An Ethnographic Study of Two Neighborhoods

Brooke M. James and Jessica A. Neel

Louisiana State University

Authors Note

Brooke M. James, Studying Child and Family Studies, Louisiana State University. Jessica A. Neel, Studying Child and Family Studies, Louisiana State University. Correspondence in reflection to this paper should be directed to Brooke M. James. Email:bjames9@tigers.lsu.edu or Jessica A. Neel. Email: jneel1@tigers.lsu.edu.

Abstract

The writers will observe and analyze the details of two neighborhoods, Kenilworth Subdivision and the one in which Polk Elementary is located. Observers will physically drive to each neighborhood spending equal amount of time recording descriptions of the houses, cars, condition of lawns, and buildings. Information regarding the racial and age composition, as well as specific activities people are participating in will be provided. Similarities and differences between the two neighborhoods will be recognized and examples of each will be exhibited. In addition to the above descriptions being produced, an assessment of the meanings of them will be conducted and explored. In conclusion, an opinion regarding the neighborhood experiencing greater emotional connections and challenges will be cultivated.

An Ethnographic Study of Two Neighborhoods

There are no two people in the world alike. Therefore, there are no two neighborhoods alike, even if they are located within the same city such as Kenilworth Subdivision and Old South Baton Rouge, where Polk Elementary is located. An ethnographic study was conducted by a pair of observers to explore how the communities could be potentially affected by the noted details observed and recorded. When an ethnographic study is conducted, it is done so with the purpose to produce a detailed, in-depth analysis of the particular neighborhood. The intent of this study is to develop an interpretation of the culture discovered within each neighborhood. Following the conduction of the study, the ethnographer is then equipped to construct meaning that is located within the details and events observed. It is desired that after the study is completed it accomplishes the purpose to adequately translate what was seen and heard, producing an understanding of the reality of the lives of the community members. This particular ethnography consists of detailed descriptions of both neighborhoods including the houses, cars, condition of lawns, and institutions. The study also entails portrayals of the people in the neighborhoods, including their racial and age composition, as well as their activities. The observers also included thorough descriptions of the type of businesses in both of the neighborhoods. Prior to the study, the observers withheld a preconceived idea that a disadvantage accompanies those being raised within a low-income neighborhood.

**Method**

**Procedure**

The observers drove around in their car discovering details of the neighborhood that Polk Elementary is located, which is referred to as Old South Baton Rouge, and Kenilworth Subdivision. While remaining in their vehicle, the observers examined and recorded on paper the features of the two different neighborhoods. The observers remained in certain boundaries for both neighborhoods. The Old South Baton Rouge neighborhood’s boundaries included Highland Road, between East Roosevelt and East Washington Street, between Tennessee and Carolina Street, and between Highland Road and Maryland Street. The boundaries for Kenilworth Subdivision are Kenilworth Parkway to Staring Lane. Spending the same amount of time in each place, the observers were able to equally record the specified areas of interest in order to complete the ethnographic study’s purpose.

**Results**

1. **Description of Both Neighborhoods**

 The neighborhood, in which Polk Elementary is located, is established within the heart of “Old South Baton Rouge.” This neighborhood is perceived as the typical low-income neighborhood that you may encounter in any ordinary city. Among the houses located, there is a considerable amount with rod iron bars on the doors, as well as the windows. Of the houses observed, all are constructed of wood on a cement pier foundation. Although some had peeling paint, all were painted a diverse assortment of colors. A couple houses were spotted with blue tarp on the roof, with the assumption of still remaining from a past hurricane. In the back part of one street the ruins of a burned house remained with no signs of being cleaned up. Located on the windows was aluminum foil, which is a sign of poor insulation in a house. Some houses remained unfinished, and seemed they would continue that way in the future. One house in particular stood out with painting on the side reading, “VIP Barber Shop,” with an arrow pointing to the direction of the shop. In addition to those houses found, there was one house wrapped in yellow caution tape, possessing no sign of occupancy. Around the houses there was a variety of car models sighted. Some appeared brand new, old, and considerably decent. Majority of the cars observed were found to be older models, and there were several kids seen using their bicycles as a mode of transportation. The condition of the lawns appeared to be extremely un-kept with broken items remaining in a vast amount of yards. Within the neighborhood, the businesses that were observed included bars, grocery stores, a school, police station, Baptist church, gas station, community center, and thrift store. All of these buildings remain within walking distance for all of the community members located within the given boundaries of this neighborhood. Most of the businesses observed stood with bars located on the doors and windows.

 Kenilworth Subdivision, a more affluent neighborhood than Old South Baton Rouge, welcomes its residents with a brick sign entrance, indicating the subdivision’s name. Dividing the main boulevard in the subdivision is a landscaped median. Kenilworth Subdivision consists of mostly middle class, brick homes. None of the houses were boarded up or concealed with tarp. A couple of the houses were decorated with wreaths for the Mardi Gras season. The cars in this well-off subdivision seemed to be of middle class, including small cars, trucks, sports utility vehicles, and mid-size sedans. The cars did not look wrecked or damaged, but instead were in good condition. The manicured lawns were cut and landscaped with trees and flower beds. A porter potty located in the front lawn of a house looked out of place among all of the other kept up yards, but insinuated remodeling taking place. The institutions in Kenilworth Subdivision include Kenilworth’s BREC Skate Park, a recreational sports center and park, a football field, surrounded by stadium lights and seating, and Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

1. **Description of the People**

 The people that are discovered within a neighborhood are a key element to understanding it, for without the people, the neighborhoods existence would be in vain. Within the time frame the observers spent in Old South Baton Rouge, only people of the African American descent were seen. There was a severe diversity among the age of people sighted, as well as, their individual activities displayed. Found there, were children riding their bikes, an older man sitting on his porch, two women displaying verbal exchanges over the fence, and people simply taking a walk down the street. In addition to those activities, there were children, approximately 15 of them, conducting a game of football in the street. Down another street there was another group of children of various ages playing basketball, with the goal located in the street. Catching the observers’ eyes as they drove by, was four children playing in a yard with battery operated cars, only they were not being run on batteries; instead, the children were pulling one another with a string they had tied to the front of the cars.

 The residents of Kenilworth Subdivision comprise of majority Caucasian families. The observers did not see one African American in this neighborhood while performing the ethnographic study. The age composition of the people in this neighborhood range from young children to elderly couples. The people were engaging in various activities. The observers recorded three different instances of people walking their dogs, and all of these dog walkers were middle-aged Caucasian women. Two Caucasian women were observed running along the boulevard of the subdivision. A group of seven children, with their parents, stood on the side of the road petting a dog and talking with its owner. Another middle-aged man washed his car in the driveway of his home. A middle-aged Caucasian man with two younger children walked through the park next to the recreational sports center. An older woman rocked in her chair on her front porch. The observers also spotted an older couple gardening in their front yard.

1. **Description of the Types of Businesses**

 Majority of the businesses discovered in Old South Baton Rouge were of poor quality. Most reside in unlit areas with features implying they have resided there for many years without the proper maintenance. Most of the places for shopping included thrift and dollar stores. Covering a variety of types of businesses located there, one characteristic that remains in common between most of them is the bars located on the windows and doors. This insinuates that previous problems have occurred with crime to result in the application of this outward measure. Although there are a variety of restaurants located within a five mile radius of this neighborhood, none would be considered upscale. Some of those restaurants include: The Chimes, Pita Pit, Louie’s Café, Serrano’s Salsa Company, Jack in the Box, Burger King, Wendy’s, Buffalo Wild Wings, and Inga’s Subs and Salads. The shopping that is available within the same radius can be done at St. Vincent De Paul Society, CVS Pharmacy, Family Dollar Store, Thomas Grocery, Bicycle Shop, and other various apparel stores. In addition to those businesses also located nearby is Louisiana State University, South Baton Rouge Clinic, University Car Care, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and various churches and gas stations.

There are a variety of businesses located throughout Kenilworth Subdivision, as well. The businesses in and surrounding Kenilworth Subdivision appeared to be kept up, recently new, and in great condition. Pennington Biomedical Research Facility, located in Kenilworth Subdivision, has a metal white fence and sign at the opening of the driveway. The driveway is outlined with trees and shrubbery on both sides which leads to a parking lot outside of the facility. The facility is enclosed by a metal fence. Across from the Pennington Biomedical Research Facility is the Kenilworth BREC Skate Park. The BREC Skate Park includes several cement skate ramps and pits, a black and red metal climbing gym, black and red metal pavilions with tables, a rock wall, and approximately ten red metal tables and chairs surrounding the park. The entire Skate Park is enclosed by a black metal fence. Lights are strung around the park in addition to the stadium and street lighting in the park. Next to the enclosed Skate Park, is the largest skate pit/ramp of the entire park. This skate pit is surrounded by stadium seating constructed of metal. There were several other types of businesses the observers saw while examining Kenilworth Subdivision and the surrounding area. There is a school located near the area, Kenilworth Middle School. Other schools located within a five mile radius of Kenilworth Subdivision include Louisiana State University and LSU’s Laboratory School. Multiple convenience stores, including CVS and Walgreens, surround the Kenilworth area; at least four were noted by the observers for this study. Several gas stations were also noticed in a five mile radius, including at least one Exxon, two Shell stations, and two Circle Ks. Outside of the Kenilworth Subdivision is Baton Rouge’s General Medical Hospital and a Lake After Hour’s Care Center. Various shopping centers and restaurants border the Kenilworth area. The restaurants range from high-end dining, such as, Sammy’s Grill, to fast food restaurants, such as, McDonald’s. The observers noted the following restaurants around the subdivision: Johnny’s Pizza, DiAngelo’s, Mellow Mushroom, Qdoba, Izzo’s, Subway, Walkons, Taco Bell, Monjumies, Hello Sushi, Coldstone Creamery, Cc’s, and Yogartland. Multiple grocery stores were also spotted, including Walmart and Winn-Dixie. Several religious institutions or churches are located around Kenilworth too, including Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist worship centers. All of the businesses and institutions sited around Kenilworth Subdivision appeared to be in excellent condition. There were no signs of chipping paint, dilapidated structures, barred-in windows, or tarp roofs. Instead, the businesses were clean, well lit, painted, and not falling apart.

**Discussion**

1. **Similarities between Neighborhoods**

 Two similarities noted by the observers include the comradery among the community members of both neighborhoods and the sense of safety among the community members in each of their own neighborhoods. Even though the extent of the comradery, or sense of community, differs between the two neighborhoods, the fellowship among the community members is still evident. In both Kenilworth Subdivision and Old South Baton Rouge, the neighbors interact with each other. The children play and intermingle with one another, the parents interact and visit with each other, and the families pet and play with their neighbors’ animals. Both sets of members in their own communities also appeared comfortable and safe within their own neighborhood. In both neighborhoods, children were playing games and mingling with each other without any adult supervision. Women were also seen walking around alone in both communities.

1. **Differences between Neighborhoods**

As you explore the results of this study, it is no mystery that these two neighborhoods display a plethora of differences among them through the details of each neighborhood alone. Aside from that, there were two apparent differences noted by the observers that go beyond simple differences in characteristics. Within the neighborhood located in Old South Baton Rouge, noticed is the basketball goal in the street, indicating that children felt ownership extended to the entire neighborhood, not just to the confines of their own yard. When observing the children in Kenilworth Subdivision, it is apparent that although many will use the sidewalk to their own discretion, it is not common to see the children playing in a place other than their assigned yard or the designated play area at the park. The second noted difference is greater visibility of people among the Old South Baton Rouge neighborhood compared to Kenilworth Subdivision. Although citizens are observed in Kenilworth Subdivision, they are more abundantly sighted in the other neighborhood. There were two instances experienced in the Old South neighborhood where the observers had to wait for children to move out of street in order to proceed, whereas that was not encountered in the other neighborhood.

1. **Neighborhood with Most Challenges**

 After conducting this ethnographic study, it has produced the results that the neighborhood that appears to experience a greater challenge is Old South Baton Rouge. It is a poorer neighborhood; therefore, allowing its members not as many resources as a more affluent one would have, such as Kenilworth Subdivision. There are not as many options for grocery stores or convenience stores. The options the community members are faced with are not always up to par either. There is only one school located in the area, Polk Elementary. Kenilworth has multiple options for schooling. Polk Elementary is also not as kept-up and up to standards as the schools in Kenilworth. Therefore, the children may not receive as good as an education as other students in various areas might have, putting the Polk Elementary children at a disadvantage in their future. In general, poorer neighborhoods tend to suffer from higher violence rates. Considering Old South Baton Rouge is a poorer neighborhood than Kenilworth Subdivision, they probably experience more violence, making the neighborhood unsafe and threatening to its community members.

1. **A More Close-Knit Community**

 The observers believe the community of Old South Baton Rouge is more close-knit than the neighborhood of Kenilworth Subdivision. The businesses, institutions, and even the other houses in the Old South Baton Rouge area are closer in proximity to one another than in Kenilworth Subdivision. The members of the Old South Baton Rouge’s community can easily walk to the restaurants, convenience stores, grocery store, and churches. Even the children of the community can easily travel to and from Polk Elementary for school every day. By allowing the entire community and its resources to be in close reach, this enables the dependence on community members. In turn, this develops for a more close-knit community.