

Faith and Friendships Empowering Older People in Conditions of Precarity



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Assistant Professor of Sociology, Department of Social Work,
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Ethnographic fieldwork in Papua New Guinea



Ethnographic fieldwork observing gender relations in children's play interaction in three Swedish pre-schools for two years





Helping People in Acute Crisis in Stockholm

Ph.D. in Sociology, Lund University, 2016

PhD title: Managing Medical Emergency Calls.
Based on an ethnographic fieldwork in the Stockholm Emergency
Center, 1995-2016

Intercultural communication in the calls
With more refugees the need for interpreters increases
War traumas and mental health problems



Psychiatric Acute Mobility in Stockholm – Suicide Prevention Services Assessment in Suicide and Acute Psychiatric Emergencies





Performed crisis support work with children and families who had evacuated from New Orleans to Baton Rouge in Louisiana after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005-2006



Worked with crisis support, reading, art and storytelling activities for children in the Children's Room of East Baton Rouge Main Library

Agenda

- **Outline of the context and aims of the study**
- **Ethnographic Fieldwork**
- **Findings from the study**

Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana, United States





Ethnographic fieldwork in senior citizen centers, churches, grocery stores and cafés in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States, 2013-2017

The ethnographic fieldwork

- Ethnography as directed toward comprehending and explicating how people understand their lives.
- Ethnographic observations and interviews.
- In documenting the everyday life of the principal informant in the fieldwork, I let her social activities define the boundaries of the contexts of observation and the fieldwork.

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to gain an understanding of social ties and activities in senior citizen centers in Baton Rouge, the capital city of the U.S. state of Louisiana.

To address the purpose, answers were sought to three research questions in this study:

- (1) What types of social ties do older adults build in senior centers?
- (2) What types of activities do older adults participate in at senior centers? and
- (3) What do these social ties and activities mean to older adults?

Examine experiences of precarity and ways of dealing with precarity among a sample of seniors in Baton Rouge

Concept of Precarity

- **Means risk, insecurity and uncertainty.**
- **Used in this context about seniors who are thought to be at risk, a situation or an environment.**

Findings from the study

The study revealed the key importance of spiritual faith and friendships that:

- buffered some elders from the impact of their precarity, and
- supporting them in dealing with the consequences of their precarity.

Conditions of precarity and sources of stress for the elders

Discontinuities

Constant threat of lack of and discontinuity of home care, housekeeping, mental and social services, prescription and medication access.

Continous efforts by elderly care services are needed to reduce and protect against precarity for older people.

Elderly poor

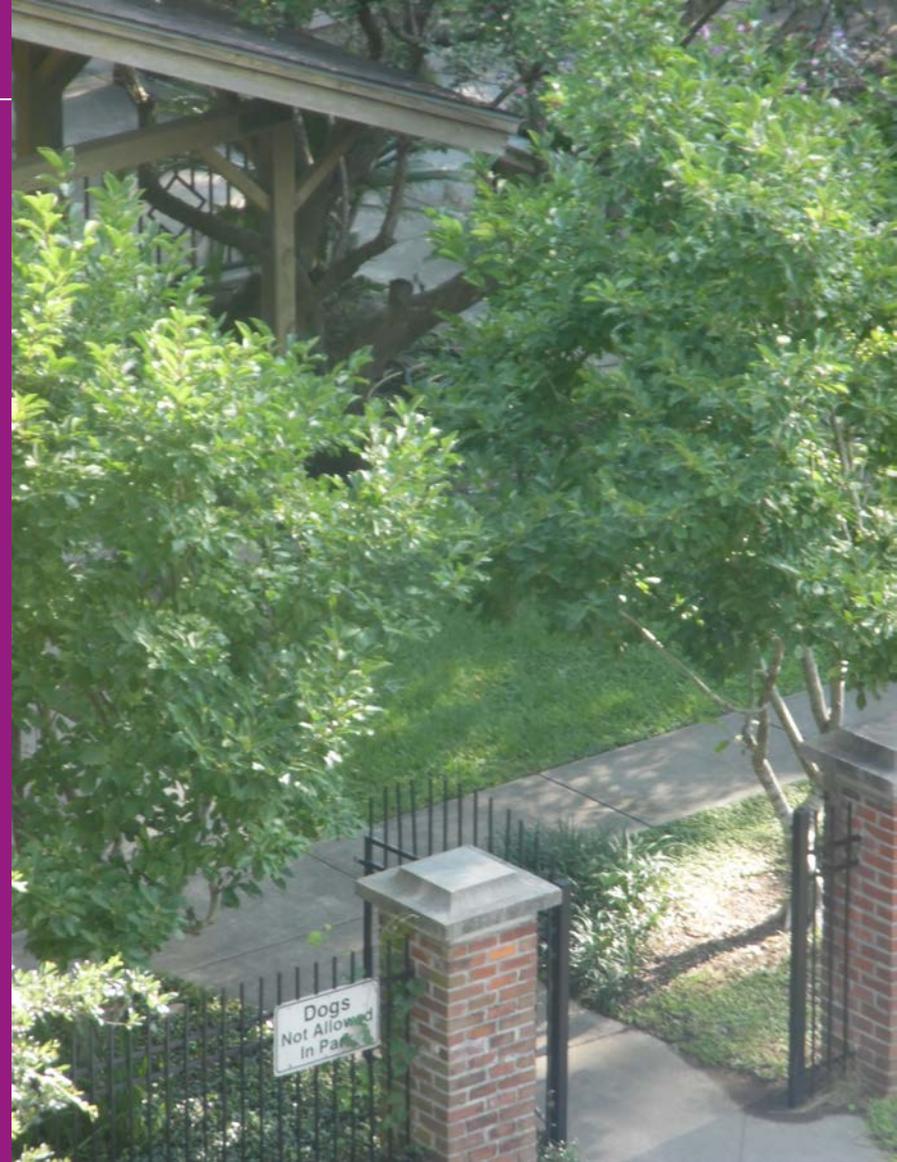


- Social problems of poverty.
- Over 85,000 seniors in Baton Rouge of which 50% are living at or below the poverty line.

Residential insecurity

Threats to residential security and risk of being evicted.

Homeless woman living
in the park after being
evicted from the
senior center apartment
complex.



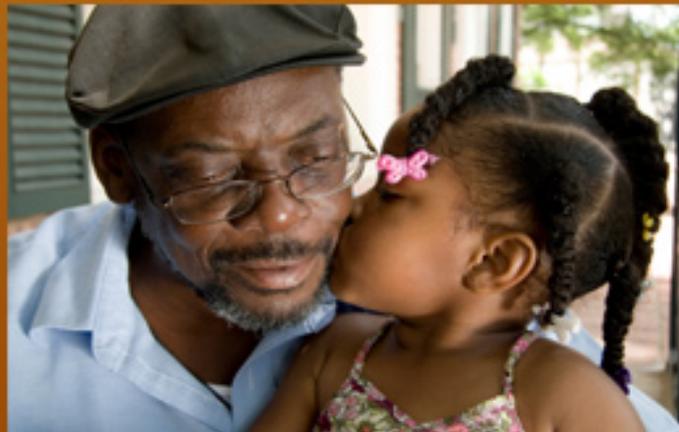


**Changes in health status, injury,
and mental illness.**

**Prevalent ideology
that prizes
independent
behaviors and
personal
responsibility**

Seniors' ways of dealing with precarity and key protective factors for seniors

Constant family support in securing housing, care, medications, and safety.





Spiritual faith and practices to deal with existential insecurities.





Strong friendship ties in senior centers provided a buffer for elders from the impact of their precarity, and dealing with the consequences of their precarity.



- Seniors expressed that faith was a central and constant inner focus and a major source of empowerment in conditions of precarity.
- One senior said “I got a little friend. She cares about people and is a good Christian. She knows Jesus. She takes care of me when I’m sick. She prayed for me.”
- One senior described her best friend and the decisions she made initiating this friendship: “She is a good Christian and very sweet. I love her. She has never said anything bad to me. She called my sister and talked to my sister about Jesus before she died.”

Elderly support services

- **Baton Rouge Council on Aging**
- **Public, private and charity organizations available to elders**
- **NHS Human Services– Non-profit eldercare with visiting nurses and physicians. Medication management. Advocate for the elderly and disabled**
<http://www.nhsonline.org/>
- **Affordable Pharmacy – Patient-centered pharmacy. Free delivery of medication**

Elderly services of the East Baton Rouge Council On Aging

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05JFQTzVZmE>

Senior citizen centers





Participant observation of over 20 African American seniors in an intergenerational senior and youth center (2013-2014) that later moved to a senior center nearby (2015-2017).



- **Free lunch meals from Monday to Friday**
- **Social activities**
- **Source for establishing and maintaining social relationships**
- **Source for keeping active physically**



Participant observation of more than 15 mainly African American seniors in a combined senior center and independent living environment for low-income elders living alone in apartments.



HARTIN
TOWN



The conversations with older people demonstrated that senior center activities provided three main areas of meaning:

- (1) social activities,**
- (2) social ties and**
- (3) spiritual faith.**













The role of churches

- Uneven edges of the sidewalk
- The cane
- The walker
- Take breaks
- The heat and humidity







The importance of memories



The role of grocery stores and cafés

- Food, drinks and groceries close from home for elders and social contact
- Intergenerational neighborhood meeting place
- Memory activating activities and environment
- Local Louisiana food (cajun and creole food)
- Jazz, blues and rock music venue



Spanish Town Market in downtown Baton Rouge, historic corner store and café



CALANDRO'S SUPERMARKET BAKERY DELI





MATHERNE'S
Market





PICCADILLY
Cajun

Piccadilly

Handicapped parking symbols (wheelchair icons) on the asphalt.

Piccadilly Restaurant

Pick your food from a buffet, and it is served to you

Sometimes live jazz music played by seniors



Resilience through music and dance











Seniors center elders in Baton Rouge doing

Hip-hop dancing:

Stanky legs

Break your legs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQH97zfdBus>

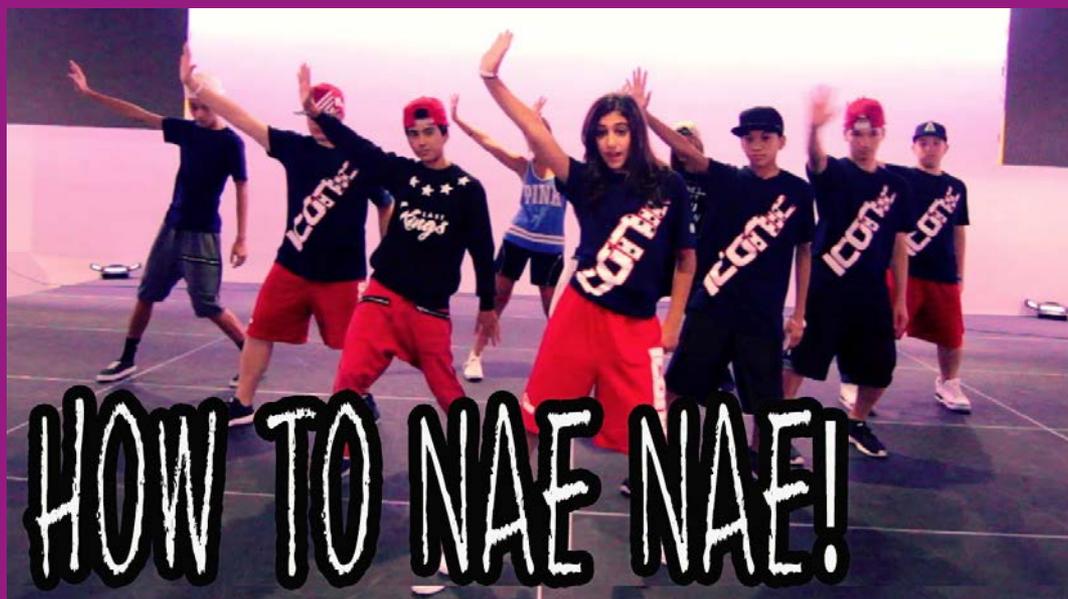
0:10





The Superman Step

Whip





Questions?

Contact: Karl Hedman, karl.hedman@ju.se

Reference

Hedman, Karl, McCall, Mary (forthcoming)
Faith and Friendships Empowering Older
Women in Conditions of Precarity.

Community meeting places in New Orleans



Woman with dementia in a senior center and the importance of love

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kdHYkUDNKw

St. Paul's Senior Center Senior Prom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHdV9U9BTsQ>

The St. Paul's Senior Center is a daily gathering place for seniors to socialize, eat a healthy meal, take computer classes, and receive support through case management services.

0:25

The Uptown Senior Center in New Orleans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsKqQr0eeSw>

” When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Parts”

By Spike Lee

51:00

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12xj1sHvIWA>



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