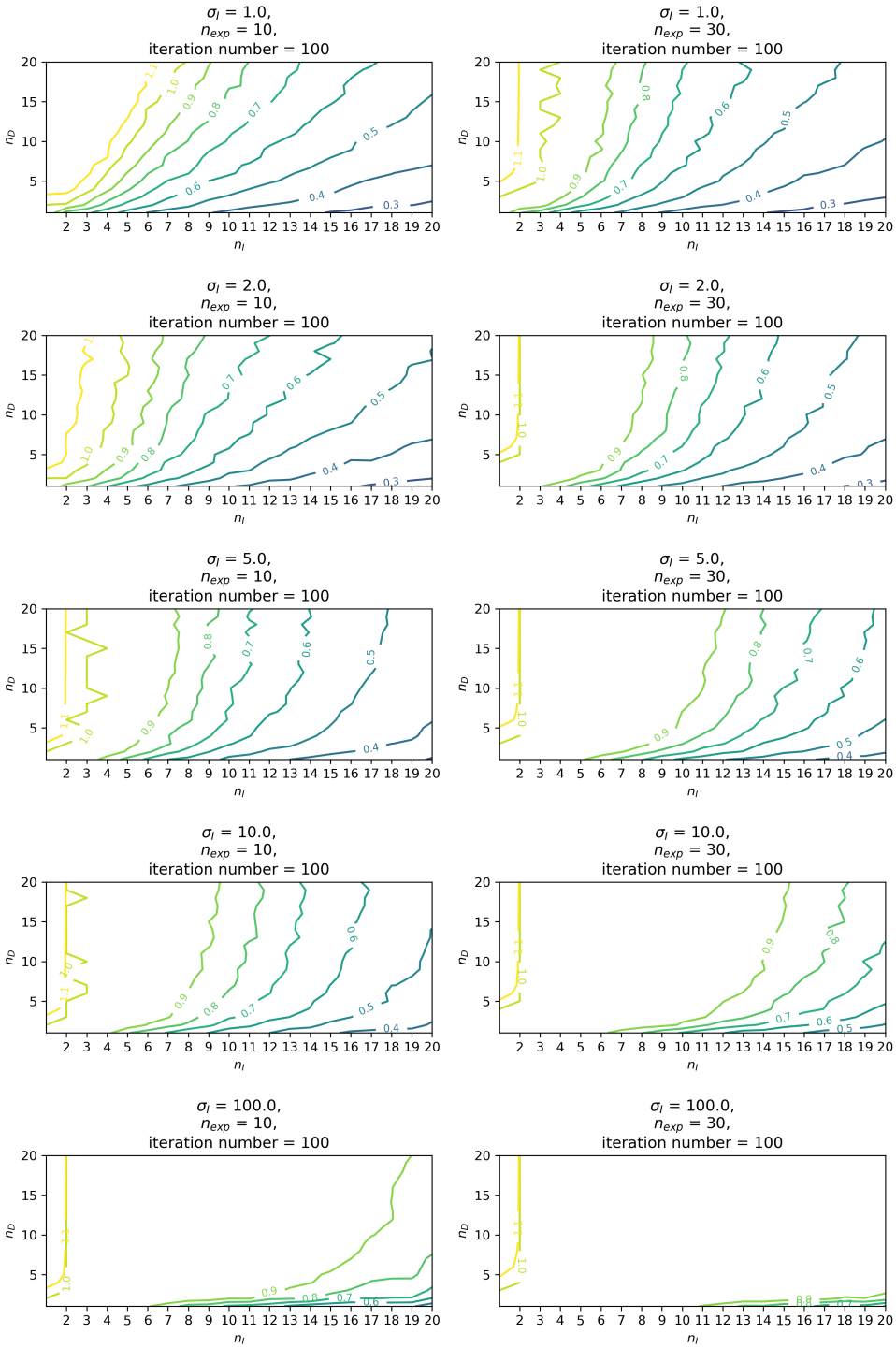

Figure 4: Contour plots for average performance scores for cluster estimation, $\bar{r}$ in 100-steps simulations. Areas near the score of 1.0 represents areas of parameter combinations where perfect estimation scores returned.

4 Discussion

Simulations with agent-based models suggest that recent implementation of a community clustering algorithm in the SNA could well estimate latent community structures generated by mixed Gaussian distributions under several parameter conditions. First, SD ratio parameters, $\frac{\sigma_I}{\sigma_D}$, likely influence performance for identification of clustering structures. The greater these ratios are, the more precise the estimations of cluster size obtained. This result is reasonable since the contrast of the modular structure becomes clear (see Figure 1 as an example of the $\sigma_I = 100$). Likewise, the more iterations, the more accurate scores of clusters size became. This result is also not surprising. An important result is the effect of numbers of *dependers* ffor the cluster estimation. Results consistently indicate that greater numbers of *dependers* improved estimation performance, at least within the range of parameter settings used in study simulations. Too many *dependers* would likely lead to overestimations of the cluster sizes, but such confusion occurred only in the case of $\sigma_I = 1, n_{exp} = 10$, and did not occur using most other parameter combinations.

An additional lesson from the simulations is an implication that appropriate numbers of the *independenters* exixt for better performance in cluster estimation. At least for parameter settings of $1 \leq n_I \leq 30$, a single-digit number, except for 1 and 2, likely shows better performance. In summary, results suggested that SNA applications of the Louvain algorithm to single-file movement data work well even when using only 30 iterations in simulations ($n_{exp} = 30$), when 1) the *independenters* range between around 3 and 10, 2) *dependenters* count is as large as reasonable, and 3) SD ratios of *independenter* per *dependenter* are high.

Looking back to observations of actual animal societies in reality, animals would fit with conditions appropriate for fine reconstruction using the present method? A promising candidate, for example, are primate societies. Primates are middle to large mammals mainly inhabiting tropical forests and sometimes adapting to dry savanna, temperate forests or cool-temperate climates [51]. Primates show a large diversity of social systems [52], from simple monogamous to complex multi-level societies that presumably emerged based on the ecological constrains, such as competition for food and threats of predation, as discussed in successful ecological models [e.g., 53, 54, 14].In general, principles of primate social formation rely on kin-based relationships and due to ecological constrains, group size is typically limited to about 100 individuals, but mostly groups range from 2.5-50 individuals [55]. Group size and structure, which are often consist of a few matrilineal clustered families and a few independent males, seemingly match with the successful parameter conditions indicated in the simulations.

Another advantage of primates is methodological characteristics of primate behavioral ecology. Primates are typically long-lived animals with slow life histories, and long-term studies that have been ongoing continuously for approximately a decade or more, are relatively common [56, 57]. Traditionally, primatologists have made individual long-term observations. Consequently, all group members can be perfectly identified in both field and captive studies. Observations at road or river crossings —— a suitable event for single-file movement—— have been reported in field observations for several primate species, e.g., chimpanzee [58], mandrill [44] and proboscis monkeys [59]. Such events (single-file movement) would potentially happen frequently in the field, though these observations may be used only for counting group members. Relevant findings of simulations are that the SNA works well for only 30 iterations of the single-file observation, and such observations may well exist for well-studied primates. Given advantages in primate groups, applications of the present SNA to their single-file movement data can be empirically tested soon. The quest to find the social structures of the primates is a fundamental issue, studied by many pioneer primatologists. Thus, the proposed approach provides a novel and empirical tool to analyze primate society, especially for their socio-spatial organization.

The results of the study might also be applied to other unusually social animals. Due to the recent human imposed threats such as roads, animals are often forced into single file formation to cross risky or dangerous places. Such an aspect of socio-spatial organization under highly risky situations has also been analyzed in meerkat [60] and elephant [61]. Also, single-file movement is naturally observed in zebra heading to water holes [41] and in wolves through snow [62]. Anywhere such single-file movements are often observable recently developed camera-trapping techniques [63] would enable collection of a valuable data set. Further, where animal movement is controllable in semi-free range conditions such as narrow gateways to feeders and water, another opportunity exists. Such single-file movement has been recorded for sheep [*Ovis aries*: 39], and would be ideal to test simulation results in various situations.

Finally, we also acknowledge possible integration with other social network data. The output from the single-file movement-SNA is just one dimension of inference for social structures. For a deep understanding of social organizations, investigation of animal society with multidimensional views and data is needed. For example, genetic test of relatedness is a direct evaluation of network patterns. Behavioral observations, e.g., traditional quantitative grooming counts of the groomer-groomee or vocal exchanges of callers and responders, are also direct metrics that reflect social networks. Gut bacterial flora of groups of individuals was recently suggested as a possible candidate to elucidate the network structures of animal society. Thus, access to many kinds of elemental data is available for predictions concerning social networks. Together with comparisons among network structures reconstructed by different metrics, an ultimate understanding of fundamental mechanisms underlying the animal society will eventually emergence.

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Code accessibility

All code is available from `https://github.com/hkoda/mix_gauss_caravan_sna`.

Author contributions

Project organization: HK IM; Computational simulations: HK; Manuscript writing: HK IM.

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