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Joshua P.H. Livingston

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PLACE-MAKING BY BLACK AND LATINX STUDENTS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTIONS: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AND MEANING MAKING THROUGH A
SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

by

JOSHUA P.H. LIVINGSTON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Social
Welfare in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor
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ABSTRACT

Place-making by Black and Latinx Students in Predominantly White Institutions:

Participatory Design and Meaning Making through a Social Enterprise

by

Joshua P.H. Livingston

Advisor: James M. Mandiberg

Black and Latinx male retention in post-secondary institutions, particularly predominantly white institutions (PWI), remains a critical social problem. Even though many PWIs set up structures to welcome and support Black and Latinx males, those structures are defined and created through dominant cultural norms. They have been challenged to mitigate the individualized facets of disengagement. A social innovation, proof of concept model was conceptualized, designed, and developed alongside Black and Latinx males in college. Social innovation is defined as a new way of approaching long standing and complex problems. Proof of concept (PoC) helps to validate that processes and designs are feasible for application in a broader context.

This dissertation outlines the design process used to create a social innovation barbershop model as a solution-based effort to the institutional problem of Black and Latinx male retention in college. Research of this POC was conducted at Bard College; a small, liberal arts PWI. The research investigated the design of a student informed and led campus barbershop, and how that space serves as a platform for meaning making for Black and Latinx young men. Research utilized non-prescriptive journals written by participants that focused on their individual use,

understanding, and meaning of the space. The goal of the research was to further inform the design of the barbershop model.

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To my wife, Natalie, I could not have done this without you. From idea to completion, we were in this together. As my partner, you stood firm and reminded me why I endeavored to do this work. Throughout this journey, you constantly lifted our family and moved us forward. And when the material on the page was unclear, you taught me a new skill—how to embrace process. I am inspired by you and forever grateful for your love, patience, insight, and humor. We did it!

To my mother, Nancy, your sacrifice for me is beyond measure. Your teaching that there is something to learn from everything around us, even those things that stem from hardship,

carried me through. You instilled in me a conviction to pursue who I'm called to be, and implored me to have integrity in that work. The reminder that I "am here to do something for somebody, for somebody else" continues to resonate with me and always will. I am privileged to have a double-portion of your and my dad's spirit.

To my daughter, Jude, what a blessing it was to have you arrive while navigating this journey. You are a beacon for me; thank you for reminding me that sometimes playing "chase" and dancing is much more important than figuring out the concept of abduction! I am also deeply grateful for the absolute support of my family, in particular my in-laws. Joe and Marie, your embrace and guidance gave me fuel to keep pushing toward the goal and allowed me to remain sure that it would all be worth it.

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Finally, to the Black and Latinx men at Bard, my deepest thank you for allowing me to be a part of your journey. You built something special, and it will always tell the story of the fruits of perseverance. Know that I believe in you, and the young people you will inspire.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Figures	x
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Conceptualizing the Work	4
Introduction to the Location and to Iteration	8
Overview of the Dissertation Contents	9
Chapter II: Understanding the Problem	14
Chapter III: Institutional Versus Market Environments	18
Wicked Problems	20
Social Innovation: Embracing Hybridity	22
Chapter IV: Review of the Literature	26
Navigating New Terrain	27
Exploring a Second Choice	28
Shifting a Paradigm	30
The Barbershop: A Space of Choice	32
Chapter V: Theoretical Concepts	37
Think Like a Consumer: Want versus Need	37
Making Sense of the “Borderland”	39
Third Place	41
Chapter VI: Design with Intention	44
Physical Design Iterations	45
Human Design Iterations	46

Operational Design Iterations	47
Constructing the Platform.....	49
Investing in Students.....	49
Physical Build-Out	51
Chapter VII: Methodology	54
Iteration is Difficult to Capture in Traditional Methods.....	55
Research Aims and Methods.....	57
Methodological Approach.....	58
Recruitment and Sample	60
Data Collection.....	60
Data Management and Analytical Steps.....	61
Ethical Concerns	62
Chapter VIII: Findings and Interpretations	64
Phase 1: The Linear Way.....	64
Reflection.....	70
Phase 2: Defamiliarized and the “Guess”	70
Phase 3: Theorizing a “True College Experience”.....	72
Ever Emerging: Moving from Stigmatized Identities	75
Chapter IX: Implications and Conclusions	78
Implications for Predominantly White Institutions.....	79
Implications for Social Work.....	81
Future Disruption	84
References	87

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Design thinking iterative process.....	5
2. Features and characteristics of market versus institutional environments	18
3. Defining social enterprise business model	24
4. Process of significant events or experiences that fuel alternative choices.....	40
5. Process to select a research methodology	59

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

One of my most significant memories is about a trip I made to my local barbershop. I was 15 years old, and my sophomore year of high school was starting the next day. What was special about this particular school year was that I would be attending a new high school: a predominantly White, Catholic school. My mother had to be out of town at the time, so I was home alone. As I scanned my mind to be sure nothing was out of sort, I noticed that I had missed the most important aspect of my first day preparations—I had forgotten to get my haircut! The only means of transportation I had was my bike. I rode it for nearly an hour across the city to my barbershop to make it before they closed.

When it was my turn in the chair, Mr. Johnson, the shop owner and namesake, talked about my new school and asked me what I was looking forward to. My barber, Shawn, took extra care because he understood that I was nervous to go to an unfamiliar space and be one of a handful of Black students. I got my haircut that day, but what I also got was an opportunity to share my excitement and anxieties about my new school with men I looked up to. I was a part of a group of guys that made me feel like I belonged and was an important member of that group. My place among them readied me to face the challenges I would encounter in my new school.

My memory at the barbershop before that first day of school helps me see what makes the barbershop so important in communities of color, especially for young men. The motivation for this project stemmed from my personal experience as a Black man in the barbershop setting, as well as my research and practice as a social worker in youth development. Prior to entering my doctoral program, I left the formal field of social work as a manager to become a master barber. While what I was doing as a program planner was deemed effective from an outcomes standpoint, I knew there were complex issues that young men of color faced that were not being

addressed in the context of the programming. Further, I experienced my own challenges within the traditional space of social work that I needed to find solutions to in order to do my best work in the field. Being a barber has helped me to refocus and better understand the nuances and opportunities for social change and place-making that exist in the barbershop environment and other spaces that are not traditional for social work.

Every client who walks into my shop shows a desire to feel appreciated as an individual. Those feelings are not unique to me. The barbershop is a place that can allow a person to relax mentally and physically. It is a place where a person can feel safe and respected, and culture is celebrated. A place where intense debate will always happen, but at the same time where shared values and experiences remain a central part of the community. My dissertation takes my experiences in both the barbershop and social work, alongside my studies, to shape ambitious and original scholarship: the creation of an innovative model and unique approach that takes aim at the social problem of college retention of Black and Latinx¹ young men at predominately White institutions (PWI). My roles position me to bridge theory and practice in a significant way.

Culturally, Black and Latinx males celebrate heritage through personal style and aesthetic, music, dance, food, and a host of other eclectic cultural trappings, not to mention styles and techniques in cutting hair. In these communities, the historical African-American barbershop's tradition and practice set the tone for how barbershops in Black and Latinx communities function. I refer to such shops as Black American barbershops throughout the paper. The first time I studied barbering and social work together was in 2014 when I conducted IRB-approved ethnographic research at a barbershop in the Bronx. In engaging in this research methodology as a participant observer and interviewer, I hoped to better understand some of the

informal supports within communities of color, and unpack the multiple ways that the barbershop serves its patrons outside of just giving them haircuts. I conducted interviews with men who patronize the space for haircuts, “hang out” as regulars in the space, cut hair as barbers, and also with the owner of the shop. My qualitative study looked at how a neighborhood barbershop is utilized as a setting to promote the healthy development of Black and Latinx young men. The concepts of free spaces and urban sanctuaries found in the youth development literature were used as guiding theories (Delgado, 1999; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Such spaces allow individuals to retreat and feel safe, accepted, and understood. Some men explained how they felt that the space allowed men to care for one another, and represented an extended family and safety net for their own sons. A barber in the space referred to stylists as therapists; where services go far beyond the simple haircut, beard trim, or shave. Men often find solace inside the space, staying to hang out long after the haircut is complete.

The study allowed for a better understanding of the way youth are supported in the barbershop setting by older men. One of the limitations, however, was that it did not take into account the youths’ own feelings and perspectives, as they were not interviewed for the study. In addition, it did not take into account ideals of diversity, neutrality, and inclusiveness within Black and Latinx communities—particularly young people contesting former ideals of normative behavior.

Instead of conforming to norms or imitating past models of behavior, young people create new cultural norms. They determine what it means to feel safe (Upadhyd & Mullin, 2017; Young, 2017). Diversity within communities of color and opportunities for individuality help create a sense of self. The type of clothing one wears, the way they choose to wear their hair, their topics of conversation, the music they listen to, these are all points of self-expression

(Travis, 2013; Hebdige, 1979). They also signal belonging to a particular generation. More specifically, these points are particularly important when examining the history of the Black American barbershop. While it may serve as a community hub and space for support, diversity is not always celebrated, particularly around gender and sexual orientation. For example, the fair and equitable treatment of women, gender fluidity, and queer identity have been contested within the Black American barbershop. In many instances, gay men are made to feel uncomfortable or generally feel unsafe.

After conducting this pilot study and learning other research traditions in my doctoral courses, I understood that I would have to look beyond the more normative methods most often used in social work research in order to capture the dynamic and emergent processes that were so important to my inquiry. While traditional uses of qualitative methods helped me understand what the barbershop means to older men of color, it was limited in facilitating how the dynamics of the barbershop and its unique design features could be mobilized for the benefit of Black and Latinx young men attempting to navigate an unfamiliar, predominantly White environment. Exploration of methods commonly used outside of traditional social work—in conjunction with those more commonly used—helped me understand that a space needed to be created. I could then best learn what meaning the barbershop could have for young people when the space is informed *by* young people. The theory, design, and method chapters will further unpack this point.

Conceptualizing the Work

When dealing with social problems that are highly complex in nature, social innovator Paul Polak (2008) suggests that we employ a solution-focused strategy and bottom-up approach,

one closely tied to the wants and expressed needs of the service user. We must go to where they live and walk with them in real time. We must seek out flexible ways to think and act that:

- Empathize with the user’s current experience;
- Work to define the problem through practice experiences, conversations with the user, and review of existing approaches; and,
- Allow us to vigorously brainstorm along with the user to find a number of solutions, build prototypes, and try elements of the prototypes.

Such an approach is known as *design thinking* and served as the conceptual basis for my study (Fast Company Staff, 2006; IDEO U, 2017.; Naiman, 2017). Design thinking is particularly appropriate to the development of socially innovative projects and shares with social work the common goal of social change (Scarnato, 2018). Design thinking allows us to develop solutions to problems that are highly complex and imagines new ways for our service users to thrive. We rely on gaining an understanding and appreciation for the people we serve and the conditions they face. The process is predicated on a vigorous intellectual inquiry and persistent practice (see Figure 1) (Dorst, 2015; <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/getting-started-with-design-thinking>).

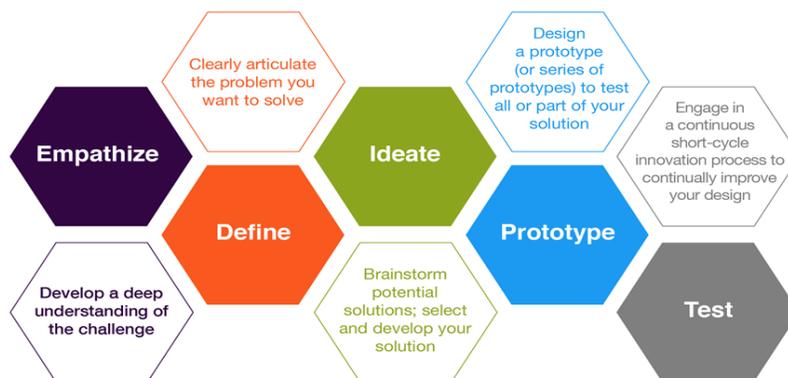


Figure 1. Design thinking iterative process (Stanford University Institute for Design [d school])

Empathy for the service user is of critical importance when engaging in design thinking. As a designer, when we are able to imagine how the user group feels by putting ourselves in their shoes, we can truly find out important information about the intended user. We research their condition and find ways to connect. Social workers employ empathy in service planning and delivery. Our training roots us squarely into this practice. *Defining* the problem is achieved through conducting a host of research that pulls from various fields. In some cases, it is important to reach outside the experience of the population we intend to study to uncover important concepts that help us better understand the problem at hand. Observation in the field furthers our knowledge of the problem. Design thinking in problem definition also requires cross functional insight into each problem by varied perspectives as well as constant and relentless questioning until simple answers are discarded and the true issues are revealed.

While one type of model can be developed to address a social problem, many solutions should be created for consideration. They also must be able to be evaluated equally as potential answers. This portion of the process is referred to as the *ideate* phase and requires us to look at the problem from more than one perspective, incorporating a full team to do so. Teamwork is paramount to design thinking, as looking at a problem from more than one perspective yields richer results. After ideas are fleshed out, the *prototype* is developed. This plan of action is the development of the physical tool or tools that will be used in the testing phase. Prototypes allow us to incrementally try out different stimuli or iterations of the full innovation and can help determine if the model is worth undergoing a full test. Lastly, execution of the developed model is not only evaluated by the developers, but more importantly, it is evaluated in real time by the service user. The *testing* component brings the project to life. It is a fully functioning innovation that we try to continuously improve upon.

Kees Dorst (2015), a leading thinker in innovation and design, explains that contrary to what most believe, design is not all about the generation of ideas. When the creative process happens, it is an intentional and rigorous one. Creative brainstorming, or the ideate portion of the process, looks to explore solution possibilities within a setting that has limitations. Limitations in this case are beneficial, as they work to force a strategic, well thought out, and very deliberate approach to the complex problem at hand. There is no light bulb moment necessarily, but rather, design thinking takes time to really understand the condition the innovation will target and how the new design is most reflective of the user and any problems they experience. Further, the process is non-linear in that designers may very well move backward to a phase throughout the process to uncover challenges that persist. Linear models—program designs where activities are set and bear a strong relationship to intended outcomes—are not always most appropriate for developing solutions with users who experience complex, rapidly evolving problems, as they do not readily allow for flexibility and iteration (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 2013; Coppola, 1997; Gillespie, 2000).

While aiming to bring results through a well calibrated and creative process, Dorst (2015) also suggests that good designers are required to lean on their instincts and take a bit of risk—they make an educated guess when proposing solutions. Guessing is not only an essential part of design, it is also an essential part of abductive reasoning, a logical inference employed in multidisciplinary research to formulate an explanatory hypothesis (Folger & Stein, 2017; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Dorst, 2010; Kolko, 2010). Charles Sanders Peirce (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017) explains that abductive reasoning is the process of taking facts and devising a theory to explain them. Abduction is also suggested to be the best way to reason the proposal of a new idea (Kolko, 2010). The process takes into account the facts

available to the researcher, experience that affords them a vast knowledge, and the ability to draw similarities from past experiences to serve as reference for a choice that is made to try a particular solution (Folger & Stein, 2017; Psillos, 2009). The more common methods of deduction and induction then follow.

Introduction to the Location and to Iteration

In September of 2017, grounded in the mission of college retention and armed with my expertise in the barbershop, my social work practice experience, and my theoretical explorations as a PhD student, I had an idea to start a social enterprise campus barbershop for Black and Latinx young men. I set out then to establish connection with a predominantly White institution that would allow me to further explore my idea. I was introduced to Bard College through a man of color whom I've mentored and been close with since my years as a social worker. In Bard, I found an institution known to be socially progressive and an innovator in the space of higher education, but dealing with the common problem of retaining young men of color. Further, I found a dedicated and open faculty and staff, with ideas of their own and a willingness to try something new. But most importantly, I found a bunch of young people who expressed the desire for the kinds of haircuts and barbering experiences that were unavailable in a largely mono-cultural White community. After meeting with the Dean of Inclusive Excellence,—a person deeply committed to students of color and new ideas—and her team, and completing the necessary bureaucratic functions (e.g. insurances, licenses), I was fortunate to be offered a small, underdeveloped space for a shop. With contact to key players on campus and an introduction with the buildings and grounds contracting crew, the shop had the green light.

In early 2018, having done months of driving back and forth two days per week from Brooklyn, NY to Bard's campus in the Mid-Hudson Valley to work on the concept of the space

and the functions within, I brought the progress to a halt. I realized that I was not truly utilizing design thinking and a process orientation, but rather reverting to my experience as a program planner. The shop would not truly be a place built for the long-term if I built it on my own. In order for it to have life, or be a place that young people found meaningful and truly owned, they had to be involved in the creation of it from the onset. Through my mentee, I was introduced to a collection of talented and intelligent young men of color who not only possessed a native knowledge of community building, but more importantly, a desire to leave a mark on their college. I discovered that there were two young men of color who had already taken the problem they experienced into their own hands, and had created a collegiate club they coined “Bard Barbers.” They had no past experience or formal barbering training, but had become dedicated to putting in hard work teaching themselves; the commitment yielded a loyal following. It is worth noting that regardless of them having little to no experience, men of color on campus would rather use their services than have to have to travel far, be denied services by barbers in a largely White community who did not know how to cut their hair, or go without a haircut all together. Leveraging these young men’s underground economy as a foundation, it was at that point the barbershop came to fruition.

Overview of the Dissertation Contents

My dissertation project operationalizes the barbershop as a solution-focused strategy. It responds to a desire among students and administration at a PWI to create a space to learn from the expertise and tactics of resiliency that Black and Latinx males employ repeatedly. It explores how to work in concert with what is already being done by a PWI that is dealing with the challenges of recruiting and retaining Black and Latinx males. Further, the project is rooted in

for-profit, market involved research that nevertheless engages in the theory and practice of social innovation and social enterprise.

The barbershop model is currently in proof of concept (PoC) stage. PoC is a way to confirm that a model is feasible for application in a broader context (Kendig, 2016). It is a method to confirm functional assumptions and feasibility, identify problem points in the model, and to determine how or when to customize the project's design (Rabinowitz et al., 2013). PoC also helps identify potential technical and logistical issues that may interfere with success (Arelekatti et al., 2014). It provides the opportunity for the researcher to have an internal feedback loop about a promising product or service while reducing risk and exposure of the model and its stakeholders. Moreover, it uniquely provides the opportunity for stakeholders to manipulate design choices early on. A PoC is a vital tool in determining how the product or service will ultimately be delivered to future users with the fewest number of flaws (Rouse, 2017).

PoC has two phases: prototype and pilot (Velasco, 2016). The prototype phase is the iteration of the model in its earliest form with a limited number of features. The purpose of the prototype is to trial the PoC, manipulate features, and gather specifications for a working model rather than solely a theoretical one. The pilot is the first real production of the model. The purpose is to gauge if the concept is working as expected.

The barbershop model employed both prototype and pilot phases simultaneously. While technical elements of the barbershop are the pilot phase, the act of prototyping comes in the form of design iterations toward a proof of concept. Reactions to those iterations then set up efforts of re-prototyping. Design thinking as a conceptual framework allowed me to move to the proof of

concept stage; it also aids in our understanding that iterations should be developed and performed together with users, and most importantly, should be intentional.

This project deals with a social problem that has proven resistant to more traditional PWI solutions (e.g., student unions and clubs) and more traditional social service approaches (e.g., counseling). In my work, I will outline the complexity of conceptualizing a new and multi-disciplinary approach, as well as developing and trying out (i.e., prototyping) design iterations together with Black and Latinx male stakeholders with the goal of bringing to life a space that feels truly owned by them. I refer to the space that was created as a *platform*. As a working definition, I use platform to mean a place, object, concept, or medium that, through its use, facilitates individual and collective meaning making by its users. In current experience, a good example of a platform is the smart phone. Others are common social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. As platforms, they have allowed both individual and collective meaning making through the various ways people have found to use it.

The barbershop serves as a platform where individuals come together with one another, but determine use and meaning independently. While the barbershop serves as a place to get a good haircut, individuals may also use it as a social hangout, somewhere comfortable to do school work, or, they can challenge others in a debate on current topics. Users choose to be as vocal, as quiet, or as engaged as they'd like to be, in a space where they feel ownership or unconditional acceptance. As a facilitator, I spearheaded the charge to create an inclusive barbershop modeled after the traditional Black American barbershop. This platform utilizes the central tenets of design thinking, innovation, and social enterprise, and offers a unique product within a unique consumer market that meets the wants of its users.

The contents of my dissertation can be best understood if considered in two parts. The first part, chapters two through six, move through the conceptualization and actualization of the model. In the second part, chapters seven through nine, I justify and outline the method of study, offer the perspective of students who built and patronized the space, analyze and discuss those narratives, and offer implications with which to move forward.

Chapter Two sets the frame for the social problem under examination: retention of Black and Latinx males at predominantly White institutions. The third chapter of the dissertation will examine institutional and market environments and the common approaches to program development within those spaces, with a critical lens toward the normative ways programming is developed for Black and Latinx males at PWIs. It will explain the more typical linear approach to social problem solving and how highly complex problems are better paired with solution-oriented, very flexible approaches. The fourth chapter will unpack common experiences of Black and Latinx males at PWIs, and the choices they are confronted with when considering their future in an often-time foreign space. Through this chapter, a significant review of the literature narrows in on the ways Black and Latinx males cope while attending PWIs, and how those coping mechanisms provide us with insight into the thoughts and lived experiences of Black and Latinx males. It also introduces and expands our understanding of a very special place within communities of color — the barbershop.

Chapter Five dives into the leading theoretical concepts that help to create this social innovation, explaining the critical differentiation between want and need, space and place, and assimilation and cultural inclusion, and how those theories justify the creation and examination of a ‘third place’.

The barbershop must be marketed to the target audience. Depending on the intended users, it must possess an element of aesthetic attractiveness. To achieve the aim of place-making, there is an intentional design process in the physical, human, and operational realm. In chapter six, I will introduce how the development of a unique solution-based platform comes together. I have coined that approach *design with intention*.

Chapter Seven explains the chosen methodology for this project. It outlines the route taken to solicit feedback from stakeholders of the space, specifically considering sample recruitment, data collection method, chosen analysis, and ethical concerns. Chapter Eight presents and analyzes the results, via open-ended journals, and their self-reported feelings of what the space means to them. Lastly, Chapter Nine discusses those findings and offers a set of implications for future work around this topic.

ⁱ Because I am speaking specifically about the experiences of youth who identify as male, throughout this work I utilize the more current term Latinx male/young men.

CHAPTER II: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Black and Latinx male retention in post-secondary institutions, particularly predominantly White institutions (PWI), remains a critical social problem (Rios, 2012; Tate, 2017). Pervasive in the current discourse around education is the inequity seen in Black and Latinx college graduation rates, particularly compared to their White counterparts. Much of the response to this discourse has been to take preventative measures, developing national and local programs geared toward making Black and Latinx males “college ready.” For example, at the national level, former President Barack Obama garnered \$300 million dollars in funding to implement the My Brother’s Keeper Program, an initiative aimed at closing the achievement gap for young black males in secondary and post-secondary education (Henderson, 2014). At the local level, in 2004, The City University of New York (CUNY) committed resources to launch a major Black Male Initiative that still persists to date. This plan seeks to increase admission rates in all of CUNY among Black and Latinx males and strengthen the “school-to-college” pipeline, among other goals (The City University of New York Black Male Initiative, n.d.). Black and Latinx male high school students are increasingly earning a seat in institutions of higher learning, and many are able to be selective in their choice (Rios, 2012). The establishment of a metric-based or outcomes-oriented approach to moving the needle on academic achievement is paramount to these initiatives (ASCD, 2012; ExpandedED Schools, n.d.; Fabricant & Fine, 2013).

But whereas the focus has been mostly on scholastic achievement in high school as a mechanism to get Black and Latinx males into college, many researchers understand that it takes more than academic preparation to stay in college and graduate (Baker, 2013; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Karkouti, 2016; Keels, 2013; Luedke, 2017; Pérez, 2015; Sinanan, 2016). As per the latest six-year span of research, the college graduation rate within six years for those seeking a bachelor or equivalent degree at a four-year school in the United States is 59.4% (Nichols &

Evans-Bell, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). When aggregated by race and ethnicity, the highest graduation rates belong to Asian (73%) and White (63.3%) students. The lowest are among Black (39.5%), 'Hispanic' (53.6%), Pacific Islander (48.5%) and American Indian (41.2%) students. When localizing the data to Black and Latinx males, the numbers drop further. Black and Latinx males graduate at a rate of 8% less than their female counterparts. Only 31.4% of Black males and 45.7% of Latinx males will graduate college within six total years and earn a bachelors or equivalent degree at a four-year post-secondary institution (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Among the many four-year colleges that Black and Latinx males can apply to and attend, many attend PWIs. These schools often have strong recruitment efforts, funding, and hold benefits associated with career access post college (Beasley, Chapman-Hilliard, & McClain, 2016; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). The insertion of mentoring, academic support, specialized courses, and programs that are created by students of color at PWIs have contributed to the success of many Black and Latinx males who do stay (Baker, 2013; Beasley et al., 2016; Brooms, Clark, & Smith, 2017; A. Sinanan, 2016). However, they have not alone been able to mitigate the individualized facets of disengagement that many Black and Latinx male students experience (Brooms, 2015; Brooms et al., 2017; Keels, 2013). Black and Latinx males can still encounter limited options to take courses that are outside of Eurocentric curricula and experience micro-aggressions and racism on campus (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Further, isolation, difficult interactions with faculty and students, and not being familiar with the dominant culture or alienating physical space shape their collegiate experience at PWIs are additional issues (Sinanan, 2012; Woldoff, Wiggins, & Washington, 2011). Even though many PWIs set up

programs and initiatives to welcome and support Black and Latinx males, they have a difficult time meeting some very basic but important needs. Most Black and Latinx men are averse to seeking out professional help, particularly counseling in critical times. Instead, they seek out social and family supports to cope with challenges and discuss common issues (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004). They talk to each other about sports, their neighborhood, music, and cultural routines that are part of their individual, relational, and collective identity (Carter, 2017; Travis, 2013). Asking each other “Where do you get your hair cut?” in a space where you don’t see many people who resemble you may seem like a trivial question, but the significance is powerful and fundamental to their adapting to the new collegiate environment.

Another competing factor against their inclusion into collegiate life is that Black and Latinx males find solace, and or, have responsibilities back home (Carey, 2017; Heller, 2016). Home can offer family, friends and familiar culture. As a young person entering college of any race, there is a ‘normal’ set of stressors to deal with when one is not physically close to family. However, for Black and Latinx males already coming from a space of being marginalized in our society, the stress becomes that much more complicated. Stress in this form is distinct from discomfort of transition that most young people face. It is instead manifested as a fear of living among the unknown and being away from social and emotional anchors that once served as coping mechanisms of that fear. Visiting culturally important places away from campus like the local barbershop that focuses on young men’s wants and desires can be comforting, as they can invoke the feeling of nostalgia and familiarity (Harper, 2013). However, going back home can also serve as a source of stress for Black and Latinx males if circumstances there are multilayered (Charles, Dinwiddie, & Massey, 2001). Moreover, the difficulty trying to live

between the familiar world of home and the unfamiliar world of the academy adds insurmountable pressure (Linard et al., 2007).

What are the ramifications of experiencing these two spaces? What happens to the psyche when you find familiarity in one space, but unfamiliarity in another? What takes place in the mind when a young person is thrust into a new culture while simultaneously going through identity development as a young adult?

While examining PWIs' approaches to promote Black and Latinx male retention, we must consider the structures in place that govern those approaches. Further, we must consider creative methods to design solution-oriented models for such a complex, individualized, and persistent problem (Dorst, 2015). The problem requires us to look critically at what young men want for themselves and how they identify and prioritize need (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Polak, 2008). To assume that the reasons these young men exit PWIs are universal among them would be overly general and complacent. When a young man decides to leave college before completing a degree, some aspects may be for reasons others may share, though it is also an issue unique to him.

We must strive to expand on our existing knowledge of appropriate intervention models for Black and Latinx males if we hope to aid their process through college. Integrating various forms of scholarship or disciplines to create models allows us to learn from the unique aspects of different disciplines, find intersection, and utilize knowledge gained to inform original research (McNabb & Pawlyshyn, 2014; Boyer, 1990). This project gleans from young men's understandings and incorporates the features that they want to see and be engaged with. The research will explore the following question: *How do Black and Latinx males make meaning of a social enterprise barbershop as a platform designed specifically by and for them?*

CHAPTER III: INSTITUTIONAL VERSUS MARKET ENVIRONMENTS

Non-profit institutions do all they can, but they are often not able to take risks and incorporate strategies that stretch beyond the parameters by which they are constrained (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). On the other hand, for-profit businesses can operate differently because they speculate in the free market and are less restrained by regulation. In a lecture on organizational theory, Mandiberg (2014) illustrates how organizational environments can be examined along a continuum between market and institutional. He explains that there are few or no pure market or pure institutional environments, so they are characterized as dominant market or dominant institutional (see Figure 2).

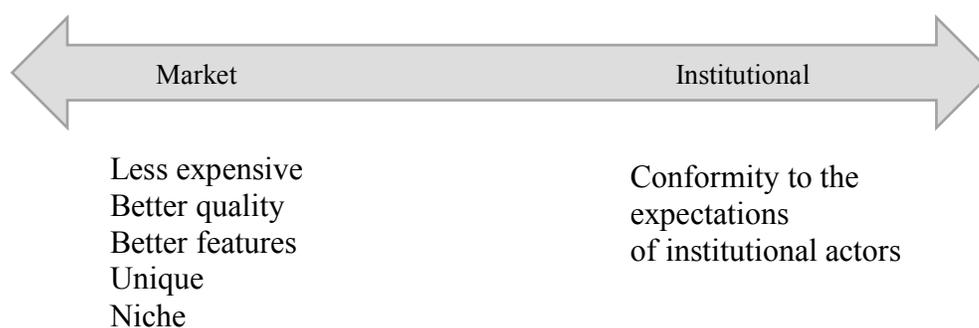


Figure 2. Features and characteristics of market versus institutional environments.

In market environments, success is measured by making decisions about cost, quality, features, uniqueness, and place in the market. For example, being cheaper or more expensive, or having better or worse quality, having more or fewer features, being a unique and exclusive brand, or targeting a specific customer are all strategies for achieving success. In institutional environments, success is generally measured by achieving outlined objectives and/or conforming to the desired outcomes of institutional actors (Bryson, 2004; Hasenfeld, 2000). Institutional actors are government or state funders, donors, regulators of organizations, board members, and related individuals and groups.

When presented with a problem, entities that operate within the institutional environment typically are pressed to problem solve through a linear model. Linear models involve a systemic approach, where following incremental steps is essential in turning out a successful outcome (Coppola, 1997; Gillespie, 2000). It is not to say that linear models are reductionist, although they do attempt to make the complex look ‘simple.’ Instead, they work from starting points to desired end points in a straight-line fashion. Or, they start from desired end points and fill-in towards starting conditions.

As agents for change, we strive to operate from a strength-based perspective in institutional environments, looking to examine our service users’ process in working through their specific issue. However, to satisfy sponsors in an institutional environment, we are required to be concerned with systems and outcomes (Christensen, 2015). We are swayed to focus our efforts on problems that we can clearly identify and plug into frameworks that follow a rational process (Hasenfeld, 2000). The implementation of the logic model, a programmatic mainstay in institutional environments, is evidence of such a framework, where the primary focus is on putting our resources toward a problem centered approach and evaluating that approach against a set of pre-established outcome measures (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 2013; Knowlton & Phillips, 2012).

The problems that we encounter as social workers however are not always so straightforward that we can easily adopt a linear approach and find unencumbered success for our service users. Problems instead are typically complex. They are also individualized, requiring us to consider approaches that can handle complexity and are rooted in the history and culture of the population we intend to serve. Another way to approach problems is to consider solutions that do not follow a step-by-step pattern, but instead allow for process. Process is more in line

with how our service users actually navigate social problems in real-time. It does not follow a linear progression because the problems service users face do not always fit into the plans we create. It is also de-linearized, thereby minimizing inflexibility (Coppola, 1997). Service users' processes are important (Christensen, 2015) as process acknowledges complexity and human choice.

Wicked Problems

Not-for-profit PWIs are among those that are bound by the normative and required outcomes of institutional actors, including peer institutions, donors, laws, and accrediting bodies (Holladay & Trinklen, n.d.). Pedro Noguera, a leading voice and researcher on educational equity for Black and Latinx male high school students, lends credit to those initiatives and mission-driven entities that have found success in preparing young men for college, but also discusses the complexities that surround enrollment and retention in higher education for Black and Latinx males (Fergus & Noguera, 2014). He refers to that struggle as a “societal issue” (Rios, 2012, p. 9), not just a school issue. Intersectionality of class, gender, race and the construction of identity at large both inside and outside of school make the problem wrought with challenges. The pressures, stereotypes, and treatment directed toward Black and Latinx males by everyday institutions impact their hopes, dreams, and economic opportunities. The complex social problem Noguera is referring to can be conceptualized as a *wicked problem*. Horst Rittel (in Churchman, 1967) describes wicked problems as those social problems that are difficult to solve. They have convoluted and compounded factors. The expanded understanding of wicked problems (Conklin, 2006; Rittel & Webber, 1973) has been described to share the following features (in Mandiberg, Livingston, & Silva, 2019):

- There is not one best way to formulate a wicked problem. The problem may not be well understood until a solution is developed since the solution helps to define the problem.
- We may not know when or if we have solved a wicked problem, as there is no definitive test of the solution.
- Solutions to wicked problems are good or bad, not true or false, right or wrong.
- Wicked problems are often tightly coupled to other problems, and the solution may reveal those other problems. (p. 21)

Social workers are used to seeing wicked problems, even though we typically do not frame them as such. We understand that complexity is the rule, not the exception, in the lives of individuals whom we serve. The problems that individuals face can be so complex that they are overwhelming, or that in the process of solving them new problems are uncovered or created. It is at this juncture that we must ask if utilizing a problem-focused approach is always appropriate. Increasing research and discourse on ways to approach such complexity from an organizational and programmatic level is most suitable in the context of Black and Latinx male college retention. The failure of government and contracted nonprofit social services has led many to look to other ways of addressing social problems (Trivedi & Stokols, 2011; Williams, 2007). For example, new public management approaches, which contract-out services to for-profit providers, also have been largely unsuccessful. These traditional model solutions to social problems are loathe to acknowledge their failures, as this risks contract cancellations. Some scholars and practitioners believe that part of the failure of these efforts has been the use of linear and overly simplified problem diagnosis and planning processes for what are extremely complex issues, or in other words, wicked problems (Mandiberg, Livingston, & Silva, 2019; Dorst, 2015;

Polak, 2008). Some have begun to adopt non-linear approaches to understand and address these complex, wicked problems, including acknowledging that complexity has inherent risks of failure. Further, there is increased interest in organizations that do not follow a linear format in their structure and practice and are willing to embrace risk and sometimes failure in search of the most appropriate service approach (Crutchfield & McLeod Grant, 2012). Vijaya Chand (2009) argues that many social change efforts are too reliant on the input of government and do not embrace or incorporate diverse and innovative forms of social action. Being too reliant on government issued grants and philanthropic efforts is inherently problematic. For example, as Gregorg and Howard (2009) point out, there is a sort of nonprofit starvation cycle that is occurring, where nonprofits are so hungry for decent infrastructure and funds to serve their clients, that they will agree to very unrealistic expectations around outcomes for their service users (Oliver Wyman & SeaChange Capital Partners, 2018).

Social Innovation: Embracing Hybridity

Wicked problems need a solution-based approach that can be flexible and handle complex issues. Social innovation as a concept affords us the opportunity to think of alternative ways to approach complex social problems. By definition, social innovation is a new way of stating a problem, a way to develop a new concept, a new way to think about outcomes for those we serve, or it could borrow from models outside of the normative choices for the population we intend to serve (Mandiberg et al., 2019). Social innovation considers how market-based principles and tactics, social service theories, ethical practice, and diverse ways to utilize resources can be impactful in mission-driven work. While it involves strategy and diligence, social innovation can develop unique projects in institutional environments. Social innovation has the ability to separate itself from profit-motivated capitalism while working toward social

change (Cooney, 2011; Shaw & de Bruin, 2013). They create social value rather than personal or shareholder wealth and involve innovation or creation of something new, rather than replicating existing practices (Austin et al., 2006). In simple terms innovation is new approaches to longstanding problems. Social innovations are exciting to social workers once they understand that new approaches to services are possible. It is also an approach to addressing problems, especially wicked problems.

While social innovation is understood to be a new way to approach problems, social enterprise can be understood as one of several organizational methods to operationalize social innovation. Kim Alter's (2007) hybrid spectrum is an important framework for developing a working definition of social enterprise, and how a social innovation can utilize the method to fit within an institutional environment. On one side, we find traditional non-profit structures that many organizations embody. They operate with a mission-motive first. *Stakeholder* accountability and institutional actors, including the measurement tools those actors employ, control the level of flexibility given to agencies and organizations in the delivery of service. On the other side of the spectrum we find traditional for-profit business. These are firmly rooted in the guiding principles of capitalism and its profit generating functions. The free market is a vehicle to maximize the means to gain profit and live up to the promises made to principal investors or *shareholders*. Shareholder/investor accountability overshadows any other business motives, as those interests take precedent.

The products that use a mixture of both sides of the spectrum are referred to as hybrids. Hybrids have: mixed motives; balance of mission and market; create social and economic value, and; reinvest in mission activities or operational expenses or can be retained for business growth

and development. Figure 3 represents how hybrids are defined and understood on the spectrum of business type (Alter, 2007):

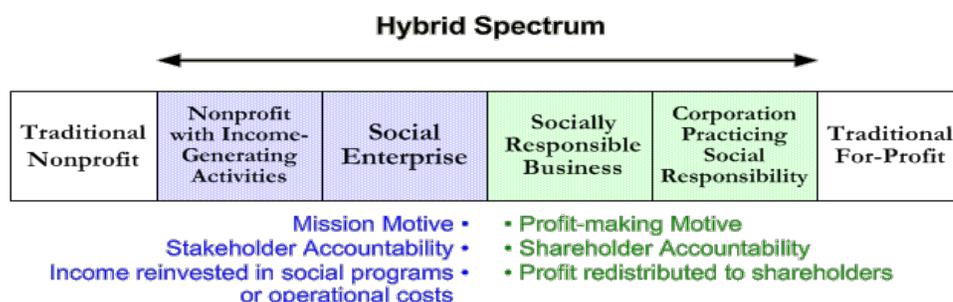


Figure 3. Defining social enterprise business model (Alter, 2007)

Social enterprises are hybrids. The goal of social enterprise is to take positive attributes from the traditional non-profit side, and the for-profit side. A social enterprise adheres to a mission motive at all costs from the traditional non-profit, but utilizes the profit-making capabilities and flexibility of the for-profit. Among many advantages, social enterprises afford the ability to choose a bottom-up approach. Similar to the strengths-based perspective in social service, working from the bottom-up starts with adequate community resources and creates intervening models from that point. Using this method, there is less need for institutional input in terms of resources. Instead, institutions can combine the attributes of existing programs that produce outcomes with a business framework that produces revenue and built to fit into the wants and needs of the user (Polak, 2008).

PWIs are bound creatively by the nature of institutions, but many are open minded and wanting to find avenues for their students to stay enrolled in college and achieve. This much is evidenced through the amount of literature focused on Black and Latinx male achievement in higher education. The symptoms of the problem of Black and Latinx male college retention are so varying in their nature that they restrain the current strategies we employ to address it. Social innovation opens ways for us to better define the issue and offers a new approach in serving this

population. It can be driven through a social enterprise that synthesizes what works both inside the institutional setting and in the market setting. A bottom-up approach allows us to build from young men's inherent knowledge and experience and also creates opportunity for place-making and ownership. Businesses that operate in a market environment inherently have many of the advantages that not-for-profit entities such as PWIs attempt to reach, but have not been able to reach. Inversely, the PWI's commitment to mission can bolster the market business' agility and promote unique and sustainable opportunities for social change. The following chapter will consider themes found in the literature that justify a need for a re-envisioned approach.

CHAPTER IV: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Families or entire neighborhoods make great sacrifices to send young people off to college and bring back the harvest as a means to continue advancement of their people (Carey, 2017). Moreover, the weight of education is arduous on many Black and Latinx males, as they often bring the hopes and needs of their entire communities, not just their own passion and desires, in their scholastic journey (Linard et al., 2007).

Black and Latinx males choose PWIs in part because of the resources afforded them. Academic majors, specialization, prestige, funding, job opportunities post-graduation, chances to work with renowned professors, international travel, geographic location, and campus clubs are a few of the attractions for students (Beasley et al., 2016; Guiffida & Douthit, 2010). PWIs may not have familiar cultural elements, but young men look for encouragement from their support networks to curtail fears in going to these colleges. PWIs are excited for Black and Latinx males to attend and devote state and private funding to initiatives that support inclusion (Augustine, 2015; Baker, 2013; Pérez, 2015). They hire and deploy faculty to research and develop courses and diversity programs. Academic support, including immersion into culturally competent curricula, mentoring, and opportunities for campus leadership are key programmatic themes that have shown success in retaining some Black and Latinx males (Beasley et al., 2016; Brooms et al., 2017; Sinanan, 2016). PWIs are indeed spaces where resources are housed, but there is a fight of the mind and the spirit among many Black and Latinx males to resist the negative and alienating aspects of their college experience in quest of those resources. Some young people stick it out, but not without their fair share of problems.

Navigating New Terrain

Synthesizing the literature, many articles focus on the following to explain the challenges and negative aspects Black and Latinx males face at PWIs: inadequate preparation for the academic traditions of PWIs; longing for social engagement; feeling isolated; missing home; experiencing racism; having no or poor interaction with faculty; pressures associated with poverty, and; stressors with home life (Charles et al., 2001; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper, 2013; Heller, 2016; Karkouti, 2016; Linard et al., 2007; Sinanan, 2016; Sinanan, 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Woldoff et al., 2011). Interviews included in the aforementioned literature with Black and Latinx males found that among these key themes, the level of preparation for college life at a PWI and the feeling of social and personal isolation were most frequently reported. Mostly, they cited lack of connectedness with dominant culture within a PWI. Some students reported wanting to engage, but not really knowing how, and feeling isolated because of their lack of diverse experience before entering college. One way PWIs try to combat this feeling is by offering institutional supports, such as Africana and Latinx studies majors, identity-focused student groups, and cultural clubs and events, among others (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). Another way is to encourage immersion in diverse experiences with the dominant culture. Shofield et al.'s (2010) research on intergroup friendships on campus supports the idea of diversity in experience and multiculturalism as a means to reduce prejudice among the majority on campus, anxiety among Black males, and historical racism. Woldoff et al. (2011) concur, discussing diversity *within* Black culture among students at a PWI. Their study examined differences between Black students who are familiar with PWI environments compared to those who come from segregated Black neighborhoods. While those students who were familiar with

PWIs had a less difficult time integrating than those from segregated spaces, all students experienced aspects of difficulty being a student of color on campus.

The aforementioned studies, and many alike, explicitly or passively use Tinto's theory of educational departure as a leading theoretical framework to understand why students choose to leave college. Tinto (1988) explains that in order to persist, students need to feel integrated into the campus culture. He calls on the college to offer social support to address this concern. Baker (2013) however points out a critical hole in this argument, calling into question how Tinto's theory differentiates Black and Latinx students' experience from those of white students at PWIs. Tinto does not point out specifically who is to be integrated and how that is to happen. He suggests that all students must assimilate into the culture in order to be successful, but does not acknowledge that external race related stressors, closeness to family, home life, and socioeconomic status play a significant role in the success of Black and Latinx males attending PWIs. Moreover, Baker (2013) discusses utilizing individuals of the same race and ethnicity to serve as advocates for Black and Latinx college students at PWIs. Lopez-Mulnix and Mulnix (2006) second Baker's point, explaining the importance of colleges and universities to be multicultural—adopting new programs and being open to new ideas of what has worked for students' needs in order to successfully address retention issues.

Exploring a Second Choice

After a short period of time, challenging experiences may lead to the search of an alternative solution. One solution is to seek out social networks beyond the formal offerings of the college as a coping mechanism. Peer relationships are important ways to find motivation to persist in college (Brooms et al., 2017), as skepticism or dismissive attitudes toward using professional resources that carry a Eurocentric focus are common among Black and Latinx

males. Within institutions like a PWI, the first response is to refer students to counseling services rather than build upon more organic natural supports that are more familiar to Black and Latinx males. Chiang et al. (2004) found that Blacks and Latinxs have negative attitudes toward seeking professional help but more favorable attitudes to informal networks. They have strong cultural values regarding family and social support that influence coping sources. In their interviews, it was found that both groups frequently cited exercise, hobbies, and engaging in activities with family members as coping practices that make them feel better about what was happening at college. Black and Latinx males seek out familiar community spaces such as barbershops as well (Harper, 2013). This is another example of the disconnect between the normative responses of the institution versus the experiences of Black and Latinx males. Chiang et al. (2004) conclude that alliances between informal and formal should be developed.

Black and Latinx males, especially in freshman year, also visit home more frequently to get support (Carey, 2017; Heller, 2016). Many find solace at home, even if home life is turbulent and causes stressors that affect academic engagement and performance at school (Charles et al., 2001). At home, you can get familiar food, experience familiar culture, reunite with friends, and patronize familiar spaces. Going home often in the first year, however, amplifies the differences when returning to campus. The opportunity to be among a familiar culture allows an individual to be themselves in ways that the being among White culture does not. Even small instances such as wearing clothes that you feel comfortable in, being vulnerable, and not having to put on a guarded persona to combat the stereotypes and microaggressions often are prevalent in White dominated space are looked forward to as a relief.

Shifting a Paradigm

Programs at PWIs developed to ameliorate the problem of Black and Latinx male attrition focus on issues that we can see at the surface, are told to us through interview or survey, or that we as researchers have deemed most prevalent or problematic. Essentially, PWIs are an inter-organizational group, and so come to adopt isomorphic solutions that may pay more attention to conforming to the legitimate norms of the inter-organizational space than the needs of Black and Latinx males (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While these programmatic efforts are often appreciated, they have had a moderate effect on stemming the sense of alienation many Black and Latinx males feel at PWIs. One striking feature of these supports is that they have been planned, in a linear fashion, to build on the institutional infrastructure that already exists at the school (Ebbinghaus, 2009; Liebowitz & Margolis, 1995). That is, they have simply added on to their existing framework but have not thought outside of it or significantly changed it. Programs designed through this problem-oriented lens—and by professionals rather than young people by in large—have a difficult time serving students who experience issues that are multilayered. Even some Black and Latinx professors cannot always understand the layers of these problems because the current iteration or evolution of youth culture is ever-changing and, in some cases, they themselves have been acculturated into the norms of liberal PWIs (Travis, 2013; Upadhyd & Mullin, 2017).

As previously discussed, PWIs seek out or are sought out by institutional actors to find solutions to the problem of college retention. In turn, PWIs deploy scholars, often faculty of color, to quickly uncover through research what takes place on the frontlines regarding the Black and Latinx male experience at PWIs. Once a common problem is found, a program is developed and a request for funding is written to institutional funders who share the perspective of the PWI

to address this problem. Reliance on funding from these institutional actors and their desired outcomes guide the intervention. These programs work for some students, but not for all. And those who it does not work for remain isolated. In an ironic twist, some faculty of color that are leaned on heavily to research and support young men of color may be feeling the same type of isolation themselves at PWIs (Whittaker, et al, 2015).

The problems Black and Latinx males experience are wicked. Each problem is not only complex within itself, but each problem expresses itself differently for each individual and may be difficult to speak about with those who do not share in this experience. The solutions that have been created by the PWIs may be defining the problem in ways that make sense to the PWIs, but not to the lived experiences of the Black and Latinx males. Further, institutional actors may not be able to recognize nonconforming solutions. In that context/environment, it is hard to find an empathetic ear. These wicked problems provide a rich academic discourse in terms of the strengths and limitations of theoretical perspectives around education, critical race theory, and youth development. However, the issue concerning the outcomes and problem-oriented process that institutions are limited to is not treated through rigorous debate of such a complex and individualized set of experiences. Instead, it is important to turn to research that suggests we find approaches that pivot from the current way we view problems. Andrew Van De Ven (2007) suggests a strategic approach, employing scholarship in our unpacking of what is really taking place with the social problem at hand. This requires us to look to common themes in Black and Latinx males' lives and examine spaces that are open to both collective and individual expression. Further, to operationalize the tools used in spaces that are designed with a high-level of intention and embedded in the history, values, and experiences of the Black and Latinx communities (Byrdsong, et al. 2013; Moffitt & Harris, 2004; Daly et al, 1995). Such

spaces that support community, can generate natural mentoring, are inclusive, and most importantly, offer choice. Barbershops encapsulate many of these attributes, and thus provide a window into the wicked problems of Black and Latinx male college students face regularly.

The Barbershop: A Space of Choice

A visit to the barbershop is more than just a haircut. It is a culturally embedded experience of people of color who fall under the African Diaspora. Other communities of color, specifically Latinx communities, have adopted the traditions of the Black American barbershop and view it as a significant cultural space. Particularly in urban centers, barbershops employ predominantly Black or Latinx staff, and they serve both populations. It is important to note that this practice is more common on the East Coast, where the Latinx population has Afro-Caribbean roots. However, the cultural norms and barbering practices common in the Black American barbershop also exist on the West Coast, even though there is a predominantly Chicano (Mexican American) population. Thus, it is important to review literature that outlines the historical significance and cultural relevance of the Black barbershop for men of color (Sathian, 2014).

The barbershop is recognized as a setting where there is a sense of community among men of color of all walks of life. Described as the Black man's universal home or country club (Grier & Cobbs, 1992; Harris, 1979), Black men are said to always be welcomed there. The barbershop not only represents a home for Black men, but its location, physical features, internal make-up, activities, and social functions are further extensions of the Black community. It takes notions of home with all of its complications, unity and division, consensus and tension. While the space itself is vastly understudied in social work literature, discussions about Black barbershops are increasingly found in public health literature as targets of intervention for health

and wellness. Non-scholarly literature is the primary source to understand the inner-workings and culture of the barbershop. Film (Apple iPhone 7 Plus TV Commercial, n.d.; ESPN, n.d.; Lee, 2016), websites (bevelcode.com), Instagram hashtags (#barberlife), radio (Martin, 2019; “NPR Special Series: Barbershop”, 2010) and barber challenge events discuss barbershop banter and practice. Only two scholarly books, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Mills, 2013) and *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought* (Harris-Lacewell, 2004) have delved deeply into the barbershop history and culture in the twentieth century and what it means to Black men specifically. As the only two scholarly books to date on the space, we must rely on them for information regarding significance.

Barbershops are places that constantly have their finger on the pulse of culture (Alexander, 2003). They are also known in communities of color as a rite of passage space for young boys of color. The bonds created in the space are known to build self-esteem (Ford, 2004; Tarpley, 2009; Shabazz, 2016). Historically, while barbering took talent and gained important revenue that increased influence and status, the job was still seen as an “unskilled profession” (Mills, 2013). Nonetheless, Black men understood the shop’s political and organizing potential. Black barbershops became a place for political action and activism because Jim Crow was pushing them out of other commercial spaces. And while barbershops are commercial spaces, allowing entry for anyone, they are private in that “there’s an expectation that what happens in there, stays in there” (Mills Quoted in Oatman-Stanford, 2014). Barbershops became spaces considered as safe havens to come together. This is particularly important for a community historically dealing with oppression. The development of Black consciousness in individuals could take root in the barbershop: that consciousness is forged from the input of various people

for many other people to see, acknowledge, understand and accept (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Mills, 2013). What's more, it is a natural space needed for grooming and acts as a non-threatening space for the dominant culture who do not really understand all that it is being used for.

To be sure, the barbershop is also ripe for toxic masculinity and homophobia to take shape where heterosexual male privilege is not questioned (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). Barbershops are not monolithic utopias. They open space for misogyny, stereotypes, patriarchy, and other criticisms. Homophobic rhetoric may permeate the space and go unchecked, presenting an opposite effect of a safe space. For some gay men, going to the barbershop is seen as a necessity, but feels far from a luxury. Frankly, the cultural norms that have been known to exist in the barbershop may feel hostile and unsafe. In these cases, the messages being projected on to young men is indeed a dangerous one. This historic normality in the Black barbershop requires us to be intentional about how we strategically challenge these negative performances.

Outside of the positive and negative cultural significances, Black barbershops are unique in that individual barbers often act and are viewed as entrepreneurs within a structured business. Possessing a low barrier to entry, barbershops can employ those who typically find difficulty gaining employment for a host of reasons (formerly incarcerated, withdrawn from college, those with GEDs, trades-people). Further, many barbers are pillars of their communities. Barbering creates a career path and can be lucrative, as it is a skill-based profession that allows for individual and business growth. Throughout the history of the Black barbershop, some of those who owned barbershops were able to take their revenue and reinvest it, creating businesses and endeavors that still exist today (e.g. Atlanta Life and North Carolina Mutual). The companies they developed supported Blacks at a time when other companies refused to do so (Mills, 2013).

According to Mills (2013), Black barbershops are unique for-profit businesses in that they are “private spaces in the public sphere (p. 7).” Moreover, “...black patronized shops [are] spaces of economic, cultural, and political resistance outside of the purview of white society (p. 7).” They are spaces that are able to produce the type of economic viability and social impact that typical for-profit businesses, no matter how socially responsible or motivated they may be, have difficulty producing. Through its history and practice, the Black barbershop is inherently similar to a hybrid model. It is not to say that Black barbershops are purposefully social enterprises, as they do not put mission first and foremost over profit generation. But their history is rooted in a mission to support Black men. Further, they utilize the free market and for-profit principles, which in essence creates a hybrid. The presence of mission and profit generation makes the space a prime model to utilize in the creation of a social enterprise, one that places mission over profit at all costs.

Although Mills (2013) and Harris-Lacewell (2004) discuss the barbershop’s role in community, its entrepreneurial teaching value, its meaning, as well as concerns of its climate and culture, they do not explicitly explore how the nuances within the shop may have a critical impact on a young person. Mills (2013) does touch on a vital point however. Stokely Carmichael, Civil Rights leader who coined the term Black Power, was first exposed to activism at his regular barbershop as a youth. Carmichael explains that waiting for his turn for a cut in the Harlem barbershop on 145th street was the only time he enjoyed waiting for anything. The Black barbershop gave him an opportunity to experience his own culture and collective history, not to mention, get a good haircut. Black men are often looking to get a haircut in places where they are socially understood; the sheer texture of their hair is understood too (Harris-Lacewell, 2004;

Mills, 2013). This is part of what creates a sense of comfort or home. It is also an acceptable ‘intimate’ space among men, both physically and culturally.

The idea that Carmichael and others could be moved to engage is a powerful indicator of the impact a barbershop can have on a young person. There is a level of trust and camaraderie in the barbershop. According to Harris-Lacewell (2004), barbershops are “chosen communities.” When men style each other’s hair, it is a coming together that affirms and comforts. They can come together without the burden of being othered, or having to explain their experience of the world to others. Further, getting a haircut gives them a chance to forge an individual consciousness while simultaneously creating an opportunity to learn about the vast diversity among them (Harris-Lacewell, 2004).

Bearing in mind young Black and Latinx men specifically, it is important to consider that while they are forging their own educations, they are also forging an identity that is composed of their aspirations and their background. Ideals around community are often topics of discussion in the barbershop among older men, in particular the ideals we have for Black and Latinx young men (Coakley et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2015). But how do they themselves bring together their personal experiences in the context of a larger narrative? Where do they find space for voice and choice? Is the barbershop such a space? Barbershops are still largely understudied, but they are empirically understood as central players in Black and Latinx communities. Social work can benefit from the study and operationalization of this space, particularly with Black and Latinx males.

CHAPTER V: THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Peter Brinckerhoff, a leader in non-profit management and organizational theory, makes a critical point that can be seen to link the market-oriented Black American barbershop to services that happen within the institution of college. Brinckerhoff (2000) suggests that for institutions to be effective, it is critical that we understand and distinguish the differences and importance of need and want among service users. Need, as it is defined in his book, is often the topic of interest to institutions such as colleges. In institutional environments, service providers are constantly in search of what people need: we do needs assessments, we talk about unmet needs in board meetings and in weekly staff meetings. We, as service providers, are conditioned to address service user's needs, which are additionally influenced by institutional views of legitimate and illegitimate needs, including what institutional actors are willing to fund.

But the difference between need and want is critical. In social innovation as well as social enterprise, the distinction is vital to success. Since social enterprise must concern itself with the market environment while also maintaining a mission, it has to constantly adapt to service users and ask them what they want. "People seek out what they want, not what they need." (Brinckerhoff, 2000, p. 13).

Think Like a Consumer: Want versus Need

A good example the aforementioned quote comes from the barbershop setting. When a client comes in for a haircut, the face value is that they are looking to get something they want. They sit down in the chair and a mini monologue takes place. They lay out, sometimes in detail, sometimes in vagaries, what they want done to their hair. The barber will go back and forth for a bit until something is agreed upon with the client, and then the service begins. After the haircut is over, the client will say a variation of one of two things most likely: "Great! I love it thanks!"

or, “Looks good... do you think maybe we can take a little more off the top?” The barber is now at a crossroads. They can say what they really think, “No. It’s perfect the way it is, it will grow in well like this, and not if it’s shorter. And I know that because I’m the expert.” Or, they can smile and say what their client needs to hear, “Sure! No problem!” The barber then does a few fancy tricks with the shears or clippers that does not really alter the original haircut too much, but satisfies the client want. Now the response is “Great! Perfect! I love it. Thanks!” What this story illustrates is that the client got what he or she wanted: the client also got what he or she *needed*. That need was to be validated. His or her voice was heard and therefore a need was met. The point is that providing the want is really the key to find out the true need.

Another important distinction between want and need in the context of human service is that needs are most often determined by others, not those who have the needs! Even when we survey people in need for what their needs are, we take that data and then tell them what their needs are. Particularly in the context of how providers and institutions can fulfill those needs. Wants are different. Wants entail choice. That choice can be expressed in markets, in other free choice situations (I’ll take the train, bus, walk, etc.). Wants imply choices, which is not always the case in needs.

I contend that this rings true for many young Black and Latinx men attending PWIs. Too often the current institutional programs try to engage them based on ideals that we as social service professionals and educators hold dear. As professionals, our considerations can fail to align with the choices or desires of our service users. At times, we overlook that the real need cannot be simply defined by us. Leonard (1984) identified this as a chooser-user issue. When educators, for example, who operate in institutional environments, choose mentoring or other student activities as a method of intervening based on perceived need, the student may not like

the choice that was made for him, so he may not use it. In turn, the young person is not engaged by the systems put in place, but rather, he will find an alternative space. That alternative space may be back at home or elsewhere outside of the college. Unfortunately, services and activities for Black and Latinx males in PWIs typically do not include them in the design of the intervention, nor are the choices in programs differentiated. Personal choice is of critical importance to Black and Latinx males. For instance, we do not think that leaving campus to find a way to get a good haircut is a choice that gives a young man an opportunity to escape for a moment—it gives him a chance to look and feel good when things around him may be bleak. To control how he looks is to control how he feels. That is an opportunity for real ownership. The concept of that haircut also offers us a way to discover a new engagement tactic and find common ground. Brinckerhoff explains, “If we are to add value to our services, we must focus on wants and never assume we know what they are until we ask.” (p. 13).

Making Sense of the “Borderland”

Through review of the literature, I have developed a diagram to articulate the landscape of Black and Latinx college retention. On the one hand, the choice to go to college affords a person a host of opportunities. Some of the highlights among them are knowledge acquisition, mentorship, clubs, fraternities, relationships with faculty and students, sports, and student-led activities. On the other hand, the choice to leave college offers another set of opportunities. Some of those highlights are home, family, friends, and familiar culture. The space that exists in the middle is unknown. I refer to it as a *grey area*: a space where a process of significant event(s) take place that cause young men to go from their original choice to a second choice (see Figure 4).

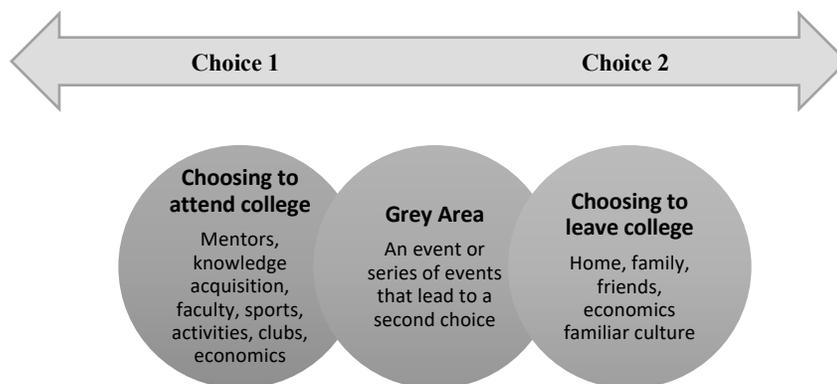


Figure 4. Process of significant events or experiences that fuel alternative choices.

This diagram can be further explained through Gloria Anzaldúa's (2007) work on borderlands. Anzaldúa describes a borderland as the area that is most susceptible to *la mezcla* or hybridity, not fully of one space or another. As a Chicana, a woman of Mexican decent, she speaks of the literal border between Mexico and the United States and her relationship to that border as a Spanish speaker and English speaker. She also discusses possessing multiple cultures as a lesbian woman. In an autobiographical account of her life and experiences, she wrestles and comes to terms with the components of her particular experience. Her culture is a mixture of many cultures. She utilizes both English and Spanish in her writing, as the substance of the material comes from both cultures. Her work maps the plurality of self, called *mestiza*, or border consciousness (Hammad, 2010; Orozco-Mendoza, 2008).

Anzaldúa (2007) uses the analogy of taming a wild tongue as a way to explain a memory of getting punished for speaking Spanish at school. "If you want to be American, speak 'American'. If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong." (p. 43). Here, she is urged to assimilate by one side, but also not forget where she comes from on the other. She explains that wild tongues cannot in fact be tamed. They can only be cut out. People who exist in this type of duality have learned to become part of both worlds, and cultural expectations in both are expected to be adhered to. She challenges the conception of a border as a simple divide

and ultimately calls for the majority to nurture active interest in the oppressed and challenge their attitudes that foster the growth and sustenance of borders.

While Anzaldúa's work has been used most often in gender and queer identity studies, the borderlands theory is a lens through which we see the relationship between PWIs and Black and Latinx males. Her work is powerful in this research context because it warns against assimilation or suspension of one's culture of origin. It instead acknowledges a third space and argues for a proactive approach to allow space for cultural inclusion. It also helps better understand the impact of the grey area. The language of home and the language of the academy are divided by a border. For Latinx students specifically, the language may in fact be actual language difference, making the border more pronounced. The expectation of citizenship in a native culture and another is an onerous one. The difference between the two spaces is clear. When a young Dominican man is told "we don't do that here" when entering freshman orientation with his pants a bit below his waist, or is required to code switch in the classroom (Koch, Gross, & Kolts, 2001; Moreno, Federmeier, & Kutas, 2002), or monitors the complexity of his vocabulary when he's with his family and friends, those are times when the duality strains and requires effort to sustain. The institution in this context should consider opening up opportunities for the development of new spaces that allow Black and Latinx males to operate within their existing duality of cultures.

Third Place

The idea of institutions creating a third space that Anzaldúa refers to is not new. However, when we examine the literature, we find that the body of work that dissects the idea defines it under a slightly different name. In his book, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg (1997), articulated the sophistications of ubiquitous social settings within communities and in

turn coined the term third place. Third place breaks down the importance of these settings that are not our primary areas of engagement: home or work. This theory and has been used to study the nuance and intricacies of important cultural hubs. Third places are important to people because of their proximity to both work and home life, while simultaneously feeling far away. Membership or engagement in a third place allows release and an opportunity for camaraderie. There is a sense of pride in playing a role that is self-defined and there is a level of accountability in these spaces. However, accountability is not portrayed in the traditional definition. Third place accountability is sought after as opposed to demanded (Friedman, 2012; Oldenburg, 1997).

To truly bring together Anzaldúa's and Oldenburg's work together, however, it is important first to distinguish the difference between space and place. To assist in that characterization, French anthropologist Marc Auge's (1995) work on *non-place* is befitting. He defines non-place as spaces where history, relationships, identity and the like are not of critical (or frankly any) importance. According to Auge, spaces that qualify as non-places are airports, supermarkets, hotel rooms, malls and the like. A *space* then is understood to be more of the framework or meeting spot for people; while *place* is defined by what is made by the people based on the life and meaning they put onto it. Although, one could argue against this qualification, particularly for young people in suburban areas. Non-places then are meaningless platforms; platforms that do not by their design help people to build meaning. Until a group or subculture, like young people and malls, find a way to do so.

The Black American barbershop is a third place. The barbershop fulfills the want for proper grooming, while simultaneously serving as a common place where Black and Latinx men can talk about a host of topics of their choosing, among peers who may or may not agree with them. They know they will be treated with dignity and respect in their third place. They can

have confidence that their hair texture can be understood; they can have confidence that the texture of their lived experiences are understood. They have confidence that their conversations in a very public place will be held with a high level of confidentiality.

CHAPTER VI: DESIGN WITH INTENTION

People embrace what they create with love, with energy, with passion. They are prepared to go the extra mile. Their work becomes a labor of love—for we as people do not labour for monetary reward, we labour for meaning (Moore, 2016, p. 76).

When I began my formal barber training and subsequently applied for a barbering job, I was very intentional about where I wanted to work. I made it a point to diversify the pool of clients I served because as a social worker, it would have felt limiting to work within a space where I felt “too comfortable” I decided to apply as an apprentice at a very well-known and highly regarded barbershop, which at the time served a predominantly white male clientele. While I had always gone to predominantly Black barbershops as a client and was more versed in that practice, I wanted to contribute by bringing the culture of the Black barbershop to this new space. I discovered that one of the owners in particular, who had come from that type of shop, desired this as well. I was fortunate that he took me on and showed me both the important skills of being a great barber, and the business operations required to gain success.

Subsequently, my clientele that I have been humbled and privileged to develop a deep relationship with over the years reflects rich diversity. It is made up of different ethnicities, races, social classes, sexual orientation, and gender, as well as those who are international and multi-lingual. Their professions and interests are just as wide; students, artists, bankers, cooks, entrepreneurs, nurses, detectives, doctors, lawyers, coders, designers, architects, and scholars, to name a few. It is my belief that this intentional diversification grants me a unique position to understand varying perspectives, and possess a firm grasp on how empathy is one of the primary drivers of human connection and place making. From a practical standpoint, it also pushed me out of a comfort zone to understand how to cut varying hair textures and how to teach that

practice. Patrons who sit in my chair feel confident that they will leave with a top-notch haircut. For me, barbering offered a tangible tool for getting people to open up and make important connections with one another.

My experience as a barber along with theoretical exploration helps me understand that design should be intentional in the effort of place-making. The space was designed in a way that reflects inclusion and is open to iteration. A high-quality aesthetic and sustainable operation aids in eliciting buy-in from current and future students (Polak, 2008). Explicitly showing consideration to the details within the space contributes to a higher level of ownership and care by fellow students and guests. The goal in this work is to elevate students' expectations of how they deserve to be, and should always be, served. The space intentionally was designed to make people feel like they just stepped away from Bard's campus; while simultaneously contributing to the heart of its mission. Derived from my synopsis of programs and services in both the institutional and market environments, as well as a consideration of the hybrid spectrum, I drilled down to three design areas that are critically important to consider in place-making. I have coined the three areas as *design with intention*.

Physical Design Iterations

Design of a space that is visually pleasing and highly functional is extremely important in developing spaces that are ultimately turned into places by their users. Small businesses such as coffee shops, hair salons, and barbershops, as well as offices, modern gyms, boutique clothing stores, and restaurants understand aesthetic as a driving force for user experience. Authors and designers such as Ingrid Fetell Lee (2018) and Avi Friedman (2012) explain that the feeling of joy one gets from experiencing a space should not be glossed over. It is not attributed to some internal feeling that we cannot understand. On the contrary, feeling joy comes from individual

stimuli strategically or inadvertently introduced in a space, and when those stimuli work in concert fluidly, the patron latches on to the feeling and is more inclined to return to the space as their new “place”—it is where joy is housed. Fetell Lee (2018) takes a deep dive into this concept, outlining seven aesthetics of joy: energy, abundance, freedom; harmony; play; surprise; transcendence (lightness); magic; celebration; and renewal.

Doorley and Witthoft (2012) include that spatial design is critically important for place making and creative collaboration. And popular interior design sites such as Remodelista (<https://www remodelista.com>) have authored books (Carlson & Guralnick, 2017; Carlson, 2013), hosted markets and trade shows for independent designers, and have in many ways become the hub for visually experiencing and strategically unpacking the elements of design that are critically important to user experience. Pieces dedicated to “do it yourself” (DIY) design, architecture and interiors (Lind, 2008; Woods, 2014), and timeless furniture design (Assouline, 2014) are also helpful to gain a better understanding of how a level of elevation, comfort, and style are important to promote desirability. Stimuli in this design iteration are derived from the exploration of this literature, as well as the collective creativity of the students. Examples of physical design are: lighting, spatial flow, colorways and palettes, furniture, and functionality.

Human Design Iterations

Authors such as Oldenburg (1997), Friedman (2012) and IDEOs Field Guide to Human-Centered Design (2013) aid us in understanding the importance of the second social design iteration area—human design. Mirrors, familiar colors and smells, traditional barbering services, and spatial layout not only promote individual self-esteem, but also help fulfill a want and restore/supply dignity.

Experiencing a sense of ownership and the nostalgia of familiar barbershop jargon are all important to place making. The services of the space are familiar in that the tools, astringents, barber chair, broom and dust pan, and other accoutrements that are ubiquitous to barber shops everywhere exist inside the space and are strategically incorporated in the décor. But what makes this different is that the quality of each piece is elevated to the highest degree. In a typical market environment, that elevation is purposefully planned to justify increases in price point and therefore is profit motivated. Here, the insertion of high-end materials are designed to elevate young Black and Latinx men's expectations of how they deserve to be, and should always be, treated. Some of the materials and services introduced in this design iteration were eucalyptus infused hot towels, plush barber chairs, warm shaving cream, and top-grade razors, tools and products.

An open architectural design (Levison, 2019) promoted the social mission, allowing for conversation and a safe-space to hang out, even while not getting a haircut. Open architecture started with computers, particularly computer software, to help developers add or substitute components quickly. The concept has been adopted by the design world for its relevance in spatial development (<https://www.architectmagazine.com/firms/open-architecture>). An open design afforded the opportunity for furniture to be shuffled around and utilized for varying functions, including events and workshops (Doorley & Witthoft, 2012), and seating to be arranged for community building and working.

Operational Design Iterations

The primary factors of business design revolve around the hours of operation, days of the week the space is open, the cost structure and the training the apprentice barbers will undergo. The days of the week and hours were developed alongside students initially to reflect their

availability outside of their academic requirements and class time. While operational logistics like time seem to be static and should remain the same for reliability purposes that only benefits us in a true market environment. In an institutional environment, such as a college, operational strategies must be re-imagined, particularly given the transient nature of these spaces. Not only is the student body transient, but every four months or so their schedules turn upside down as well. This example of a constant shift reflects the need for the business to shift and be malleable to sudden changes in order to be successful. The iterations of this area revolved around the fluctuations that are necessary to make the place reliable for students.

Apprentice barbers gave feedback to stimuli directed toward them. Teaching methods such as demonstrations through masterclasses once per week, introduction to new tools, and expansion of skillset in new hairstyling techniques worked to broaden the range they will have as barbers once they leave. It will also help to solidify an appropriate instructional curriculum within the space.

Paul Polak (2008) and Peter Brinckerhoff (2009), among other scholars in social enterprise, argue that it is important to consider cost structure, specifically making people pay for services or goods when developing social enterprise innovations. The idea around this is that once people consume and have to invest their time and money they not only value the service more, but they buy into the product. It gives them a voice and autonomy to choose if the service is adequate. Another important stimulus that was introduced to the space was the concept of white-boarding. White-boarding is a way that designers and innovators are able to flesh out ideas and move through iterative processes that require complexity in thought, and view the issue from multiple lenses. White-boarding is important within a PoC because of the amount of fluctuation

and change that is necessary to land on a model that is consistent and reliable. It also keeps ideas transparent and allows us to sit with ideas a little bit before implementing.

How the space was promoted to the public was also considered. One particular and unique safeguard from the threat of personal information being shared and how the space could maintain an intimate feel was to ban social media and photographs in the space. All patrons and students working in the space were notified and are reminded that the barbershop is to be treated as an “underground,” word of mouth only space. The ban of imagery increased the level of intimacy and provided some safeguard from breeches in confidentiality. It subsequently served as a highly effective marketing tool. All students became champions in the motto, “NO PICS!”

Constructing the Platform

At the launch of 2017, I was awarded the \$10,000 Dean K. Harrison Fellowship Award from The City University of New York Graduate Center. Among a competitive pool of applicants from the social welfare program and others, my project proposal was one of the very few to receive this discretionary funding. My award proposal outlined the key components of the conceptual idea, intended data collection methods, proposed budget, and proposed timeline to completion of the dissertation. As outlined in the proposal, the budget was utilized to purchase tools, equipment and materials for a full buildout of a high-quality barbershop. Those include: barber chairs; hair cutting tools and products; equipment for creating barber stations, shelving and a waiting area; and cabinetry to store products required to maintain the space.

Investing in Students

Consistent with social enterprise development, I chose to take a risk and invest in the project with my own award, showing good faith that I believed in the concept and the student’s ability to develop a unique version of the innovation on Bard’s campus. A funding partnership

was then developed with the administration at Bard College, as they fully bought into the mission and model. Bard agreed to contract their Buildings and Grounds crew to provide electrical work including lighting, plumbing, paint and any structural needs for space layout. I was able to leverage connections through my network as a professional barber to get products and materials at low and wholesale costs, and in some cases, donations. The full build-out of the concept will remain constructed at Bard College after my doctoral study, given the understanding that the space remains a flagship and incubator space under my direction, with full intention to scale my intellectual property under my parent company I developed while in the doctoral program, Por la Gente™, Inc.

Por la Gente™, Inc. formed an informal partnership with Bard Barbers, the existing club on campus to create the social enterprise function of the model. As an institution, Bard College secures and allocates funds to the development and sustainability of student created and facilitated clubs on campus. Those clubs are able to request funding, in a model typical to that of a not-for-profit requesting funds through a written funding proposal to a grant maker. Those funds are given based on projected impact or outcome to the general student body, and can be specific to populations with special interests (e.g. Black Student Union, Queer Women United, Latin American Student Organization). Those funds do however have limitations. Even after funds are granted, all requests for spending are subject to student fiscal committee review, and must be approved. The student fiscal committee is overseen by Student Activities, a department of the College.

Bard Barbers' budget was utilized alongside my initial discretionary investment and projected revenue that the barbershop would bring in from haircut services. The blend in funding allowed students to purchase larger items that the institution would allow, but also have

the flexibility and autonomy over their own space with revenue generated from their service delivery. I developed a project budget for sustainability for students at Bard College to operate the shop post research. They will be responsible to provide ongoing maintenance of the space. Any student or guest barber coming into the space will have their own tools, as these are specifically owned by individuals in the field.

Physical Build-Out

One of the most critical elements to the development of the barbershop was the build-out of the space. Initially, I worked on the design specifications, such as lighting and electrical needs, as I understood the particulars of building a barbershop and had to relate those to the Buildings and Grounds crew. I drew up floor plans and purchased materials to build the barbering stations to begin facilitation of the full effort. The Bard Buildings and Grounds crew was highly instrumental advising on and implementing electrical, plumbing, and contracting details, as well as removing “noise” (i.e. overbearing and mood depleting colors, odd entryways and silhouettes) from the space. As a person versed in design of place, I knew it was important to remove said noise and to start from a clean slate. Completely muted spaces—or in this case bright white—that employ an open architectural design are a way to remove clutter of the mind and force the imagination of designers. It also signals a new beginning, opening the mind to interpretation of what space could be. Subsequently, the colorways chosen for the space “pop” out against a white background, creating a vibrancy inside while simultaneously keeping things sparse as to allow for mobility and re-organization of furniture, depending on the need or want as defined by its users. Books in the African diaspora scattered throughout were strategically placed for students of color to draw inspiration from as they built and presented their space. It reflected that the shop belonged to them.

Going back to my design thinking knowledge as discussed in the executive summary, I was reminded that I could not push the project any further if it were to be truly owned by the young men. Black and Latinx male students fully built-out the space from this point forward. They chose particular colorways that represented cultures that they wished to see, assembled barbering stations made of wood and copper, and strategically placed mirrors. This was done in a way that was not only functional for barbers, but also allowed full reflection so that at any angle, everyone in the space could be seen entering, conversing, or leaving the space at any point in time. In the Black American barbershop, greeting one another as one enters and leaves the shop is a cultural norm. The young men inherently knew that there must be ways to honor that to create the community they wanted to see. They also built a working table in the main room, measuring it to desired scale, cutting the top and legs, sanding the pieces, and whitewashing it with a hand-mixed paint formula. The table became a multifunctional centerpiece; common space to join around for conversation, a silent place to do work from, a place to share meals, to hold workshops, all while knowing that it was conceptualized, designed, and built by students.

The newly designed space inspired the young men to consider other ways light could be cast in. The only windows, however, were the small windows typically found in basements. These windows, four in total, had been boarded shut and the exterior glass and details around the frame had not been cleaned in what seemed to be years. The students opened the windows, cleaned them thoroughly and made them operable by creating a pulley system that was designed with dock-ties and rope to reflect the industrial design of the basement space. Overtime, other pieces were added, like a custom built cubby that they designed to measure. This served the purpose of extra seating as the shop got busy, but also as a place for students to put coats and bags in the cold months.

The barbershop became theirs through this build-out process. To see tasks completed from start to finish presented an opportunity to take pride in a tangible way. Further, the physical connection to creation of space deepened the level of ownership they expressed over it. It had become a space for Black and Latinx males to set the tone of culture, one that was intentionally designed to feel inclusive. Ultimately, the space is malleable for iteration, as it can be added to, subtracted from, or re-created many times over to reflect the wants and needs of populations of young people to come.

CHAPTER VII: METHODOLOGY

“Excited” is not quite the word that best describes the attitudes of the young men the night of the barbershop’s grand opening. In the week leading up to the event, the young men who built the shop worked together day and night to come up with operating hours, the days of the week it would be open, the online reservation system, and how the tour of the space would take place, among many other planning elements. They decided to hold a cookout on the lawn directly in front of the barbershop doors. That piece of land happens to sit behind the oldest, and most central building on campus. Small “invitation” cards were passed out to students around campus that only gave the location, date, time, and haircutting shears in logo form. They only gave out 50 cards and let the word of mouth spread. Gorilla marketing—a type of advertising that employs eclectic and on the ground tactics—best explains the process. The purpose was to create an excitement by promoting the opening as “secret,” with the understanding that even without invitation, students would plan to attend based on curiosity and anticipation. The tactic proved successful.

The reaction to the opening was tremendous. “How do I book [an appointment]?!” “Whoa! Look at this!” “A *real* shop on campus?!” These responses were not only from the young men of color. A diverse group of students, including several young women attended the cookout and wanted to get a peek. Some White students also attended. Even the security guards and professors wanted to see. All were eager.

It was clear that night of the opening that the barbershop would be well patronized. But what quickly materialized, and frankly caught me off guard, was that the process of researching the proof of concept would not be so straight forward as I had anticipated.

Iteration Is Difficult to Capture in Traditional Methods

I began cutting hair as the main barber, teaching as I took students as clients. The barbers I trained would work on staggered schedules and have two days to work with me away from their school responsibilities. The environment was light and fun, but I found myself heavily worked. In those first two weeks I left over-joyed that things were busy and students were enjoying themselves, but I was also overly-tired and consistently wrestling with the feeling that something was not quite right. One day after staying late into the evening to teach a master barbering class, it came to me. I was the focus; not the student barbers. How could I really be a facilitator and researcher if I kept cutting hair? This barbershop was not about me and my ability to develop an intervention driven by the need that I defined for Black and Latinx males. I had to find a way to stop and hand things over to the students.

I made the phone call as soon as I got home. It would be the first of many long conversations and informal meetings I would have with the students about design iterations. I conveyed my concern to the young men, and reiterated my role as a facilitator and my intention that the two barber chairs be theirsⁱⁱ. I was getting in the barbers way of developing an independent clientele and getting in the way of all students to take ownership of the space. I devised a plan to stop cutting hair within one week, and when asked if that was O.K., I got a resounding “Yes!” As they explained, while my presence behind the barber chair gave credibility to the types of haircuts students should expect to get inside the space, its continuation would have blocked the freedom to take ownership of the space.

That was the first of many times I would withdraw from explicit instruction within the barbershop and take critique and counsel from the young men. I started leaving a bit early in the evening and allowing more haircuts to happen without my unsolicited teaching intervention.

Many haircuts came out masterful. Some, I watched walk out knowing it could be a little better. All of these instances became tools that I used as learning opportunities and ways to bring up new iterations to try within the proof of concept.

Simultaneously, the students who patronized the shop emerged as natural stakeholders. They chose self-defined roles such as “Shop Manager,” and “Advisee.” They held their own events in the space, one of which was a workshop on how to make custom duragsⁱⁱⁱ. This workshop was significant at a PWI for two primary reasons: 1. The wearing of a durag has often been associated with criminality or being a “thug” by the dominant culture, so many men of color looking to appear approachable or professional in White dominated space will only wear them in private (Acquaye, 2018; Josephs, 2017), and 2. A White female professor was invited into the space by Black and Latinx male students as a special guest to guide them through the process of cutting and sewing individually designed durags.

The students had become emboldened to incubate new ideas for themselves and others on campus, ask questions, play their own music, hold meetings, bring in exciting news, and use the space to discuss frustrations. One student would come in the shop regularly and never get a haircut. Anytime the shop was open, it was inevitable that you would see him, and it was also inevitable for him to say “I’m growing it out.” As his hair got longer and longer, the running joke became a staple. At times, barbers would even offer free or “just get me next time” haircuts to young people who they knew were struggling financially at the time.

Students reveled in the way the barbershop looked and talked about *their* hideaway place with great pride. Not a single picture was allowed to be taken; no social media whatsoever. Students would make the announcement at the door as new customers walked in. Customers came from all backgrounds and if uninitiated, were educated on the way in which a Black

American barbershop operates. As I witnessed interactions taking place within the barbershop, it seemed as if the design iterations were proving to be effective at getting people to come.

However, I could not exactly say how or why I knew that to be true. More specifically, I could not say if it was really the most important aspect to consider when investigating if the model was working. What I needed to better understand was how each stakeholder was utilizing the space, what their relationship to it was, and what meaning they took from it. Recalling design thinking as my conceptual basis, the more I observed the trend of the place being transformed into a multifaceted environment, the more I felt inclined to “step back” and allow that process to unfold. To gather the most appropriate research to inform the proof of concept design, I knew I needed a flexible methodological approach meant to capture the most pertinent information as it emerged.

True to design thinking, iteration is the most important aspect to the discovery of a solution-based product that is meaningful and impactful among its users. As new insights and discoveries in the barbershop rapidly unfolded, it was critical to go back to the *empathy* and *define* stages to best capture a working definition of the barbershop and how Black and Latinx men were utilizing the space; making their own individual and collective meaning of it. It was then that I understood the barbershop as a platform.

Research Aims and Methods

Black and Latinx male retention in post-secondary institutions, particularly predominantly White institutions (PWI), remains a critical social problem. Even though many PWIs set up structures to welcome and support Black and Latinx males, those structures are consistent with dominant cultural norms and are thereby challenged to mitigate the individualized and complex problems these young men face. While examining current

approaches to promote Black and Latinx male retention, we must consider the development of solution-based models to approach such a complex, individualized, and persistent problem. To reiterate, the barbershop is a social innovation, proof of concept model conceptualized and developed for Black and Latinx males at a PWI. Social innovation is defined as a new way of approaching long standing and complex problems. Proof of concept helps to confirm that processes and designs are feasible for application in a broader context.

Considering the barbershop as a proof of concept, the research focused on improving the design of the barbershop as a model, not evaluating an intervention. It aimed to investigate how the development of a student informed and led campus barbershop could serve as a platform for meaning making for Black and Latinx young men. The research centered the voices and experiences of Black and Latinx male students to better inform how the platform can grow and evolve for the future as a space of choice for young men of color. Platform is defined as a place, object, concept, or medium that, through its use, facilitates individual and collective meaning making by its users. According to Steven Krauss (2006), meaning making is vital, as it represents the ways in which we understand and make sense of the experiences we have in our lives. The research investigates meaning making through a research question: *How do Black and Latinx males make meaning in a social enterprise barbershop as a platform designed specifically by and for them?*

Methodological Approach

The research portion of this project employed a qualitative approach and utilized emergent design in the construction of research methods. A qualitative research approach is best at uncovering the meaning that people make of their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Krauss, 2006). Emergent design is a methodological style used in dynamic research settings, when a fixed

design is unable to adequately capture the unanticipated changes that may occur throughout the research project. It is especially appropriate for iterative design research (Wright, 2009). In this case, emergent design removed the pre-specification of other research traditions and afforded the flexibility necessary to discover the most relevant data to collect, which procedures to utilize, and how to best analyze said data for a model that kept evolving and unfolding over time (see Figure 5).

The first level of investigation of the barbershop required finding out what the space meant to those who use it. That is, although the design process of the barbershop was developed to assist Black and Latinx males with their decisions to remain or leave a PWI, there was no way to know *a priori* what the design process and the shop meant to these men, and whether and how it contributed to their decision making. This is a necessary step in the PoC in determining further design iterations and future scaling of the process and model. Without specific lines of questioning, it was important to gain open-ended responses that could be individually coded and analyzed, then compared to discover if themes occurred. Non-prescriptive and open-ended journals have the potential to produce data that aid in understanding the meaning that is made of the barbershop as a platform.

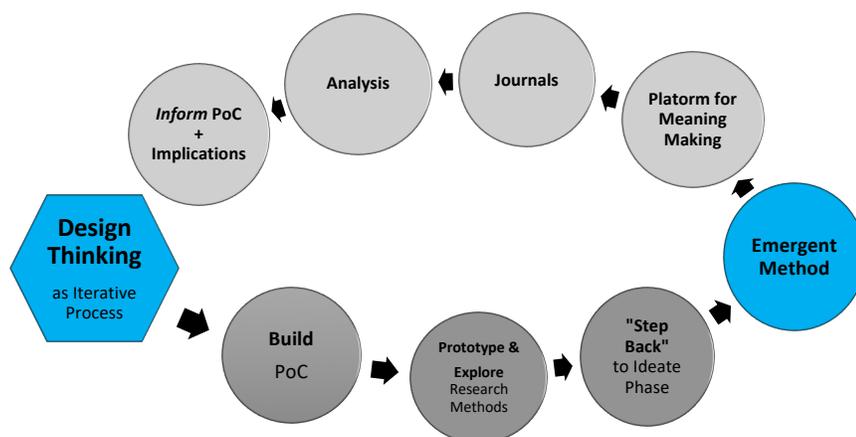


Figure 5. Process to select a research methodology

Recruitment and Sample

The primary rationale for inclusion in the study was to be at least 18 years old and self-identify as Black or Latinx and male. A convenience sampling approach was used (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012; Creswell, 2007) and was based on students' consistent use of the barbershop space, whether they used the shop for getting a haircut or for other purposes. Recruitment took place in various spaces outside the barbershop on Bard College's campus; all participants were asked privately their interest and willingness to be a part of the research in formal conversation. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to improve upon the design of the barbershop model. Participation in the study was voluntary and all personal identifiers and information were kept confidential. Confidentiality was ensured by using the pseudonym “stakeholders” along with numbers to separate individual journals. All data was stored using the same pseudonym and corresponding number to safe-guard from any anticipated risk. The study sought to gather a diverse range of perspectives and uses of the barbershop by these young men in particular. Black and Latinx males who patronize or spend time in the barbershop are made up of those who come from varying geographic origins, academic interests, backgrounds, ages/academic levels (18-23, Freshman - Senior), and represent varying levels of engagement (highly involved, moderately involved, not involved) in clubs and other activities on campus. In turn, the sample represents a diverse group of Black and Latinx males. Eleven (11) Black and Latinx males participated in the study.

Data Collection

The research instrument utilized for this study was an individual, non-prescribed journal. Open-ended journals written by Black and Latinx males who engage in varying ways with the barbershop were collected and analyzed to best understand individual relationship to and use of

the space. Consent and participants' journals were obtained via an internet based tool that anonymized data. A timeline of the barbershop—from conception to current iteration—was used as the primary journal prompt. The timeline represented the full spectrum of the barbershop at Bard, allowing the sample of participants to find a starting point of their first interaction with the barbershop. Date prompts allowed participants to recall their thoughts, understanding, and feelings at the time where they initially engaged with the space. Other written prompts were developed to promote writing that is reflective and individualized. Additional written prompts were provided to serve as thought cues. Participants were able to complete the study in their own time and were not given page restrictions in the writing of their journal.

Data Management and Analytical Steps

An abductive approach was employed to develop a framework to code, analyze, and allow for creative and in-depth understanding of the data. Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans (2014) follow abductive reasoning developed by philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce to formulate a pragmatist construction of coding and analysis. Simply put, abduction allows one to make educated guesses about the deeper meaning expressed in the data. Abduction grants the researcher the ability to make sense of surprising findings, making it an approach that dovetails well with emergent research design, proof of concept, and design thinking. The core element that these four concepts share is the process of *iteration*.

Abductive approach allowed for defamiliarization of language that came up in the data. Defamiliarization can be defined as the presentation of common things in an unfamiliar way in order to enhance the familiar (Geng & Wei, 2016; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). That is, the process requires us to look at seemingly mundane language, turns of phrases, breaks in written flow, and the like to uncover what is truly being said by the writer. Defamiliarization is critical

to abductive approach because what it requires the researcher to do is to initially code the text, then go back and investigate it again and again (and again) to find polysemy. In fact, each time the data is revisited, a different set of observations or codes may emerge. Abductive analysis is particularly significant to a meaning making exploration, as it does not look to prove one or more pre-determined hypotheses from one or more pre-determined theories. There are no “right” answers. Rather, the approach allows the researcher to explore varying meanings that are presented by participants, those that are both collective as well as individual.

Through the framework developed, each participant's individual journal was read and coded "by hand" using thematic coding to interpret the different meanings the barbershop holds for different "stakeholders". Themes were further cross-referenced with other journals to find commonalities and dissected repeatedly until saturation was achieved. Journals were then reviewed again individually to draw out more in-depth interpretations of specific language being used and how a particular tone was being conveyed. Those interpretations were then clustered under common themes. The themes, and a surprising ‘tone’ that emerged within the narratives are discussed via the writing of the findings. Summaries were then drawn to inform the model's design and implications with which to move forward (Johansen & Le, 2014).

Ethical Concerns

The barbershop functions as a safe space for various topics to be explored, bringing about emotional responses at times. However, the study does not concern itself with gathering identifiers or examining personal relationships between individuals. Rather, the data collected centers on the individual meaning that is made of the barbershop as a platform to inform the design. Therefore, the study presented minimal to no risk or discomfort to participants. The research complies with Bard College’s and the City University of New York’s ethics

requirements. Permission was secured from Bard College IRB to conduct research activities on their campus. The City University of New York's IRB identified the research as exempt, as the information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the identity of participants cannot be readily ascertained and the disclosure of participants' responses outside the research would not reasonably be damaging to them.

CHAPTER VIII: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A mass of facts is before us. We go through them. We examine them. We find them a confused snarl, an impenetrable jungle. We are unable to hold them in our minds. We endeavor to set them down upon paper; but they seem so multiplex intricate that we can neither satisfy ourselves that what we have set down represents the facts, nor can we get any clear idea of what it is that we have set down. But suddenly, while we are pouring over our digest of the facts and are endeavoring to set them into order, it occurs to us that if we were to assume something to be true that we do not know to be true, these facts would arrange themselves luminously.

That is abduction (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 37).

Phase I: The Linear Way

Upon first movement with the data, I found that four primary themes emerged. I began by organizing narratives to see how they could be coded individually then collectively. Recalling that the barbershop is a platform and individuals make different meanings out of the platform, I felt it best to group their use into themes to be able to more accurately interpret and explain the narratives presented in the study. Each journal was read and material that resonated was highlighted. I then used terms that could work as definitions, or phrases that helped group together what was being said. After completing that process for all eleven (11) Stakeholders, I put the lists together and attempted to make sense of all the phrases and how they related to one another. Most journals overlapped, demonstrating that saturation had occurred. But some journals had phrases that differed from the others, indicating that an individual experience took place for Stakeholders.

First, Stakeholders acknowledged the barbershop as a **platform for respite**. It was not so much about what they felt they were stepping into when they came to the shop, but rather they expressed in more detail what they were stepping out of. Stakeholder 4 illustrated this point by explaining what it meant to remove oneself. He writes,

For real though, the energy changes when you go from everything else Bard College offers the student body to the shop. That is one of the reasons why it was important one of the Shop's (*sic*) philosophies would be to keep away modes of media that would lead to uncontrolled documentation of the shop as it might be detrimental to the shop's pure energy.

To be inside the space for them meant a respite; an opportunity to get away from all of the negative aspects of being a man of color at a PWI where you were reminded of your race before your individuality. Stakeholders spoke of finding "authenticity," comfort, a feeling of home, no judgement, and a lack of "surveillance," among other things. Multiple Stakeholders discussed the feeling of relief to have a basic necessity that they hold so dear be readily accessible to them, and operated in a way that felt calming. As Stakeholder 1 says,

It was the best feeling ever [hearing about the barbershop] because we wouldn't have to go off campus (and far off campus) to get what we view as an essential need for our lives.

Stakeholders also addressed feeling "comfortable and at peace...feelings I don't get a lot being on this campus." while using the barbershop. As Stakeholder 3 further explained,

Stress is everywhere and underrepresentation is everywhere, even though my college is on the progressive end. Being in that space gave me a break from all these feelings and allowed me to be at ease.

The second theme that emerged from the data was a **platform to be me**. Stakeholders went into great detail about the exploration of self. The barbershop platform gave Stakeholders opportunity to work on themselves and independently define what that work entailed. Further, they spoke about possibility and growth. They went into detail about the pride that they felt about the ability to contribute to something that would be impactful to others moving forward. Stakeholder 3 explains,

I wanted to help [with the barbershop] in any way I could... in my mind, I had no problem doing so because doing such work was more exciting than having the privilege of experiencing it myself; future generations of other people of color will enjoy this space for themselves even after I'm gone.

Even though the work was done within a group, and it was for a group, it fell under the platform to be me because of the personal satisfaction gained and pride taken in the work. While self-care and the culture of appearance was coded within this theme, what was most salient was that Stakeholders spoke again about being recognized as an individual. Within the barbershop setting, they created and experienced a place that, if only for a moment, allowed them to choose to be a member of the collective or be an individual. Stakeholder 6 illustrates this in a passage about getting his first haircut:

It was time for me to get a cut...My hair was affecting me in ways that I had no idea that it could. Once [the barber] was finished and I saw the final result, I had such a huge smile on my face. I saw the young man that I was missing for four years. He came back to me that day. I suddenly remembered what it felt like to look in the mirror and be happy with what I saw. It was so great walking down the road and everyone saying how much they loved my cut and how it made me look

amazing. For me the barbershop meant a place where I could reboot myself. A place of grounding. When I walked out the door I never felt the same way as when I entered the space. This was the biggest part of the entire experience for me.

The barbershop as a platform allows for individuality. That exploration was new to many Stakeholders. The space “normalized” their “othered” quality on campus, and in essence de-exoticizes it. They expressed being able to let their guard down and be able to own and be proud of what they look like, particularly when the culture of appearance is so important to Black and Latinx males. Stakeholder 11 says it plainly,

...in 3 years [of being at Bard] I would just have to go across the bridge to get my hair cut by people who did not know how to cut my type of hair. That’s it.

Nobody would be fresh up here... We are some fine looking Black men you know? Without a good haircut.

The barbershop platform made the focus on self a part of the college experience in ways that were not possible before for Black and Latinx young men. Once they became users of the space, the individual was allowed to emerge and the guard that was up begins to wither.

The third theme that was uncovered was a **platform to be us**. What was most interesting and telling to this theme was that the stakeholders interchanged language between “I” and “we” frequently, even using the two identifiers within the same sentence. Collective consciousness emerged from their writing as they spoke about what it is like to be a young man of color inside a PWI. Their perception of how the College invests in Black and Latinx males, or the community of color at large was explicitly addressed. Further, Stakeholders discussed how important it was to finally be acknowledged and be engaged in ways that they wanted to be engaged. Stakeholders

wrote of instances where they could be vulnerable, and without hesitation, care for one another outwardly and openly:

One memory in particular that really sticks out to me was when [my barber] cut my hair during a time that the shop was not open...It was a beautiful moment because it was just me and him...talking about life from everything to relationships, school work, the future, our struggles, our insecurities and our strengths. Two men of color sharing an intimate time together. That night meant everything to me and it was a beautiful experience.

What comes out further in Stakeholder 7's passage is that young men spoke of having the freedom to move about, and having choice. They got the opportunity to get to know new people within the place. Speaking freely about others in a broader context and being representatives of their race and culture on campus came up often. This theme of "us" is closely tied to the prior theme of "me" because of the dual consciousness that emerged through repetitive analysis of the journals. Stakeholders offered the notion that they are simultaneously individuals and a collective at all times. The writing shifts back and forth between themselves as individuals, but also addresses other "men of color" on campus in ways that seem that they possess the authority of how others feel. This interlocking or commonality of experience suggests that "men of color", and in this instance specifically Black and Latinx men, have a unique meaning making process about being on a campus where they clearly do not feel intrinsically connected to the dominant culture. The mentions of "essential need for our lives" and "...I'll speak for my friends as well..." by Stakeholder 1 help to support this. The place is both "mine" and "ours" at the same time.

While a dual consciousness reflects what we currently understand about the Black American barbershop—the ability to be an individual and part of the community at the same time—what was most critical was that this duality in the barbershop created a rare opportunity for choice, ownership, and control. Choice to be an individual when you felt like being an individual; choice to be part of a family when you felt like it. Choice to have all of the normative qualities and self-exploration that you should have in a normal college experience.

The last theme reflected the plethora of statements that were used by stakeholders as descriptors of its physical and human design. This area is described as a **platform to be treasured**. While stakeholders were asked to give an account of their experiences and their thoughts of the barbershop, they chose to use language that could be likened to romanticism or veneration. Stakeholder 7 says,

What makes the barbershop special to me are those small moments that aren't shared with many but instead just a few, filled with powerful and intimate vulnerability... An intimate space filled with touch, dialogue and most importantly love. That's why the barbershop meant the world to me. Every time I walked [in], I walked into a space built for me, created to help me grow and become a better man of color.

The idea of venerating the space creates a sort of legend that will grow over time. The Stakeholders are acknowledging that they understand that the struggle they speak of is a collective struggle. That future generations of men of color at Bard will encounter their own wicked problems within the dominant culture's space, but places like the barbershop, that are designed from the bottom up, will work to give a platform to those that are not being served in the ways that they want to by the institution's programming.

Reflection

I wrestled with how to write up the first phase; how to stop where I did knowing the data was deeper than that. The information I coded and analyzed helped describe a Black American barbershop. We know through the exploration of the literature and the building of the platform that the young men indeed built a Black barbershop, so I knew the information was factual. But what I could not reconcile with is that beyond words there was a particular mood to the journals that could not have easily been explained. The venerating of the barbershop set a tone in the journals, but that mood was not consistent with my coding through textual analysis. In other words, how could I capture what I felt and how I knew they were writing from a space of emotion by simply following the step-by-step format of the thematic coding? I was missing parts—something was being said in between the lines.

Phase 2: Defamiliarized and the “Guess”

While the words Stakeholders were saying represented ‘factual’ information and the process of coding and finding themes satisfied the initial investigation, I knew that the process I undertook in Phase 1 was not allowing me to fit information together in a way that truly concluded the analysis and began the process of theorization. Further, I understood as a designer that I needed to bring myself back to what I knew—that was iteration. I had to read and analyze the journals again, but this time I had to defamiliarize the words in the writing, and instead embrace the mood and look at details that I did not see before. In order to achieve this, I needed to see that the arc of the journals were more important than the individual words. These are intelligent young men, trained by their college to write and think. Returning back to the literature, I was reminded that if I “...were to assume something to be true that I did not know to be true, these facts would arrange themselves luminously” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 37).

I was then liberated to make the best informed guess, based on my experience and the arc of the journals.

Tavory and Timmermans (2014) inform us that "...good abductive insights may seem obvious in retrospect." (p. 61). After repetitive rounds of coding and analyzing the data, I came to learn this to be true. Calling back to design thinking, I recalled a common method used with human-centered designers that addresses this point. Design thinking employs an activity with designers called method cards. The purpose of the cards is to keep design teams honest as they move through the iterative process. Typically, when design teams are given a problem that needs a solution, they come to the solution too quickly. This is problematic because the team likely did not take the time to move back and forth through the processes before landing on something they felt would work. In other words, they default to linear planning and design. What method cards do is put a kink in the proposed solution, to see if the design can withstand varying problems or complexity.

This analogy runs parallel to my initial analysis. By defamiliarizing the language of the journals and coding the data in too linear a fashion, I was not able to capture the larger significance of how Stakeholders actually make meaning of the platform. After my final read of the journals, I came to conclude that what the journals all truly had in common is that none of the Stakeholders really utilized the journal prompts. Instead, each journal was a representation of a small journey for the individual and a description of their intimate relationship with the shop. It was after I took this step back that I was able to realize that the journals were really written as open letters. Those letters possessed the language consistent with self-expression, romance, anger, frustration, thanks, love, hope, and pride. They were open letters that had a directive toward the college, in some ways acknowledging the many opportunities they have had while at

the school, but in others to explicitly provide a glimpse of the realities Black and Latinx males go through as they try to navigate a PWI. Not only are they grappling with the issues common in youth development and being new to collegiate life, but with being seen first and foremost as a Black or Latinx man, and being burdened with the stigmatized identity that goes along with it.

Phase 3: Theorizing a “True College Experience”

What I came to assume or “guess” was that the barbershop, in its intentional design, became the platform for Stakeholders to have the college experience they wanted to have, but did not have the place to have. After receiving an investment for something that satisfied their *want*, they finally got that space, and transformed it into *place*. Black and Latinx males represent an identity community on campus. Mandiberg and Warner (2012) explain that identity communities are representative of a population with commonalities around culture, language, experiences, or other mutual interests. It is important to understand the Stakeholders as an identity community, as they have been socially devalued or stigmatized through stereotypes and other race related labels both in the past and present. There are three different ways identity communities respond when situated among the dominant culture. The first, is that they may be reactive, which could lead to exclusion—or excluding themselves—social isolation, or holding exclusive relationships amongst one another. The second are passive identity communities. These are communities that are primarily engaged by the institutions and systems that provide services to them and have not fully realized their organizing potential. Lastly, proactive identity communities respond by banding together socially, through promotion of their common culture and respond accordingly (Mandiberg & Warner, 2012).

Stakeholders within the study have been mostly engaged passively, or have tried to be proactive through grassroots clubs and programs they founded through the College. Via the

barbershop they have created a unique proactive identity community and are now choosing the type of college experience they want to have as both individuals and as a collective (Mandiberg & Edwards, 2013). This is not to say that Black and Latinx males' stigmatized identity was first introduced at the College, but rather the College could not offer what the barbershop offers because of the stigmatized identity thrust upon them that is pervasive on campus; that identity is made up of trappings that prevent Black and Latinx males from forging their own sense of self, a primary component of what colleges market to young people. For all Stakeholders, the barbershop became a vehicle to advance their grassroots efforts on campus and become a proactive community. The barbershop represented a way to neutralize or omit those trappings, if only for the time they were inside the space and experience what it is like to develop as an individual absent the components of race, class, demographic location and the like that are defined for you, not by you. The barbershop then became a platform for the self to be discovered, developed, and realized. For some Stakeholders, the platform was a chance to meet new people; a platform to take a risk and open up. For one Stakeholder, the barbershop meant a chance to heal the wounds inflicted by the barbershop:

As excited as I was [to go to the new barbershop], I was also extremely nervous. For me, growing up I always dreaded going to the barbershop. I hated to go because of the environments that the shops had...I constantly found myself every two weeks entering a space of toxicity. I'd experienced cases of hyper-masculinity and homophobia. Things that I didn't identify with but had to in order to blend in and not stand out. While everyone else in the barbershop growing up were extremely vocal and outspoken. I remained silent. Never wanting to say the

wrong thing in case everyone there would see that I was a fraud and was not like them.

This barbershop, while not exempt from all problems, became Stakeholder 6's opportunity to be a part of the evolution of a space that was designed by and for the people with inclusivity in mind, and consciously choose to not follow the traditional stereotypes.

One Stakeholder's open letter illustrated the shop as a platform to address head-on the pressure of choosing between "us" and "them" as it related to relationships with White students. Among students of color, especially in a space where the numbers are so few in relation to the entire campus, there are pressures of not "selling out" your race by hanging out with the other side. Instead, the barbershop allowed him to realize that his feelings all along were correct; to exclude White patrons in the space meant to do the exact same practice to someone else that he feels every day as a man of color on campus.^{iv}

I remember one of our initially deep conversations in the shop, I broke down...because of a discussion we had about whether or not we would patron white students for the possibility that their presence may challenge the integrity of the space, and I think now I realize and understand why I almost needed their presence. There is no one more equip from casting someone outside of the community than those from within it...When the conversation came about for white patrons (not based off their skin, but a distinct level of respect they would hold for the shop) I felt that my position might be put in jeopardy due to my level of blackness...I felt like I needed white patrons around in order to be able to clearly distinguish myself from them...I also recognized the idea of kicking someone out reminded me of so many of my people displaced from spaces in

history by someone else. I didn't want to become the product of a negative seed that would overcome a system of oppression, only to become one. It might be a bit of a dramatic way to think about it, but when you see a campus climate or culture of younger generations that are prone to ideas or ways of thinking that are tampered with by the perceptions of others and creating a faceless enemy to take out their anger, it's worrisome to think that in a moment where young people are defining who they are for themselves that this anger and loose ideas of an enemy could become a part of who they believe that they are. I can't change everyone, but the shop allowed me to argue my thoughts and feelings in space where I felt that this idea of exclusion may not be necessary. Instead, I did my best to make everyone feel welcomed and comfortable in the shop. It was because of instrumental conversation and the shop that in my senior year at Bard College, I felt like I was home. It has made all the difference to me.

An eye-for-an-eye was not the appropriate response for this person. He needed to feel ownership of the platform to have a respected voice among the broader community of color on campus. And with that voice, he opened up the dialogue and ultimately the decision to promote inclusivity within the space. While maintaining the culture important to the roots of the Black American barbershop, this Stakeholder's healing came through the practice of inclusion of others.

Ever Emerging: Moving From Stigmatized Identities

Black and Latinx male Stakeholders in the study want to be seen for who they want to be, not how they have been required to be. As Stakeholder 4 writes,

The ability to use the Barbershop as a space where I could see my own growth, in understanding ownership, granted me the understanding that I need to literally make the most of my resources. That is how I will see the change I want to see in my life, in society, etc. That led to an accountability of self as well, not just speaking ideas into existence but accomplishing them.

Discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, many Black and Latinx males make the explicit choice to go to college, and sometimes specific PWIs, because they want to experience the opportunity for self-exploration. But if you do not have a chance to go in with your best foot forward, how can you engage in your full capacity? And how can you take advantage of the plethora of opportunities that the institution promotes and so much wants you to take advantage of, but you are blocked internally in doing so? The mental blocks that isolation, microaggressions, and longing to be connected to familiar culture have are not problems that are easily solved through offering up opportunities. As Stakeholder 5 put it,

This barber shop is special. I could not be more serious. This place represents how people of color come together to create an environment that reminds people of where they come from. It makes people comfortable to be themselves because they know they are not going to be judged.

Stakeholders used the barbershop to choose their own identity. It is a platform for them to begin exploration of who they want to be. It is a safe environment to make mistakes, say things that you cannot say outside the space, and the ability to try on new ideas of self.

Of all the design iterations used to create the space, it is worth noting that the business iteration was the one least mentioned. However, one passage from Stakeholder 8 helps us understand how the role of social enterprise aided in the development of the platform:

No matter the time I spent away from the barbershop when I walked into it, it felt like home. I've spoken to many people that stated, "The barbershop is a big reason I graduated." I feel the same because it was a safe haven where I could escape academia. The barbershop acted as a multiplicity of things such as a barbershop, therapy, a social space, and much more. I realized that after a while we stopped calling it the barbershop and referred to it as "the shop" because it became a non-capitalistic space to shop for things like stress relief, comfort, and pure love.

CHAPTER IX: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This project and subsequent research was born simply out of male students of color asking, “Where do I get my haircut?” It was this expressed want that began the journey. When I went to Bard initially to discuss this proposed project with the faculty, they mentioned that they were looking for a way to retain male students of color by engaging them through things that they want and things that feel like home. While neither of us had the answer, we possessed the commitment to investing in the young men on campus. In turn, I was fortunate to be challenged to stay true to iteration and bottom-up human-centered design.

The barbershop model has broad implications for social work literature and conceptualizes a dramatic shift in approach toward service with Black and Latinx males in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). It adopts proven methods in an institutional setting as well as a market one. This particular social innovation has importance in five unique ways: 1. It uses a central historical place, the barbershop, that is understudied in the social welfare literature and is sustained through a market-involved practice; 2. It is predicated on the voice and choice of young men of color; 3. It can support existing programming at PWIs that already have had some positive outcomes in Black and Latinx male retention; 4. It responds to an expressed want from young men on campus, and; 5. It is developed by Black and Latinx male students from the ground up, not by the PWI or outside entities that work in linear fashion.

PWIs have done much in the way of welcoming people including creating time for students to come early, meet new people, and get a feel of what is in store. But while all of those things are critical to the development of Black and Latinx males, they cannot supersede the stigmatizing that takes place outside and within the campus environment that are perpetuating feelings of isolation and being generally misunderstood.

Implications for Predominantly White Institutions

Men of color seek each other out for support, sensitivity, comradery, quality of life, shared experience, survivorship, adjustment, and identity. The barbershop is both a practical space as well as a mental health space. It is a safe and free space. Evans and Boyte (in Delgado 1999) define “free spaces” as: “...the environments in which people are able to learn a new respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Free spaces are settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens act with dignity, independence, and vision.” (p. 72).

While interventions that are developed through traditional research and evidence-based practice are important, Black and Latinx males are interacting in a new and often foreign environment at PWIs where approaches that address issues we find through deduction are no longer sufficient to meet their individualized and complex need. PWIs can reinforce and strengthen their services for Black and Latinx males if they can be receptive to creative process that lives outside of competitive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For it is within those programs that Black and Latinx males find themselves feeling the pressure of surveillance, all while trying to navigate a foreign environment that would be a challenge for any young person to navigate, let alone someone possessing a stigmatized identity. The color of their skin alone acts as an aesthetic that draws attention. That type of attention is multilayered and creates burden for many Black and Latinx men at PWIs.

In many cases, PWIs position themselves to be very innovative and some actively take risks. They find ways to offer academic and enrichment opportunities that are tremendous. But within that innovation, they still operate within an institutional environment; being constrained by an inter-organizational requirement to regulations and the pressures of their own non-profit

marketplace. What's more, PWIs possess the requirement to produce outcomes and appeal to institutional actors. In other cases, PWIs who are risk adverse reflect a tendency to be path dependent. In relationship to institutional environments, path dependency can be best explained as the dependence on a particular or set of activities or programs that achieved outcomes along a particular path. Organizations look back to models that have produced, and adhere to those models. The more success or desired outcomes that are garnered, the more ingrained the dependency (Ebbinghaus, 2009; Liebowitz & Margolis, 1995).

Path dependency presents issues for the service user who is dealing with complex problems. Most programs for men of color that are supported by institutions focus on the problem-oriented approach that will produce outcomes, but they are limited in their ability to focus on the experiences that happen in the grey area for Black and Latinx males in real time. Based on institutional constraints, it is difficult to gather information and immediately put action around that feedback. Design thinking opens the creative process up to allow for the development of models that can withstand complex problems, draws upon input from multiple disciplines, and focuses on drawing out the feedback of users for their own benefit. We want input from the user in the immediate to find out what makes them motivated to engage. It is at that point, instead of an intervention working on the person, the person is able to process and try out solutions to work on their own wicked problems.

The barbershop model not only offers PWIs an option to demonstrate investment in Black and Latinx males, the design process affords PWIs an opportunity to understand the power of place-making. As professionals, our considerations can fail to align with the choices or desires of our service users, and at times, we fail to understand that the real need of our consumers cannot be simply defined by us (Leonard, 1984). In turn, the young person is not

engaged by the systems put in place, but rather, he will find an alternative space. That alternative space may be back at home or elsewhere outside of the college. Unfortunately, services and activities for Black and Latinx males in PWIs typically do not include them in the design of the intervention, nor are the choices in programs differentiated. It is worth repeating what was stated in chapter four: Personal choice is of critical importance to Black and Latinx males. At a PWI, being able to get a good haircut is choice that gives a young man an opportunity to escape for a moment—it gives him a chance to look and feel good when things around him may be bleak. To control how he looks is to control how he feels.

Implications for the Field of Social Work

Social workers and the field at large should be empowered to embrace design thinking, social innovation, and social enterprise. A hybrid design, for example, affords an opportunity to test an innovative paradigm shift that is not heavily reliant on institutional actors. Using design thinking as a scope asks us to reorient our traditional line of questioning, conceptualizing social problems in unique ways that we did not consider before. A blog post about the design thinking paradigm gives a good example: "If we were trying to design seating, we wouldn't just say 'let's design a chair.' We'd say, 'let's create a way to suspend a person'" (Fast Company, 2006). The way we question and think about problems inform how open and creative we get to be to approach the issue at hand. This way of "tinkering" with social design iterations with the goal of moving toward a replicable barbershop model in a PWI broadens the field of social work, offering insights to a new and innovative approach to serving Black and Latinx males. It also includes our field's guiding principles when discussing and implementing social innovation. At the moment, social enterprise and innovation work is dominated by those who come from the free market business world. Tech designers, MBAs, venture capitalists, and other business

people speculate and create at a rapid rate in this fast-growing field. But in an arena where tasks like empathy, problem definition, and stakeholder mapping are paramount to the successes of human-centered design projects, those who have training and practice knowledge in social services need to be in those conversations and be the ones enriching those ideas (Ahlstrom, 2010; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010). Business schools cannot be the only schools producing social entrepreneurs. Social workers need to bring their creativity and knowledge of service-user experience. We bring a unique understanding of the complexity of wicked problems. In designing for solution-oriented models, social workers have the ability to offer checks and balances in the social service market place as it relates to ethical practice (Lourenco et al, 2012).

Endeavors in innovation allow the field flexibility and a chance to process at a time where metric informed and evidence-based outcomes dominate our current practice. It is necessary for us to continue looking to theories found in psychology, sociology, public health and other disciplines that offer empirical evidence that relate to the individuals and communities we serve, but we must also identify and embrace our unique ability to integrate other disciplines such as architecture, interior design, marketing, and trade work in our practice. We understand the resilience our service users practice constantly. We have our fingers on the pulse of people's need and understand how to mobilize them to take the reins of their condition, turning disabled or disenfranchised into abled and inspired. Social workers have always innovated, but we haven't always considered our work in this way.

Social innovations are exciting to social workers once they understand that new approaches to services are possible. For example, one social innovation in the area of homelessness is the Lava Mae Bus (<https://lavamae.org>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch>). Lava Mae was founded by a woman who was interested in one particular aspect that could humanize

people who experience homelessness. Her idea was to create mobile showers that would pop up in densely populated areas that were occupied by people who were experiencing homelessness. Former city buses were purchased, repaired and converted into portable and beautifully designed full service bathrooms that were equipped with showers. Wherever Lava Mae showed up people were able to have a rare moment of privacy, a hot shower and toilet, and access to clean towels. The goal of the project was, if only for a moment, to restore dignity. There were no imposed outcomes, there were no activities, there were no tasks; there were no logic models. The innovation could operate independent of the typical regulation that would have been placed on a traditional social service innovation in the homeless sector. While some could argue that this is not pushing the needle on eradicating homelessness it cannot be argued that it highlights and documents the experiences of people who are homeless in a unique way. To create a solution to a problem means to empathize with the affected population, work with them to find their own problem and find creative ideas to approach it. For some the showers meant a chance to freshen up and find privacy, for others the showers meant the ability to clean up for a job interview. And for others it created a moment of “normalcy.”

Another example that social workers should explore are alternative spaces. These are best defined as spaces that people repurpose for themselves. The intention is for it to be used one way, but people find ways to use the space that best meets their individual and collective needs. A recent article in the New York Times discusses this phenomenon (Dimon, 2019), where a make-up bar has been thriving in the most unlikely of places—the New York City Port Authority Bus Terminal. Daily, people commute to and from work, where thousands of people find a moment in the most democratic of spaces, the restroom. Women have repurposed this space as a place to get ready for their day. To put on armor for a meeting at work, to freshen up

for a design pitch, or to simply feel the boost in self-esteem one receives from accentuating the features of their face and feeling empowered to go about their day. What makes it unique is not the fact that women are making themselves up in a public restroom, but that the attendants of the space are actively engaging with “patrons” and actively attempting to create a warm and inviting experience. They exercise empathy. The City can be so high energy and intense, to be able to have a moment of calm is important. It is a wonderful way to start off on the right foot before being swept into the current of New York City. While seemingly ordinary, these types of spaces are ripe for social workers to brainstorm and consider how innovation can help our service users.

Social innovation allows us access to service paradigms that are not solely reliant on government and private funding that typically support our efforts. The work requires risk, creative fundraising, and a level of patience for impact, but if we are successful there is an opportunity to be released from the parameters placed around our approach to complex social problems. It offers us the ability to give the control back to those who feel powerless by unleashing the tools and traits they already know and have inside of them.

Future Disruption

Acknowledging positionality, it is worth noting I was an integral part of this study and that my facilitation of them creating place impacted the space. The buy-in and responses could have been attributed to the fact that I was a non-employee, a Black man, and a barber. I was challenged repeatedly to step back and not revert to my background as a program planner, and let the young men build the space and allow iterative process to take place. Going back to my opening story, it is also essential to note that I was able to access empathy in the immediate. But that is not to say that this project could not have happened without me. Had I attempted to do a place-making project with an effected population that I did not share the same lived experience, I

would need to start from a more base level. It would require me to hold focus groups, and find other ways to begin the process of empathy.

As I read the journals again and again, what resonated most was that the young men were thankful that someone recognized them for who they want to be and had the confidence and trust to invest in something meaningful to them—that they were finally seen. The barbershop model is not to be replicated the way dominant culture replicates programs or best practice within institutional environments. It is not a catch all design, but rather designed specifically to meet the expressed wants and needs of a specific population, iterated with a group that considered age, race, location and experience. Wicked problems need thoughtful, slow-cooked solutions; tried over time and curated to fit. They must be tailored. Using the model in a high school or in a college where men of color face differing challenges would likely fall flat. It takes the patience that design thinking roots itself in to approach this kind of work. Young men of color need the freedom to define themselves and thus address their own wicked problems.

The model could benefit from continued research and iterations within the proof of concept. Finding opportunities to follow up on the data collected in interview form would yield more detailed information about the user experience. Also, an exploration of the user's feelings about programs that they are involved in at the College and how the barbershop can support those initiatives would strengthen the model.

In the act of prototyping for a PoC, failure is just as important to acknowledge as success. Those who operate within institutional environments are not used to referring to programs and practices, or components of them as failures. Instead, they are classified as challenges. Designers however use the word failure in order to recreate or readdress an issue. The acknowledgement of failure is actually an empowering one in that it gives you a chance to learn

from mistakes made, opening up the opportunity for further iteration. While the young men proved to be successful in the design of space and the operation there in, they were not exempt from experiencing a host of failures. When ideas they had in the barbershop proved unsuccessful, they were immediately addressed. That gave the young men the courage to continue to try things out. The ability to be able to accept and process failure actually became inspiring to students. They were able to find alternate solutions in the immediate, or have the ability to cut their loss when they knew they were headed down a path that did not yield an anticipated result. Failure allows designers to strengthen models at the moment they uncover the failure. Failure was translated as a chance for new possibilities.

Seeing the barbershop in its completion was truly eye opening...its reconstruction changed my outlook on how I craft space for myself as well as gained a deeper appreciation for the changes to come....The existence of the barbershop was one of the biggest blessings I ever received during my four years in college. The space in itself represented not only comfort but a mentality, a mentality of creating your own space anywhere. Never escaping or going somewhere else but standing your ground and getting the things you feel that you deserve, that your identity deserves, and that your people deserve....Every time I stepped into the space I felt I can make anything happen. — Stakeholder 3

ⁱ Because I am speaking specifically about the experiences of youth who identify as male, throughout this work I utilize the more current term Latinx male/young men.

ⁱⁱ In the barbershop, barbers refer to their designated station as “my chair.” Having a “chair” in a barbershop signals established clientele, ownership within the space, and expertise in craft.

ⁱⁱⁱ Originally called a “tie down,” by inventor William J. Dowdy, the durag is a silk headwrap worn in order to lay down short length curly hair and allow the process of waves to form in the hair. Or, to maintain braids or dreadlocks. The durag is a cultural mainstay in the Black American barbershop, particularly among African-American men.

^{iv} As this Stakeholders words were analyzed for tone, mood, and arc of narrative, the body of this particular passage was kept in long form as much as possible.

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