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PERFORMING RACE AND SHAPING COMMUNITY IN THE BLACK

BARBERSHOP

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Ever since Du Bois described the double consciousness, scholars have debated if African-Americans hold a distinct worldview because of experiencing racial stigma. Yet controversies surrounding cultural explanations for racial disparities in education and poverty led sociologists to abandon the question of whether blacks enact unique beliefs and values. This ethnography of a Brooklyn, NY barbershop examines how black men perceive and talk about culture and morality through a racial lens and use folk conceptions of race to guide interaction. Building on conceptualizations of the double consciousness and race as performance as well as research on race and place, I find that the men: (1) sometimes express beliefs and values that they claim are uniquely black, while at other times frame conforming to “mainstream” values as “acting black;” (2) deploy notions of an “authentic” black worldview to judge the actions of whites and blacks; and (3) are pressured to put on racial performances in the barbershop. By showing when and how blacks perceive beliefs, values, and practices in relation—and in opposition—to whites, this study of a “racial backstage” shows how a black worldview is accomplished and moralized in interaction and furthers efforts to bring culture back into racial theorizing.

DEDICATION

For COLIN JEROLMACK,
my brilliant and hot professor

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INTRODUCTION: RACE, COMMUNITY, PLACE AND SPACE

The Crown Crafters is vibrant tonight, with barbers and customers talking and laughing in groups and pairs. Big Chris, a regular customer at the Brooklyn barbershop, loudly asks me, “What are you doing here? Are you getting a haircut?” As everyone listens, I reply, “No.” He comments on the school I attend upon seeing my logo adorned sweatshirt. He brashly asks, “You’re getting a bachelor’s degree?” I reply, “No, PhD.” He exclaims, “PhD? A young black woman, getting her PhD. Wow. I’m proud of you!” Everyone in the shop returns to the one-on-one conversations they were having before.

Suddenly Big Chris announces “Okay, top ten hip hop movies of all time...” The film *House Party* is the only contribution to the list. Big Chris, with his hefty voice, says “Okay top five historical black movies...” The responses are *Rosewood*, *Malcolm X*, *Glory*, and *A Soldier’s Story*. The lists hereafter note the top five black comedies, “shucking and jiving¹” movies, and black films of all time.² Big Chris grills me with a series of questions as he leaves the barbershop. “Where do you live? Are both your parents black? Why do you go to that white school? Why not a black school?” Big Chris says that he better not see me with a white man before asking, “Are you black and proud?”

Big Chris seems to think race is inextricably linked to a particular set of beliefs and behaviors that inhere in a race-specific culture. By initiating lists of the best “black

¹ Shucking and jiving is a term that refers to misleading or deceptive talk or behavior. Historically, it was a racist slur towards slaves who intentionally gave a false impression to their white masters. But this false impression was a strategy for survival as well as a form of resistance. More recently, the term is slang for talk or action characterized as foolery, shenanigans, or bull shitting.

² Movies that made the comedy list include *Coming to America* (1988), *Friday* (1995), and *Life* (1999). *Harlem Nights* (1989) and *I’m Gonna Get you Sucka* (1988) made the shucking and jiving list. *Do the Right Thing* (1989) by Spike Lee is unanimously identified as the best black movie of all time. Notably, Spike Lee is acknowledged as accurately portraying the “black experience” in his films.

films,” Big Chris takes for granted that all of the men in the shop have a shared experience of consuming black popular films; and the all black audience performs on cue by appearing to be familiar with each of the movie nominations. The race exclusivity, predominately male space, and communal legacy of the black barbershop makes it a place wherein “blackness” is a salient moral category to be enacted, discussed, and defended; through these practices, what it means to be black is constituted in interaction. The barbershop shapes these performances of blackness such that talk and interaction becomes moralized in the space. For instance, the barbershop sets the stage for Big Chris to frame the films as “black” and part of “black culture”; and because of this frame, the audience is encouraged to participate in making the lists with as few breaches as possible to avoid the risk of marking oneself as a potential outsider, having their racial authenticity challenged, or being a “bad” audience member.

Big Chris also appears to have very particular conceptions about the type of beliefs, actions, and status attributes that constitute an “authentic” black identity, which is evident from his interrogation of me. We see that he seems to consider the race of both parents and residential neighborhood as components of black authenticity. Moreover, he judges me based on what values I *should* have such as black pride, affiliation with black academic institutions, and a commitment to dating within my race. His interpretation of race becomes a matter of morality once he expresses how other black people should behave. Blackness, therefore, is an interpretive, cultural, and moral project for him. The vignette is indicative of everyday interaction in the barbershop, where the interpretation of black identity extends beyond nominal categorization based on phenotype to a moral and cultural realm vis-à-vis blacks and whites.

Over a century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois famously wrote that black people in the US have a distinct worldview characterized by the “double consciousness,” as a result of the irreconcilability of their national and racial identity. He argued that blacks’ experience as a racially stigmatized group prompts them to look at themselves through the eyes of—and measure their worth against—whites. As the marked minority, blacks are often aware of their racial categorization and concerned with others’ perception of them *as blacks* rather than as an individual or a holder of other statuses (e.g., lawyer, father).

As the above vignette from the barbershop shows, a version of the double consciousness is still part of some blacks’ lived experience today in that certain beliefs and behaviors are interpreted in a racialized way, particularly through a “black worldview” that presumes shared experiences and values that are unique to African Americans. Even when Big Chris seems to promote “mainstream” (i.e., white) values such as education and marriage, he indicates that blacks *ought* to attend historically black colleges and marry within their race.

Although the existence of “black values” and “black culture” is a taken-for-granted inter-subjective reality for men in the barbershop, social scientific controversies surrounding cultural explanations for enduring racial disparities in poverty and education—embodied, respectively, in the notorious “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1966) and “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu 1986) theses—have led sociologists to largely abandon the idea that blacks may hold distinct worldviews from whites. The idea of a “black oppositional culture” was buried under a wave of ethnographies that documented the extent to which blacks subscribe to “mainstream” beliefs and values (see Duneier 1994; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974; and Harding 2010).

While the contentious debate as to whether or not blacks subscribe to pathological or mainstream values led to the near disappearance of scholarship on “black culture” (Young 2010), a budding area of inquiry has begun to examine how blacks’ continual experience of racial stigmatization leads them to use race as a lens to interpret their social milieu (Young 2004; see also Anderson 2011) and inform their worldview (Vargas 2006; Nunley 2011). Lamont (2000) demonstrates the persistent relevance of constructing one’s racial identity in relation to “the other” by showing how black men’s racial boundary-work vis-à-vis whites (see also Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996) allows them to create a more noble and respectable identity despite their marginal status. Anthropologist John Jackson (2001; 2005) adds another dimension by showing how notions of racial “authenticity” can operate as a moral lens by which blacks judge the appropriateness of values and behaviors expressed by *other blacks* (rather than compared to whites). My study builds on this body of research to show how: (1) people in the barbershop interpret their values and culture as “black”; (2) these understandings are constituted and enacted in *interaction*; and (3) these talk and interactions become moralized by virtue of occurring in a tacitly designated “black space” that is the barbershop.

The historical recognition of the black barbershop as a significant racial and communal institution (Harris-Lacewell 2004) makes it an ideal location to better understand how blacks construct their identity in relation to whites and blacks. Studies indicate that the double consciousness may play out differently depending on place (Duneier 1994; May 2001; Jackson 2001, 2005)—for instance, Anderson (2011) shows how blacks may adopt an ethnocentric and/or cosmopolitan perspective based on the situation and racial composition of the audience. Similarly, scholars theorize that there is

a reciprocal relationship between race and place, such that place can shape race consciousness and race can (re) define a place (Lipsitz 2007).

This dissertation conceptualizes the black barbershop as a privileged site for conversation and community making—a kind of “racial backstage” (cf. Goffman 1959) area where they can work on constructing respectable identities *in the absence of white scrutiny*. It demonstrates how this space encourages and sometimes even demands that people put on racial performances; in doing so, blackness is made moral in this setting. Here in the introduction, I first review the classic conceptualizations of race and community, the different kinds of social ties in society over time, and recent research on boundary work and identity formation. Then I describe the overarching theoretical framework for the dissertation, which is W. E. B. Du Bois’ classic theorization of the double consciousness coupled with the notion of race as performance (Jackson 2001; 2005). I explain how the barbershop came to be a historically significant institution associated with the black community and its structural characteristics as a place that lends to my aforementioned conceptualizations of it as a space. I then describe the neighborhood of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, my main research site “Crown Crafters” barbershop (pseudonym), and my methods. Lastly, I provide a brief overview of the remaining dissertation chapters.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE BLACK COMMUNITY

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF RACE AND COMMUNITY AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Race and community are each terms with multiple conceptualizations and at times, competing definitions. Each definition of race or community, confronts a critical tension

of being characterized as too “hard” or essentialist, brash, and flattening such that it ignores the possible negotiation rigid definitions undergo depending on the situation. A “soft” conceptualization, in contrast is situational, numerous, and loose to the extent that it means nothing and everything at the same time (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

In this vein, conceptualizing a black community solely in terms of categorical commonality is problematic and complicated by competing definitions of race itself. Essentialist theorists conceptualize race as fixed, static, and immutable (Bernier 1684; Blumanback 1776). Most sociologists today recognize that race is a social construction specific to time and place. Yet, people experience race as essential in their everyday lives despite its social construction. Another tension with racial categorizations is external identification versus internal identification. Individuals may identify themselves as part of one race while others may classify the same person into a different race.

Conceptualizations of community encounter a similar tension of being either too rigid or too loosely defined. The key characteristics of any concept of community are organization of a population by geographic neighborhood, the individual feeling of belonging to a group, and relationships based on functional interdependence (Park 1936). It is faulty to treat any single characteristic as a complete conceptualization of community (Park 1936). Still, there are various definitions of community, many of which stem from just one of the three characteristics of community. For example, community defined by a precise geographic neighborhood is a hard definition, and community defined by internalized feelings of belonging or the sorts of ties people form with one another, are soft definitions of community. The conceptualization of community is problematic due to its many differing definitions (Hillery 1968; Minar and Greer 1969; Blackwell 1985;

Lyon 1987). Multiple conceptualizations of community limit the comparability of research findings solely due to definitional inconsistency (Bell and Newby 1971).

The primary conceptualization of the “black community” is in terms of race (Clark & Clark 1939; Hraba & Grant 1970; London & Hearn 1977; Carter & Helms 1988; Blackwell 1991). This conceptualization suggests that race is the sole basis of solidarity among black individuals. In other words, the conceptualization implies that being a black person is enough to create a sense of relatedness to all other black people. Other studies explore how people (black and white) who live in a federally recognized black historic district imagine and understand their social relations in racial terms (Polanco 2014). The recognition of class difference is the most common approach to challenge the idea of racial solidarity among all black people (Dillingham 1981; Pattillo-McCoy 2005). These studies show that black people of the middle class try to distinguish themselves from lower class blacks on the grounds of differing lifestyles.

However, there are several limitations with just either a race or class frame of the black community. One, the aforementioned studies assume that there is any such entity as a black community. Therefore these studies are not primarily interested in whether or not the sorts of ties and relationships that exist among their participants is a result or are even related to sharing a common race. Two, an understanding of why race itself may be the basis of solidarity among any group of people is muddled. That is, why is race, be it conceptualized as essentialist or a social construct, a primary way for people to relate to one another? Can sharing in a common race create feelings of closeness within the group and distinction from people of other races? In my research of some form of a black community, I grapple with the possible connections between race and community, as I

explore (1) the sorts of ties that exist in pre modern to modern society, (2) the dynamics of boundary making, and (3) the process of individual and collective identification.

GEMEINSCHAFT, PRIMARY GROUPS, AND PRIMORDIAL TIES

The sorts of ties that exist among people vary according to the characteristics of a given society at a particular time. In pre-modern society, people experience feelings of intense group solidarity where they live and work in close-knit villages (Tonnies 1887). The individual is integrated in the group to the extent that the norms, values, and expectations of the group supersede that of the individual. Here, ties are formed through frequent personal interactions with people of a similar background and they all share in the same cultural norms, values, goals, and tradition (Tonnies 1887; Simmel 1902). Groups are characteristically homogeneous and feel a sense of closeness or mechanical solidarity based on their commonalties (Durkheim 1893).

The transition of society from pre-modern to modern marks a change in the way people relate to one another. In modern society people are no longer bound to land or a tightly knit village. And the values and norms of the collective are more abstract and less restrictive on behavior than in pre-modern society. A rise in the cult of the individual emerges such that the individual's wants and needs become more important than that of the collective.

As a result, social ties in modern society are based on the realization individuals depend on other people for the functions they serve different from themselves or functional interdependence (Durkheim 1893). A slightly different perspective poses that similar to pre modern society, the individual in modern times ultimately succumb to the values and norms of the "primary group" (Cooley 1909). Primary groups are defined as

intimate face-to-face interactions that constitute a “we” feeling. Though there is differentiation and competition among individuals, these passions tend to come subject to the shared interest of the group (Cooley 1909: 23).

Just as primary groups endure from pre modern society through to modern times, a sense of communality persists through to modern society in the form of “primordial ties” (Shils 1957). Primordial ties are characterized as the most elementary relationship that individuals have to one another and ultimately to the group. Shils argues that modern society is not in a state of dismay as Tonnies portrays with his concept of “*gesellschaft*.” Rather it is mostly during moments of disaster or special occasions and rituals that then the individual experiences a heightened sense of group norms and values. On a daily basis, the individual is concerned with “personal attachments, moral obligations in concrete contexts” such that people do not consciously think about group values. One result is that “classificatory properties” such as sex, age, and physical characteristics, among other things, becomes an even more prominent basis of which people relate to one another.

With the exception of Shils, these theorists discuss group solidarity in the context of widespread “we” ness, value consensus, conformity and maintenance of social order versus anomie, non-conformity, and total chaos. The possibility of a “we” ness at a more micro level and where social order is not particularly at stake, for instance between two strangers who cross paths on the street and will never encounter each other again, remains under explored (something similar to nationalism). These works also overlook the possibility of an existing “we” feeling among members of a somewhat abstract community (unlike tightly knit neighborhoods, fraternities, or private clubs for example)

where group values, morals, and even qualification for membership are not so clearly defined. Shils and his notion of classificatory properties is the more useful tool when thinking about how strangers might begin to relate to each other while crossing paths. I argue that in modern society individuals look for markers or symbols, not to feel closeness just based on sharing a common classificatory property, but rather to use classificatory properties as an indicator of morals and values and then determine closeness or not based on sharing these common morals and values.

Finally, theories on social ties in pre modern and modern society focus on an inclusive “we” feeling within a collectivity but pay little attention to an implied and simultaneously existing “them” group. These theories also imply that some sort of boundary work occurs in the creation and maintenance of social ties given that members must establish ways to identify who qualifies to join the group. Therefore, the acknowledgment of boundaries is key to understanding inter and intra group social relations in today’s society (Cohen 1969; 103; Wallman 1978:205). It is in this way that I draw on the boundary work literature, which is the function of boundaries as it pertains to notions of community formation and social identity.

BOUNDARY WORK, IDENTITY FORMATION, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Boundaries play an important role in the creation of any collectivity (Dewey & Bentley 1949; Cassirer 1953; Somers & Gibson 1994). People who feel a sense of closeness to one another based on particular commonalities ultimately form some sort of collectivity. The recognition of shared commonalities simultaneously involves the acknowledgment of how these similarities sets a group of people apart from other people who differ in some way (Jenkins 1996; 80). The role of a boundary then is to create or maintain a

feeling of closeness within one group and distant from people who are not a part of the collectivity. Two types of boundaries, symbolic and social, further explain the role boundaries play in relation to collectivities.

Symbolic boundaries are cognitive distinctions and categorizations that people make in order to organize objects, people, and behavior in social life (Lamont and Molnar 2002:168). They are intangible but its effects manifests within institutions, social interactions, social order, and everyday life of the individual (Lamont and Fournier 1992:11; Epstein 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2002). They provide a framework when trying to understand classifications and categories that have a widely accepted definition in a given society. For example, for centuries in the US, being black was defined by the one-drop rule or having any degree of black ancestry.

Similarly, social boundaries are demarcations that social actors make to separate events, practices, resources, and other entities apart from one another (Cohen 1969:106). They are a concrete manifestation of difference such that people have unequal access to resources and opportunities; and this creates and maintains various kinds of inequality (Lamont and Molnar 2002:168). Social boundaries can be “structural,” meaning one social system can meet and intersect with another (e.g. work and education), or “subjective” in the sense that boundary has meaning for the observer as well as members within the observed social system (Wallman 1978:206). Social boundaries and symbolic boundaries should not be considered as totally separate concepts rather they are closely related and dependent one on the other.

Symbolic boundaries, among other things, must be well established and reach a consensus somewhat prior to the manifestation of social boundaries (Lamont & Molnar

2002; Lamont 1992). They enforce and maintain, as well as contest, reframe, and can even replace social boundaries (Lamont & Molnar 2002:186). Symbolic boundaries which form along cognitive categorizations such as race, gender, and class and then manifest into social boundaries, along the same lines, serve as a primary bases on which social identity is created (Fiske 1998; Lamont and Molnar 2002).

Social identity is the components of an individual's perspective of himself or herself, which are based on their sense of belonging to a social category (Tajfel and Turner 1985:16). Similar to how individuals may classify objects according to their sameness, people may also categorize themselves into social groupings based on their commonalities (Huddy 2001:132). This is the basis on which collective identities and "in" versus "out" groups are formed (Fiske 1998; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Likewise, categorical commonality is sufficient to form a "symbolic" or "imagined community" even though members may have significantly varying lifestyles (Hunter 1974; Anderson 1983; Wuthnow 1989; Calhoun 1991:108; Lamont 1992; Lamont & Molnar 2002:182).

Collective identity may be understood as an objective recognition of a shared status or a subjective feeling or perception of being similar to someone else; and this eventually translates into "solidarity, shared dispositions or consciousness, or collective action" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:7). It also emphasizes how one of the commonalities for any particular group is its experienced difference from another collectivity (Jenkins 1996:80; Brubaker and Cooper 2000:19). The binary opposite relationship between "in" and "out" groups, means that the definition of some collective identities are in constant dialogue with on one another to the extent of being interdependent (Cohen 1969:103). Given this, group members have "psychological motivations" to evaluate themselves

favorably in comparison to another group, which also aids in their construction of a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979; 1985; Turner et. al. 1987:42; Huddy 2001:132; Lamont and Molnar 2002:170).

THE DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS, CULTURE, AND MORALITY

Classic studies on how black people interpret their racial identity highlight the particularity of their racial experience. Du Bois (1903) memorably coined the term “double consciousness” to describe blacks’ feeling of being both separate from and a part of mainstream (i.e., white) society. This duality involves the experience of always feeling judged and evaluated as a member of the black race rather than as an individual, by a real *or imagined* white audience. As a result, Du Bois argued, black people feel that they must represent the race in interaction with whites and each other. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton (1944: 390-5) built on the notion of double consciousness to argue that “race men” interpret their individual identity in direct connection to the advancement of blacks as a collective. The race man’s task is to foster racial pride and solidarity, uplift the race as a whole, and work towards “solving the race problem”. Elijah Anderson (2011:189) offers a modern version of the Race Man/Woman in the form of the “ethnocentric” black who “emphasizes loyalty” and solidarity to other blacks while having a general distrust of whites.

The notion of the double consciousness, and the extent to which it is rejected or embraced by blacks, underlies more recent studies that describe blacks’ experience in the US. Controversial ideas of a “black oppositional culture” (Fordham & Ogbu 1986), “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1966; see also Frazier 1966; Moynihan 1965; cf. Wilson 1987), and a “street” orientation (Anderson 1999) imply that, in response to durable

inequality and overt discrimination, some blacks refuse to conform to mainstream values or judge their self-worth through the eyes of whites. In other words, blacks resolve the double consciousness by constructing an alternative set of values and practices in direct opposition to whites. The infamous “culture of poverty” thesis (Lewis 1966; Moynihan 1965), for instance, is generally understood to imply that the pathological beliefs, values, and practices of poor people contributed to their economic marginalization. Along similar lines, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) described how black students who ostensibly demonstrated a commitment to mainstream values by striving to perform well in school were accused of “acting white” by their peers. In order to deter challenges to their racial authenticity, black students allegedly made a willful choice to underachieve and were rewarded by their peers for doing so with “fictive kinship” ties (Fordham & Ogbu 1986:189). In response, some studies have explored “acting black”³ to show how college students reject the idea of educational success as “acting white” and how they come to perceive it as a core aspect of their black identity (Willie 2003, see also Carter 2005).

A number of ethnographies have attempted to refute any suggestion that blacks have a “pathological”, “disorganized”, or “distinct” culture or set of values (Liebow 1967; Duneier 1994, 1999; Stack 1974). Instead, they emphasize the ways in which poor black men (Duneier 1994; Liebow 1967) and women (Edin & Kefalas 2011; Stack 1974) subscribe to the same values and aspirations as middle class whites but face unique structural obstacles to realizing them in their everyday lives. Acknowledging the legacy of racial stigmatization, some scholars highlight how poor black men ground their racial

³ Willie (2003) introduces the concept of “acting black” to focus on the relationship between black alumni’s understanding of their racial identity, their choice to attend a historically white (Northwestern University) or black college (Howard University), and their experiences within those institutions. However, I use the term to analyze how people arrive at and perform their definition of blackness in situ.

identity in a “politics of respectability.” For instance, Duneier (1994) finds that working-class black men who gather at a diner think about their racial identity in association with respectability and humanism. And Elijah Anderson’s research demonstrates how some working-class and poor black men’s acute awareness of white society’s gaze motivates them to enact “respectable” (Anderson 1976), “decent,” (Anderson 1999), or “cosmopolitan” (Anderson 2011) identities and distance themselves from those they consider to be “hoodlums,” “street,” or “ethnocentric.” While these ethnographies emphasize blacks’ subscription to mainstream values, they indicate that black men still struggle with the double consciousness in that they obsess over how whites view them and critique other blacks who do not live up to their moral standards.

The backlash against the various incarnations of black oppositional culture resulted in the virtual disappearance of culture from sociological theories of race (Young 2010). However, this is beginning to change. Over the last decade or so, a few notable sociological studies have examined how black men may use understandings of race as an interpretive frame (Goffman 1974) for making sense of their beliefs and life chances. For example, Young (2004) finds that the poor black men he interviewed perceived their future economic prospects, and the chance of mobility for others, through a lens of race. But the extent to which they think being black inhibits their chance for success (and perhaps the degree to which they experience the double consciousness) depends on how much social contact they have with middle-class whites.⁴ Young argues that there are different forms of cultural capital between some blacks and whites; and the kind of

⁴ Young (2004) finds that poor black men who experience limited social contact with people beyond their place of residence believe in individual agency in affecting their life chances, whereas those with considerable more social contact think that structural forces minimize their life chances.

cultural capital associated with poor black men can intensify their marginality (Young 2004; see also Bourgois 2003).

Similarly, Lamont (2000) finds that the working-class black men she interviewed interpreted their identity and respectability through a lens of race, and that they in part built a sense of self-worth by contrasting their values with whites. She demonstrates that black men took for granted: (1) the racialized way in which they interpret their altruistic values, morality, and respectability; and (2) the degree to which they defined blackness in relation to whiteness. More significantly, by black men orienting themselves in relation to a “caring self” against whites as the “disciplined self,” Lamont shows both that black men draw symbolic racial boundaries that are also *moral*, which allows them to see themselves as (morally) superior to whites despite their marginal status, and the persistent relevance of constructing one’s racial identity in relation to the “other.”

While little other contemporary sociological literature exists on whether and how blacks perceive themselves as holding a distinct worldview, several scholars in other disciplines have probed this question in greater depth. Anthropologist Joao H. Costa Vargas (2006) defines blackness as a kind of knowledge and moral category in and of itself. In studying blacks, political organizations, and the arts in South Central Los Angeles, he finds that “blackness” takes on different meanings such as resistance, solidarity, agency, and strategies against marginalization. Specifically, Vargas argues that there is an interpretive lens and set of values that one learns by virtue of being black. This knowledge comprises a sort of toolkit that helps blacks navigate and present themselves in the social world---and more importantly, thrive and survive despite marginality.

Rhetorician-philosopher Vorris L. Nunley (2011) builds on the conceptualization of blackness as a form of cultural knowledge, or what phenomenologists call a “lifeworld,” to argue that in popular culture, the portrayal of some blacks’ talk of conspiracy theory, critique of government and political figures, racism, and inequality is grounded in a “true” black experience. This rhetoric is marginalized in that there are few public, “mainstream” spaces where it can appear unfiltered and without demonization (e.g., Kanye West’s statement that “Bush does not care about black people” and Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s controversial remarks about the U.S. government as racist). Still, Nunley argues that studying the black “lifeworld” provides glimpses into black rationalities that challenge white hegemony and the notion of humanity.

These studies highlight that some blacks engage in a kind of “oppositional identity work” wherein people of marginal racial status ground their identity in a “politics of respectability” in order to make themselves feel equal, if not superior, to the dominant category (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996:141, see also Lamont 2000). This claim resonates with the aforementioned ethnographies of black men and women striving for respectability (Duneier 1994; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974), as well as with studies that show how some homosexual Christians emphasize mainstream values such as monogamy, manhood, and motherhood to “normalize” homosexuality (McQueeney 2009); while others borrow race, class, and gender inequality discourse to create a “moral identity” (Sumerau 2012). A morally charged racial identity can also be created by within-group distancing from negative values and alignment with positive values, as researchers have shown with heterosexual black men who construct their identity in opposition to femininity and homosexuality (Cohen 1999; Johnson 2003). Lastly,

oppositional identity work involves signaling a *kind* of black male identity to whites and other blacks by defining, coding, affirming, and policing the values that comprise the moral identity (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996).

Anthropologist John Jackson (2001, 2005) further specifies how race operates as a moral lens for some black people by moving beyond the ways that blacks *narrate* race (cf. Lamont 2000; Young 2004) to examine how they *perform* understandings of race in everyday life (West & Zimmerman 1987). Similar to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Jackson argues that the black people he studied in Harlem conceived of certain practices and values as racially “authentic” or inauthentic; but in his case, the imagined comparison group was not whites but rather other blacks. In this way, Jackson reintroduces the idea of racial authenticity as experienced, performed, and policed *among blacks* in situated interactions—regardless of whether or not an objective black culture exists. Specifically, he examines how people signal, interpret, and internalize their own and others’ commitment to a black identity through everyday behaviors that also signal value commitments. How blacks send and receive signals about their racial identity become moral matters since others judge them through the lens of black “authenticity.” In other words, certain words and actions are coded as evidence of a “real” black identity while others are met with suspicion.

Jackson’s analysis of racial authenticity can serve as a bridge between conceptualizations of race as an interpretive frame (Lamont 2000; Young 2010) and race as a situated performance (Goffman 1959). Building on Jackson, I develop the notion of “acting black” to highlight how talk and interaction in the barbershop is organized around an inter-subjectively shared assumption that (1) the men share a distinct worldview and

value system by virtue of being black; and (2) their situated interactions are geared toward a real or imagined white audience. To the extent that the black men in the barbershop express an allegiance to these presumptions and police those who do not, they construct and achieve “blackness” in the setting. And even when these men express their subscription to mainstream values, in this space their consistent statement of human virtues is viewed as a performance of blackness. The barbershop, then, functions as a sort of “racial backstage” in which the men can work on defining and producing a respectable black male collective identity in the absence of white scrutiny. Its status as a black space prompts—and sometimes even demands—the performance of black culture and plays a role in (re) defining even ostensibly mainstream values and behaviors as distinctly black. In other words, the barbershop as a black space allows people to construct middle class morality as black culture and black values, encourages them to enact these understandings with others in the space, and pressures the audience to cosign these framings to avoid marking oneself. Thus, in addition to demonstrating how “acting black” enacts racialized understandings of culture, this dissertation also shows how the black barbershop as moral place affects the enactment, and therefore the construction, of black values and worldviews.

THE BLACK BARBERSHOP: A HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT INSTITUTION TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY

In order to fully grasp the pertinence of the talk and interaction I describe hereafter, we must first understand how the black barbershop came to be a significant institution associated with the black community. This history provides a broader framework in which to situate when and how the men at Crown Crafters barbershop perform blackness

and/or interpret certain values, behavior, and other aspects of social life through a lens of race. By contextualizing the knowledge production that occurs in Crown Crafters within the structural, economic, geographic, and cultural history of the black barbershop, I argue that the barbershop is an “agentic player” (Gieryn 2006:466) in shaping the social dynamics within the space; and I provide the groundwork for my conceptualizations of the barbershop as a privileged site for community making as well as a moral space where blacks are encouraged to use race as a lens and perform blackness.

For blacks in the United States, entrepreneurship has historically been and continues to be, a particularly difficult dream to bring to fruition. Scholars have long argued and documented that black entrepreneurs are likely to struggle to start and operate their own business due to the confines of what Merah Stuart famously calls the “economic detour.”⁵ This phenomenon sheds light on the “relatively low level of entrepreneurship among and the small scale of businesses owned by black Americans” (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). It emphasizes how institutionalized and interpersonal racism, up to the middle of the twentieth century, effectively prohibited black entrepreneurs from competing in the mainstream (i.e. white) market. Simultaneously, black entrepreneurs were restricted to an all-black market, which was also accessible to whites and other ethnic entrepreneurs.

Blacks have always sought out self-employment, and despite the economic detour, they have been relatively successful (Pierce 1947; see also Butler 1991). During slavery, free blacks had successful businesses in “merchandising, real estate, manufacturing, construction trades, and transportation”(Butler 1991) and as “tailors,

⁵ Merah Stuart (1940) “*An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes.*” Wendell, Malliet & Co., New York

restaurateurs, caterer, sail-makers, and blacksmiths” (Wingfield 2008). Post-bellum, black entrepreneurs established profitable businesses in the “insurance industry, undertaking, and banking” (Wingfield 2008:26). Notably, barbering and owning barbershops have continuously been profitable ventures for black entrepreneurs (Du Bois 1899; 1902).

For enslaved black men, barbering created two possible paths to freedom, which were to escape from their master while rendering their service away from the plantation; and purchase their freedom (and enslaved relatives) after saving money from their practice (Mills 2006). After abolition, black barbers almost exclusively serviced white men since whites did not want to patron an integrated barbershop (Mills 2006) and whites generally avoided the service industry (Harris 1936). The elite white clientele were a potential “economic and political resource” for and offered social capital to black barbers who would in turn use their influence to benefit other blacks in their neighborhood. Barbershop owners and barbers were successful in joining the rank of elite black men, which at the time consisted of church pastors, politicians, and morticians (Drake and Cayton 1945). They maintained their domination of white clientele until white natives, German, and Italian immigrants began to compete for white patrons.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, an influx of white owned barbershops moved black owned barbershops from central business areas to segregated black neighborhoods such that white patronage of black barbershops all but diminished and black barbers seized a monopoly over black clientele (Mills 2006, see also Drake & Cayton 1945). Though these processes are not overtly or solely due to racism, informal residential segregation, whites general unwillingness to care for black bodies (dead or

alive), and blacks presumption that only other blacks have the cultural knowledge to properly care for their hair are laden with individual attitudes about race. Black entrepreneurs' are likely to experience institutionalized racism with banks that are inclined to deny them a loan and the criminal justice system, which incarcerate black men at a disproportionately high rate compared to non-blacks.

The black barbershop is then best categorized as a “racial enclave economy” wherein systemic, gendered racism shapes the experiences of black entrepreneurs and as a result, they are restricted to one particular market (Wingfield 2008). Nonetheless, black men embraced their autonomy such that the barbershop came to be a site of collective organization and action, a cultural resource to blacks in the neighborhood, and a place where black men gather more casually to network, talk about race relations, and socialize. Thus the black barbershop emerged as--and remains today--a racial exclusive place one wherein physical characteristics dictate who qualifies to enter unquestioned and blunt, group conversations about black identity are sanctioned.

In addition to the ways racial segregation within neighborhoods controls the patrons who have access to the black barbershop, its race boundary and communal characteristic are effortlessly maintained by hair care service offerings. Given that hairstyles are not always interchangeable or easily accessible for all hair textures, potential non-black patrons are likely discouraged to enter the black barbershop. Moreover, black patrons come to assume that only black barbers know how to style their hair. This intra-racial service industry creates and/or spurs trust between a black barber and black customer—one that is based on the barber's skill, reputation, and quality service; and also the assumption that by virtue of being black, s/he has cultural

knowledge as to how to properly care for black men's hair. This tacit (and sometimes explicitly expressed) *racialized trust*, I argue, encourages men in the barbershop to discuss their black identity and (re) construct it with their trusted barber or collectively with other patrons. The race exclusive hair care service facilitates collective discussions of black identity and exemplifies how the men in the barbershop move between being categorically and singularly black to emanating the perception of race relatedness and/or actually forging it.

In fictional black literature as well as popular culture, the black barbershop is depicted as a central place to gather, get information, and organize political action. It is consistently recognized as such in works by authors that are renowned for poignantly capturing and expressing the black experience in the US, including Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Ann Petry (Harris 1979; Thornton 1979). Similarly, the barbershop setting is directly linked to ideas of black identity and culture in classic films such as *Malcolm X* (1992) and *Coming to America* (1988), as well as Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop (1983) by Spike Lee, *Barbershop* (2002), and its sequel *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* (2004) (Mukherjee 2007).

In politics, the barbershop was instrumental in helping get Barack Obama, who is generally referred to as the first black president of the United States, elected in 2008.⁶ Obama's visits to barbershops strengthened his claims to black authenticity. The images depicting Obama getting a haircut while chatting with patrons, which were plastered in black neighborhoods such as West Philadelphia, indicated that he embodies features similar to the other black male patrons and that he is able to participate in the sociability

⁶ Though Obama is of mixed race, his categorization as "black" is a result of the historic definition of black based on the one drop rule.

(much of which relates to black culture) that occurs in the barbershop. Also, the Obama campaign reached out to first time black voters by establishing temporary registration offices inside of barbershops and beauty parlors in black neighborhoods on the assumption that these are central places where black people gather.⁷

While race commonality is not synonymous with group (Brubaker 2002), the black barbershop's structural and economic characteristics, and cultural reverence lend to its legacy as a communal space; likewise its geographic location and intra-racial body labor makes the perception of groupness based on race commonality palpable. Therefore, I argue the barbershop actively shapes talk and interaction to transform individual race identity into a collective one and spark a sense of race relatedness. I argue, and the data hereafter will show that the barbershop is an institution wherein once a customer becomes black by using race as a lens throughout talk and interaction, he is likely to experience feelings of authenticity, inclusion, and race relatedness rather than isolation, marginalization, and exclusion.

“CROWN CRAFTERS” BARBERSHOP

The Crown Crafters is located in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. In 2010, the median household income of this neighborhood was \$38,430 and its racial and ethnic composition was about 65.5% black, 16.7% white, 11.9% Hispanic, 2.8% Asian, 0.2% American Indian and Alaskan Native, 0.4% other non-Hispanic, and 2.5% of non-Hispanic of two or more races.⁸ These numbers are a sign of gentrification--in 2000, 78% of residents were black and only 6.8% of residents were white. The liveliest business strip in Crown Heights, Fulton Street is lined with predominantly black

⁷ <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/10/06/politics/politico/main4505197.shtml>

⁸ <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/lucds/bk8profile.pdf#profile>

barbershops, beauty salons, nail parlors, storefront churches, and Caribbean restaurants. The Crown Crafters barbershop⁹ is located a few blocks off of Fulton on a quieter commercial street.

In September 2008, I began observing the social interactions at Crown Crafters barbershop. As I passed several barbershops on my way daily route to and from the subway, I noticed that Crown Crafters in particular had a steady flow and variety of customers on any given day of the week. It seemed to be a legitimate business, lively, and (to have) longevity. I gained access by asking the owner of the shop, Sam, permission to observe talk and interaction there. After briefly explaining my research interest, he agreed. Sam said, “It is good that you are interested in (researching) the black community. We need more studies like that.” He also emphasized that he was happy to have a role in helping me as a young black woman attain my doctorate.

Although the sign above Crown Crafters advertises itself as a unisex barbershop, the patrons are predominately male. The large glass windows of the shop are a showcase for a medium sized white OBAMA 08 poster and a large poster of an ad for “The Secret Lives of Bees” movie. The window also advertises copy, fax, printout, and Internet access services available inside. An area near the front door houses a cluster of several bicycles chained to one another whenever the shop is open for business. It is not unusual to see three or four young men standing in front of the shop in the evening. At night, the barbershop radiates like the sun onto the dark street. The radiant appearance of the shop results from the string of single light bulbs atop each mirror and the orange colored paint on the walls.

⁹ The name of the barbershop, barbers, and patrons are presented in this dissertation under pseudonyms.

Crown Crafters has typical features of a barbershop, namely: hair cutting utensils, posters of haircut designs, a price list, a television and DVD player, and sports magazines. The smell of green alcohol lingers in the air. But Crown Crafters also has properties that may not be common to other black barbershops. The décor of the shop reflects a celebration of black culture and signals that this particular barbershop is a “decent” and “moral” space. Multiple pictures in the barbershop feature reggae music icon Bob Marley, images of the African continent, and historical black political figures such as Nelson Mandela, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. One framed art poster titled “God’s Gift” depicts a black woman sitting and leaning in towards the ankle of a black man.

On top of the television is a five by three inch white cardboard box that is used to collect money from whoever uses foul language in the shop. The box reads: “\$1.00 for using the N word in honor of our ancestors.” In smaller font the rule extends to prohibit usage of any foul language. A small refrigerator poses as a stand for the television and also a shrine for newspaper articles that discuss the ban of the N word.¹⁰

The signs in the shop are clear declarative statements of values, particularly cleanliness and intelligence. A sign reads “Be Seen Keeping the Scene Clean.” “It doesn’t hurt to read while you wait” is near a bunch of books that form a mini library. Announcements for chess tournaments are written on a mirror adjacent to a chessboard with all of the pieces in place for a new game. The presence of a makeshift library and chessboard indicate that the barbershop is a place for the nurture and development of

¹⁰ The titles of the articles are: “Use of N-word demeans us all”, “Resolution calls for February moratorium on ‘N-word’”, and “N-word (with a circle around and a slash through the words) Councilman proposes ban on hated word.”

certain values.¹¹ The characterization of chess is as a game that requires intellect, strategy, and skill, and the announcements signal that intellect, strategy, and skill are valued in the shop. The mini library, chessboard, and signs imply that customers should be productive while waiting for service. Customers are encouraged to play chess, read a book, sweep the floor, or do something with time other than wait to receive a haircut. Likewise, the bathroom is covered is signs that emphasize cleanliness such as “If you sprinkle when you tinkle, please be neat and wipe the seat” and “U-HU-MAN keep clean and be God.”

On my first day of fieldwork, Sam discussed some of his ideas about the barbershop as a place and his perception of black men’s behavior, which helped me begin to understand his motivation behind posting the many signs and rules in Crown Crafters. He said that he does not like the way black people act, which is why he tries to control how the barbers and customers behave in Crown Crafters. He said, “People come in here talking loud and cursing. I tell them that all of that is not necessary. It is a form of self-hatred and shows that they did not break out of the slave mentality yet.” After a couple more days in the field, I learned that Sam keeps a bell near his station to ring when someone is speaking too loudly. He went on to say, “Guys come in here to get haircuts. But some of them come in just for the company, just to hang out. And that is fine. I mean I get loud sometimes too. If the guys are talking about something, especially politics now, I can’t help but get involved you know.”

¹¹I observed two customers sweep the floor on different occasions. I saw a game of chess played once between Stevie and Sam.

Sam attempted to say my name a couple of times but was only successful after I spelled it out and had him repeat it after me. (Several years later and he still erroneously calls me Shamita instead of Shatima.) He asks if my name is African, its meaning, and then, “How did you get such an interesting name?” I told him how my parents saw a little white girl on television with the name and my father liked it so much that he gave it to me. He replied that he never really liked and had thought about changing his “slave name” but never got around to doing it. He asked where I am from originally and how long had I lived in the neighborhood. He said that I sound as if I come from the mid west or California. I jokingly reply, “Did you just say that I talk like a white girl?” He paused for a moment and finally replied, “No, you do not talk like a white girl but your mannerisms are like a white girl.” He explained that he knows whites inside and out because he went to school with them; and contrary to what many people think, he does not dislike white people.

We went on to discuss more topics related to blackness such as the teachings of Louis Farakhan and historically Black colleges; and non-race talk, namely our respective astrology signs, hobbies and personal interests. Upon leaving the barbershop, Sam walked me to the door and introduced me to three barbers, Marquis, Slim, and Sam Jr. Marquis was unsuccessful at repeating my name. He said, “We’ll just call you Tima. That is how black people do it.”

As I was introduced to the barbers, I got a glimpse into how their ideas of blackness permeate casual conversations and how they use race as a lens throughout some of their talk and interaction in the barbershop. Our conversations concerning the behavior and the “slave mentality” of some of the patrons, the alleged similarities

between my mannerisms and those of a white girl (whatever Sam means by this), and names (the origin of mine, Sam's desire to change his "slave name," and Marquis's license to give me a nickname) each show how the men work to incorporate references to a black culture and interpret behavior through a lens of blackness. The signs posted throughout the barbershop indicate that it is a place where certain middle class values are to be enacted such as cleanliness, using one's time in a productive manner, and generally being respectful of oneself and others in the space. Though the signs and rules may seem overbearing, people for the most part abide by and appear to appreciate them. This suggests that the barbershop is a moral space where some "problem spots" or undesirable behavior on the part of some (i.e. cursing, speaking loudly) can be addressed and worked out.

At the end of my first day in the field, I had mentioned that one of my hobbies was baking to which the men collectively requested that I make a pan of banana pudding. From this point until my last days of fieldwork, I occasionally brought baked goods to the shop. I also eventually helped the barbers clean up and got my eyebrows shaped with a razor, but otherwise I mostly observed and participated in conversation. After several months, people began referring to me as the "queen" or "mother" of the shop. While I do not claim to be a "fly on the wall" or "just one of them," I have created a role for myself in the field as "researcher" and in doing so the participants have ultimately been socialized into the ramifications of having a researcher present. Moreover, while the claim that a female researcher in the barbershop would "fundamentally alter the dynamics of the space" (Harris-Lacewell 2004:175) may hold some truth, my gender did not render me unable to observe everyday talk and interaction in the space. This is evident in the

similarities between my observations and the data presented by male researchers who have previously conducted ethnographies in black barbershops (see Mills in Harris-Lacewell 2004; Sanchez-Jankowski 2008; Wood & Brunson 2010).

The data presented below are based on observations and informal interviews with 6 barbers and 80-100 customers at Crown Crafters barbershop. The data spans three years starting in September 2008 and ending in September 2011, where on average, I visited the shop twice a week for 3-4 hours per visit. I varied my visits by day of week, time of day (e.g. morning, afternoon, evening), and the schedules of barbers in order to notice if and how the dynamics of the space varied under certain conditions. An additional factor that I eventually came to consider is the type of customer present, as there are some regulars and charismatic patrons who consistently have an effect on the interaction in the barbershop. Also, season affects interaction—in the summer, a variety of passersby stop in to chat with greater frequency; and in the winter regulars hang out for longer periods of time.

Notably, people in the barbershop are not always performing blackness or talking about values—for instance, other common topics of conversation include professional wrestling (particularly World Wrestling Entertainment), dating, and the goings on in the neighborhood. Also, sometimes customers do not interact with each other and instead entertain themselves with an electronic gadget, take a nap, or remain silent. The chapters that follows include a sample of my data where barbers and/or customers use race as a lens to “act black” in talk and interaction in the shop.

In general, I did not participate in group discussions unless I was directly invited to do so. Similarly, I never interjected in a one-on-one conversation between a barber

and his customer that had a serious tone (i.e., absent of jest) or where words were spoken quietly. I probed and asked follow-up questions once a barber or a customer had already introduced a topic. I did not use an audio recorder in the field, as the owner did not feel comfortable letting me do so. I instead wrote field notes immediately after leaving the barbershop. I also jotted down key phrases while in the field as the barbers in the shop became more accustomed to my presence. The quotations presented in the chapters that follow are paraphrases of what was said in the interactions.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter 1: What White People Do

Building on the notion of the double consciousness, this chapter demonstrates how blacks at times decidedly use race as a lens by which they explicitly compare their values and behavior to whites and imagine how whites perceive them. I focus on how the men in the barbershop invoke a narrative of whites as “the other” to create or reinforce racial solidarity and build consensus around the perception that blacks abide by specific rules such as how to interact with pets and discipline children. In their discussion on interaction with animals, race is invoked and blacks collectively laugh at and scorn the behavior of whites.

However, the men also frame whites as “the other” to affirm and police their ideas of how blacks should behave concerning parent-child relationships. During this talk, the black men in the barbershop invert the racial order to make a positive assessment of themselves and judge the perceived behavior of whites negatively (Lamont 2000). I also include data that shows how the men reframe connections upon learning about my interracial relationship.

Building on studies that claim that some blacks abide by an “oppositional culture,” I show that the men in the barbershop do not seem to reject mainstream values but rather they presume that they are morally superior and/or more respectable than whites (cf. Fordham & Ogbu 1986). This chapter illustrates the enduring ways that blacks’ sense of self is still experienced and shaped in relation to whites.

Chapter 2: Acting Black

In this chapter, I show how notions of racial “authenticity” can operate as a moral lens by which blacks judge the appropriateness of values and behaviors expressed by *other blacks* (rather than compared to whites). Here, I describe the men’s perception of the behavior and values that blacks enact and the others they *ought to* enact through their racial self-critique and storytelling; and how they make distinctions among themselves that mitigate feelings of racial relatedness. The barbershop owner, Sam offers a racial self-critique of blacks based on his perception that many of them do not consistently adhere to certain “mainstream” values in comparison to whites; and therefore, he and perhaps others do not always see “acting black” and “black values” as superior to whites (cf. Lamont 2000). I document the work Sam takes on to “uplift” the race and address the problems that he identifies as a unique plague among blacks. During storytelling, the men construct their values as distinctly black and also give mainstream values a black inflection.

I also find that missed connections occur due to differences in music tastes, political views, and opinions seemingly linked to generation. Chapter two illustrates how blacks make sense of different behaviors as indicators of others’ racial authenticity based

on their adherence to a presumed black culture. And it shows the work the men put into creating racial relatedness and argues that just as race is an intermittent occurrence for the black men at Crown Crafters, so is racial relatedness.

Chapter 3: Grooming Black Masculinity

In this chapter, I review several key conceptualizations of gender and then I present data that emphasizes how the men work to build consensus around the values and norms that should comprise their male identity. Divided into parts, in the first half of the chapter, I describe how the barbers chastise children in the space to shape the performance of their budding masculinities; and how the men discuss and debate the appropriate haircuts and dress code that signal heterosexuality. In the second part, I document how the men interact with women in the space, their philosophies about relationships in the absence of women, and how the men performed masculinity in front of a woman researcher. Here, I focus on how the barbershop as a pre-designated predominately male and hetero-normative space, shape the way black men enact masculinity via their talk and interaction at Crown Crafters barbershop.

Chapter 4: Race, Space, and Place

While existing studies on the black barbershop conceptualize it as a place wherein blacks can be their “true selves,” I argue instead that it is a privileged site for conversation and community making, a kind of “racial backstage” (cf. Goffman 1959) area where they can work on constructing respectable identities *in the absence of white scrutiny*. However, I also show moments in which the barbershop acts as “front stage” (Goffman 1959) for

performing blackness because it encourages the men to take up the work of creating a racialized moral identity *in situ* with *other blacks* as the audience. In other words, I conceptualize the barbershop as a racial backstage where blacks can discuss things that they might not in front of whites, but it is also a front stage for them to perform racial authenticity.

In chapter four, I offer new conceptualizations of the black barbershop giving careful consideration to how its race exclusivity, predominately male, and male-on-male hair care service structures talk and interaction in the space. I describe how the barbershop fosters “caring relationships” via informal mentorship and also how one particular customer challenges these kinds and other sociability through his intentional breaches. Lastly, I discuss how the barbershop is a privileged site for establishing self-worth and self-esteem as an individual black man.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My concluding chapter highlights several key findings. First, while race scholars have shied away from claims of blacks having a distinct value system, this study finds that the men in the barbershop at times do presume a common black worldview and culture such that they apply race as a lens and situate their talk and interaction in the context of a shared black experience. Second, my dissertation shows how the men *consciously and explicitly* continue to construct and experience their black identity in relation to whites (cf. Lamont 2000) and fleshes out the dimensions and contents of the specific values and practices that some black people consider to be authentically black (Jackson 2005).

Third, this study shows how the performance of blackness is an interactional achievement and moral project by which people at times construct their values and culture as “black” in the barbershop. In doing so, I demonstrate when and how black performances arise (Brubaker 2006) which shows how blackness is achieved in context. Fourth, my dissertation demonstrates that blackness is something to be “taken up,” enacted, and achieved in interaction; and it demonstrates how the black barbershop as a pre-determined “black” space encourages and/or demands racial performances in this setting. The barbershop as a place has enough power to in effect force people to be a good audience, prove their racial authenticity, and enact a particular kind of blackness, which makes these racial performances and lends a moral quality to acting black.

Fifth, my dissertation offers a rare within group and across age analysis of how black men socialize male children into performances of (black) masculinity in interaction, in the barbershop. It demonstrates how gendered bodies invalidate false dichotomies between sex categories and how the dominant group employs gendered performances to compensate for the similarities between the sexes once it becomes salient in a given setting (cf. Gieryn 2000; Martin 2004). Lastly, this study demonstrates that racial solidarity is an interactional achievement that requires active work on the part of black men and women such that race commonality is not synonymous with group or community (Brubaker 2004).

CHAPTER 1: WHAT WHITES DO

Sam Jr. says, “What is with all the cops around?” Slim replies, “I saw two cops standing right there on Atlantic Avenue when I came in this morning.” Sam Jr. replies, “Yeah, they were all in the train station too.” Mr. Carl says, “I wonder what happened.” Sam Jr. mumbles, “It’s Tuesday.” There is silence. He adds, “That’s what happened.” We all laugh. Mr. Carl says, “Oh, I was about to ask, what happens on Tuesdays? But now I understand what you mean.” Mr. Carl says, “Well there are all of these white people moving into the neighborhood. I don’t mind them as long as they do not bother me. Maybe that’s why the cops are around.” Slim replies, “Maybe, but there have been a lot of robberies around here lately.”

In this interaction, Sam Jr. understands the increased presence and surveillance of police officers in the neighborhood as an everyday, normal part of the black experience. But Mr. Carl attributes it to the steady increase of whites moving in. The vignette shows how the men in the barbershop are cognizant that the neighborhood is experiencing gentrification and that the barbershop is an appropriate place to freely discuss their attitudes about whites. The vignette points to a general phenomenon, which is that even though whites are rapidly moving in to Crown Heights, they do not enter Crown Crafters barbershop. Given this, the black men in Crown Crafters capitalize on the racial exclusivity of the barbershop to mock, negatively judge, and create a black male identity in opposition to whites.

Building on the notion of the double consciousness, this chapter demonstrates how blacks at times decidedly use race as a lens by which they explicitly compare their values and behavior to whites and imagine how whites perceive them. Here, I illustrate

how the men in the barbershop frame whites as “the other” and how they construct certain values as white in oppose to black. I describe how the men deem blacks to be more respectable than whites in their discussions on how to interact with animals; and how they police and force other blacks in the barbershop to not act white during their conversations on parent-child relationships. Then I use the revelation of my interracial relationship to document how racial relatedness is reframed once a black person violates one the key values associated with the type of black identity that is celebrated in the barbershop. Finally, I discuss how these data show that the men in Crown Crafters engage in oppositional identity work to construct their values as more respectable than whites.

WHITE BEHAVIOR AND VALUES

INVOKING THE OTHER

The men in the barbershop commonly state certain norms (sanctioned modes of behavior) as expressions of assumed shared distinct black values or moral ideals. The men’s ideas of what is black versus white behavior usually involve identifying whites as “the other.” Through this talk, the men highlight perceived differences between blacks and whites in regards to their alleged practices and values. Below, I focus on how the men in the barbershop invoke a narrative of whites as “the other” to create or reinforce racial solidarity when discussing interaction with animals and how they mock whites’ behavior.

One day in the barbershop, there is a conversation going on about a woman who made national news because she was attacked by a chimpanzee.¹² Marquis, a barber in

¹² In February 2009, Charla Nash was attacked by a 200 pound chimpanzee named Travis. Nash’s neighbor, Sandra Herold, kept Travis as a pet in her home. http://articles.cnn.com/2009-02-17/us/chimpanzee.attack_1_charla-nash-chimp-attack-sandra-herold?_s=PM:US

the shop says, “White people kiss their dogs in the mouth. Who knows what else she (the woman) trained that gorilla to do.” A customer replies, “It wasn’t a gorilla. It was a chimpanzee.” Marquis says, “That monkey was 200 pounds. I am 231 pounds. He is a gorilla not a chimpanzee.” Everyone laughs. He continues, “She probably trained him to...” Marquis begins to grind his hips into the air, imitating sexual intercourse, and make monkey sounds, “Oo oo ah ah!” People laugh louder.

Marquis ridicules the woman for having treated a chimpanzee as a human. Moreover, he makes fun of white people in general for the intimate way they interact with their pets. He specifies whites as the only group of people who treat their pets in such an intimate way as to kiss them in the mouth. The implication is that black people do not act in a similar manner. The men made a sound of disgust after the comment about whites kissing their dogs in the mouth, which signals that they view the practice as inappropriate and unhygienic. Ultimately, the practice is framed as an activity white people willingly participate in and black people do not.¹³

There are also various instances of mockery in the barbershop where whites are framed as the other. Marquis (who sits closest to the front door and windows) imitates white people as they walk past the shop. He says they are walking so quickly through the (predominately black) neighborhood because they are concerned about their safety. Marquis holds his head up high with a focused grin. He paces quickly and swings his arms back and forth at either side in imitation of white passersby. As he ridicules them he says, “Even when they are worried about their safety, they have a smile on their face.

¹³ Notably, this type of talk echoes Anderson’s observations of how blacks criticized whites for the way they show affection to pets (1990:222).

White people are always happy.” He goes on to say that blacks tend to have a more serious disposition.

On a separate occasion, Marquis mocks the facial expressions and gestures of John McCain.¹⁴ Marquis comments that he does not trust anyone who cannot lift their arms or fingers above their head.¹⁵ He says, “You know white people know how to use their fingers.” He points and says, “It was that man!” in jest. Here, Marquis describes whites as being in a socially privileged position to implicate black people as criminals. That is, white people are presumed to be in the position of victim or credible witness in the event of a crime, whereas black people are assumed to be the perpetrator. Marquis frames whites as the other and makes a statement about the social standing of black men in society.

This brief interaction is another example of how the men in the barbershop ridicule whites. Slim turns off a CD that is playing classic rhythm and blues songs. A regular customer, Mr. Carl exclaims, “What are you doing changing that good music?” Slim says, “I know its good music. But it’s time to tighten up.” Another customer chimes in, “I don’t know how to do that dance. I’ve never seen anyone do it before.” Mr. Carl asks, “Tighten up?” Slim replies, “Yeah, do you know how to tighten up?” Mr. Carl replies, “You ever see white people dance?” Slim nods and says, “Yeah.” Mr. Carl says, “That’s tightening up!” We all laugh.

As people in the barbershop frame whites as the other, they present a unified front in opposition to the behavior of whites. In their discussion on interaction with animals, race is invoked and leads to a sense of solidarity, and to collectively laugh at and scorn

¹⁴ John McCain is a senator from Arizona. He was the Republican Presidential Nominee in 2008.

¹⁵ John McCain cannot lift his hands above his head due to a war injury.

the behavior of the white other. Likewise, as they mock the behavior of whites, the men construct a curiously happy disposition, the willingness to be a credible witness to a crime, and an inability to dance as white behavior and/or characteristics. However, the men also frame whites as the other to affirm and police their ideas of how blacks should behave concerning parent-child relationships, as the following data section shows.

POLICING AND AFFIRMING BLACKS' BEHAVIOR VIS-À-VIS WHITES

Three women with two children enter the shop. One of the women says that she needs two boy haircuts. Marquis informs her that it is going to be about a 30-minute wait. As Marquis talks, one of the boys begins to jump up and down while yelling. Marquis continues, "The bathroom is right back there if he has to go." The woman responds, "No. He just used the bathroom before we left." Marquis says, "The bathroom is right there. Take him in there for a 3-minute talk. Handle your business. You can't hit him out here, but you can hit him in the bathroom. You know you can't beat your kid in public. That's why I'm in family court now." The customers in the shop softly laugh.

One woman sarcastically says, "Who says I can't beat my kid in public. I didn't get that memo." Marquis says, "That's what the social worker told me. Beat them at home but not in public." The woman says with disregard, "That's the white people rule. Then they are the ones killing their kids."¹⁶ The onlookers nod in agreement. Marquis says, "You can't hit a black kid in public. A white person will say, 'Little Raheem doesn't deserve that. Oh, did you see what she did to little Tasha. Huh, he used the n-

¹⁶ This is the case the woman in the barbershop explicitly referenced. A white man named, William Parente killed his wife, two daughters, and himself in a hotel room in Maryland on April 19, 2009. http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/p/william_parente/index.html

word two times...” The onlookers laugh. The woman chimes in “And they’re the ones who invented the word.”

In this instance, the men construct a narrative of the other based on issues surrounding the chastisement of children. According to the women, whites do not physically chastise their children like blacks do, but they should. Given their claims that media reports of child homicide usually involve whites, the women argue that it is morally worse to kill rather than physically chastise your child. Therefore, whites should not be critical of black parents who use corporal punishment.

Throughout the entire discussion, the other patrons nod in agreement with the framing of corporal punishment as part of “black” parenting and laugh at the caricature of whites’ reaction to witnessing this style of discipline. The vignette also shows how “black” values are treated as taken for granted knowledge, as shown when Marquis has to explicitly decode his suggestion to take the child to the restroom. He prefaces the practice of black parents physically chastising their child in private with “you know,” which makes it nearly impossible for the women to say otherwise (e.g. “No, I do not know”) and risk marking themselves or having their authenticity challenged. Even though the women seemed to either be unaware of or perhaps even “violate” this rule since they did not beat their children for misbehaving, they nonetheless quickly signaled their subscription to the value *in this setting* by joining in to criticize whites for not beating their kids. Marquis successfully codifies this “black” value and polices the women’s enactment of it.

Given the unchallenged idea in the barbershop that blacks beat their kids and whites do not, blacks who do not beat their kid are accused of “acting white.” One time,

after my sister and her two sons came to the barbershop, Marquis said to me, “Your sister needs to beat those kids. She has some hood in her. I’m afraid of her. But she acts Caucasian with those kids. She needs to beat them.” He says, “She was in here saying to the little one, ‘We had an agreement.’” I emphatically deny this in what I now realize was an attempt to defend my sister’s black authenticity and street credibility. Slim looks over at me, and nods to confirm Marquis’s statement. Marquis says, “She was talking to him like he was an adult. That’s the Caucasian in her.” Slim agrees.

Marquis points out that he thinks my sister is “tough”. But in regards to how she interacts with her kids, Marquis accuses her of exhibiting traits of a white person. He makes fun of her for talking and reasoning with her two year old son in order to control his behavior, which according to Marquis is the way whites engage with their kids. He tells me that my sister should beat her kids, presuming that is the way blacks normally, or at least are expected to, behave.

As the men discuss childrearing, they seem to use notions of “acting black” to judge the behavior of other blacks--for instance, saying my sister should physically chastise her kids--or redefine and update how blacks ought to behave when saying now “we” have to beat our kids in private. Unlike the discussion on interaction with animals, here the men invoke race once the women in both instances seem to violate a “black” value; the men want to “police,” or get the women back in line with, what it is blacks allegedly do in opposition to whites.

REFRAMING CONNECTIONS

Thus far, I have focused on the ways in which black men in the barbershop engage in boundary work to draw distinctions between themselves and the perceived behavior and

values of whites. This highlights how the men in the barbershop presume that there are specific behaviors and values that blacks should enact by virtue of their “blackness” and that this enactment is a moral matter in that it is an indication of black authenticity and racial solidarity. In this section, I illustrate how race relatedness is reframed once the men find out that I have violated a cardinal “black” rule by dating and eventually marrying, a white man. Here I present data, which shows how the men negotiate their ideas of how blacks should interact with whites once the boundary is crossed and the expectations of how to “act black” are not satisfied.

The following vignette recounts the first time my interracial relationship is revealed and discussed in Crown Crafters. Marquis asks me, “Are you married yet?” I smile and say, “No.” When he asks when will I get engaged I reply, “Maybe next year. Why do people ask women when are they getting engaged? I don’t know when he’s going to propose.” Marquis interrupts me to say, “I’ll tell you why. Because it looks like you guys are really into each other.” I ask, “What? You’ve never seen me with my boyfriend.” Marquis replies, “You don’t know what I’ve seen.” I challenge him and say, “What does he look like?” Marquis begins to sing, “The thing about my baby, it don’t matter if you’re black or white¹⁷.” I cover my mouth and laugh. Marquis says, “I ride my bike everywhere. 42nd street, Bryant Park, everywhere!”

I inquire, “Well, now that you know my boyfriend is white, does that change your view of me?” He quickly replies, “Why would that change my opinion of you?” I answer, “I don’t know. I’m just curious.” Marquis replies, “No. You have to find love wherever you find it.” I say, “Okay, well can my boyfriend come in to the shop to get his

¹⁷ These lyrics are the chorus of the song, “Black and White” (1991) by Michael Jackson.

hair cut?” Marquis shrugs his shoulders and says, “Yeah, what kind of haircut does he get?” I reply, “I don’t know. I’ve cut his hair before but that didn’t turn out well for him.” We both laugh.

Though Marquis is prone to frame people’s behavior in racial terms (i.e. black and white) and skin color (i.e. light and dark), he introduces the topic of my personal, dating relationship strictly in terms of love and affection. This may have been to make the revelation that he knows about my interracial relationship all the more dramatic and significant. However, he emphasizes the importance of me being in a loving relationship rather than scolding me for not being committed to intra-racial dating, challenging my authenticity, or questioning my allegiance to blacks in general.

A few months later, I accepted my boyfriend’s marriage proposal. I was excited to share the news with Marquis and finally reveal to the other barbers that I was engaged to a white man. But on my next day of fieldwork, Sam announced, “I saw you and your boyfriend snuggled up in Washington Square Park!” I immediately told him the news of my engagement. Sam replied, “I can’t talk to you anymore. You are a white woman now. You are taking his last name.”

He sweeps the hair up from half the floor in the barbershop. He walks back over to me, wipes his hand along his shirt to clean his palm. Then he shakes my hand as he says, “Seriously, that deserves a congratulations. When are you going to bring him by the barbershop for a cut? The white devil. I’m just being mean. I’m only upset because he took one of our girls and you are not fat.” I reply, “You can be mean to me but you can’t be mean to my boyfriend if I bring him to the shop.”

Unlike Marquis, Sam's response to news of me dating and marrying a white man is more complicated. Sam jokingly says that he has to dissociate himself from me because I have violated the cardinal rule of dating within my race. In this moment, it seems like I have lost all credibility as an authentic black woman and that I have done something "wrong" by being in an interracial relationship. Because of this, Sam expresses his disappointment and disapproval by expressing that his view and relationship to me has changed for the worse. Still, he eventually offers what seem to be sincere well wishes for my marriage.

Eventually, I brought my fiancé into the barbershop just to introduce him to the barbers. On my following visit I ask Sam, "Was it okay for me to bring my fiancé to the shop?" He looks me in my eye, hunches his shoulders and says, "I don't care about that! It's a free country." I reply, "Yes, but it's your place." Sam hunches his shoulder again. He says, "It doesn't matter. Why would I care? You should love who you want to love. As long as you can deal with it...as long as you are okay (he points to his head). I'm just mad because I'm too late. It should have been me."

He continues, "You see, a lot of people think I don't like white people. But when I was younger, I was around white people all the time. I grew up around them. My father used to have white people in and out of our house a lot. When I talk about 'the system' that doesn't mean that you can't find any nice white people out there."

Sam goes on to say, "Black people especially young men, don't want to invest or believe in anything." We are standing outside and Sam looks towards the front door to check if anyone is within earshot. He says, "I can talk to you because you are on both

sides of the spectrum. Once you have traveled, and been around whites, it makes a difference on how you view things.

In my subsequent visits to the barbershop, Sam would reference my interracial relationship to launch into a critique of what he perceives to be the problems that plague young black men today. He often prefaced or ended his critique by saying that he understood why and is not surprised that a “nice girl” like me ended up with a white man, given all of the issues he claims black men have. Sam still teases me about my relationship, but he also consistently extends an invitation to my husband to visit the barbershop, get a haircut, or join the barbers on one of their semi-regular long distance bicycle rides.

This interaction and Sam’s treatment of me hereafter, raises the question of how much of the attitudes he expresses about race in front of the other men in the barbershop is a performance for the audience in that space. His one-on-one conversations with me wherein he approves or celebrates my loving relationship with a white man are perhaps another performance. In those moments, Sam establishes himself as being adept at assessing the problems of young black men and more insightful on relations between blacks and whites since he says he grew up around people of both races. The revelation of my interracial relationship to Sam, brought into question my black authenticity and it simultaneously created a platform for him to express some attitudes that he says he can not share with the men in the barbershop (i.e. racial self-critiques).

The following interaction illustrates how race relatedness gets reframed once Chris, who in the previous chapter challenged my racial authenticity and asked if I was proud to be black, finds out that I am in an interracial relationship. He greets me and

immediately asks to be reminded of the school I attend and how I am progressing there. He then says, “Well you’d better stick with the brothers.” I reply, “Well, if you want to know the truth.” He exclaims, “Oh Lord! Don’t tell me.” I say, “I’m engaged and my fiancé is white.” He says, “Oh no.” Chris asks, “Well are you happy? Does he treat you right?” I reply yes to both questions and add, “I’ve dated black men before and it just didn’t work out.” His voice becomes dramatic as he responds, “As long as you are happy, that is all that matters because you are a Nubian princess. You deserve to be treated like a queen and carried on the shoulders of men.” Slim and I laugh heartily.

Chris asks me, “Well, is his hair black? Are his eyes black?” I reply no to both questions. He desperately asks, “Does he have a black jacket?” I say yes just to end his line of questioning. I add, “We’re getting married on a farm.” He says, “A farm? Oh boy! Well okay. I’m going to be at your wedding. I give good gifts—a one hundred dollar gift card to your favorite store.” Slim and the man in the wait area, laugh at these comments. Chris continues, “And I’ll bring some food if you want, and leave with a container. That is how we (used to) do.” We all laugh. I gather my belongings in preparation to leave the barbershop as Slim finishes shaping up Chris’ flattop. Chris says, “Ok, nice seeing you again. And good luck okay.” I extend my hand to either shake his hand or give him a high-five. He shuffles his hand from under the plastic cover and makes a fist. I make a fist and gently pound his. As I walk away, Chris asks, “You don’t have a bun in the oven, do you?” I smile and reply, “No, I do not have a bun in the oven.”

This interaction shows how Chris, the one customer who challenged my black authenticity, searches for grounds that might make it acceptable for me to marry a white

man; and perhaps in turn, justify him not discrediting me as a black woman and/or disowning me as part of the black community. As Chris grapples with news of my interracial relationship, he momentarily asks how happy and satisfied I am in the relationship. But he quickly resorts to his performance of race and using race as a lens when he refers to my black woman identity in and of itself as ample reason for me to be treated well by my fiancé. His inquiry as to what black characteristics he might be able to associate with my white fiancé, inviting himself to the wedding, and greeting me with a pound (a handshake associated with an urban culture, not necessarily black) are his efforts to reorient his relationship to me and show his tolerance of me marrying a white man.

The work that Chris does to reframe our connection rather than shame me indicate that some of the talk about black people dating within their race is a performance for the men in the barbershop; and it simultaneously suggests that the attitudes Chris expresses in our one-on-one conversations are another performance for me. On one hand, his efforts to reframe his relationship to me is at least an admittance that though intra-racial dating for blacks is celebrated or idealized in the barbershop, he recognizes that some black people will enter into an interracial relationship. And perhaps, he (and the barbers, all of whom eventually discovered that my partner is white) did not wish to marginalize me because of my personal choice.

On the other hand, his acceptance of my interracial relationship during our one-on-one conversation may be the compassionate response that the interaction demands. Neither of Chris' presentations is "truer" than the other. Instead, the interaction and stage setting structures what behavior and sentiment is appropriate given the particular

situation. For instance, in front of a smaller audience (i.e. fewer than five black men were present), I felt comfortable enough to reveal to Chris that I was engaged to a white man and that the wedding will take place on a farm—both of which I assumed would place my authenticity under scrutiny. Whereas in our prior interaction where Chris warned that he had better not see me with a white man, I did not feel comfortable confessing in front of the crowd of nearly twenty black men in the barbershop. I was worried that my black authenticity would be discredited beyond repair and that the men might harshly judge my feelings of racial solidarity.

DISCUSSION: OPPOSITIONAL IDENTITY WORK IN CROWN CRAFTERS BARBERSHOP

This chapter reveals the legacy of the double consciousness by demonstrating that black men in the barbershop at times decidedly use race as a lens by which they explicitly compare their values and behavior to whites and imagine how whites perceive them. In “acting black”, they do not take for granted their use of race as a lens (cf. Lamont 2000) nor do they shy away from declaring their perception of certain values as black in opposition to white (Fordham & Ogbu 1986). For instance, in discourse where whites are explicitly framed as “the other,” there is consensus in the perception that blacks abide by specific rules such as how to interact with pets and discipline children. During this talk, the black men in the barbershop invert the racial order to make a positive assessment of themselves and judge the perceived behavior of whites negatively (Lamont 2000). Their “opposition” to whites does not seem to be a rejection of mainstream values but rather a presumption that they are morally superior and/or more respectable than whites (cf. Fordham & Ogbu 1986). Here, the notion of the “white gaze” is at the forefront of their

conversations and how they present themselves, which encourages them to assert distinct values that make blacks better than whites. The race exclusivity of the barbershop allows black patrons to say things that they cannot otherwise say in front of the imagined white audience.

The power of the barbershop as a place makes it difficult for people to *not* put on a racial performance by acting black or to challenge the framing of a value or culture as black. We see this with the women who are “called out” for not acting black and physically chastising her child in the restroom. The mother’s response is to recognize and affirm the allegedly black value by going on to complain about whites—even though she does not take her child to the restroom or discuss whether or not she ever using corporeal punishment on her kids. The data also illustrates how Marquis takes for granted that the women know and use corporeal punishment on their kids by virtue of their blackness and presumably working class status. The barbershop as a place allows Marquis to successfully construct the behavior as “black” and it exerts its pressure to demand that the women (and onlookers) agree with this framing in their interaction. I myself experienced pressure to put on a racial performance when Chris initially confronted me about the “black” values I enact. At the time, I felt it would be morally problematic to confess that I was dating a white man, in the setting and at the moment when my black authenticity and qualifications for being in the shop were under scrutiny. This lends to my conceptualization of the barbershop as a place that fosters and sometimes even demands racial performances rather than a place where people can enact their “real” orientations or be their “true” selves (cf. Nunley 2011). The racial policing that happens indicates that

the barbershop is a stage for performances of racial authenticity and checking each other's "racial credentials."

The data illustrates the enduring ways that blacks' sense of self is still experienced and shaped in relation to whites and it highlights the continual prevalence of black men grounding their racial identity in a politics of respectability and humanism (Duneier 1994; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974). As the men discuss how to interact with animals and parent-child relationships, they work to define, codify, affirm, and police one particular kind of blackness for the other blacks in the barbershop as well as an imagined white audience (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996). As we saw, many of these discussions occur without a breach due to the power of the place and interaction, which demand that people perform accordingly. However, the data on reframing connections demonstrate how relationships are worked out once the kind of blackness celebrated at Crown Crafters barbershop is violated.

Throughout conducting this research, one of the most common questions people asked me was about my experience as a woman in a predominately male space. While this is an obvious and valid question, my most pressing concern initially was trying to keep my interracial relationship secret for as long as possible. Given how frequently the men discuss the appropriate way to act black, how they identify and define those behaviors with great specificity, and their generally contemptible perspective of whites, I found few opportune times to reveal my secret to the barbers. However, the data on reframing connections demonstrate how Sam used news of my interracial relationship as a platform to critique the behavior of young black men, though he still teases me at times. For Marquis and Chris, they share which conditions and situation (i.e. love, happiness)

might assuage my transgression. And Chris responds by inquiring about literally any black (colored) physical trait or object that he can associate with my white partner.

This chapter illustrates how the men in the barbershop invoke a narrative of whites as “the other” to create or reinforce racial solidarity and build consensus around the perception that blacks abide by specific rules such as how to interact with pets and discipline children. The data on reframing connections shows how feelings of racial relatedness gets worked out after the men discover that I have violated a key component of the kind of black identity celebrated in the barbershop by being in an interracial relationship. Collectively, these data show the unspoken and sometimes clearly articulated notion that blacks should behave in oppose to whites given that whites tend to engage in less respectable behavior.

CHAPTER 2: ACTING BLACK

A customer in the shop, Alfred, stands in the middle of the floor and introduces the topic of how much people idealize whiteness. He loudly says, “It’s like we’re obsessed with whiteness. Nothing is good unless it is white. It’s as if white equals purity, when in fact, the brown stuff is healthier.” The customer asks Marquis, “Tell me my brother, which is healthier: white rice or brown rice? White sugar or brown sugar? White bread or brown bread?” Alfred asks each question quickly, one after the other, which made it apparent that these were rhetorical questions. Still, Marquis tilts his head to acknowledge each of the latter options as his answer. The onlookers nod and make sounds of “uh huh” in agreement with Alfred’s claims. Alfred exclaims, “I mean flour isn’t even white! They have to put something in there to make it white. All of those chemicals they put in our food and we think white is better.”

Alfred looks in the direction of and stretches out his arm towards a customer, Curtis in the waiting area. He starts out, “You remember,” (he pauses, then continues) “Nah, you’re too young to remember.” He turns to Sam and asks, “Do you remember when the milkman would come and drop off fresh milk to your house?” Sam agrees, “Yeah, that was fresh off of the farm. And when you’d spill milk, you’d have to rush to clean it up from the floor because it would stain. Now you can just get a paper towel and clean it up in one swipe (he moves his arm from side to side like a windshield wiper).” Alfred continues, “Yeah, and you know why it doesn’t stain anymore? Because they put all of those chemicals in to past...” Marquis completes the sentence, “pasteurize it.” Alfred replies, “That’s right! To give it a longer...” Marquis says, “shelf life.” Alfred excitedly points to Marquis and responds, “That’s it my brother.” He continues, “Like

when you see those sales in the stores, ‘buy 3 for \$2’, it’s because those products are about to expire. They are at the end of their (he pauses) what’s the word my brother said?” Marquis repeats, “shelf life.”

The vignette shows that Alfred seems to think (and other men in the barbershop agree) that the idealization of whiteness has permeated all aspects of people’s imagination, so much so that they fail to recognize when “whiteness” is bad, impure, or unhealthy. Moreover, he argues that people are so convinced that “white is right” that it is difficult for them to realize that some brown colored produce are indeed the healthier option. His monologue expands beyond black versus white values, and on to the ways in which whiteness has become an “ideal type” even in regards to people’s food consumption. According to Alfred, this sentiment is pervasive enough that manufacturers reinforce and exploit it by using chemicals to change the color of some foods from brown to white. Though Alfred’s argument may apply more broadly to American culture, he uses the word “we” in a racial exclusive place, among other black people. The language he uses when referring to the other men in the shop, “my brother” is an expression of racial relatedness and brings to mind black culture and the role black men are encouraged to assume, which is “my brother’s keeper.” He appears passionate about raising the consciousness of the other men in the shop, as if he does not want them to be or continue being bamboozled into idealizing whiteness.

The vignette showcases how black masculinity is performed in the barbershop. Alfred takes center stage as he speaks aloud to everyone in the barbershop. He encourages the barbers and other customers to actively engage with his theories by directing questions to and soliciting a response from Marquis, Sam, and Curtis. Alfred

establishes his “old head” status by seeking affirmation of his past experience in regards to the home delivery of fresh milk from Curtis first, and then from Sam, once he deems Curtis too young to have such knowledge. Marquis, in contrast, completes Alfred’s sentences, and Alfred comes to rely on him to do so as part of the performance for all others in the shop. Their exchange assumes a “call and response” characteristic, similar to that in a black church; likewise, the language of “my brother” borrows terminology commonly used among a black congregation. The onlookers are a “good” audience in that they intently watch, listen, and participate in the interaction with their nods and “uh-huhs.”

In the previous chapter, I presented data that illustrated how the men in the barbershop ascribe certain values and behavior to whites. In doing so, they made comparisons (explicit and implicit) to their perceived values and behavior of blacks, which is a component of acting black. Here, I focus on other aspects of acting black and show how notions of racial authenticity can operate as a moral lens by which blacks judge the appropriateness of values and behaviors expressed by *other blacks* (rather than compared to whites). I describe how the men take for granted a shared knowledge and consumption of black culture, and their perception of the behavior and values that blacks enact and the others they *ought to* enact through their racial self-critique and storytelling. Then I document the missed connections that occur due to the policing of and challenges waged against the kind of blackness celebrated in the shop. Finally, I discuss how these data exemplify that acting black is a moral project for the men in Crown Crafters barbershop.

BLACK CULTURE AND VALUES

MUSIC AND MOVIES

The radio is on and tuned to 107.5 WBLS, a station that plays classic rhythm and blues music and is geared towards a black audience. Curtis says, “Man, remember Soul Train? Don Cornelius was the man. He invented Soul Train! You’d see those people up there, dancing each week. (He stands up and dances.) That was blackness.” A song titled “Let me clear my throat¹⁸” plays. Curtis and Marquis sing along. Curtis laments, “They don’t make music like this anymore.” Alfred says, “Everything is recycled from the past.” Marquis says, “Yeah. A lot of the hits today are samples from older music. Like the hook on Jaheim’s song (Ain’t Leavin’ Without You) is a sample from...” Curtis says, “De La Soul!” Marquis says, “A lot of people don’t know that. Yes, it’s from their song (he sings and Curtis joins in to sing) ‘Hey, how ya doin’, sorry ya can’t get through. Why don’t you leave your name and your number. And I’ll get back to you.’¹⁹”

Curtis adds, “But Drake is coming on strong. He’s nice.” Marquis disagrees. Curtis replies, “He is! Did you hear his first single?” Marquis says, “What was it?” None of the men are able to remember. Alfred says, “Who, Dre’s first song? I remember Dre’s first song.” Marquis says, “No not Dre, Drake.” Alfred says, “Who? Dr. Dre?” Curtis says, “No. Drake.” Marquis emphatically spells, “D-R-A-K-E, not Dr. Dre.” Alfred says, “Oh, I don’t know who that is.”

Marquis continues, “You know, this may sound off, but you know who I love? Jaheim. That’s my man.” Curtis replies, “Yeah, Jaheim is good.” Marquis says, “And

¹⁸ This song is by DJ Kool (1996).

¹⁹ The song by De La Soul is titled “Ring Ring Ring (Ha Ha Hey).”

you know who I can't stand, and people are always surprised to hear this, but I don't like Sade." The men collectively say, "Ah" and then listen carefully to Marquis's rationale. Marquis adds, "Everyone loves her. But her music is just depressing. But you know what? After hearing, (he sings) 'This is no ordinary love' so many times, I started to like it." Alfred says, "Yeah-if you hear it enough times, it begins to sound good."

In this vignette, the barbershop as a place and the stage setting of the radio tuned to WBLS, encourages the men to discuss elements of past and present black culture. Here, the men hark back to a moment when people religiously watched weekly episodes of Soul Train to see their favorite hip hop or rhythm and blues artist perform, hear chart topping music, and learn the latest dance moves. The men take for granted that everyone in the barbershop knows about and understand the significance of Soul Train. And although the radio is not blaring, the barbers take for granted that the patrons will enjoy hearing the music that plays on WBLS. The place demands and the stage is set for the men to perform blackness and be a "good" audience by way of dancing and singing along to songs as they play on the radio and/or as the men reminisce about classic black music. In this racially exclusive space, race does not recede into the background. Instead the barbershop forces people to "take up" and perform blackness for each other.

These moments of reminiscing and celebrating black culture are an opportunity for the men to prove their authenticity and also establish status or a rank order based on their age and experience. We see this as the men engage in hip-hop music trivia and discuss the lineage of the lyrics and beats to the songs being played. They situate their knowledge in assertions such as "They don't make music like this anymore" and "A lot of people don't know that," which makes them worthy of respect because of their cultural

knowledge and age. The interaction shows how the recognition of age can cement the bond among the men who are of the same generation as with Marquis and Curtis who discuss a current hip-hop artist Drake; and simultaneously widen the gap between men of an older generation, such as Alfred, who is unfamiliar with one of the most popular rap artists today.

Finally, Marquis acknowledges the taken for granted assumptions the men in the shop make about the type of music and artists that he, as a black man, is expected to enjoy. He realizes that his masculinity may be subject to scrutiny when he shares that he loves listening to the ballads of black male R&B artist, Jaheim. He prefaces this announcement with, “this may sound off.” Likewise, he knows that black female artist Sade and her unique soul and jazz infused sound are greatly revered in black culture. By saying that he dislikes her music, he knows that this may potentially discredit his racial authenticity, which is apparent in his statement, that “people are always surprised” to hear this aversion.

It is common for the men to presume that everyone in the barbershop has consumed black popular movies, and as such, they tend to discuss black culture via films geared towards a black audience. In another interaction, Marquis asks a customer, “You know what movie was good, and I wasn’t expecting it to be?” The man replies, “What?” Marquis says, “Precious. Man that movie was good. I saw the ads for it and I was like ‘Ok, that is just the same old movie.’ But then I saw it. Man that movie makes Losing Isaiah look like a fairytale. And Monique...she was great.” Another patron, Luke joins in and says, “They say she might get an Oscar for her performance.” Marquis replies, “Man when I saw her performance, it screamed ‘academy award’. I’m going to put it like this;

if she doesn't get a nomination then I know there is still injustice in the academy. And Mariah Carey was in there. I didn't even recognize her. She was just raw. No makeup."

Two patrons who are waiting for haircuts join the conversation. One of them says, "You know what movie was good? Black Dynamite. That was the funniest movie." Marquis and the other customers agree. The customer continues, "My favorite part was when you could see the mike in the camera shot." Marquis replies, "Really? I didn't see that." The guy replies, "Yeah, right at the beginning. He even turns towards the mike to speak into it directly. It is hilarious." The other customer agrees, and the two of them briefly reenact a part of the movie scene. Marquis says, "Oh, I have to watch it again."

Similar to the previous vignette, this interaction shows how the men delve into discussions about movies that capture something about the black experience; and how they presume a shared consumption of these movies, by virtue of being black. As several customers contribute to the discussion, they enact blackness and authenticate themselves by immediately focusing the discussion to their favorite part of the movie rather than offering an introduction or background information about it. The men also rely on cultural knowledge of black actresses, and suggest that if Monique does not earn an Oscar nomination that it would be racially discriminative.

On another day in the barbershop, the radio is tuned to 107.5 WBLS and the following songs play: "Groove Me" by Guy; "Playground" by Another Bad Creation; "Poison" by Bell Biv DeVoe; and "Fairweather Friend" by Johnny Gill. I softly sing along to these songs but I become more animated when singing the last song. Marquis takes notice and says, "What do you know about Johnny Gill?" I reply, "What do *you*

know about Johnny Gill?” He laughs, “I keep forgetting your age, twenty-seven right?” I nod and jokingly say, “But I look like I’m eighteen, right?” I ask Marquis’s customer, “How old do I look?” He replies, “Twenty.” I eagerly say, “Thank you!” Marquis says, “Well, she’s not twenty. She’s an old woman!” Marquis begins to do a dance called the cabbage patch. I dance too, swinging my head and arms from side to side. He says, “Oh! I bet you don’t even know the name of that dance.” I keep dancing and answer, “The wop.” He seems surprised and impressed as he replies, “Oh!”

This brief interaction shows how I authenticate myself by knowing the name of and how to do a classic hip-hop dance (not that hip-hop is synonymous with blackness, but it is historically associated with black culture). Similar to the previous vignettes, the stage is set with classic R&B music playing, which encourages people to perform race. In this case, these performances take the form of Marquis engaging me in a bit of hip-hop trivia and us dancing classic hip-hop moves. He appears to be surprised by my enactment, especially since it is unusual for me to sing and dance in the barbershop. This vignette also shows how I perform gender, where as a woman, I consider it a complement that Marquis says he tends to forget my age and that the customer guesses that I am significantly younger than my actual age based on my appearance. In contrast, the men (even those as young as thirty years old) seem to work diligently to draw attention to their age in order to command respect and establish status by claiming to having had richer life experiences and more knowledge than other men in the barbershop.

On any given day at Crown Crafters barbershop it is likely that a movie or music will be playing, both of which tend to be infused with elements of black culture. As I have shown, these movies and music usually spark discussions about the men’s

understanding of their black male identification. However, there are also times when the music playing does not generate a discussion and the men instead quietly bob their heads or softly sing along to “Juicy” by Notorious B. I. G. and “Killing Me Softly” by The Fugees. Even when there are only a couple of customers in the barbershop, the men will take this as an opportunity to enact blackness together. This was the case when barbers Slim and Sam Jr. were watching an unofficial DVD of The Jackson 5’s best television appearances. Stevie, a regular customer, and Sam Jr. yell out requests for Slim to play and replay their favorite parts of the performances. They each admire and imitate the dance moves in the middle of the barbershop floor. There are also times when the men do not perform race and instead entertain themselves with various personal electronic items, sleep, or sit in silence while they wait. Acting black, is not always lighthearted in the barbershop, as the following section on racial self-critique will show.

SELF CRITIQUE

A different form of acting black is to critique the behavior of black people in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups (May 2001). Sam, the shop owner, seems to believe that there are certain professional values to be adopted by blacks if they are to experience upward mobility. In doing so, he critiques and (in his shop) polices the behavior of presumed lower class blacks or those with a “street” orientation (Anderson 1999). I choose to focus on the racial self-critiques Sam solely makes because his ideas about problematic “black behavior” seems to give cause for most of the formal rules in the shop, and even the level of engagement the barbers and patrons have with each other in the space. Below, I document the work Sam takes on to “uplift” the race and the

problems that he identifies as a unique plague among blacks by way of harsh self-critique and comparisons to people of different racial or ethnic categories.

Sam expresses what he perceives to be a need to improve black business practices and a stronger family structure for blacks. He says that black owned businesses do not carry on once the owner dies, but that members of other races and nationalities pass down their businesses to family members. That is why, he believes, businesses owned by other racial groups flourish more so than black businesses. “Why do you think people of any other race can come to America and make a better life for themselves than blacks?” He adds “And we have been here longer than any other race” Unlike the previous examples of othering, here Sam looks at other racial groups as an example that blacks should emulate. He seems to blame black business owners for not reaching the same level of success, as do business owners of other racial groups.

In an ongoing conversation about how blacks are doing as a group, Sam says, “Black people don’t invest in the right things. We don’t want to be our own boss or own our own business. Yeah we have all of these barbershops, beauty salons in Harlem. But the people who work there don’t want to own anything. People are content. They have way more opportunity than I had and they don’t want to take advantage of it.” He continues, “Black people want to get rich overnight, but it doesn’t work like that. Blacks are willing to go into debt for clothes and cars, but not to own a house or invest in something that the next generation will benefit from. They just don’t think like that. We’re the only people who are like that. I always say it’s a curse that follows us. Some predetermined curse that plagues us (black people).”

Here, Sam is critical of blacks for allegedly valuing material goods and fast money over smart investments. He considers the many black salons in Harlem to be a misleading indication of the socioeconomic status of blacks. It may seem as if black stylists are doing well for themselves. But, according to Sam, these stylists just work in the shop and do not aim to own the business. Lastly, Sam claims that the disinterest in property ownership, and planning for the future and the following generation, are issues that blacks specifically struggle with over time.

In another instance Sam says, “This white man came in for a haircut, he was German or Russian. He came in with a black guy. And he [the black man] was saying ‘nigga’ a lot. I told him that he couldn’t say that word in here. And the guy said, ‘Aw, you’re too sensitive!’ And you know what the white man said? He said, ‘Y’all look stupid when you use that word.’” Sam looks up at me and pauses, “Now isn’t that telling?”

Sam agrees that some blacks that have re-appropriated the N-word make all black people look foolish. Although saying the N-word as a term of endearment is often a marker of “black” culture since arguably it is only acceptable for blacks to use it in this way, Sam objects to this, and enacts another kind of “black” culture in this barbershop where use of the N-word is banned and subject to a one-dollar fine. The vignette highlights that there are multiple versions of black cultural performances, some of which Sam despises precisely out of concern for how unflattering it makes blacks in general appear to whites and “decent” blacks. In a separate discussion on racism, Sam elaborated on this theme:

Remember I told you I got a degree in niggerology? I deal with it every day.

These people come in here with all these messed up mentalities, like this place is a bullpen. And I know people think of the barbershop as a place where they can let their hair down, and this is true. But they want to come in here and behave any way they want, and use all types of language. What they don't understand is that the barbershop is a social setting for all, where you have to show respect for everyone here. This is where niggerology comes in....Like him (taps the customer in his chair), he doesn't know him over there (points to another customer sitting in the wait area). He could be a social worker, a lawyer, a teacher; and he (the other man) comes in here talking all loud and using all sorts of language. He could be a potential person to network with... But they don't see it that way. So I have to make sure that when people come in here, they understand the rules of conduct and show respect for one another.

Sam acknowledges how his idea of the way individuals should carry themselves in the shop differs from some patrons and uses it as a foil through which to mark the barbershop as a “decent” or “moral” black space. His ban of profanity and “loud” talking forces some patrons to enact these values in this setting, which in turn ostensibly sets the stage for patrons to respect white collar professionals and potentially network across class lines in the barbershop. Interestingly, Sam frames these “middle class values” and his attempt to socialize patrons into them, in racial (i.e. black) terms under the phrase “niggerology,” which shows how he constructs some middle class values as ones blacks ought to enact.

Even though his racial self-critiques are considerably harsh, absent of structural explanations, and discount the advances that blacks have made, they are not merely passive. Instead, Sam's awareness of self-identified problems guides his ideas of appropriate behavior and values that the customer's should enact in the barbershop. He seems to feel an obligation to make "absent" values known to other blacks, as a way to raise consciousness about the pitfalls they may (and according to him, should) be able to avoid. Moreover, Sam's self-critiques exemplify how double consciousness works in that he seems acutely aware of how whites perceive one black man as representative of the entire race (as we saw in the vignette with the white customer). He enacts this understanding by socializing other blacks into the values he perceives will help them advance as a race and not look inferior or foolish in the eyes of white society (cf. May 2001). Even in Sam's critique of black values and behavior he in effect enacts and reifies the idea of black culture by trying to construct an alternative way of acting black. Sam's racial self-critique shows that he and perhaps others do not always see acting black and black values as superior to whites (cf. Lamont 2000).

ACTING BLACK THROUGH "MAINSTREAM" VALUES

Thus far I have demonstrated how black men in the barbershop interpret and construct their individual and collective racial identity primarily through the assertion of values that blacks in particular allegedly hold or *ought* to hold. However, the men do not always explicitly frame their values as distinctly black; sometimes they use race in subtle ways to emphasize mainstream values but still with a black inflection. The following section on storytelling illuminates how in the racially exclusive setting of the barbershop, the work

of emphasizing these values grounded in respectability, and socializing other black men into those values, becomes defined as a performance of blackness.

As barbers and customers tell stories, I argue that they articulate what may be a black inflection on perceived mainstream values such as having respect for one's mother and also deferring to someone only a few years older than oneself as an "old head" (Anderson 1990), which is a black variant on "old timer" and can apply to black men as young as 30 years old. That is, the appropriate response to disrespecting one's mother is getting physically chastised and this is celebrated in the barbershop; and the respect your elder maxim applies even if men are only a few years apart and are middle aged. In this way, enacting mainstream values still functions as a racial performance.

One day in the shop, Big Chris and Aaron exchange stories of being disciplined by their mothers in public. Big Chris takes center stage, literally standing in the middle of the floor. He tells a story of how as a child he had disrespected his mother by talking back to her. As a result, he says, his mother smacked him right there in the street. Big Chris swings his hand across the empty space in front of him to reenact the smack. Everyone in the shop laughs at his performance.

Aaron says, "Well that ain't nothing. My mom beat me right there in Disneyland." Slim asks. "In Disneyland?" Aaron emphatically replies, "Yes!" There is a burst of laughter. Big Chris, refusing to be outperformed says, "Well, my mother swung her hand back so far (he reaches his hand as far as it could go around his neck) and she brought it down like this...A wham!" As people chuckle, Aaron adds, "My mom did the same thing, right there in Disneyland. You can ask her." He gets out of his chair and walks to the front door, holding it open as he loudly asked, "Momma, right, you beat me

in Disneyland?” His mother, who actually is standing outside, looks puzzled for a minute. Then she nods her head. With that, the entire shop is in an uproar.

Both Big Chris and Aaron’s stories implicitly state respect for your mother as a social norm. Big Chris’s rude behavior towards his mother brought on the chastisement. Moreover, his disrespect towards his mom is so intolerable that she smacks him without any regard to the public setting. Similarly, Aaron is chastised in a crowded family-oriented public space and his mother will not tolerate disrespect from her son. Big Chris and Aaron do not make any claims that only black people respect their mothers or attempt to claim it as a distinctly black value in the way that they do parents’ physical chastisement of children. Yet the men seem to take for granted that the physical chastisement and type of parenting they received as a child is a common experience for the other men in the shop by virtue of being black—everyone presumed that their mothers enacted the “right” values by using corporal punishment on their kids in public. The racially exclusive barbershop allows the men to assume such commonalities as a part of their experience being raised in a black household and to affirm and codify perceived black values in the process of reinforcing ostensibly “mainstream” values (i.e., respect your mother).

The men’s assertion of social norms takes on a competitive tone at times. Marquis, a barber in the shop, tells me a story of how a “kid” that once worked at Crown Crafters used to brag about having more skills than him. Marquis repeatedly refers to the barber as a “youngster” throughout the story. A customer overhears Marquis and takes issue with Marquis using the word “youngster” so carelessly. The customer appears to be

slightly older than Marquis and is offended that Marquis deems himself able to speak as an elder.

The customer says to Marquis “That is disrespectful to me. You are not that old that you can call people around here kids. I’m your elder.” Marquis replies, “Excuse me. I wasn’t talking to you. And you can’t be that much older than me. How old are you?” The customer refuses to reveal his age and says, “It doesn’t matter, I’m older than you.” He goes on to say that there is a big difference between someone who is born in the seventies and someone born in the eighties. Marquis agrees that a decade is a significant age difference, but insists that a decade is not the age difference between him and the customer. Finally, the customer reveals his age. He is four years older than Marquis.

Marquis argues that an age gap of four years is not large enough to qualify the customer as his (Marquis’s) elder. Marquis and the customer debate the significance of a four-year age difference. The customer says, “When I was in fourth grade, you were in first grade.” Marquis replies, “Yeah, but we were in the same school.” The customer then says, “Ok. But when I was a freshman in high school, you were still in grade school.” Marquis says, “But we still lived on the same block and listened to the same music.” The two men go back and forth for about five minutes. Everyone in the shop listens in on the debate and judges the validity of each point the men make. The sound effect is a mixture of “uh huhs” and “that’s true.” The customer gets so animated at one point that Sam, the shop owner, rings a bell to signal for the customer to lower his voice and eventually says, “Quiet down for a few minutes. The news is coming on.”

The social norm here is the rather “mainstream” maxim of respecting one’s elders. Marquis’s declaration that he is an elder offends the customer. The customer

expresses that Marquis should not make claims to a status that he does not belong to. Moreover, the customer feels disrespected given that he considers himself to be an elder and to have somehow earned his status, whereas Marquis has not earned the right to make claims to the position. The men begin to check each other's qualifications. They go back and forth, competing for the status of elder. Their debate ends when Sam--an undisputed elder in the barbershop--calls for silence.

The barbershop is a place where older black men who are valued for their life experiences, wisdom, and decent character may give advice to younger black men or boys—a relationship characterized as “old head/young head” (Anderson 1990:69). In this type of relationship, there may be an age difference as small as two years between the mentor and protégé—but the young head graciously defers to the age and life experience of the old head (Anderson, 1990:69). While the men may sometimes quibble over the minimum age gap that qualifies relatedness between two men as “old” and “young” heads, they share in the presumption that a middle-aged man can qualify as an elder. In this setting, it seems that this taken for granted understanding is related to acting black—that is, even though they do not claim that respecting one's elders is uniquely black, invoking the folk categories of “old head” and applying them to someone as young as forty or even thirty years old puts a black inflection on the performance of the value of respecting one's elders.

MISSED CONNECTIONS

Thus far I have presented data in which there is a general consensus over what constitutes black culture, values, and what kind of behavior is condoned in the barbershop.

However, there are occasions where the men police and chastise each other for not acting black and debate what are the problem spots for blacks today. The data that follows illustrate the missed connections that occur when the kind of black culture and kind of performance of blackness celebrated in the shop, is challenged and confronted with another kind of blackness.

In this interaction, the radio is tuned to 106.7 Lite FM. Pop songs such as “She Works Hard For The Money” by Donna Summer play followed by a lengthy country western song. Marquis asks, “What is this playing? We are not in Colorado! We’re in New York. It sounds like some thing you’d hear in a movie to let you know that the people there are racist. Come here Jebadiah.” A customer adds, “Man that was in the past. I don’t want to go there again.” Marquis returns to cutting his customer’s hair. A few minutes later, Marquis drops his arms and steps back from the customer. He pleads, “I’m sorry. Look at where we are and listen to the music playing. I mean c’mon. I keep looking around for a cowboy to pass by. For real, close your eyes and listen to the music. Now open your eyes. Look around at us in the shop. C’mon. Turn that music off.”

Sam asks, “You all don’t like this music?” Marquis says, “You do?” Sam replies, “Yeah, its mountain country music.” Marquis says, “But we are in New York. This sounds like lone ranger music.” Sam adds, “Yeah, like when you’re riding in the mountains all alone. It’s good music.” Marquis asks, “Are you serious?” Sam says, “The slaves sang these songs before white people. It’s true.” Marquis replies, “I don’t know about that Sam. That is not true.” The soulful “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell plays next. The customer announces, “Now we are back in New York.”

In this interaction the stage is set with the radio tuned to Lite FM, a station that is geared towards a mainstream audience and plays songs from various genres. As we see, not every song is well received by the men in the barbershop. Marquis associates the one song with a cowboy, mid-western, white culture and because of this, he argues that the song is unsuitable to play in the black barbershop. When Sam expresses that he enjoys the song, Marquis questions his taste in music and ultimately his authenticity. Sam quickly tries to recoup some degree of authenticity by saying that blacks sung western music before whites. Marquis's policing of the music being played in the shop, Sam's attempt to repair the attack to his authenticity, and the customer's agitation are all a performance of race.

In the following interaction, we see how some of the men challenge Sam's perception of the problem spots among blacks and in doing so, they offer an alternative stance on and example of how to act black. Slim is present and cutting a customer's hair. Another customer who appears to be in his mid forties to early fifties, Louie stands in the middle of the barbershop as he has an intense conversation with Sam. Louie passionately says to Sam, "You're still talking about black and white and it's not about that anymore. It's about me trying to get ahead." He continues, "If you're going to be upset with anyone, be upset with the government. They're the ones out to get you."

Sam Jr. enters the shop and greets me with a hello. Sam says, "If I go to the corner store and take ten dollars out of my pocket, the person who is going to pull out a gun and rob me is going to be black." Louie looks around the shop and with a sharply pitched voice asks, "For \$10, Sam? Come on!" Everyone snickers. Sam says, "Yeah,

well maybe not for ten dollars but he will see it and wonder what other money I have.”

The customer shakes his head, waves his hands, and says, “No!”

Louie adds, “You should ask yourself ‘why is this man robbing me?’” Sam emphatically asks, “What?” Louie replies, “He’s robbing you because he’s hungry and he has a family to feed.” Sam says, “Please, that’s not my problem. He should get a job.” Louie replies, “There aren’t any jobs out there. He’s trying to make a living the only way he knows how. Why don’t you let him come in the shop and cut hair?” Sam says, “No!”

Louie continues, “You think those white people aren’t killing each other?” Sam says, “No. When you watch the news, we are the ones killing ourselves, shooting one another.” Louie rebuffs, “Look at those shootings in Colorado...the um (he snaps his fingers and looks at the other men in search of someone to finish his thought).” Sam Jr. says, “Columbine.” Louie says, “Yeah, Columbine and those other school shootings. White people are just as bad as us, maybe even worse.” Sam answers, “No, but we are shooting each other every day. With those school shootings, whites aren’t t killing each other every day like us.” Louie replies, “Yes they do. You just don’t see it on the news.” Sam Jr. and the customer sitting in Slim’s chair nod in agreement. Sam replies, “No, they are not.”

Slim joins the conversation and sharply asks, “Sam, are you there to see what happens?” There is a moment of silence. Slim answers his own question, “No, you are not there. So you can’t say it’s not happening down there.” Sam asks Slim, “Are you there?” Slim says, “No, and neither are you. So you can’t say what’s happening there

just because it's not on the news." Louie says, "They have Crips²⁰ out there in Alaska."

Sam Jr. agrees, "Uh huh." Louie says, "What do you think they are doing out there?"

They are out there gang banging, shooting, and killing each other."

The men eventually move on to discuss O.J. Simpson. Louie says, "Look at what happened to O.J." Sam asks, "What? Why are you talking about O.J. now? See, I can't have a conversation with you jumping around like this." Louie replies, "Because he didn't do what he was suppose to do." Sam asks, "And what is that?" Slim's customer says, "Keep his head off the chopping block." Louie agrees, "Exactly. He got away with killing that white woman." Sam interrupts, "I thought you said it isn't black and white anymore." Louie replies, "Since you want it in black and white, I will give it to you in black and white. O.J. forgot the goal and instead of keeping his head off of the chopping block..." Slim's customer says, "He placed his head on the chopping block!" Louie continues, "O.J. never did anything for us once he made it." Slim's customer agrees and adds, "He never took up a cause for us." Louie says, "But with this stealing stuff, no one cares about O.J. anymore."

Sam interrupts, "Maybe you don't care but how do you know no one else cares about him anymore? Do you even know what's going on with him now? Do you have personal dealings with him?" Louie says, "No, and I don't care. He's in jail washing somebody's drawers²¹?" Sam, "See, how can you say no one cares and you don't even know what's going on with him now. Do you know what is in the papers?" Louie replies, "The last thing I read said that he was sentenced to jail for nine years." Slim's

²⁰ The Crips are a gang with tens of thousands of members spread across various sections in the United States, with a strong presence in cities such as Los Angeles, CA and New York City. They were once notorious for wearing the color blue.

²¹ "Drawers" as used here, is a slang word for underwear.

customer says, "O.J. tried to put his suit up for auction, you know, the one that he wore during the trial. He tried to get some money for it. But nobody wants it. It's pitiful."

Marquis walks in and softly says to me, "I don't know what I'm walking in on, but it seems..." Sam says, "Good, Marquis is here. Marquis would you handle your customer?" Marquis asks Louie, "What's going on?" Louie begins to talk when Sam interrupts, "He's jumping all over everywhere. I can't talk to you all." Slim says, "Sam, how are you going to tell him to handle his customer, but then you jump in when he tries to talk to him?" Marquis makes a funny, comical noise with his mouth. Slim says, "See we're trying to have a real conversation and you come in here like Porky Pig!" Marquis tells Slim, "Take the bass out of your voice."

Sam says, "Well, you can't say no one cares about O.J. anymore. I care about him." Louie says, "Why, do *you* have personal dealings with him?" There's a moment of silence. Sam answers, "Yes, but not directly." Louie says, "No. That is it! I'm done." He puts on his jacket and heads toward the door. He declares, "I'm never listening to Sam again!" Slim objects, "Hey!" Louie says, "No, did you here what he just said? I asked him if he had personal dealings with O.J. and he said 'Yes.' I'm never listening to Sam again!" He walks out of the shop. Slim turns around and says to me, "Don't mind us."

This interaction shows how the men "act black" and debate over identifying the cause and solution to problem spots among blacks. Sam has the most power to express, implement, and enforce his understanding of what it means to act black in Crown Crafters. However, Louie represents an alternative way to act black by challenging Sam who blames individual black people for their plight without any recognition of structural

explanations. The men behave similar to a kind of modern “race man” as they debate the causes of economic strife among some blacks and black-on-black crime.

Though Louie makes the argument that Sam’s view of the world in racial, black and white terms is out dated, he eventually uses race as lens to compare daily black-on-black crime to the mass school shootings within the white community. We see the persistence of blacks comparing themselves to whites, as Louie deems the degree of intra-racial violence among blacks to be equal and perhaps lower than whites. The other men inevitably join in the debate and largely side with Louie.

They transition to discuss a notorious figure in black culture, O.J. Simpson a former celebrated player in the National Football League, who was found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman (both of whom were white) despite an abundance of incriminating evidence. The men describe how O.J. should have known to avoid any criminal activity after the acquittal, but with his recent petty crimes and failure to mobilize on behalf of blacks, blacks in general have become indifferent and unsupportive of him. The conversation relies on the taken for granted background knowledge that black people nationwide celebrated the not guilty verdict, not necessarily because they believed he was innocent. On the contrary, a general sentiment among blacks is that the trial was a rare instance where the imperfections of the criminal justice system benefited a black man instead of unfairly targeting, imprisoning, or punishing him. The men in the barbershop then, presume that by virtue of being black, they *should* care about and defend O.J. Simpson, which is perhaps why the debate gets so intense.

DISCUSSION: ACTING BLACK AS A MORAL PROJECT IN THE BARBERSHOP

This chapter demonstrates how people in the barbershop use race as a lens to varying degrees in order to interpret the values they say they enact. They explicitly invoke race both to celebrate the music and movies associated with black culture, and emphasize middle class values blacks *ought* to have in the form of self-critique; but implicitly give some mainstream values a black inflection via storytelling. Because the men are not always *acting* black even though they are always *nominally* black (Brubaker et al. 2006), my study sheds light on when and how “blackness” becomes interactionally relevant, and on how the barbershop as a racially exclusive place presents myriad situations in which racial understandings and racial experiences are foregrounded and made morally salient. I developed the notion of “acting black” to show how talk and interaction in the barbershop is largely based on their (sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit) assumption that they share a particular worldview and value system which also shapes their understanding of what is appropriate behavior for them as blacks.

The notion of acting black highlights how blackness is achieved in interaction, and the idea of the barbershop as a “racial backstage” helps specify how it operates as a moral space that shapes these performances. The data show how, in a place already designated a black space, patrons are pressured to achieve blackness with each other in interaction—and thus, these performances of blackness become moralized in context. An individual can encourage and/or demand the audience to put on the lens of race by either taking for granted certain information as background knowledge or assuming common cultural experiences with the expectation that audience members will be able to follow along (see Nunley 2011). We saw this in the opening vignette where Alfred links racial attitudes to blacks’ preference for “white” over “brown” foods even though the latter

tends to be healthier; and in the vignettes where the men discuss black movies, music, and hip-hop trivia. An all black audience in the barbershop is expected to know black movies, sing the lyrics to classic songs in black culture, understand what an “old head” is so that they can judge whether or not someone qualifies as an elder, and in short, participate somehow. This dynamic, the moral demand to be a good audience is a way for men to perform race, affirm black values, and prove their black authenticity (if one is able to follow along without necessarily being “filled in” on taken for granted knowledge and cultural experiences).

This chapter presents one particular *kind* of blackness in the setting of a black barbershop. Whereas some studies conceptualize blackness as a moral category to be expressed in various fashions such as resistance, solidarity, and agency (Vargas 2006), I argue that for the black men in Crown Crafters barbershop, blackness is in part a *moral project*—one that involves identifying and addressing problem spots and determining what the shared values are or should be. In conceptualizing blackness as a moral project, this study illustrates how black culture and black values are constructed and performed through face-to-face encounters in particular settings, such as the barbershop—in which actors understand them to be interactionally and morally relevant. The men’s comparison between perceived “black” and “mainstream” values and the assessment of those values—even if blacks do not fair as well to whites as in Sam’s racial self-critique (cf. Sumerau 2012)—points to how some of the men think of themselves as a modern “race man” or stakeholders in the black male’s individual and collective construction.

The men’s discussion of black culture demonstrates that they interpret their black male identity in relation to their consumption and knowledge of classic black movies and

music. The barbershop is a place where they are encouraged to “take up” blackness and prove their authenticity by way of testing each other via hip-hop trivia, singing along to tunes that play on WBLS, and doing dances such as the wop, cabbage patch, and imitating the band, Jackson 5. In the barbershop and *in interaction*, the men frame their consumption and knowledge as distinctly black; and construct a collective black male identity based on this presumed shared experience.

In terms of the values blacks allegedly subscribe to, Sam’s racial self-critique of reveals a perception that many of them do not consistently adhere to certain values in comparison to whites. Unlike the “acting white” paradigm, Sam criticizes blacks for not subscribing to mainstream values and does not portray black racial identity in direct opposition to whites (cf. Fordham & Ogbu 1986). In Sam’s view, property ownership, solidarity, and smart investments are values blacks *should* have; and since they allegedly are unwilling to subscribe to those values blacks in particular are plagued with a limited chance of upward social mobility. Interestingly, Sam does not blame structural inequality for what he perceives to be the problems of blacks, nor does he discuss structural changes in institutions as a possible solution. The cause for problem spots and responsibility for addressing them are taken on by the individual black men in Crown Crafters. These critiques make salient the men’s awareness of the black double consciousness, in which they recognize that whites may judge the alleged moral failings of particular black men as representative of the entire race.

At other times, the men place less emphasis on blackness as a distinct set of values and instead define, affirm, and police the mainstream values blacks ought to have (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Yet these are still moments where the men engage

in a sort of racial performance by putting a black inflection on the ostensibly mainstream values they enact. The black inflection manifests in unique meanings such as celebrating being beaten by one's mom and deferring to someone only a few years older than oneself as an "elder."

During missed connections, the men police and make sense of different behaviors as indicators of others' racial authenticity based on their adherence to a presumed black culture. For instance, Marquis and a customer voiced their objections when a country western song played in the barbershop and they questioned Sam's black authenticity when he expressed that he enjoyed the music. We saw a similar disconnect between men in the barbershop when Louie challenged Sam's tendency to blame some of the economic strife of working class and poor blacks on the individual without giving consideration to the role of racial and structural inequality. Louie, arguably, represents a neo-liberal kind of blackness, in oppose to Sam's narrow and somewhat dated standpoint. The missed connections illustrate how the men police the appropriate ways to act black in the space; and simultaneously, highlight the great amount of work they put into avoiding breaches, conforming to the dominant kind of blackness celebrated in Crown Crafters, and creating racial relatedness. I argue that just as race is an intermittent occurrence for the black men at Crown Crafters, so is racial relatedness; and perhaps more importantly that race relatedness is an interactional achievement that takes a great amount of work by the men in the barbershop when it does occur.

CHAPTER 3: GROOMING BLACK MASCULINITY

Mr. Toby, a regular customer at Crown Crafters barbershop, engages in small talk about his last fishing adventure, music, and his current diet while he waits for Slim to finish cutting a customer's hair. He then discusses his recent visit to the doctor. He says, "Slim, the last time I was in the doctor's office, I saw this fine lady. She was tall and slim. She had a nice shape. Come to find, it was a man! The doctor said that he had surgery for the (breast) implants and he was taking hormones so that he could become more like a woman. I knew something was wrong though. Her voice was too deep. And if you looked at her face carefully, it was kind of broad and masculine. The next time I went (to the doctor's office for an appointment), there were two of them there. Now, I cannot understand why a man would want to be a woman or why a woman would want to be a man. I've heard all sorts of explanations: they're born that way or it's a hormone imbalance. But I just don't get it."

Mr. Toby eventually asks Slim about my presence. He asks, "Is this your sister or girlfriend?" Slim replies, "Neither." There is silence. Slim adds, "She is married." Mr. Toby says, "Well she looks like a nice young lady." Slim says, "She is married, unfortunately."

As Mr. Toby sits in the chair to get his hair cut, he asks, "Slim, you're not married?" Slim replies, "No, Mr. Toby." He replies, "Why not? You like your freedom?" Slim answers, "These girls are destructive. They come in and want to destroy what I have. And I'm not having that. It would be one thing if they came in and left my stuff alone. But they are destructive. And yes, I like my freedom." Mr. Toby asks, "Do you have any kids?" Slim replies, "No." Mr. Toby replies, "Then you are blessed."

Slim laughs and says, “Yes, very much so.” Slim asks Mr. Toby, “Aren’t you married?” Mr. Toby replies, “Do you see my wife with me?” Slim answers, “No.” Mr. Toby says, “Then I’m not married.” Mr. Toby eventually says to me, “You need to get one of these chairs and be a beautician, young lady.”

In this interaction, we see that Mr. Toby seems ambivalent about transgendered people but he reveals some of his ideas of what are masculine traits (i.e. deep voice, broad face) and which physical attributes he finds attractive in a woman (i.e. tall, slim, “nice shape”). We also see that he acknowledges my presence in the barbershop and questions Slim about my identity before directly speaking to and advising me to earn money in the barbershop as a beautician. Though Slim describes his disappointment that I am already married, he and Mr. Toby express contempt for being legally bound to a woman because according to the men, women in general are destructive and burdensome. In a performance of masculinity or perhaps just a reflection of Mr. Toby’s personality, he jokes that if you do not see his wife with him then he does not consider himself married.

This vignette introduces several themes that follow in this chapter, which are the men’s perception of how to signal masculinity and heterosexuality, how to navigate relationships with women, and how to interact with children. In the previous chapters, I focused on how the men think about and perform their black identity. Here, I review key conceptualizations of gender and then I present data that emphasizes how the men work to build consensus around the values and norms that should comprise their male identity. Divided into parts, in the first half of the chapter, I describe how the barbers chastise children in the space to shape the performance of their budding masculinities; and how the men discuss and debate the appropriate haircuts and dress code that signal

heterosexuality. In the second part, I document how the men interact with women in the space, their philosophies about relationships in the absence of women, and how the men performed masculinity in front of a woman researcher. Finally, I discuss how the men's performances create a gendered hierarchy in the space as well as construct the barbershop as a gendered institution.

GENDER AS PERFORMANCE AND STRUCTURE, AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY

Sociologists have long noted the distinction between the definition of sex or a category determined by biology and gender, which is learned and ascribed behavior based on the norms associated with a person's sex. Similar to the notion of race as a performance, some sociologists argue that gender is something to be "done," accomplished, and achieved in everyday life (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995). The concept of "doing gender," suggests that individuals constantly, inevitably, and unconsciously adopt attitudes and enact behavior that are consistent with their sex categorization. These performances are a routine achievement and accomplishment even in the absence of others (West and Zimmerman 1987).

When gender is achieved in interaction, the definition of the situation structures and informs the performance. Individuals enact gender with the assumption that others in the interaction or the audience share a common understanding of masculine and feminine behavior (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1993). Likewise, other conceptualizations of gender as performance emphasize the importance of talk and interaction to argue that gender is accomplished through social discourse (Kondo 1990) and performance repetition (Butler 1993).

Beyond the level of the individual, the dichotomy between sex categories is reinforced and codified in institutions (West and Zimmerman 1987). Sociologist, Thomas Gieryn (2000: 473) writes:

Place sustains difference and hierarchy both by routinizing daily rounds in ways that exclude and segregate categories of people, and by embodying in visible and tangible ways the cultural meanings variously ascribed to them.”

For example, men generally receive hair care service in barbershops and women in beauty salons, which are commonly segregated by sex. This separation suggests that there is either a significant difference in how women and men care for their hair or what men and women do in a place that provides hair care services. Researchers have demonstrated how institutions such as schools, the curriculum and teachers and students inadvertently create gendered bodies, reinforce an essential difference between the sexes, and promote inequality by controlling the bodily practice of boys far less than girls (Thorne 1993; Martin 1998). But how gendered bodies are created by place and how space shapes black men’s performances in a racial and gender exclusive location such as the barbershop remains under explored.

Gender structure theory, of which gender as performance is a component, poses that gender should be studied as a system or social institution, rather than an individual attribute (Ferree 1990; Risman 1998; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Martin 2004; Acker 2006). The conceptualization of gender as structure facilitates an analysis of how gender intersects with other statuses such as race, class, and sexuality, which collectively informs identity formation and performance (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). It is also an effective analytic tool for understanding how these interpretations and behaviors at the level of the individual become codified and reproduced in institutions such as religion,

work, and the economy (Martin 2004). By conceptualizing gender as a system, it sheds light on the previously obscured ways that other institutions are gendered and offers a more sophisticated frame and discussion of power and inequality (Martin 2004).

This framework also clarifies and makes salient that gender hierarchies exist across and within sex categories. The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” encapsulates the notion that structures and gender practices sustain the dominant social position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 1995). It also poses that gender intersects with race, class, and sexual orientation (among other statuses) to produce various kinds of masculinities with significantly different degrees of privilege and power, which are subordinated, complicit, and marginalized (Connell 1995). Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes that people have particular ideas of what is masculine versus feminine behavior, that different forms of manhood have more power than others, and in essence white patriarchy reigns supreme.

Other studies hone in on how gender intersects with race and class to shape gender formation and identity for black men in particular. Researchers argue that there are four conflicting ideals of black masculinity (Hunter and Davis 1992). The first ideal type poses that black men should conform to the dominant gender role expectations or fulfill the expectations of manhood that applies to men of all races. In this instance, black masculinity is associated with being successful, competitive, aggressive, and an adequate financial provider. The second ideal suggests that black masculinity is defined by altruism or his willingness to address the needs and concern of blacks as a group before his own needs. Black men are expected to simultaneously behave in accordance with the norms of both types, even though the values and behavior for these kinds of

black masculinity are contradictory (Hunter and Davis 1992). Third, black masculinity is defined by black men's inability to fulfill the dominant expectations of manhood; and instead they adopt sexist attitudes and behave irresponsibly and violently (Hunter and Davis 1992:465). Finally, black men construct their masculinity based on "self-determinism and accountability, family, pride, and spirituality and humanism" (Hunter and Davis 1992:471).

This study uses the aforementioned conceptualizations of gender to examine how black men perform race and gender collectively and how they navigate the norms and behavior, which they are expected to incorporate into their gendered performance in a pre-designated black male space. I also examine how the barbershop as a predominately black male place structures these performances and creates racial and gendered bodies.

PART I: THE SOCIALIZATION OF BOYS INTO PERFORMANCES OF (BLACK) MASCULINITY AND THE POLICING OF HETERO-NORMATIVE BEHAVIOR AMONG MEN

BUDDING BLACK MASCULINITIES

On weekday afternoons, you are likely to find an adolescent wearing his school uniform with his book bag in tow in Crown Crafters barbershop. On weekends, particularly Saturday mornings, you are likely to encounter children as young as two years old who are so physically small that he needs to sit on a cushion as a makeshift booster seat. At times, a father and son will both receive a haircut. When mothers are in the barbershop, she may either sit quietly and wait, or stand near the barber to oversee his work, or talk to and entertain her young child in order to keep him calm under the hair clippers.

Still, it is common for a mother to usher her son to the barbershop, exit, and return for him once his appointment is over. These mothers may not feel comfortable lingering

in a predominately male space; or she may want to give her son the opportunity to feel like a young adult, develop a relationship with his barber, and have the experience to dwell and participate in a male space. Additionally, there are mothers who use the time to complete an errand to quickly go to the supermarket, dry cleaners, or Laundromat and announce that she will return for her son thereafter. I did not detect a pattern in which adult was likely to escort or remain with the child in the barbershop. However, one thing was clear, the barber's goal was to quickly complete the haircut of any child age ten or younger to facilitate his swift exit out of the barbershop.

Though the barbers usually directed children customers to Sam Jr., Marquis and Slim also have a sizeable customer base comprised of kids (I never saw Sam Sr. give a haircut to a child). Perhaps this is because a boy's haircut is relatively easy and Sam Jr. tends to cut hair faster than the other barbers and minimally engage with his customers. The data that follows illustrates that each barber has their own means of interacting with children, particularly those who misbehave in the space.

One Saturday afternoon, a man, boy child, and woman with a stroller and baby approach the barbershop. As the middle aged man and three or four years old boy enter the shop, he turns, makes a screeching car sound and puts his hand in the woman's face (as if to tell her she can not enter with them). The man and child sit down in the wait area and the woman pushes the door slightly open and says, "Here" as she waves a twenty-dollar bill. The boy runs to the door, grabs the money, and returns to his seat. Sam tells the boy to take his feet out of the chair and when he does not, the man accompanying him repeats the instructions.

Eventually the child, who seemed relatively well behaved until now, sits in the barber's chair and kicks and refers to Slim as a "big head." Slim asks, "Did you just kick me?" The boy replies, "Yeah, and I'll do it again." Slim says, "Say sorry for kicking me or I'm going to press on your Band-Aid," which was visibly located on the crease of the boy's inner elbow. The boy yells, "No, I just got a needle at the doctor!" Slim replies, "Then apologize." Slim presses on the bandage and the boy screams in agony. Slim repeats, "Say sorry." The little boy yells, "Sorry, you dummy."

Slim prepares the child for a haircut by situating the neck strip (a kind of tissue used to protect the skin) and placing a protective plastic drape over his chest, as the boy punches and kicks the drape. Slim threatens the boy, "Stop, or I'm going to give you a needle like the doctor." Throughout the session, the boy is fidgety; he takes off his sandals (Slim helps him put the shoes back on) and complains that the haircut hurts.

Slim repeatedly instructs the child to hold his head down instead of trying to watch the kung fu movie on the television. Eventually, he forcefully pushes the child's head downwards and the boy screams in pain. Slim says, "You're not holding your head down. So, I will do it for you. You're still trying to watch TV, but you can't right now." The man accompanying the boy yells, "Hold your head down!"

After a few minutes of silence, the boy warns Slim that he is going to give him a "noogie" (a hard grind of the knuckles, especially on one's head). Slim replies, "Okay, you can give me a noogie when I'm done. You better do it too; or else I'm going to give you a noogie." The boy responds, "No, you're not. I'm going to mush you in your face." The boy soon shouts, "Ouch, you big dummy." The man says, "Watch your mouth." The boy replies, "But he pinched me!" The man says, "Did you hear what I said?" When

Slim finally finishes giving the boy a haircut, the boy mumbles, “son of a” but he does not complete the phrase. Slim cues up the latest Transformers movie, places a fold up chair directly in front of the television, and literally sits the boy in the chair while his escort receives a haircut.

This vignette demonstrates how Slim interprets his role as a barber and how he asserts his masculinity in the space. He physically chastises the boy by applying pressure to the boy’s bandage and maybe even giving the boy a pinch. He is physically aggressive when he pushes and holds the child’s head downward. However, Slim is also somewhat courteous to the child when he puts shoes on the boy’s feet and later when he inserts a popular kid’s movie for the boy to enjoy.

Slim seemingly teaches the boy a lesson about manhood or masculinity as he gives the boy options, demands an apology, warns him of the consequences, and follows through with the punishment. He engages with the boy as if the child is independent and autonomous. That is, Slim speaks to him directly (not his guardian) and gives him an opportunity to control his movements, be it to sit still or hold his head down. Notably, Slim takes liberty to use corporeal punishment on the child and he does not delegate the task of controlling the boy’s behavior to his guardian. These are an enactment of masculinity (i.e. I can handle this child on my own) and illustrate that Slim interprets his role as a barber to extend beyond providing hair care service and on to having the authority and perhaps moral responsibility to scold a child without seeking permission or assistance from their guardian.

Though the child’s behavior is naughty in the barbershop, the better way to describe it is as a boy who is imitating and trying to act as if he was an adult male. The

child, whose voice and pronunciations still sounded toddler-like, seemed to be trying to figure out his black male identity and the appropriate performance of masculinity in the space. The child does not appear to be intimidated by Slim. He hurls insults, threatens to give a “noogie” and a “mush” or forceful push to the face, and gets violent with Slim. The boy uses the barbershop as a place where he can explore, develop, and practice his performance of masculinity; and he recognizes his barber as a person who plays a significant role in this process (i.e., how he constructs his black male identity).

The male guardian (the boy never addresses him as his father) seldom intervenes and when he does, it is to reinforce the instructions the barbers have given the child. He does not appear to be remotely perturbed by the forceful way Slim interacts with the boy. This (along with him barring the woman from entering the barbershop) suggests that he has a respect for the place as a predominately male space; and he considers the chastisement and monitoring of the boy to be within the realm of responsibilities for the barbers in the space. The guardian allows the child to get the full experience of what it means to be a black man in the barbershop, which is it is a place where you have power to shape the interaction and sociability however you choose; and that the relationship between a barber and his customer is sacred.

At other times, Slim has a more pleasant interaction with children and he uses a gentler form of discipline on kids in the barbershop. One summer evening, a woman who appears to be in her early thirties, brings a young boy who is about three or four years old to the barbershop. The mother closely looks at her face in one of the large mirrors and then she turns sideways and glances at her rear-end. Suddenly the mother says to Sam Jr., “You know why he’s grilling you (staring at someone with an impression of dislike) like

that? He remembers what you did to him last time.” Slim who was rollerblading while listening to his CD player in front of the barbershop, soon enters and prepares to give the boy a haircut.

The mother says to Slim, “Is he asking you about wine?” Slim says, “Yep.” The mother laughs and says to her son, “I told you that ladies drink wine at night. Wine is for ladies. Men don’t drink wine.” The mother abruptly exits and stands in front of the barbershop to talk with a man while her son sits in the barber’s chair. She reenters once Slim completes the haircut. The child then grabs a quarter out of his wallet and hands it over to Slim. Both of the barbers laugh warmly and the mother says, “You’re trying to pay Slim with a quarter? That’s not enough. Here take this (she hands him a ten dollar bill). I got this one, the next time you can pay with your own money.” The young boy takes the money from his mother and places the ten-dollar bill and quarter in Slim’s hand.

The mother laughs and Slim grabs the boy to playfully shake and tickle him. She returns outside to talk with her friend while her son remains in the barbershop. Slim and the child continue to play; Slim place the boy’s cap, which is too small for him on his head. The child repeatedly jumps up and down to try to retrieve it. They stop playing and the boy runs over to Sam Jr. and begins to punch and hit him. Slim vehemently says to the boy, “That is enough!” But the child continues his attack on Sam Jr. who protects and braces himself by folding and turning his body away from the child. Slim walks over and places the cap on the boy’s head. Then Slim tightly clutches the child by the arm to pull and place him beside his mother who is standing outside.

Unlike the previous interaction, Slim has an endearing exchange with this particular child. The child’s eagerness to seek Slim’s perspective on the lingering

questions he has after a discussion with his mother suggests that he considers Slim to be a trusted source of information. As Slim playfully tickle and “wear” the boy’s hat, he gives the appearance of being a positive male figure for the child; and he seems to embrace this role.

But Slim also disciplines the child by telling him to cease attacking Sam Jr. and then physically removing him from the barbershop once he is disobedient. Again, we see that Slim does not call the mother and ask permission or her assistance in controlling the boy’s behavior. He takes liberty to defuse the situation himself, which suggests that he considers disciplining children who misbehave in the barbershop is part of his moral responsibility as a barber and an older black male (compared to children) in the space.

The child attempts to behave like an adult and performs masculinity by trying to pay Slim with a quarter from his wallet. His mother nurtures this performance by giving her son a sufficient amount of money to pay Slim (i.e. she does not pay Slim directly). She also protects his independence and budding masculinity by assuring him that the next time he gets a haircut, he will have sufficient funds to pay using his own money.

The mother seems to acknowledge that the barbershop is a predominately male space given that she puts on a performance of gender by admiring her backside in the mirror when she first entered the shop. But then she stands outside the majority of the time that her son receives a haircut and when he lingers in the shop thereafter. While she seems to respect her son’s relationship to his barber Slim, she still speaks on his behalf and mediates the interaction for him within reason unlike the male guardian in the previous interaction.

When children misbehave at Crown Crafters, a barber may lecture and threaten to use corporeal punishment on a child. A young boy who appears to be no older than six years old gets his hair cut by Marquis. Throughout his session, he complains that Marquis is going to hurt his scalp with the hair clippers. The boy repeatedly says, “You’re going to cut my head if you hold the thing (hair clippers) there too long.” Each time Marquis turns on the clippers and it makes a buzzing sound, the boy literally cringes in his seat. The child complains, “Hurry up and finish.” Marquis replies, “You talk way more when your mom is not around. You are like a totally different person.”

He exclaims, “Ouch, you’re hurting me!” Marquis denies this and then tests the child’s accusations by turning on the clippers and holding it with the razor pointing away from the boy’s scalp. Then Marquis asks the child if he feels pain, to which he responds “yes.” Marquis says, “You mean to tell me that if I hold the clippers right here for a couple of minutes, it’s going to cut through your skin?” The child screams, “Yeah, mother fucker!”

Marquis turns off the clippers and swivels the chair around so that he can see the child’s face. He says, “Do you want me to tell your mother that you are using bad words? I better not ever hear you say those bad words again. Do you want the belt? Now be my big man and sit still.” The child keeps an angry look on his face and continues to complain about pain for the duration of his time in the chair.

Similar to the other children we have seen thus far, this boy also seems to be asserting and performing his budding masculinity. Marquis notes that the child speaks more often, aggressively, and rudely in the absence of his mother. The child’s sharp tone of voice, defiant facial expressions, and use of foul language gives him the appearance of

an adult male. Indeed, Marquis encourages the child to behave like a “big man” even though he does not endorse the particularly “tough” male persona that the boy displayed at the moment.

In comparison to Slim, Marquis takes a gentler approach to disciplining children in the barbershop. Marquis uses his words to scold the child by expressing his disappointment in the boy’s behavior and threatening to inform his mother about his use of foul language. Though he does not use physical force, he enacts masculinity by threatening the child with the use of corporeal punishment. This also suggests that Marquis considers it his responsibility to monitor and reprimand children in the space.

Not every barber at Crown Crafters considers disciplining children to be his moral, professional, or personal responsibility. One afternoon, a woman with a teenage and three or four year old child enters the shop and says that her small son needs a haircut. Slim tells her to wait for Sam Jr. to arrive. The entourage sits in the wait area when the child begins to jump and point to Slim’s collection of superhero figurines that hang above his mirror. The little boy repeatedly exclaims, “I want that!” for several minutes to which the mother offers an occasional response of “okay.” Slim eventually says, “You want that? Well, you can’t have it because it’s mine!” The boy yells and runs over to his mother who hugs and tries to console him. She says, “If you get a haircut, I’ll give you money and you can buy your own.”

As Sam Jr. enters the shop, Slim gestures to the mother that Sam Jr. can cut her son’s hair. Sam Jr. sets down a black leather cushion to use as a booster seat. The child’s behavior worsens as his yells and screams turn into a full-blown tantrum and he falls to the middle of the floor in the barbershop. The mother tells him to get up and the teenage

boy, who I presume is his brother, picks up the young child who then punches his older brother in the chin and face. The teenager grabs his face and drops his brother to the floor, and the child continues his tantrum. Sam says to her, “He’s going to get ring worms down there.”

The mother finally gathers her son up from the floor and he retaliates by punching her chin. She roughly shakes his body and says, “You have to get a haircut.” Several customers are visibly annoyed and one man shakes his head as he exits the shop and waits there until it is his turn for a haircut. The barbers and remaining customers exchange facial expressions of agitation and disapproval as the child continues his disruptive behavior once he sits in Sam Jr.’s barber chair. The boy’s mother eventually sits in the chair and holds him to try to keep him from thrashing about while Sam Jr. attempts to “line him up” or carefully cut a neat line around the perimeter of the head.

The child and his entourage finally exit the barbershop after an intense twenty-minute haircut. With wide eyes, Sam Jr. glances at several of us and takes a deep breath. We all laugh. He shakes his head and says, “I need a break after that one! That’s the kind of kid who gets what he wants, when he wants it. She gives him everything he asks for and that is not good.”

In comparison to the children we have seen thus far, this boy displays the most disruptive behavior to the place and overt display of violence and disrespect for adults, especially his mother. The boy’s behavior is so egregious that it highlights he is just a child who is misbehaving rather than attempting to perform his budding masculinity. The way his mother and brother interact with him reinforces this idea in that they attempt to control him physically (e.g. pick him off of the floor, hold him during his haircut).

Though Slim antagonizes the child, the mother intervenes to calm and pacify him by saying that she will get him his own figurine; rather than allowing Slim to continue his antics or encouraging the child to cope with not being able to have his desires satisfied immediately.

While children often misbehave in the barbershop, no one including Slim, Sam, or Sam Jr. attempt to chastise this particular boy. Instead Sam calls on the mother to try to control her son's behavior when he warns her that the boy may contract a fungus by flailing about on the barbershop floor. The child's mother physically chastises him by forcefully shaking him, but she seems embarrassed by her son having punched her in front of everyone in the barbershop. Everyone in the barbershop looked on with disapproval of the boy's violent behavior and the mother's inability to fully gain control over his conduct in the space. Still, Sam Jr., who maintained a nonchalant attitude throughout the boy's visit criticizes and blames the child's mother for his disorderly conduct.

SUSTAINING HETERONORMATIVITY AND TRANSGRESSING MASCULINITY

Lawrence is one of Slim's regular customers and on this occasion he requests to have his girlfriend's name shaved into the left side of his hair. Slim repeatedly asks Lawrence "Why do you want a girl's name on the side of your head? Do you know what that means?" Aaron, a young man who is also a regular customer at Crown Crafters and will stop by the barbershop nearly every other day just to hang out, joins in on the taunt. Slim and Aaron take turns speaking back and forth posing the question as if it is the chorus of a song that only they know.

The only interpretation that Lawrence offers is that the hairstyle is a sign of affection for his girlfriend, which is an unsatisfactory response for the men whose taunts make Lawrence become increasingly anxious as the interaction unfolds. Finally, Slim says, “You don’t know what it means? I’m going to do it. Then you go to the Village.”²² You’ll know what it means then.” Aaron adds, “What did you think was going to happen if you put the girl’s name in your head? You are going to attract a bunch of dudes.” Slim replies, “It’s the same thing with getting your ears pierced. Who do you think you are going to attract?” He adds, “You don’t believe me? Alright, go get your ears pierced and then tell me what happens.” Lawrence is skeptical of Slim’s interpretation of the hairstyle and ear piercing but he is unwilling to subject his sexuality and masculinity to questioning by others, which ultimately persuades him to just get a caesar haircut without his the inscription of his girlfriend’s name.

Slim asserts a definition of heterosexual behavior by saying that men should not inscribe a woman’s name in their hair because the style in and of itself signifies homosexuality. His statements indicate that men should appear masculine, especially in places associated with homosexual people and gay culture, or else their masculinity and sexuality will be scrutinized. In an enactment of masculinity, Slim threatens to proceed with the haircut once Lawrence is informed that it might compromise the perception of his sexuality, which makes him literally squirm underneath the clippers. Through taunting, teasing, and having a cryptic dialogue among themselves, Slim and Aaron appear to be wiser and more experienced than Lawrence.

²² Lite is referring to Greenwich Village, a neighborhood in Manhattan that is widely recognized as an area where homosexuals tend to socialize.

While the role of a barber is to execute the customer's desired haircut, Slim deems it appropriate, and his repetitious questioning suggests that he felt some moral obligation to state what he considers to be negative social consequences associated with the hairstyle to his patron. When Slim says, "Then tell me what happens," he suggests that people outside of the barbershop will undoubtedly connect the haircut with homosexuality and femininity, even if Lawrence himself does not make the same connections. As Slim attempts to protect the perception of Lawrence's sexuality and masculinity, he reveals that he feels some sense of connection and moral responsibility to Lawrence, and that he interprets his role as a barber to extend beyond appeasing the demands of his customers.

Similar to the ways the men in the barbershop use hairstyles to police and affirm hetero-normative behavior, the following vignette shows how they also associate certain topics and words with sexuality. A few small conversations are happening between barbers and their customers and customers with each other while they wait to be serviced. Suddenly, the customer who is currently getting his hair cut by Slim interjects one of those conversations, lifts his face upward and says, "All I heard is I don't like to strip, but I like to wax. I figured I wouldn't say anything but that sounds like some homo stuff." Ralph, a patron of Crown Crafters who regularly stops in the barbershop on his way home from work, stands up and walks over to Slim's chair. Ralph addresses the sitting customer and says, "What did you just say? I could have been talking about anything. You can strip and wax a car. You can strip and wax a floor. Just because you heard strip and wax does not mean that I was talking about gay people or sex."

The interaction demonstrates how the men police their conversations for topics that may reference homosexuality and how these discussions can potentially cause them to scrutinize each other's sexual orientation. Ralph appears slightly offended by the customer's remarks and in an enactment of masculinity he quickly walks over to stand directly in front of the customer to confront him. Unlike the previous example where Slim attempted to prevent Lawrence's sexual orientation from being subject to questioning outside of the barbershop, this example shows how Ralph defends and protects the perception of his sexuality and masculinity to the other black men in the space.

In addition to defining their masculinity in connection to heterosexuality, the men also construct hetero-normative behavior in oppose to femininity. It was a quiet evening in the barbershop when Sam and I discussed the types of bicycles we own and the long distance bicycle rides that he often takes with the other barbers. I described my Schwinn bicycle as cute because it has a bell and a basket on the front. Sam replies, "That is a woman's thing!" Slim interjects, "I have a Schwinn. Are you saying that it is a girl's bike?" Sam says, "No. I said it's a woman's thing because she said it has a basket and a bell." Slim interrupts, "I have a basket too, on the back of my bike." Sam says, "No, you didn't hear how she said it; she said, she has a basket and a bell like that was all that mattered. And I said *that* was a woman's thing."

Slim says, "She has a Schwinn? She can go riding with us." I reply, "You guys go on crazy bike rides. I can't ride my bike too well." Sam adds, "But it has a basket on it. She can go pick up groceries for us." The barbers laugh while the few customers present doze in and out of sleep. Sam says, "You don't want to go on a bike ride with

Slim. He'll take you somewhere where you'll have to throw your bike across the water, then you'll have to swim through the river to get to the other side, and then you'll have to ride down some rough path." Slim smiles and says, "That's only if you talk smack. Otherwise, it (the bike ride) is okay."

The vignette shows how Sam and Slim construct a definition of masculinity by pointing to how objects may be utilized in gendered ways. Slim appears offended by what he believes is Sam's categorization of Schwinn bicycles as a vehicle that only women use. By announcing that he owns a Schwinn, Slim cautions Sam to be more careful with the claim he makes, unless he intends to insult Slim's masculinity. Sam immediately realizes that he has offended Slim. In order to ensure that the perception of Slim's masculinity remains in tack, Sam clarifies his statements and makes a negative gendered statement about me picking up the men's groceries. He then frames Slim as an adventurous and intense bicyclist, which makes Slim seem hyper-masculine.

There are other moments when the men say they have been disrespected and they enact masculinity to literally flex and compare the size of their muscles in order to demand respect. This was the case when Marquis tells a customer to "watch your tone." As the tall and broad customer exits the barbershop he says something to Marquis that is inaudible to me. Sam rings the bell and Marquis says, "Excuse me. You're blocking the doorway." The man comes back in to the barbershop and says, "I don't like the way you said that." Marquis replies, "Okay, well watch your tone still." The man walks over to the wait area and says, "See, you're not the only big man around here." He begins to take off his jacket. Marquis says, "Oh, you're taking off your jacket. Okay, what do you want to do?" The customer flexes his chest muscles, making them dance in a rhythmic up and

down motion, as he looks over at me. Marquis replies, “Well you aren’t the only one who has been putting time in at the gym.” He curls an arm and flexes his biceps. The customer responds, “You want to do that? Let’s do it then.” Marquis shows no more interest and the customer says, “Oh, okay” as he puts his jacket back on and walks out of the barbershop.

In a performance of masculinity, the men refuse to allow the disrespect to occur without consequence, which fuels the competitive exchange of threats. Marquis will commonly tell someone to “watch your tone” if he feels that they are speaking too loudly or aggressively to him. It is his way of demanding that others remain respectful during their interaction with him. Though the customer does not object to the enforcement of the rule that bans people from standing in the doorway, he enacts masculinity to announce that he dislikes *how* Marquis iterates the rule. The customer continues to perform masculinity by escalating the tension and announcing that he is not intimidated and then challenging Marquis to a competition to determine who has bigger muscles.

Throughout the interaction, the men’s voices were monotone but their words and gestures coupled with the absence of smiles and laughter suggested to me that they could potentially get into a physical altercation. There is also the possibility that the threat of a physical altercation was part of the men’s performance given how easily and abruptly the encounter was resolved. Nevertheless, these performances of masculinity are shaped by the barbershop as a black male and communal space in that the men can address each other about an act of disrespect without great hostility and without anticipating that the confrontation will escalate into a physical altercation. They are also shaped by Crown Crafters as a particular kind of barbershop wherein Sam only has to ring a bell and the

other barbers will enforce the rules of the place and in effect manage all customers irrespective of their muscular condition or physical shape.

There are also moments in the barbershop when the men insult each other once he feels disrespected. Marquis says to his customer, “Do me a favor and don’t lift your hands like that again. It makes me nervous. And your hands are ashy. Do you want me to put some lotion on them? Black people!” Sam interjects, “Now that was disrespectful. You’ve gone too far. Don’t disrespect the man.” Marquis replies, “Now when he was attacking me, nobody said anything. I say something to him and I’m wrong.” Marquis repeatedly tells his customer to keep his hands down and underneath the cape as he resumes to cut the man’s hair. He announces, “It makes me nervous when you move your hands around too much. You didn’t notice that I’ve purposely placed the cape over your hands at least three times?”

The vignette exemplifies how the barbershop as a place structure interaction such that it is acceptable for Marquis to say that he feels threatened by and point out a cosmetic flaw in the physical appearance of his customer, without having his masculinity questioned. In this space where Marquis is already in the process of caring for and altering another man’s physical appearance, it is permissible for him to behave in a non-traditional masculine manner and jokingly offer to lotion the man’s hands. Marquis partly enacts a different kind of masculinity, one defined by a man’s willingness to care for other people and embrace his more sensitive emotions by announcing his nervousness (e.g. “real men cry”). Still, as Marquis alerts the customer of his ashy hands and offers to put lotion on them, these gestures are retaliatory and are framed as an insult, which is

more in line with the hetero-normative masculinity that is commonly enacted in Crown Crafters.

PART II: CONSTRUCTING THE BARBERSHOP AS A GENDERED INSTITUTION VIA GENDERED SCRIPTS IN THE PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF WOMEN

WOMEN IN THE BARBERSHOP, HOW WOMEN BEHAVE, AND PHILOSOPHIES ABOUT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Although Crown Crafters barbershop is a predominately male space, women occasionally accompany their spouse or son to get a haircut. Mothers tend to escort their sons to the barbershop and return to pick him up after he has received a haircut. Less often, women customers get a low caesar cut, the back of their hair shaved low, or a short stylish haircut. First, I present data that shows how the men interact with women in the barbershop. Then I describe how the men discuss their ideas of how women behave and how they should interact with their spouse in the absence of women (me being the exception).

On one occasion, two women enter the barbershop and ask Marquis to give them a “shape up,” which in their cases meant to evenly cut the ends of their hair and closely shaving the lower back of their heads. Marquis tells them that they will have to wait until he has finished with his current customer, which might take at least thirty minutes. The one woman complains, “That is too long to wait. Can’t you cut his hair faster and finish sooner?” The other woman adds, “Yeah, you knew we were coming in today. Why aren’t you ready for us?” The other woman adds, “We have other things to do!” Marquis replies, “You are acting like angry black women. And I don’t appreciate you

teaming up on me. Okay, watch your tone and control yourselves.” The women, who have yet to have a seat in the waiting area, laugh at Marquis.

One woman says, “So, Marquis what is going on with you and my sister? You know she likes you and I know you like her.” Marquis responds, “There is nothing going on with us.” The other woman says, “Where is my husband, Sam Jr.?” She walks over to a picture of him on the wall and says, “I love this picture. Can I have it?” Her friend and Marquis laugh and shake their heads from side to side.

The women are friendly to me and I eventually ask why they do not allow their beautician to cut their hair. One of the women exclaims, “Because she will fuck it up! She’s good with other stuff but not cutting.” Sam enters the shop and greets the women. He asks, “Why don’t you or your brother come to me to get your haircut anymore?” The woman replies that she does not know why her brother does not patron the shop any longer without offering an explanation for why she has switched barbers. Sam soon exits the barbershop and both women along with Marquis agree that Sam does not know how to cut hair.

In this interaction, Marquis frame the women as being impatient and aggressive. He performs (black) masculinity by hurling the insult of “angry black women” and advising them that they need to act in a more disciplined manner. We also see that the women in the barbershop present an opportunity for them to flirt and attempt to make romantic connections with men. One woman performs gender to gawk over and openly proclaim her affection for Sam Jr., while the other tries to generate a dating relationship between her sister and Marquis.

The encounter also shows how some women disregard the prohibition of cursing to say an expletive so offensive that male offenders within the space rarely utter it; and the woman does not offer nor is she instructed to pay the one-dollar fine. Though there are instances wherein men curse in the barbershop and do not pay the fine, they often pause soon after and look around to see if anyone has noticed the offense. Indeed, the barbers and customers monitor and police each other and enforce the rules; but no one makes the woman aware of her offense.

Additionally, while the male customers' talk tends to be egoistic and they occasionally tease Sam about all of rules and his quirky ways, the women gossip about his barbering skills, which is a seemingly taboo topic for the men. The women stand throughout the entire interaction, eventually exit, and return several minutes later to check if Marquis is available to cut their hair. These ideas all suggest that the barbers (or at least Marquis in this instance) acknowledge that the women interpret the space differently and therefore they do not reverence it, the rules, or Sam to the same degree as male customers do, if at all.

The barbers tend to treat women in the barbershop with a lighthearted contempt but the male customers are more likely to flirt with them. On a different day, one of the women from the above interaction enters the barbershop again. She gives Marquis a hug, tells him that she misses him, and then she says hello to everyone in the shop. Robert, a regular customer announces, "You have to greet everyone the same way." She replies, "No, Marquis is special to me." Sam Jr. walks over and gives her a hug. She walks out the door and says, "You had your chance. You blew it!" Robert mocks her then says, "That sounds like some kid shit. That's something you say when you're a teenager in

high school. How old is she, like fifteen (years old)?" The men laugh and Slim replies, "No, she's about twenty (years old)." Robert teasingly asks Marquis, "What did you do to be special to her?" He replies, "It's not like that. I've known her since her brother was getting his hair cut at the children's shop down the street."

The woman enacts gender and makes a performance out of giving Marquis and Sam Jr. a hug. Robert responds by flirtatiously demanding that she greet him (and the other men) in a similar manner. She draws more attention to her womanhood by referencing the dating relationship that her and Sam Jr. could have had potentially, which Robert deems to be immature. The vignette illustrates that when women are in the barbershop (unaccompanied by a spouse or child), the male customers may either act kind or flirtatious towards her. And he commonly asks the barber to describe his relationship to her with the assumption that she is either romantically involved with or a relative of the barber. He may wait until she departs or ask the barber in her presence, but rarely will he ask her directly, as is the case with Robert. It is as if speaking to her directly is potentially offensive to the barber depending on his relationship to her; or perhaps it indicates that women do not have the right to speak in this space. Still, the men's tone reveals that he wants to assess if she is available for him to pursue romantically or at least flirt with in the space.

While Sam Jr., Slim, and Marquis each mentioned having a girlfriend at various points throughout my research, I never saw any of their significant others enter the barbershop. Sam Jr. is the exception in that he dated several women who lived in the neighborhood and they would regularly stand in front of the barbershop and gesture to him to meet her outside.

Slim's relationship to the women in his life seems to be more complicated. He has shown me video footage of him squirting his ex-girlfriend with a high power water gun at 3am in the morning and also a video clip of him smashing her face in cake after he sang happy birthday to her. However, I have seen him leaving the barbershop to run errands for her and he has described that he still acts as a quasi handyman when she needs things maintained around her apartment. Slim does the same for his sister, who tends to call the barbershop (he does not have a cellular phone) and asks for him using his birth name after which he usually leaves immediately and announces that he will return soon.

When women are not in Crown Crafters barbershop, which is most commonly the scene, the men make harsh and stereotypical assessments about women's behavior and characteristics. This is the case when Calvin, a regular customer at Crown Crafters leads the men in a lively discussion about how women behave and how men should interact with them. He laments that teenage mothers attend parties and leave their child with the grandmother too often. He says, "Grandmas are the new mommies. How are you going to go to the club, hang out in the street all night, and you have a kid? Then they have the nerves to get mad when the grandma doesn't want to babysit. The grandma has raised her kids and now it's time for her to go out whenever she likes; and the girls complain about that."

The men nod in agreement with Calvin as he moves on to say that in current times, it is unacceptable for men to verbally abuse women; and that women are more likely to verbally abuse their child when she has had a disagreement with the child's father. He says, "If she's mad at you then she will take it out on the kid. Especially if the

child looks like the Dad, then you can forget about it! She'll be like 'Come here!'" He stands up and pretends to yank a child's collar.

He then says that women are too emotional and tend to have mood swings, which is why it is understandable that they are likely to suffer from post partum depression. He adds, "They are willing to have sex too soon after giving birth. I'd rather wait to avoid all of the blood and stitches." The men laugh and another customer chimes in, "You are right about them being too emotional. What's the show where they give your home a makeover? Once my girl started crying during an episode. I walked from her place to the store over here, went back, and twenty minutes later, she was still on the floor balling (crying) with her face all swelled up."

The men eventually discuss their mothers whom they generally speak of with great respect. Calvin brags, "I don't have a problem picking up a broom. My mother made me clean the house when I was growing up. So, I don't mind cleaning the house for my girl. Your girl is a reflection of you. If she is dirty then you are dirty." A different customer adds, "I don't understand how brothers own a Lexus but their mother still lives in Albany (a nearby housing projects). You look foolish. You need to take care of your mother first and then ride around in a fancy car." Calvin comments, "Man, the last time I was in the (housing) projects, someone asked me if I wanted to be a part of a line up for \$25. I'm not a crack head!" The men laugh as they shake their heads in disgust.

In the absence of women (besides me), Calvin describes black teenage mothers as immature and irresponsible when they choose to attend a social gathering rather than stay home at night with their child. As part of his critique, he identifies a sort of phenomenon

where young black women are expected to provide childcare for their grandchildren instead of being able to bask in the freedom that reemerges once their children are adults. Also, the implication is that childcare is the work of women, be it voluntary or involuntary (as in the case of young grandmothers). While he criticizes some of the choices that young teenage mothers make, he omits the father and grandfather as having a role in childrearing. In this instance, the predominately male space makes it more appropriate for the men to identify what they perceive to be a problem spot among black women without analyzing the potentially positive role that men can play as fathers and husbands to assuage the situation.

When the men describe their role in relation to women, they frame themselves as having power to control her behavior and as a rational decision maker. Calvin and a couple other customers characterize women as too emotional (i.e. she may cry hysterically while watching a television show), unstable (i.e. she will mistreat the child after a disagreement with the child's father), and unable to make rational decisions (i.e. women are willing to have intercourse too soon after childbirth). Therefore, according to the men, women's emotions, behavior, and bodies require management from men who have realized that verbal abuse is unacceptable behavior and who can abstain even though a woman may be willing to have sexual intercourse. The men perform masculinity as they bond over stereotypes and their perceptions of how black women behave, which makes them seem morally superior to the opposite sex.

The men are critical of other black men only when they discuss how to interact with their mothers. Unlike the previous discussion where the role of men as caretakers was omitted from the conversation and criticism of black mothers, the male customers

frame “taking care of your mother” (in this case financially) as one of their main responsibilities and defining characteristics as a black man and son. This is the case to the extent that the men say they should help their mother move into a better housing situation before buying themselves an expensive car, otherwise the status that may come along with owning a fancy car is void and shameful.

The men also use the predominately male space as an opportunity to complain about the financial costs of dating. One customer laments, “Dating is too expensive. I just spent one hundred dollars on a date the other night.” Several other customers ask for a detailed account as to how he spent the money. He replies, “The movie cost about thirteen dollars for each of us. Then she wanted (to buy and eat) ice cream bon-bons. And then I took her to a seafood restaurant for dinner.” One of the men asks, “Did you even eat anything?” He replies, “Nope!” Calvin adds, “You know, girls like to eat at McDonalds, but not all of the time.” The men snicker.

The men also give each other relationship advice. Mr. Toby asks, “So, Little Sam, how is it going with the young ladies?” Sam Jr. emphatically replies, “Nothing is going on with the ladies.” Mr. Toby replies, “You need to get yourself an old woman on welfare. This way you can collect two checks. She’ll take good care of you.” Sam Jr. replies, “No, that’s okay.”

The first interaction shows how part of what it means to perform masculinity outside of the barbershop is to cover the expenses, no matter how high, of a woman when he is on a date with her. Whereas the second interaction demonstrates that for a young man, such as Sam Jr., it may be acceptable and perhaps even a smart hustle for him to keep his job as a barber and initiate a romantic relationship with an older woman who

may be willing to share her (welfare) money with him. As the male customers advise each other that McDonalds is an acceptable location for a date (one of my adult ex-boyfriends must have heard similar advice in a different barbershop) and to become a financial parasite to a significantly older woman, I can only hope that these are a performance of masculinity in the space.

As the men discuss their various philosophies on dating and marriage, they describe their issues concerning commitment and identify what they believe women need in order to be content in a relationship. For instance, Sam says, “Everything (in the relationship) will be nice for a while and then she’ll say, ‘I need more attention.’ I believe in giving each other space in a relationship. You know, give each other love and give each other their own space.”

When speaking about his logic for deciding to remain in a relationship, or not, Robert, a longtime customer of Crown Crafters says, “If the bad days outweigh the good, then it’s not worth it. But if the good outweighs the bad, then okay.” He adds, “It gets boring after you live with someone. You have to see them every day. And it’s like, okay, I’m bored. That’s why I’m telling you to wait to get married because if you wake up and you’re bored, you can just get up and leave. You don’t have to worry about getting a divorce. There is no paper binding you two together. It gets nasty when you get a divorce.”

Both of the men provide an even keeled philosophy on relationships in that Sam emphasizes the importance of love and Robert frames marriage as a serious commitment that people should only enter into after careful deliberation. Still, they both provide

insights into the circumstances that men perceive to be irreconcilable. Sam is critical of women and paints them as overly demanding for his attention and affection. And Robert considers boredom to be a plausible reason to terminate (rather than commit to maintaining the excitement in) a relationship.

At one end of the spectrum, and unlike Sam and Robert, who are ambivalent about long-term relationships, are men who wholeheartedly endorse marriage. Calvin begins to lecture Keith (a rare customer and an ex-boyfriend) on the benefits of marriage after Keith tries to convince me not to get married. Calvin says, "Marriage isn't all bad. Don't tell her not to get married. It can be good for some people. I've been with my wife for fourteen years." Keith replies, "I know, my parents have been married since high school."

Calvin continues, "Marriage is about taking care of each other. It's a partnership. We've been together so long that we know when the other person is broke. I can just look at her and tell she doesn't have any money. So, if you know I'm broke and I'm a man who usually takes care of things, why should I have to ask you to give me money? (She should) just leave it on the dresser in the morning. I shouldn't even have to ask. And that is what marriage is about."

He adds, "Sometimes it gets hard. My boys call me up and they want me to go out with them to the club. I think about it but what am I going to find out there? Nothing but trouble! It's the same thing--you go out there, dance, have a good time, and then there's trouble. The next day my boys tell me that it played out exactly how I said it would. I can't be bothered with that anymore!"

In this vignette, Calvin describes how he has outgrown the dating and club scene and that he enjoys the partnership, security, and support that his wife provides him in their marriage. Though he describes marriage as a functional institution and a positive experience for him (as well as for some others), he speaks of the benefits of marriage in terms of financial support. His description of how “in tune” or connected he is to his wife sounds endearing, but then he shifts the focus to himself and how she should behave towards him rather than how he should treat her when they are in a similar situation of needing money.

His admittance to the men that sometimes he has little to no money and needs financial aid from his wife, and that he is unwilling to dabble in living a bachelor’s lifestyle may subject his masculinity to scrutiny. But he asserts his masculinity to frame this as a rare occurrence (i.e. I’m a man who usually takes care of things), which makes it acceptable for him to expect that his wife give him money. Likewise, he emphasizes his maturity and ability to avoid the “trouble” that will inevitably occur if he socializes with his male friends at nightclubs. Calvin’s choice to remain devoted to his wife and their marriage keeps his masculinity in tact.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are men who seemingly have minimal, if any respect for the sanctity of marriage. A customer complains to the guys that his girlfriend is too demanding. He says, “I’m talking to this girl. She got upset with me because she asked me to take her to the movies and I told her no. I don’t want my wife to see me. Now, she knows I’m married. Why is she going to ask me to take her to the movies?”

A couple of minutes later, he turns to me and asks for my phone number. I reply, “Aren’t you married? And then you’re going to get upset with me when I ask you to take me to the movies.” Everyone in the shop laughs. The customer immediately begins to talk about something else when Mike, a regular customer interrupts and says, “I’m sorry, but she shut you down hard!”

Whereas the previous interaction demonstrated how some of the men say they are committed to remaining faithful to their wives, this interaction shows that for some of the other men, an extramarital affair is tolerable. In a performance of masculinity (perhaps even hyper-masculinity) for the men in space, the customer eagerly divulges information about his extramarital affair without any sign of guilt or shame. As he describes his situation, he proudly identifies the moral dilemma to be his girlfriend’s request to attend a movie, rather than his infidelity. And no one in the audience seems surprised or appalled upon hearing of the man’s infidelity, nor do any of the onlookers scold him for his behavior.

In a performance of masculinity for me, the cheating patron asks for my phone number even after seeing me observe the discussion. I doubt that he had any interest in dating me. Perhaps he wanted to prove that he could admit to being unfaithful in my presence and still confidently ask for my contact information as an extension of his performance for the other men in the audience. Still, the encounter demonstrates that in a predominately male space, the customers will take for granted sharing in some kinds of negative stereotypes about men’s behavior in relationships such as infidelity.

Finally, in the absence of non-black women, Marquis and Sam describe their racial preferences when dating. Marquis says that what he likes most about black women is that they are strong. He admits that he has dated non-black women in the past. When I asked what were his general thoughts about women of other races, he replied, “They are obedient.” He goes on to proudly say, “black people are the only ones who can make a pretty baby with any other race, Asian or white. I’ve never seen an ugly mixed baby. I’m sure they are out there. But I’ve never seen one.”

Sam, however, laments that there are few eligible black women. He says, “There aren’t too many women for me to choose from, unless I go into the white cloud. But I would never date outside of my race; well, only an Oriental because they have never enslaved my people.” He says that he would feel “below” a white woman if he dated her. Then he shares, “I like tall and thin women; but black women don’t eat healthy. They are fat and don’t take care of their bodies.” On a different occasion, after Sam has learned of my interracial relationship he reiterates this attitude and says, “I would never date a white woman or a black woman after she has dated a white man. I don’t want to catch their germs, sorry.”

Both Sam and Marquis frame their romantic relationships in terms of power and domination. According to Marquis, he is attracted to Asian and white women because they are obedient; while on the other hand, Sam says that he would not date a white woman because he would feel inferior to her, which shows how he has developed and internalized a complex of feeling less than equal to whites. These attitudes suggest that Sam and Marquis want and perhaps need to feel superior to the woman that he is in a relationship with; and that this is a component of how they define their black masculinity.

Marquis offers a stereotypical and problematic categorization of the qualities he finds attractive in women depending on their race; that is, he is attracted to strength in black but not Asian or white women. While he frames black women's strength as a positive trait (and I would agree), the negative connotation associated with this construction is that she is less feminine than women of other races. And if she is "too strong" it may be detrimental to her chances of a long-term relationship with a black (or any) male, who may be intimidated by her intelligence, independence, and success. This typecast then, has a potentially negative racial and gender charge to it similar to the effect of a white person describing a black person as "articulate."

Sam eliminates white women as a possible dating pool because of the historically tumultuous race relations between blacks and whites in the US; not necessarily due to any particular fault of her own. But he deems many black women ineligible as romantic partners because of their physical attributes and the personal choices he says they make. Sam expresses a stronger commitment to intra-racial dating than Marquis, however, he constructs them as obese and slovenly. On one hand, this suggests that Sam may perceive black women as individuals, but he does not respect their independence and right to make personal choices (i.e. let her eat whatever she wants). On the other hand, he may perceive black women as unwilling to make the best choices for themselves, even if she has power to do so (i.e. eat healthy).

PERFORMING (BLACK) MASCULINITY IN FRONT OF A BLACK WOMAN RESEARCHER

It was somewhat common for a male customer to acknowledge my presence in the barbershop in their greeting to me. For instance, they may refer to me as "miss," "young

lady,” or they may nod and smile at me as they enter or exit the barbershop. With exception of one instance where a customer refused to show pornography in the presence of a “lady”, it was rare for the men to explicitly monitor themselves or be monitored because of me. The data that follows illustrates how some of the men in the barbershop performed masculinity with the explicit acknowledgement of my presence as a black woman and/or as a black woman researcher in the space.

Harrison, a regular customer at Crown Crafters asks, “Sam, is she with you? She looks like your type; young, pretty, nice frame, and smart.” Sam abruptly denies this, “No, she is not with me. And you don’t know what you are talking about. I don’t have a type.” Harrison exclaims, “Sure you do! Maybe you just don’t want me to talk about it in front of the lady.” Sam jokingly replies, “I don’t want you putting my business out there. I’m going to have to ask you to leave the shop.”

I ask the man, “Well, what is your name?” Sam interjects, “If you tell her your name, she can have you arrested. She works for the FBI.” I say, “Don’t tell him that. And he asked my name first. So, now he has to tell me his name.” Sam asks me, “Did you tell him your name? Don’t tell him.” Harrison says, “Why can’t I know her name if she isn’t with you?” Sam responds, “Stop saying that. She isn’t with me.” The man says, “Well I figured she must be with you, sitting so close under you!” I say, “I’m not that close to him. I am watching him cut hair.” Sam says, “Leave her alone, she’s married.” Harrison says, “Oh, now I see the ring. Let me see the stone.” After I show him my ring, he says, “That’s nice. I thought you were jiving me! You don’t have any kids? I can tell by your shape.”

He eventually spews his philosophies about women and relationships. He says to me, "I think women should kill their men. I'm serious. Women stick with their men but when she gets older the man leaves her for a woman your age. She shouldn't have to take that. Just shoot him." A few minutes later he says, "You know that the man is the head and the woman follows. That is what it says in the Bible. Are you a Christian? Then you know what I'm talking about." I say, "I know what you are talking about but my husband doesn't lead me and I don't lead him. We are partners." Harrison asks me, "Do you go to (dance) clubs?" I say, "No." He replies:

"Well, you look like a lady. You carry yourself well. I was at the club the other week and I just watched these young girls in their twenties, (he bends over forward) whining up on the men and dancing all nasty. I just stand back and look at them like this (he makes a face as if he smells a foul odor).

This one woman came over to me and she asked, 'Why are you looking at me like that?' I just kept the look on my face. She said, 'Oh, you are from the old school?' She could tell by the look on my face. Then she says, 'I work all day. I'm an independent woman and I can party if I want to.' Live for the weekend, you know.

I like a woman who is a lady. You know, she's not someone different when you take her home or move in with her. Did you see that movie, "I'm Gonna Get You Sucka"? The woman was taking off..." I interject, "Yes, she took off her leg, hair, arm..." He says, "She took off everything! And that is what women are like today. They're just fake and phony. That's why I say, you can never really know someone."

He shares that he has been married twice and that he is still legally married to his second wife even though they have been separated for over five years now. He says:

"My second wife still sends me birthday cards. She has even asked me to move in with her but we don't mesh well. If I say turn down this block, I want her to just turn. My ex-wife, my second wife, maybe thought that I thought she was not that smart; because I could say, 'Don't go around the corner.' And she would say, 'Don't tell me what to do. I know what I'm doing.' Everything was a struggle or an argument. I want a woman that's not that smart. I want a woman who just listens to whatever I say, like an Asian woman."

Harrison ends his discussion with me by inquiring about any eligible aunts or sisters that I may be able to introduce to him. Sam says, “You’d better stop. She doesn’t know you’re joking.” He says, “Of course she knows that I’m joking. She looks like a smart woman, who can tell when I’m joking or not.” Sam replies, “She doesn’t know you. How is she supposed to know you’re joking?” He replies, “Look at me. Do I look like I need her to hook me up with somebody? I got a woman waiting to take me out tonight.” He looks at me and asks, “You know I’m joking, right?” I say, “I don’t know.” Sam says, “See.”

Harrison enacts masculinity in several ways. One, he asks Sam about the reason for my presence in the barbershop rather than asking me directly. He also assumes and repeatedly teases that Sam and I are in a romantic relationship. He gets upset when Sam tries to prevent him from learning my name once he has verified that I am not “with” Sam (i.e. Why can’t I know her name if she isn’t with you?). This supports my explanation as to why men tend not to speak directly to women in the barbershop without clearance from a barber. Two, he frames women as being passive and inferior in comparison to men but his sense of morality is somewhat contradictory. That is, he says women should take control and seek retribution from her estranged husband by killing him; but then he references scripture to justify his statement that women should allow men to lead her. Third, he constructs his second wife’s independence as an undesirable trait and cites this as the reason for their failed marriage. He expresses the sentiment that he prefers to become romantically involved with women who are less intelligent than him so that he can dominate her. He is self-righteous in his criticism of black women’s

authenticity in terms of their physical appearance and personalities and his preference for Asian women.

Harrison's age adds another dimension to his performance of masculinity for me in the space, which is that he eagerly shares his chauvinistic perspective despite the unflattering impression he makes of himself. And he justifies his attitudes and how he says he interacts with women based on his life experiences (e.g. having been married twice), which helps him decipher the difference between a woman in a (dance) club and a "lady." As a black man, who is significantly older than me, he performs masculinity by inquiring about my eligible female relatives even after he has disclosed some of his chauvinistic perspectives and that he is still legally married. He maintains his performance by pointing to his attractiveness and claiming that a young woman is "waiting" to go on a date with him as evidence that he was obviously joking about needing my assistance with meeting a woman.

When questioning me directly about my presence in the barbershop, some black male customers engage me in a friendly conversation with an undertone of self-importance. On a day when there were only two customers present, I took photographs of the barbershop. A young man who appears to be in his late twenties, gets a haircut from Sam Jr. and asks the topic of my "thesis." He expresses surprise that I am pursuing a doctoral degree. He says, "You look like you're still in college. You don't even look *that* old. Can I ask your age?" I tell him my age and he exclaims, "Young and beautiful! Boy. You make me want to go to college. Those girls are the best things about school. I'd go back just to look at them." Sam Jr. laughs and agrees.

The customer asks, “So, are you single?” I say, “No, I’m engaged.” He says, “Wow! You are blessed. Because you know some people get so caught up in their work that they don’t have time for love. But you seem to have manage everything.” Sam Jr. adds, “Yeah and she’s nice.” The customer then asks where I reside and he says that he is certain that my parents are proud of me. He says, “A sister who is smart and beautiful and getting married. That is rare. You are the total package. You are truly blessed!”

This interaction shows how some men in the barbershop interacted with me once they found out that I was a researcher. At first, the customer has a tone of self-importance during his interrogation of me. I had suspected that he has some higher education (i.e. he asks about my “thesis”) and he confirms this later when he objectifies women and says he would return to college “just to look at the girls.” His interrogation seems to be less about mere curiosity and more about making an assessment of my academic progress or status.

But his tone changes from being slightly condescending to complementary and even flirtatious. This customer and I appear to be within a similar age range, which shapes the interaction in two ways. One, unlike Harrison, he indicates a little bit of interest in my eligibility. Two, he says that knows my parents are proud of me rather than expressing his own sense of racial pride in my academic pursuits, which black people who are older than me tend to do. Still, he emphasizes our race commonalty by referring to me as “sister” in the context of identifying what he believes to be a problem spot for some single, black women with successful careers. (Objectively, single status is only a “problem” if the woman is trying to but cannot find a partner and she defines this as troubling to herself.)

Sometimes men that I know enter the barbershop and on this particular occasion, one of my childhood “boyfriends,” Keith is present. He lectures me about marriage being a serious commitment that he thinks I am not ready for and then proceeds to ask about having a relationship with me. He says, “What about you and me? Can you have a man on the side? It’s not cheating or being unfaithful.” He eventually says that he feels like I am cheating on him just because my fiancé is white.

I become animated and reply, “Woah, it would be different if Marquis (as a black man) said something like that to me, I would not get so upset. But coming from you, it is different because we dated. I tried you and we didn’t work out, not because you’re black but because you cheated on me. So, I know what you have to offer and I’m not interested.” Keith sheepishly says, “I’ll deal with you later.”

Marquis turns to look at me and says, “Dang, I didn’t know you had it in you. Your voice totally changed from (he speaks softly as if to imitate me) to (he speaks loudly and moves his neck and hands). You were moving your neck like this (moves it in an S shape). You know how Beyonce has an alter ego, Sasha? You’ve got one too and her name is Keisha!” He says to Keith, “I didn’t know she was going to give it to you like that!”

Once Keith has finished getting his hair cut, he insists to speak with me privately outside of the barbershop. His tone is softer and he apologizes for his words and behavior in the shop. He waves his hand at the front door and says, “That’s just talk. I didn’t mean that. I don’t care that your fiancé is white. I know you’ll always have love (i.e. platonic) for me. And I’ll always have love for you.” We proceeded to discuss the

latest happenings in the lives of our immediate families and mutual friends from our old residential neighborhood.

My encounter with Keith in the barbershop presents an opportunity for me to witness how he performs black masculinity in the space and it allows the barbers to get a glimpse into some aspects of my personality that I try to mute when I am in the field. Keith acts as if he knows better than me and he advises me that I am not ready to get married, which is a manifestation of the men's sentiment that women need to be managed by men. He also behaves as if he is interested in having an extramarital affair (he is married with children) with me but this proposition is so absurd that I doubt he is serious about it and instead it is a performance for the space. Lastly, he enacts black masculinity to reference my interracial relationship as grounds for "cheating" on him; that is, my lack of commitment to intra-racial dating is an offense to all black men.

Keith offers key insight into the pressure that the barbershop as a place exerts upon him to behave and perform a kind of black masculinity. Outside of the barbershop, Keith denies that he disapproves of my interracial relationship and he is apologetic for disrespecting my relationship by proposing that we have an extramarital affair. Rather than conceptualize Keith's behavior in the barbershop as a complete performance or interpret his presentation to me outside as a reflection of his "true self," this interaction reveals the power of place to demand and shape how the men perform black masculinity for each other in the space.

DISCUSSION: BLACK MASCULINITY IN THE BARBERSHOP

Researchers have focused on how boys perform gender in comparison to girls (Thorne 1993; Martin 1998); and black masculinity has been researched independent of a

reference group (Hunter and Davis 1992) and in comparison to white men (Lamont 2000). This study, however, provides a within group and across age analysis of how black men socialize male children into performances of (black) masculinity in interaction, in the barbershop. In addition, this study shows how the barbershop as a predominately male space, provides black boys an opportunity to speak, behave, and act as young adults. That is, the barbershop is a place where black male children, as young as two years old, can develop, encounter, and rehearse the scripts that they hear from adult black men (cf. Kondo 1990).

The data illustrates how false differences between the sexes are challenged in the space (West and Zimmerman 1987). Women patrons complicate the predominate conceptualization of the barbershop as a gender exclusive place. The advertisement of Crown Crafters as a unisex barbershop on its awning, coupled with the presence of women patrons in the barbershop, are a direct challenge to the notion that the hair care service for black women is drastically different from black men. Given this debunker, the men work to “do” gender differently than women in the shared space, and to restore the integrity or ideal of the barbershop as a traditionally male space. They accomplish this in part by talking about women in stereotypical ways and emphasizing that women are and deserve to be subordinate to men. This study demonstrates how gendered bodies invalidate false dichotomies between sex categories and how the dominant group employs gendered performances to compensate for the similarities between the sexes once it becomes salient in a given setting (cf. Gieryn 2000; Martin 2004). I also show how the men’s work, in effect, constructs the barbershop as a gendered institution.

Additionally, my findings show how a gendered hierarchy is established and maintained in the barbershop (Connell 1995; Gieryn 2000). When women are present in the barbershop, the men adhere to an informal code, which involves not speaking directly to her and instead asking a man to account for her being in the barbershop. In contrast, the barbershop as a pre-designated male space grants young black boys the privilege to speak and behave autonomously. This study illustrates how the prescribed and appropriate behavior in the black barbershop, which is that each male is expected and in some ways is required to participate in talk and interaction, while women do not have the same privilege, creates and maintains a hierarchy across sex categories, irrespective of age (cf. Connell 1995; Gieryn 2000).

The data on sustaining heteronormativity and transgressing masculinity shows that the men police each other's hairstyles, conversations, and accessories as potential indicators of sexual orientation. Interestingly, the data illustrates that black men consider extremely specific behaviors to indicate homosexuality, which are just a slight adjustment from acts that are associated with a "macho" kind of masculinity. For instance, Slim ridicules Lawrence for wanting to inscribe his girlfriend's name in his hair. Yet, for some black men of a similar working class background, getting a woman's name tattooed on their body is acceptable, a sign of masculinity, and a display of honor, commitment, or affection for the woman.

And as Sam backpedals his statement that a Schwinn bicycle with a basket on it is feminine, he carefully notes that the location of the basket (the front versus the back of the bicycle) and use of the bicycle (i.e. going grocery shopping versus an adventurous ride) are indicators of masculinity. These data show how the men's nuanced ideas about

how to signal a kind hetero-normative black masculinity are policed, affirmed, and codified in the space.

The data on black boys in Crown Crafters demonstrates that the barbers interpret their role in the shop as extending beyond offering hair care service and on to providing guidance to their young black male customers. The barbers, who are significantly older than the children, assert masculinity by using their power and influence to mentor, control, and scold and chastise young boys. There is a sense in which the barbers behave as if they are filling in the role of absent fathers and/or they are actively assuming the role of a positive black male figure for the boys. The data illustrates that the barbers understand the chastisement of children as part of their professional, moral, and/or personal responsibility in the space.

Each barber has their own means of interacting with children, particularly those who misbehave in the space. Slim who says he does not have any children, has the most complicated relationship to kids in the barbershop. He is kind enough to entertain kids with a movie or cartoon while they receive a haircut (which also helps to minimize them squirming around) or while they just wait for their father to get his haircut. But he is also prone to play pranks on, antagonize, and chastise children in the space. Marquis may chastise a child by verbally scolding them, warning to report their bad behavior to a parent, or threatening to use physical force to punish them. Sam may also verbally chastise a boy in the shop, but I have never witnessed him threaten the use of corporeal punishment. And Sam Jr., the youngest barber, is the least likely to chastise a child in any form or fashion.

The barbers then seem to understand their role in the place as literally and figuratively grooming black masculinity. When the children behave themselves, the barbers treat them like young adults who can make decisions and speak for themselves. Parents, in general, encourage this relationship and allow their sons to have the performance of his budding masculinity shaped by his barber. Even when a barber verbally and/or physically chastises a child, the parent seldom intervenes.

When children misbehave, the barbers (and parents) tend to scold them. We saw this with the three children who were violent (one child kicks Slim, another kicks and punches Sam Jr., and a third punches his mother and throws a tantrum) and the fourth uses foul language. In all of these incidents, except the child who threw a tantrum, a barber or parent responds by applying or threatening to use physical punishment. These data complement the general endorsement of using corporeal punishment on children and supports the men's framing of this as a "black" practice (as I described in Chapter 1). Moreover, the data illustrates that working class black parents seem to understand the black barbershop as an institution that has authority and perhaps an obligation to assist them in rearing their young sons into respectable black men.

Whereas the barbers tend to speak directly to their boy customers and treat them as an autonomous human being, men rarely speak directly to the women who may be present in the space. Place shapes talk and interaction such that the men are conscious that the barbershop is a predominately male space, which makes it necessary for women to offer an explanation for their presence, if it is not obvious that she is a customer or that she is accompanying her spouse or son. Rather than ask the woman for an explanation as

to why she is in the barbershop, male customers tend to ask a barber about his relationship to her.

This may be out of respect for the man she may be accompanying or visiting in the barbershop, given that customers tend to assume that women in the space are either the spouse or mother to a male customer. This dynamic also demonstrates how talk and interaction shapes the definition of place. That is, the men's avoidance makes women appear as accessories, inanimate objects, and powerless to speak for herself. As the men implement their informal rules on how to engage with women in the space, they in effect, construct the barbershop as a place in which only black men have the privilege to speak.

When women are present in Crown Crafters barbershop, it is an opportunity for the men to perform black masculinity for each other. The male customers act curious and interested in the eligibility of young women who are present in the barbershop. In this space, single women are an opportunity for the men to enact the hetero-normative ideals they say they believe, namely that men "should" be attracted and attempt to swoon a woman at any chance, irrespective of his relationship status.

The male barbers tend to manage women's emotions in the space, frame them as aggressive troublemakers, and treat them with a lighthearted contempt. For instance, when a woman asks a barber how soon he will be able to attend to her or her son, her reasonable question is often met with disdain and the barbers (especially Slim and Marquis) will tell her to "calm down" or "relax." Whereas, the male customers may ask how many "heads" are in front of him and they may even become impatient and express this by teasing the barber about how long it takes him to complete a haircut. Still, the barber almost never responds by managing the male customer's emotions or telling him

what to do (e.g. calm down). These behaviors are compatible with the sentiments that the men express when women are not in the barbershop.

In the absence of women, the men describe themselves as being superior to and therefore they should necessarily have power and control over women. Interestingly, the men all understood their relationships with women in financial terms. In the opening vignette, Slim celebrates his single status and boasts that he has been able to protect his “stuff” from women who he claims are materialistic and destructive. The men speak of the women whom they date in association with the cost of the excursion. They generally complain about the finances they put into entertaining a woman on a date. We saw this as a customer was advised to take his next date to McDonalds, while Sam Jr. was encouraged to seek out an older woman who might supplement his salary. Though Calvin attempts to persuade the men on the benefits of marriage, his selling point is the financial support and security it (via his wife) offers, especially on the rare occasion that he cannot fulfill his role as “provider” of the household. In these conversations, the men emphasized the financial obligations that a man has when in a relationship with a woman without any mention of love, romance, their emotions and feelings or the experience being worthwhile.

Even when the men discuss their mothers, they do so through a lens of money and his financial responsibility to her. The only woman who the black men consider themselves to have an eternal financial obligation to is his mother; and if he fails to ensure the financial and material security of her then it is an act of disrespect to her and himself as a black man. We saw this sentiment as the men berated and scrutinized the masculinity of those who have financial means to buy an expensive car for themselves

but do not assist their mothers to relocate out of poor quality housing projects. While this obligation is grounded in the idea that one should love and respect his mother, the men frame it as having more to do with how they define their black male identity.

CHAPTER 4: RACE, SPACE, AND PLACE

A customer laments, “The barbershop in the sixties was different from the way it is now. It used to play a role in the community, like the church, but there is a different culture now. The environment and even the people are different. Like nowadays, you have to structure people’s behavior, because they do not know how to act in the barbershop. I’ll say this, a barbershop is only as good as its customers.”

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Keith says, “All of us in here (the barbershop) are preachers and teachers. The difference between the church and the barbershop is that the church conceals but the barbershop reveals. We come in here and tell the truth about what is going on in the world. We bring our life experiences with us and share them here in the barbershop.”

In the first quotation, the customer is nostalgic about the role of the barbershop, its ambiance, and the kind of people who once gathered there. His argument about the change in culture and “the people” is a sort of self-critique of black men; and he points to these behaviors as a justification for the recent change in the obligations of the barbershop. Notably, he associates the quality of the barbershop as a place with the character of its patrons and some notion of community, in oppose to the quality of its hair care service offerings. He also frames the barbershop as an institution that is similar to the (black) church in terms of its significance and responsibility to serve “the community.”

Keith’s ideas about the barbershop, however, are more complimentary than that of the other customer. He praises black men for being open and willing to share their personal experiences and perspectives on important matters. Likewise, he applauds the barbershop for being a space where black men can offer their insights to one another. He too compares the barbershop to the church and deems the secular institution as more

honest, inclusive, and effective in fulfilling its obligation to provide moral guidance to black men.

These dueling perspectives shed light on how some of the customers at Crown Crafters think of the barbershop as a place in terms of its institutional significance and obligation to the people and/or community that it serves. In the first comment, the customer frames black male patrons as the problem and the barbershop as a place that should structure their ill behavior. In contrast, Keith celebrates the customers for being saviors and the barbershop as a place that validates the life experiences of every single black man and also grants him agency to propose a solution to the problems they identify.

While existing studies on the black barbershop conceptualize it as a place wherein blacks can be their “true selves,” I argue instead that it is a privileged site for conversation and community making, a kind of “racial backstage” (cf. Goffman 1959) area where they can work on constructing respectable identities *in the absence of white scrutiny*. However, I also show moments in which the barbershop acts as “front stage” (Goffman 1959) for performing blackness because it encourages the men to take up the work of creating a racialized moral identity *in situ* with *other blacks* as the audience. In other words, I conceptualize the barbershop as a racial backstage where blacks can discuss things that they might not in front of whites, but it is also a front stage for them to perform racial authenticity.

In this chapter, I offer new conceptualizations of the black barbershop giving careful consideration to how its race exclusivity, predominately male, and male-on-male hair care service structures talk and interaction in the space. Then I describe how the barbershop fosters “caring relationships” via informal mentorship and also how one

particular customer challenges these kinds and other sociability through his intentional breaches. Lastly, I discuss how the barbershop is a privileged site for establishing self-worth and self-esteem as an individual black man.

TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PLACE AND SPACE

While some research suggests that black men might consider the barbershop to be a respite from performing race (Anderson 2011:196), other research suggests that in a space like the barbershop—where black men are the unmarked racial category—they would feel free to speak of topics pertinent to them and take for granted norms, values and assumptions of a common black experience (Nunley 2011). What then becomes most interesting, and what I show, is when and how the men use race as a lens to interpret the world and, ultimately, when and how the men *become* black in interaction (while they are always nominally black, blackness is not always interactionally relevant) by explicitly invoking ideas of blackness or organizing their interactions around an assumed shared cultural experience as black men in the US (Brubaker et al. 2006).

While research on race and space suggests that place can shape race consciousness, there are few empirical studies of how this unfolds in a racially exclusive place such as the black barbershop. Studies show that the built environment can be imbued with racial understandings, and that space can become racialized by virtue of the bodies that inhabit it (Brubaker et al. 2006; Lipsitz 2007; see also Gieryn 2000). In addition, some race scholars argue that in the space of a “black public sphere” (Holt 1995; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Mills 2006) or “black counter public” (Dawson 2003) such as the barbershop, blacks are aware of and embrace the racial seclusion and will carry on

conversations that they perceive are unsuitable in the company of non-blacks (Nunley 2011).

Some social scientists have focused on sociability in the barbershop, finding that it is a place for black men to discuss ideas concerning gender roles, black masculinity, and culture (Kochman 1981; Franklin 1985; Hunter and Davis 1992; Williams 1993; Murphy 1998; Wright 1998; Alexander 2003) and to express their value orientation (Sanchez-Jankowski 2008). Others have examined its role in the neighborhood and found that it is a central location for black men to network (Wood and Brunson 2010), organize local political movements (Harris-Lacewell 2004; Mills 2006), and participate in underground economies (Wright and Calhoun 2001).

While these studies touch on some of the kinds of talk and interaction that I have described in the previous chapters, they have not detangled the race, gender, and service aspects of the men's experience in the space. Below, I offer new conceptualizations of the black barbershop beyond it being a "safe haven" or "hush harbor" (Nunley 2011) because of its race and gender exclusivity. Instead, I argue that in the barbershop, black men of a shared race, gender, and class status are encouraged to perform for *each other* and deemphasize the hair care aspect of their interaction; and that the space structures these performances by way of its physical design.

RACIAL FRONT STAGE FOR THE BLACK MALE AUDIENCE AND RACIAL BACKSTAGE VIS-À-VIS WHITES

While other studies imply that the barbershop is a place where black men can be their "true" selves, I conceptualize it as a "racial backstage" or a place where they can work on constructing the racial identity that they wish to *perform* to the mainstream (i.e., white)

world. I move beyond other studies of the barbershop to specify when and how shared presumptions about a distinctive black worldview are enacted, policed, and contrasted to whites. Moreover, I show how the men interpret their individual black male identification in the barbershop within the broader framework of their understanding of racial solidarity and morality—what they believe constitutes a respectable black male identity and why all other black men should share these perceptions and behaviors.

I argue that the race exclusivity, predominately male space, and communal legacy of the black barbershop makes it a moral place wherein blackness becomes salient at times and therefore demands that patrons put on the lens of race and work to define, police, and affirm the values they perceive as “black” and enact them. During these moments, the barbershop acts as “front stage” (Goffman 1959) for performing blackness because it encourages the men to take up the work of creating a racialized moral identity *in situ* with *other blacks* as the audience. In other words, the barbershop is a kind of racial backstage to mainstream white society and a front stage for performing blackness. In the barbershop, I find that black men’s interpretation of their race is an overwhelmingly moral project. I show that the barbershop is a place where customers’ physical presentation is literally shaped and their race, gender, and moral identities are figuratively shaped by the talk and interaction in the shop.

The characteristics of the barbershop as a racial exclusive space allows the men to take up blackness as a moral project in which they: (1) make comparisons to and rebuff presumed stereotypes of an imagined white audience; (2) police and affirm “black” values among an entirely black audience; (3) signal *the kind* of individual black male identity they profess to be to each other (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996); and (4)

work to define the double consciousness today. Also, the barbershop structures interaction in the space such that talk about and socialization into values occurs without hostility—even taking on a tone of jest as shown in some talk of othering and storytelling.

In a broader sense, the work being done is facilitated by the barbershop as a privileged site for community making. Structurally, the geographic location and intra-racial service provided in the black barbershop makes the perception of groupness based on race commonality palpable. Despite recent patterns of gentrification in Crown Heights, the black barbershop's race boundary is effortlessly maintained by customers' physical characteristics (which dictate who qualifies to enter unquestioned) and hair care service offerings. Given that hairstyles are not always interchangeable or easily accessible for all hair textures, potential non-black patrons seldom if ever consider the black barbershop as an option.

The barbershop, then, is an institution wherein once a customer consciously perceives himself as black by engaging in talk and interaction, he is likely to experience feelings of inclusion and race relatedness rather than isolation, marginalization, and exclusion. In the process, one goes from being an individual black man to becoming part of a group of black men who presumably share enough cultural knowledge and/or experiences such that talk and interaction in the barbershop occurs with few breaches or interruptions. The demand to put on a racial performance, to “be” black, is a characteristic of the space that foments racial solidarity.

The notion of “acting black” highlights how blackness is achieved in interaction, and the idea of the barbershop as a “racial backstage” helps specify how it operates as a

moral space that shapes the men's performances. In a place already designated a "black" space, patrons are pressured to achieve blackness with each other in interaction—and thus, these performances of blackness become moralized in context. An individual can encourage and/or demand the audience to put on the lens of race by either taking for granted certain information as background knowledge or assuming common cultural experiences with the expectation that audience members will be able to follow along (see Nunley 2011). Notably, nationality and ethnicity are hardly ever mentioned in the barbershop, which facilitates the heightened talk about blackness rather than other kinds of closely linked identities.

We saw this throughout the previous chapters as the men made a top ten black movies list, discussed the use of corporeal punishment on children, and discussed music just to reference a few examples. An all black audience in the barbershop is expected to know "black" movies, understand what an "old head" is so that they can judge whether or not someone qualifies as an elder, show disgust at the idea of being intimate with a dog or other animal, and in short, participate somehow. This dynamic, the moral demand to be a good audience, is a way for men to perform race, affirm "black" values, and prove their black authenticity (if one is able to follow along without necessarily being "filled in" on taken for granted knowledge and cultural experiences).

MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF A BLACK AND PREDOMINATELY MALE SPACE

The floor to ceiling glass windows and door in the front of Crown Crafters barbershop provides passersby an unobstructed lens into the predominately black male space and for

the black men therein, it frames their view of the social world outside. By virtue of showcasing the black male bodies inside of the space, the glass entryway maintains the racial and gender boundaries of the place (women seldom enter and do not linger in the barbershop). As neighborhood locals pass the barbershop, they inspire and infiltrate the men's discussions on how black people behave in comparison to whites and how men should interact with women. The demarcation of the barbershop as a place where people share the categorical commonalities of race and sex, also sparks conversations of a presumed shared black male experience.

In a sort of *spatial sociability*, the arrangement of furniture in Crown Crafters barbershop encourages customers to initiate and sustain conversations among themselves. The five barbers' chairs are adjacent to one another along one side of the barbershop. Though each barbers' station is furnished with a large mirror, the barber and/or customer tend to keep the chair swiveled away from their reflections and towards the people who are sitting in the waiting area. The "waiting area" consists of a bench and a couple of seats, which forms an "L" shape where the longer side is aligned against the wall and faces the barbers' chairs. While customers wait for their appointment and as they receive a haircut, they face each other and the conversations that they begin while waiting often continues once they are in the barber's chair. This spatial arrangement creates a border that frames a wide, open floor space, which the men use as a stage for their performances and attempt to captivate the readily available audience.

The physical organization of the space shapes the men's performance of masculinity in two significant ways. First, the male customers limit and avoid using the mirror to admire their appearance and/or monitor their barber. The customers generally

seem as if they are not concerned with the maintenance of his physical appearance although this is precisely the reason for his presence in the barbershop. He also seems to completely trust his barber in successfully grooming him, which partly highlights that the consequences of a poor quality haircut or hairstyle are significantly less severe for men than women.

Second, the men literally stand in the middle of the floor and command the attention and participation of the entire audience in the barbershop. And although their stories and tales are egoistic in nature, the men are working to create a collective black male identity. That is, as the men talk about themselves they also police, affirm, and codify what they believe are “black” values and culture; and likewise concerning masculine versus feminine behaviors, and heterosexual versus homosexual norms for black men in general.

Similarly, the interactions and performances in the barbershop are more complex than what at first may seem to be black men convening to spew offensive and insensitive ideologies. This phenomenon crystallized for me once I found myself feeling more entertained than offended by the men’s performances; and I considered the men to be more endearing rather than complete assholes despite my extremely low tolerance for this kind of talk. The men’s perspectives are sometimes grounded in stereotypes, chauvinism, and binary oppositions, which are all problematic.

Yet, it is more important to recognize that these are the readily accessible, what I call, *floating frameworks* that have proven to be an effective way to engage and captivate the black male audience. A floating framework is a preexisting way to conceptualize or package and present a topic given the particularities of the situation to accomplish the

desired effect among the audience. Black men are expected to engage in racial, chauvinistic, and insensitive talk in the barbershop given the significance of place. These floating frameworks are a resource provided by the space in order to confound the caring and emotional components to the serious and necessary work the men do to create a respectable individual and collective black male identity.

Despite who may enter the barbershop, black men remain the primary and most important audience and they adjust their performances accordingly for the black women and children who may enter the space for the moment. For instance, when young black boys are in the barbershop, the barbers alter their behavior and assume an additional role of being a positive male figure and acting as a disciplinarian. The men censor their conversations and are curious about the relationship status of women in her presence. And the men tend to use and incorporate me as a prop in their ongoing performances *for each other*. For example, the men generally do not speak of their infidelities in front of women, but they will do so in my presence and then maybe ask me to go on a date. This is a performance for the predominately black male audience rather than a genuine interest in starting a romantic relationship with me. The predominately male space provides the floating frameworks that structure some of the men's conceptualizations about whites, women, and kids and their "over the top" performances in the barbershop.

SHARED STATUS AND MINIMIZING THE HAIR CARE SERVICE PROVIDED IN THE SPACE

Until this point, I have focused on the race and gender exclusive aspects of the black barbershop. But objectively, Crown Crafters barbershop is primarily a place of business where black men go to receive hair care service from another black man. Here, I

concentrate on the functional use of the place, how the men deemphasize that the barbershop is a place of business, and how masculinity is negotiated in this man-on-man service industry.

The shared race, sex, and class status of the barbers and customers in the barbershop confounds the hair care service aspect of their interaction. Research on status difference in the service industry illustrates how communication barriers, different cultures, and power negotiations between workers and clients foregrounds their encounter as a business transaction (Gimlin 1996; Kang 2003; Bearman 2005; Sherman 2007). These dynamics, in part, places parameters on the conversation, such that in the event that a worker and client speak to one another it is likely a discussion or question limited to the service that is being provided. However, in the black barbershop, where the workers and clients occupy the same race, sex, and class status, the men assume a shared consumption of black culture and are expected to discuss any and all topics, except the hair care service in progress.

For a man, getting a haircut is a relatively small investment in terms of its duration and cost and the likelihood and consequence of receiving a poor quality haircut are also relatively low. These factors are a disincentive for the men to discuss their hair care service with their barber. Instead the barbers and customers work to create the black barbershop as a communal space and they simultaneously deemphasize that it is a place of business where they receive hair care service from another man.

One of the ways that the barbers and customers accomplish this is to minimize their discussion about money. Barbers do not announce and customers (regular and new) do not inquire about pricing. Although there is a price list on display, which is an

accurate approximation of what the various haircuts may cost, I have not ever noticed anyone reference or acknowledge it. Instead, the customer hands over an amount that he believes should suffice for the fee and possible tip, and the barber returns the remaining monies to him. (It is common for a customer to audibly instruct the barber to “keep the change” or for a barber to ask each other for smaller bills.) Although only cash is accepted as payment, there is no cash register in the barbershop and no receipts.

Another technique the men use to minimize that there is a business transaction in progress is to complete the exchange of money discreetly and expeditiously. The customers rarely count money in plain sight and their bills are often folded in half and placed in the palm of the barber’s hand. Likewise, the barbers occasionally verify the amount of money given to him by “fanning” or spreading the bills with one hand.

The men seldom acknowledge that hair care service is in progress. For instance, the regular customers rarely state the hairstyle they desire and the barber does not ask. This is partly due to the long-term, client-customer relationship between a barber and customer; but given that this is the one and seemingly only opportunity for the men to acknowledge the ensuing hair care service, the topic of a customer’s hair style or management of hair is rarely broached. For old and new customers, the presumption seems to be that he will remain relatively constant with his choice of hairstyle and wishes only to have its original quality restored (unlike women).

In the instance that a barber inquires about which hairstyle the customer may want, he tends to avoid using jargon or the specific name of a style. For example, he may ask, “Take it off all around?” instead of “Do you want a medium fade?” This in effect,

makes his specialized training as a barber inconspicuous and also helps to create a more casual rather than professional environment in the space.

Though the customers tend not to look at their reflection during the haircut, the barber always shows his customer the final product by coupling the stationary mirror with a large hand held mirror. The barber proudly makes an event out of swiveling the chair towards the stationary mirror and positioning the portable mirror at several precise angles that allows the customer to view the back of his head. The customer usually approves with a mere nod and he may touch the parts of his face that were groomed.

Notably, the barbers do not screen the incoming customers to determine whether or not he is a viable candidate for a hairstyle. The barber generally executes whichever hairstyle the customer desires (with exception to the exchange between Slim and Lawrence that I discussed in Chapter 3). Along these lines, the barbers have never denied a customer service because of the quality of his hair or deemed a haircut to be incompatible with the customer's hair texture in my presence. The reverse dynamic also minimizes the hair care aspect of the men's exchange, which is that customers generally do not question or attempt to analyze the barber's ability to execute a hairstyle prior to sitting under the razor. While customers may stop by the barbershop to attempt to make a last minute appointment or check their status in the queue, they do not seem to screen the barbers by way of surveying several nearby barbershops, which is the apparent process some black women do with beauty salons in the neighborhood.

THE "CARING SELF" IN PLACE AND IN ACTION

Sociologist, Michele Lamont (2000) finds that black men interpret their altruistic values, morality, and respectability through a lens of race; and that they build a sense of self-worth by orienting themselves in relation to a “caring self” against whites as the “disciplined self.” While Lamont shows how black men take their use of race as a lens for granted, ethnographies on black men and place demonstrate that sometimes race is completely absent from how they interpret their identity and values (Duneier 1994; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974; and Harding 2010). This body of research emphasizes how black men subscribe to mainstream (i.e. white) values and how they encourage others to do so via mentorship.

Though I have emphasized the racial components of the place and the men’s performances and conversations, talk and interaction in the barbershop are not always explicitly about race. And while the men tend to deemphasize the hair care aspect of their time in the barbershop, the place can foster what I call, *caring relationships* via informal mentorship. Below I document how the men at Crown Crafters partake in a long tradition of mentoring relationships and celebrating mainstream values.

CARING RELATIONSHIPS VIA INFORMAL MENTORSHIP

In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how black men in the barbershop interpret and construct their individual and collective racial identity primarily through the assertion of values that blacks in particular allegedly hold or *ought* to hold. However, the men do not always use race as a lens to make sense of the values they say they subscribe to—many times they express value commitments that they perceive to be universal. Since the barbers and customers are not a homogenous group beyond their categorical commonality of race and gender, we see more clearly how individual black men who

appear to not know—or act as though they do not subscribe to—certain values are socialized into them by men who say they do through storytelling and mentorship.

Johnny is a teenage boy who travels from Canarsie to spend time in the barbershop. One evening, his mother calls the telephone in the shop to speak with him. Cory, a man in his mid twenties who is also hanging out in the shop this evening, answers the telephone as it rings. He shouts to Johnny, “Hey Urkel, it’s your mother.”²³ Johnny replies “Okay. I’m coming.” He seems annoyed as he walks towards the front where the telephone is located. The conversation with his mother lasts for about fifteen seconds. Nearly one minute later, the telephone rings again.

Cory yells, “It’s your mother.” Johnny responds, “Tell her to wait.” Cory angrily says, “I’m not telling her anything. Don’t tell me to tell your mother anything like that. *You* shouldn’t even be telling her anything like that.” Johnny does not respond to Cory. Instead, Johnny bows his head quietly as he gathers his belongings and places them in his bag.

This interaction exemplifies the types of informal mentorship that occur at Crown Crafters barbershop. Cory explicitly tells Johnny the appropriate way to act towards his mother. Cory mentors Johnny in that there is no teasing or competitive talk involved in the interaction. The flow of advice is totally unilateral as Johnny is instructed to respect his mother; and Cory himself is unwilling to disrespect Johnny’s mom by telling her to wait. One explanation for Johnny’s adherence to the advice given to him is that he does not want to challenge someone who is older than him.

²³ Urkel is an annoying, nerdy, and pesky black character from the television sitcom Family Matters. Johnny does not remotely resemble Urkel. Perhaps Cory calls Johnny “Urkel” as a means to define his relationship to Johnny as a bully.

“Old head/young head” mentorship also occurs among men whose age gap is not as large as the one between Johnny and Cory. The song “Never Too Much” by Luther Vandross plays aloud and Marquis sings along, “Who wants to go to work to hustle for another dollar?” He says, “You see, even Luther was talking about hustling back then.” He (teasingly) asks his customer “What you know about that?” The customer who appears to be older than Marquis says, “Please, I made babies off of this song.” As onlookers laugh, the customer asks, “Why do you laugh? I’m serious. I made my first child off of this song. After that, I was just shooting them out, one after the other.” Everyone laughs, louder this time.

The customer and Marquis resume their one-on-one conversation. Marquis says, “This young kid sitting in the front of my building had the nerves to say to me, ‘You’re still riding a bike?’” The forty-something year old customer jumps in and says, “What are you suppose to have a car?” Marquis continues his story, “The guy says, ‘You’re riding that bike but I don’t see you getting any thinner.’ Marquis responds, ‘You’re sitting on this stoop every time I leave and come in and I don’t see your pockets getting any bigger’.” Marquis says to the customer, “Can you believe that? This young kid who is not doing anything all day, was trying to make fun of me for riding a bike.”

The customer tells Marquis, “You can’t tell these young kids anything. You shouldn’t have even gone back and forth with him. You used to be able to say something but nowadays, these kids will turn around and shoot you. You can’t mess around with them.” Marquis assuredly restates, “Well I said something.” The customer firmly states, “It’s not worth it. Next time, don’t say anything and just keep walking.”

The customer advises Marquis to not respond to any remarks the guy sitting on the stairway makes. The customer makes a more general statement about how he interacts with younger guys when he talks about the danger of “saying something.” And he makes a statement about the world today in that he seems to think that mentoring young males (e.g. strangers) in this day and age is potentially dangerous, even life threatening. Thus, the customer advises Marquis to not engage in such activity.

Despite the customer saying ‘don’t mentor young males since it is dangerous in current times,’ he in fact mentors a younger male by telling Marquis the appropriate way to interact with “young kids.”²⁴ The customer declares his status as an old head at the beginning of the interaction where he says at the time the song “Never Too Much” came out, he was entering the life cycle of fatherhood while Marquis was not even close to the same stage. Marquis does not simply adhere to the old head’s advice as the teenage boy Johnny does. Rather, Marquis expresses his manhood to the old head by declaring that he *did* say something to the young male sitting on the stoop. But when Marquis makes that statement, he appears defiant. The customer gets the final word when he says, “It’s not worth it”—an expression attached to experience and wisdom.

At Crown Crafters, mentorship happens between “young” and “old” people but also within peer groups. Mike, a regular customer of Marquis is in the wait area when a young woman ushers in a five or six year-old boy. Marquis asks how often Mike “gets

²⁴ The customer’s personal familiarity with Marquis may make mentorship safe and appropriate. The barbershop setting as a place where interactions such as mentorship occur may also make the customer comfortable to mentor Marquis.

his kid” and Mike sheepishly replies that it is not often. Marquis shakes his head in disapproval. Mike adds, “I know. I try man, but his mother makes it hard for me.”

Marquis tells Mike that he should make a greater effort to spend quality time with his son despite the difficulties he may have with the child’s mother. Marquis says, “Trust me. I know. Now is the time to get him (the son) because after a certain age, they do not want to hear anything.”

Marquis says that his fifteen year-old son lived with him up until a few months ago. He and his son had a fight just this past week. Marquis continues, “He decided to live with his mother because she is less strict than me. I made him wash his own draws.²⁵ I gave him chores and responsibility. I was trying to make him into a fucking man.” Mike nods in agreement and emphatically says, “Yeah.” Marquis says that the mother of his child just gives their son money, which swayed the boy’s decision to live with her.

Marquis advises Mike to be a present and active father. Mike does not challenge the validity of the advice but agrees with it instead. The mentorship takes on a conversational tone, where Marquis gives advice and Mike affirms it with nods and “uh huhs”. This tone appears to be largely linked to Marquis and Mike peer status. They are in the same age range and stage in life cycle, which is fatherhood.

A brief interaction between Marquis and another customer exemplifies equal status mentorship. Marquis asks his customer how the job search is coming along. The customer replies, “I’m on vacation.” Marquis says, “Oh ok. So when do you go back (to work)?” There is an awkward silence then the customer says, “Man, I’m on vacation indefinitely!” Marquis says, “Oh, it’s like that. Why don’t you look for work?” The

²⁵ “Draws” in this context is a slang word for underwear.

customer squirms in the chair and remains speechless. Marquis continues, “You need to stop getting high and go look for a job.”²⁶ Marquis then talks about his side gig, which is setting up electronic equipment, and invites the customer to join in.

Here, Marquis encourages his customer to search for a job. Once the customer seems uninterested in working a regular nine to five as he did in his previous job, Marquis suggests an off the books means to earning money. During the conversation, the customer occasionally nods as Marquis talks to him.

Marquis and his customer appear to be about the same age. Moreover, the discussion of job searching has a conversational tone to it. The customer never contests Marquis’s advice to continue searching for a job. In fact, the customer squirms in his seat upon being asked about his job in what appears to be anticipation of Marquis’s disapproval. The customer seems to know what he *ought* to be doing in terms of searching for a job, before Marquis explicitly states them.

PERFORMANCES THAT DECONSTRUCT THE SPACE: BREACHES BY THE ANTAGONIST

One particular customer, Peter refuses to abide by or respect the rules at Crown Crafters. He tends to disobey the rules of the barbershop and use profanity, stand in front of the doorway, or speak in an extremely loud voice. Peter is notorious for his behavior and he makes it his duty to find every opportunity to antagonize Sam with his antics.

²⁶ When the customer enters the shop, the men in the wait area joke that he looks high or as if he just woke up. The customer admits that he just woke up from a nap, but was indeed high from marijuana before he fell asleep.

He seems to take his role as Sam's adversary quite seriously, as I have only witnessed him act disorderly in the barbershop. Peter tends to tease Sam for his attempt to micromanage people's behavior in the space. Sometimes Peter even wages a personal attack against Sam and ridicule his clothing, general philosophies, and his peculiarities. The interactions depicted below illustrate how Peter's unruly behavior fundamentally challenges explicit rules at Crown Crafters; and in doing so, I argue that his performances shed light on the taken for granted norms that structures sociability in the barbershop.

Sam Jr. and several customers gather around his cellular phone to view footage of a man committing suicide by way of a gunshot to the head. Peter says, "They say suicide is a cowardly thing to do, but it takes a lot of guts to do that shit." Sam looks at Peter, and Slim and Marquis cringe in disapproval of the foul language. Peter replies, "What? 'Shit' is not on the box. Sam, you are always trying to tell someone what they can and cannot say. That is messed up. We are grown men." He announces to all, "Sam lives and breathes for this shop. This is his world. He wouldn't know what to do if something happened to this place. And he wouldn't know what to do if I didn't come in here and mess with him." Sam responds, "I love you." Peter replies, "I know you love me."

This interaction shows how Peter openly confronts Sam about the extent to which he monitors the men's behavior in the barbershop. Peter and Sam's relationship is complicated and it oscillates between a playful disdain to utter antipathy. Sam does not verbally chastise Peter for cursing but just looks at him to let him know that Sam has heard his obscene language. Peter knows the rules of the shop well and responds to the silent chastisement by antagonizing Sam and ridiculing his rules. Though he

acknowledges that Sam is the rightful owner of the place, he still points to his status as a “grown man” as reason for Sam to lighten up on his policing of the customers.

Sam’s reaction to Peter is not as playful if he uses profanity in the presence of a young boy. Peter enters and greets a little boy by calling him the N-word. Sam says, “Excuse me.” Peter replies, “Awe, Sam. You’re going to take all of my money. I hate that box! I don’t have any change.” He flips through a wad of bills and then tosses a one-dollar coin in the box. Sam says, “Come here.” Marquis says, “It’s bad enough he has to pay a dollar, but he has to get the lecture too!” Sam says, “I ought to charge you another dollar because you used that word to address a kid. The next time you do it, I’m going to make you pay two dollars.” Peter walks away and says, “Okay Sam, alright.”

On a different occasion, Peter shouts, “That’s bull shit!” while he is on his cellular phone. Sam looks at him with a stern face. Peter ends his telephone call and begins to talk with the others in the shop. He gently taps the young boy (who does not appear to be a teenager yet) and says, “That’s bull shit, right?” The boy smiles and snickers in response. Sam says, “That’s enough. There is a child in the shop. You don’t know who his parents are. You are going too far.” Peter replies, “Okay, okay Sam.”

In both interactions, Peter puts on a successful performance in the sense that he agitates Sam enough to get a reaction. Sam seems to have a low tolerance for Peter’s shenanigans and particularly his use of foul language when children are in the barbershop. The first child seems unbothered by being called out of his name, and the second child is entertained by Peter’s apparent total disregard for the rules in the barbershop. Peter treating him as an adult and incorporating him into the conversation may have also amused the boy. Peter acknowledges and ends his performance once he

agrees with Sam that he has surpassed being playful and entertaining and is entering the realm of possibly causing offense and disrespect to the people in the barbershop.

In yet another instance, Peter incorporated me into one of his performances. He shouts, "Woo, wee. Look what I've laid my eyes on, the most beautiful woman in the world." He whispers to me, "Go along with it. I just want to get at Sam." He then grabs my right hand and kisses it.

He looks at Sam again and begins to dance in middle of floor. He hunches his shoulders in excitement, stomps his feet, and spins around in a tiny circle, all the while looking directly at Sam. (His dancing seems coordinated and resembles the smooth, rhythmic routines that were popular among black male bands in the 1960s.) He loudly says, "I've never seen such a pretty lady in my life. We should get married. We could jump over a broom or something, right? I just love those glasses and that multi-colored sweater. Oh, my gosh!"

Sam says, "Don't you come in here with that mess." Peter replies, "See, here you go being negative. You always see the negative. I'm just trying to talk to this fine young lady right here." Sam walks over to him and says, "Let me talk to you outside." Sam whisks Peter outside to the front of the shop. A couple of minutes later, Peter reenters and says "I'll talk to her if I want to!" Sam replies, "Now why are you going to come in here..." Peter interjects, "You like how I made it seem like we were talking about her the whole time." Sam emphatically says, "We weren't talking about her."

Unlike the other customers at Crown Crafters who perform for each other, this interaction demonstrates how Peter decidedly chooses to perform for Sam. He consciously attempts to annoy Sam by acting as if he is attracted to me and by putting on

a show complete with a marriage proposal, dance sequence, and backhanded compliments. Peter's behavior is a breach to the normal sociability that occurs in the space but it is somewhat of an exaggeration of the kinds of performances that the other men do in the barbershop. That is, his extreme performance satirizes the work the other men do to obey the rules of the shop; and it highlights that there are indeed floating frameworks in the barbershop, which he chooses not to use.

DISCUSSION: A PRIVILEGED SITE FOR ESTABLISHING SELF-WORTH AND SELF-ESTEEM AS AN INDIVIDUAL BLACK MAN

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that black men at Crown Crafters put great effort into creating a collective identity and that the communal legacy of the barbershop as a place structures these interactions. I have also argued that for black men, their individual and collective identity are closely intertwined to the extent of being somewhat synonymous or at least deeply embedded and dependent on the other. For the moment, I will focus on how the barbershop provides black men a space where they have an opportunity to establish self-worth and self-esteem as an individual black man.

The barbershop affords black men power that they do not commonly have in predominately white institutions. In the barbershop, every black man has authority and is expected to speak and participate in the ongoing talk and interaction. Similar to how the barber's role extends beyond offering hair care service, the tacit role of the customer is to initiate and lead discussions or else the interaction is somewhat of a failed encounter.

The sociability in the barbershop is a collaborative and cooperative effort. But a customer can distinguish himself as a discrete black man worthy of respect and attention based on the content of what he says, his delivery, and the overall quality of his performance.

For instance, a man may take advantage of the way that the furniture is arranged and literally stand in the middle of the floor and demand everyone's attention. This has the effect of making the performance more dramatic and more likely that the presenter will engage and captivate the entire audience. Likewise, a common tact the men employ in order to increase the chances of their performance being effective is to use one of the floating frameworks that are provided by the space. These tools offer structure to the men's performance of race and gender in the barbershop.

Sam exerts the most external power and has the greatest influence in structuring the men's behavior in the space via the formal and informal rules enforced at Crown Crafters. But this does not relinquish the power that the barbers and customers have to instantaneously and radically alter the dynamics of the sociability in the space within the bounds established by Sam. Rather the barbershop treats the men's race and gender as privileged statuses, which entitles him to claim partial ownership of the place and control the interaction therein. In a sort of adaptation of the expression, "This is my house and these are my rules," the men express their sense of belonging in the place by figuratively and literally spouting his rules to life for black men via mentorship. This sentiment also manifests when the men frame their ideas about how whites, black people, and women behave in terms of the values, virtues, and morals these peoples allegedly hold or ought to abide by.

All may not manage the power and entitlement that each black man has to orchestrate talk and interaction in the barbershop responsibly, which is implied by one of the customer's statement in the opening of this chapter that "people don't know how to act in the barbershop." We saw this with Sam's antagonist, who single handedly altered

the ambiance of Crown Crafters. For Peter, his audience is comprised of only Sam. Though his performances are an extreme case, it exemplifies that he acknowledges the cooperative work that the other men do to abide by the rules and show respect for the place and everyone who is in the space. His apparent choice to put on a performance for Sam rather than the other men in the barbershop indicates that the barbershop is a place for black men to perform for an audience in some form or fashion. And it shows that not all of the patrons form “caring relationships” with one another.

The barbershop is a platform for individual black men to validate themselves, their life experiences, and justify their worth as humans with each other, *in situ*. The “voice” of black men, their stories, opinions, and advice matters and is essential to the social life in the barbershop; and ultimately, it is a defining characteristic of the place. For the barbers in particular, their “worth” has little correlation to the cost of service or skill of their labor. By assuming roles such as mentor, disciplinarian, or counselor to name a few, they add significant meaning to their job and role in the barbershop.

Similarly, in a place where the men avoid acknowledging the hair care service aspect of their interaction and have minimal opportunity to express their individuality via a hairstyle, the men establish self-worth by focusing their attentions on their figurative presentation of self. They also take for granted their egoistic talk as a male characteristic, that is, no one ever deems a man conceited, self-absorbed, or know it all. Instead, they use their individualistic talk to accomplish a feeling of self-importance in the space and diligently construct a collective black male identity.

The ways in which black men in the barbershop interpret and construct their individual identification in connection to a collective identity is clearly demonstrated

through the informal mentorship that occurs at Crown Crafters. Through mentorship, men in the barbershop share their perspective with their peers and younger patrons on the values they *should* subscribe to concerning how to regard mothers, fatherhood, and the workforce. The interactions depicted show how men in the barbershop disseminate values extrapolated from their lived experiences, and in doing so they partake in constructing a collective identity grounded in respectability.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It is common to hear people reference “the black community” in academia, the media, political discourse, and everyday conversations. Social scientists have long argued that race is a social construction and that all communities are imagined in a sense (Anderson 1983; Calhoun 1991). Nevertheless, people invoke the idea of a black community in order to get tangible effects (e.g. vote or protest). But does a coherent black community exist in America today? If so, what appearance and form does it take? Is blackness the sole determinant of membership? How is social solidarity along the lines of blackness created, maintained, and policed? This study set out to research how black people achieve racial solidarity in everyday life. I chose to focus on an institution that is historically recognized as being significant to the black community, the barbershop, to examine how the people who gather there talk about race and about what creates a sense of racial relatedness between them.

I find that as customers entered the barbershop to literally shape their physical presentation, their race, gender, and moral identity was figuratively shaped by the talk and interaction therein. What appeared to be men bantering to pass the time in the chair or while waiting, at times turned out to be their ideas of black versus white values. Instead of causing silence, their difference in age provided an opportunity to mentor and socialize each other into the values blacks ought to emulate. In casual conversations, the men identified their ideas of the problem spots among blacks. They also discussed how to craft a respectable black male individual and collective identity given the unspoken stake of being seen as one in the same outside of the barbershop. My dissertation demonstrates how black men at Crown Crafters make sense of race and perform it in

everyday life and how this understanding shapes social relations to blacks and whites. It also shows how the black barbershop as a pre-designated racial and gender exclusive place actively shapes these interpretations and performances.

Here, I restate several key findings from the previous chapters and I discuss the contributions that this dissertation makes to the study of race and black identification, notions of community and solidarity, gender and masculinity, place and space, and culture and morality.

PERFORMING RACE AND SHAPING COMMUNITY IN THE BLACK BARBERSHOP

My dissertation argues that blackness and racial relatedness are a situated interactional achievement, and that places like the barbershop become moral spaces that invoke and shape racial performances. Using W.E.B. Du Bois' classic concept of the double consciousness, I illustrate how black men perceive their beliefs, values, and practices in relation and in opposition to whites. I also show how they use the barbershop as a "racial backstage" to work on issues of individual and collective black identities in the absence of white scrutiny.

Specifically, I find that the men use talk that identifies whites as "the other," self-critique, and storytelling to construct their values and culture as distinctly "black." At other times when the men stress adherence to morals they conceive of as universal, the legacy of the double consciousness manifests in their performance of a "politics of respectability" (see Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996; McQueeney 2009). That is, the men have in mind an imagined white audience that will judge any individual's shortcoming as representative of the entire race. The thesis shows how the barbershop

facilitates the men in discussing, affirming, and policing what they say constitutes an authentic black male identity. And it illustrates how the men presume a shared black culture and frame racial authenticity around the extent to which blacks adhere to it.

My dissertation makes five key contributions. First, it empirically demonstrates how solidarity based on race is achieved in the context of a black barbershop, without assuming the a priori existence of a coherent black community or treating race and community as static concepts (cf. Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Instead it shows *how* blackness is socially constructed in everyday talk and interaction and how that work creates and maintains social ties along the lines of race. I developed the notion of “acting black” to show how talk and interaction in the barbershop is largely based on their (sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit) assumption that they share a particular worldview and value system which also shapes their understanding of what is appropriate behavior for them as blacks (cf. Goffman 1959:13; Heritage 1984:81). The concept of acting black also describes how people construct their culture and values as black through situated interaction.

This dissertation demonstrates how people in the barbershop use race as a lens to varying degrees in order to interpret the values they say they enact. They explicitly invoke race both to frame what blacks versus whites “do” in talk of othering and emphasize middle class values blacks *ought* to have in the form of self-critique; but implicitly give some mainstream values a “black” inflection via storytelling. And they forgo the use of race as a lens as they socialize each other into mainstream values by way of informal mentorship. The dissertation shows how the men’s ideas of black values and

culture are defined, policed, codified, and affirmed in situ with one another in the barbershop (cf. Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock 1996).

This thesis presents one particular *kind* of blackness in the setting of a black barbershop. Whereas some studies conceptualize blackness as a moral category to be expressed in various fashions such as resistance, solidarity, and agency (Vargas 2006), I argue that for the black men in Crown Crafters barbershop, blackness is in part a *moral project*—one that involves identifying and addressing problem spots and determining what the shared values are or should be. It also describes the tacit responsibility and persistent work that black men engage in to create a respectable individual and collective black male identity by way of establishing the values and behavior that they say comprises these identities. In conceptualizing blackness as a moral project, this study illustrates how black culture and black values are constructed and performed through face-to-face encounters in particular settings, such as the barbershop—in which actors understand them to be interactionally and morally relevant.

The men's comparison between perceived "black" and "mainstream" values and the assessment of those values—even if blacks do not fair as well to whites as in Sam's racial self-critique (cf. Sumerau 2012)--points to how some of the men think of themselves as a modern "race man" or stakeholders in the black male's individual and collective construction. This is also evident in the men's storytelling, informal mentorship, and identifying whites as the other, which in this case blacks deem themselves to have better values than whites (cf. Lamont 2000). These conversations seemed to be facilitated by tacit knowledge among the men in the barbershop that part of the black experience (in the US) involves a consistent awareness of their race and how

people of another race might perceive them. Their concern with the presentation of other black men also seems grounded in tacit knowledge that part of what it means to be black is that their individual identity is rarely perceived independent of other black men collectively (Drake and Cayton 1944: 390-5). In the vein of the notion of a “linked fate” (Dawson 1994, see also Cohen 1999) the men take up blackness as a moral project and persistently do the work of creating a respectable identity as if the stakes are being seen as one in the same outside of the barbershop. This idea is also supported by how the barbers mentor, chastise, and offer moral guidance to young male children in the shop.

Cultural knowledge that the black barbershop is a place to discuss and work on issues important to blacks provides a general frame for the definition of the situation; but it is the assumption of sharing in common-sense knowledge as black men that facilitates the talk and interaction in the barbershop. By using ethnographic methods to examine the intersection of race, community, and place, my dissertation offers an understanding as to how black men interpret and construct an individual and collective identity and how the barbershop shapes these interactions.

Second, this study moves us further away from conceptualizing race as an essential characteristic, as the phrase “being black” connotes, and closer to understanding the process of how a person *becomes* black or achieves blackness situationally. I marry the notion of the double consciousness to recent conceptualizations of race as performance to pinpoint when and how race becomes a pertinent category in shaping people’s perception and behavior, and when it does not. My thesis avoids reifying race to show that black men only occasionally use race as a lens to interpret the values to which

they enact; and it demonstrates how blackness operates as a situationally enacted moral category and stock of knowledge.

That is, though I have focused on performances of blackness, people in the barbershop are not always “doing” race. Quite often, the men have conversations with each other on how to be a good spouse or get a job without framing these issues in racial terms. The men frequently have conversations that are not about blackness or values and they instead discuss healthy diets, topics concerning a bicycle culture, martial arts movies, and neighborhood gossip just to provide a few examples. Also, sometimes customers do not interact with each other and instead entertain themselves with an electronic gadget, take a nap, or remain silent.

Because the men are not always *acting* black even though they are always *nominally* black (Brubaker et al. 2006), my study sheds light on when and how blackness becomes interactionally relevant, and on how the barbershop as a racially exclusive place presents myriad situations in which racial understandings and racial experiences are foregrounded and made morally salient. My dissertation demonstrates that blackness and racial solidarity are an interactional achievement that requires active work on the part of black men. This extends Rogers Brubaker’s (2004) argument that *ethnic* communal sentiments are not coextensive with formally designated groups and are better conceptualized as cognitive frames. While studies show how black men draw discursive *symbolic* boundaries (Lamont 2000; Young 2004), this study adds another layer to show how some black men talk about them with each other and translate them into *social* boundaries through in situ racial performances.

This dissertation shows that blackness is something to be enacted and achieved in interaction; and it demonstrates how the black barbershop as a pre-determined “black” space encourages and/or demands racial performances in this setting. The barbershop as a place has enough power to in effect force people to be a good audience, prove their racial authenticity, and enact a specific type of blackness, which makes these racial performances and lends a moral quality to acting black. This study combines and builds on research concerning black consciousness, blackness as a performance, and black spaces to illustrate: (1) the persistent presence of whites in the imagination of black people; (2) how people at times construct their values and culture as “black” in the barbershop; and (3) the powerful demands that the place exerts on the men to perform and affirm these ideas together in the space.

Third, my dissertation offers a rare within group and across age analysis of how black men socialize male children into performances of (black) masculinity in interaction, in the barbershop. It demonstrates how gendered bodies invalidate false dichotomies between sex categories and how the dominant group employs gendered performances to compensate for the similarities between the sexes once it becomes salient in a given setting (cf. Gieryn 2000; Martin 2004). And it illustrates how the prescribed and appropriate behavior in the black barbershop, which is that each male is expected and in some ways is required to participate in talk and interaction, while women do not have the same privilege, creates a hierarchy across sex categories, regardless of age (cf. Connell 1995; Gieryn 2000). My dissertation contributes an understanding as to how the barbershop as a predominately male space, provides black boys an opportunity to speak, behave, and act as young adults; and how the men and boy’s performances, in effect,

construct the barbershop as a gendered institution. It also shows how the barbershop provides floating frameworks and masculine scripts for the men to enact together.

By emplacing the racial and gender work of black men in the setting of a black barbershop, my dissertation makes a fourth contribution, which is to demonstrate how place can shape race consciousness and race can (re)define a place (Lipsitz 2007). The existing research on the black barbershop conceptualizes it as a safe space where race recedes into the background, and black men can be their authentic self (see Harris 1979; Holt 1995; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Dawson 2003; Mills 2006; Nunley 2011). My study portrays a more nuanced conceptualization of it as a moral space that demands racial performances and encourages people to “take up” blackness when they may not otherwise do so. Thus, while I describe the barbershop as a “racial backstage” vis-à-vis white society, I show how the barbershop is also at times a “front stage” for performances of racial authenticity because it pressures people in the barbershop to discuss and enact particular forms of “blackness” for other blacks in the audience. I argue that these performances are as much a characteristic of the space itself as part of a person’s “true” self; and likewise, the demand to put on a racial performance that emphasizes blackness is an attribute of the space that foments racial solidarity.

Finally, my dissertation brings back, and pushes forward, the discussion of culture and morality concerning black people. Because of the backlash against the culture of poverty argument (which claims that blacks have deficient value systems), sociologists of race have tended to either shy away from discussing culture and values or to focus on how blacks hold similar values to whites (Liebow 1967; see also Anderson 1976, 1990; Duneier 1994, 1999). My research, however, brings culture back in a distinct way by

showing how at times, the men in the barbershop make meaning of their blackness through values that they explicitly say are distinct—and better—than whites’ values.

This study shows how the men *consciously and explicitly* continue to construct and experience their black identity in relation to whites (cf. Lamont 2000) and fleshes out the dimensions and contents of the specific values and practices that some black people consider to be authentically black (Jackson 2005). It also finds that the men in the barbershop at times do presume a common black worldview and culture such that they apply race as a lens and situate their talk and interaction in the context of a shared black experience. Through ethnography, my dissertation adds another layer to racial and cultural theories by showing how some black men define and police ideas of black versus white values and culture through racial performances in *interaction*. Such an approach acknowledges the subjective awareness and situational enactment of “black culture” without reifying it as an objectively existing, monolithic collective representation.

Notably, I do not claim that the kind of black culture presented here is the only or “real” one. Instead, this article shows how “black culture” is interpreted and performed by men in the setting of a barbershop on certain occasions. The barbershop is one particular site in which a version of black culture is enacted. Therefore, this study contributes one situation of how blackness is interpreted and enacted in the barbershop that necessarily should be understood in relation to existing and future studies of “black” culture and values in order to fully grasp these concepts.

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