"It's All About Just Creating the Safe Space": Barbershops and Beauty Salons as Community Anchors in Black Neighborhoods: Crime Prevention, Cohesion, and Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hunter M. Boehme[1] ⑩, Tameka V. Williams[2], Natalie Brown[1], Lekendra Kidd[1], Bryceson Hernandez[2], and Melissa S. Nolan[1]

Abstract

We conducted 13 in-depth qualitative interviews with Black owners of barbershops or beauty salons within predominantly Black neighborhoods to explore the social mechanisms that aid in suppressing crime. Four emergent themes arose: (1) community anchors and safe havens, (2) violence interrupters, (3) life counselors, and (4) COVID-19 disruption and lessons of resiliency. Findings from this study contribute to the theoretical and empirical literature focused on "local institutions" and the importance of

[1]University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA
[2]North Carolina Central University, Durham, USA

Corresponding Author:
Hunter M. Boehme, Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina, 110 Currell College, Columbia, SC 29208, USA.
Email: boehme@mailbox.sc.edu

these businesses in building informal social control within Black communities. Further, these findings enhance our understanding of underlying place-based crime prevention mechanisms. This study promotes these institutions as key components in future crime prevention and public health interventions.

Introduction

Crime is unevenly distributed throughout space and time, and scholars continue to investigate how neighborhood context contributes to increases (or decreases) in crime within and across certain areas (Nobles et al., 2016). Historically, scholars have investigated the social-demographic conditions of a spatial collective to explain crime rates such as residential mobility, concentrated disadvantage, and ethnic heterogeneity (Boggess & Hipp, 2010; Sampson & Wilson, 2020; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Other crime dispersion explanations have centered around how certain land uses may affect neighborhood or local crime rates (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995; Drawve et al., 2016). For example, gas stations, bars, payday lenders, and pawn shops have been deemed risky facilities as they are often associated with high crime rates (Kubrin et al., 2011; Wilcox & Eck, 2011). While much attention tends to be given to the land uses that attract crime, limited attention is given to those land uses and institutions that may prevent crime.

One relevant literature body demonstrates the importance of "local institutions," which are businesses/land uses that provide a platform for building social ties and cohesion, which inevitably may aid in crime deterrence at the location and within a neighborhood (Peterson et al., 2000; Wickes et al., 2019). Many of these studies, however, are quantitative and struggle in highlighting the mechanisms that occur at local institutions which are built on socio-cultural exchange. Thus, there is need for more qualitative research to further understand the protective mechanisms that occur at local institutions providing a neighborhood safe haven. Further, this study will highlight how certain local institutions may be a safe space in historically disadvantaged areas. One such underexplored local institution is the Black-owned hair salon (e.g., barbershops and beauty salons), While cultural and historical literature suggests barbershops and beauty salons are important "cultural institutions" to the Black community (Wood & Brunson, 2011), there remains a dearth of research examining the potential criminological impact of such institutions.

The current study qualitatively explores the positive effects Black-owned barbershops and beauty salons provide to the Black community. We conducted thirteen in-depth interviews of Black owners of barbershops or beauty salons within two United States' Southeastern cities, which highlights the value these businesses provide to historically disadvantaged communities. This study contributes to previous criminological theory and literature by providing insight as to how local institutions generate social cohesion and informal social control. Further, this study will highlight how certain local institutions may be a community anchor, by creating a local platform for resource dissemination and refuge, particularly following impactful life events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, findings from this study offer important and timely policy implications.

Theoretical Traditions: Local Institutions and Informal Social Control

Since the initial introduction of the social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), the paradigm has been significantly refined and extended (Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson, 2012; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson et al., 1997). One notable extension proposes that socially disorganized neighborhoods, which already suffer from structural characteristics such as residential mobility and concentrated disadvantage, also lack the number of local institutions needed to effectively exert informal control (Pattillo, 1998; Sun et al., 2004; Wo, 2016). Thus, a dearth of socially important local institutions makes it difficult for communities to build social ties, cohesion, and informal social control through organized community meetings, gatherings, and other neighborhood activities.

Local institutions may provide a neighborhood platform for establishing social cohesion, mobilizing neighborhood resources, organizing neighborhood events, and help "keep watch" over the neighborhood (Kubrin & Wo, 2016; Sun et al., 2004; Triplett et al., 2003). These organizations may support community crime/violence reduction efforts (Braga et al., 2019), help with youth outreach (Cobbina et al., 2008; Hastings et al., 2013), and ultimately build collective efficacy (Pegram et al., 2016). While there may be a lack of legitimate local institutions within neighborhoods struggling from poverty and other structural problems, supportive businesses and institutions within these neighborhoods still exist which provide protective effects supporting disadvantaged neighborhoods. For example, Pegram et al. (2016) highlighted that Black community churches may serve as important social institutions that help boost community ethos and subsequent crime prevention through

developed social capital and collective efficacy. Therefore, the identification of additional local institutions within historically marginalized neighborhoods positivity contributing to local society is warranted. This study highlights the four themes in which barbershops and beauty salons offer protective effects within the Black community.

Oldenburg (1999) proposed the "third places," which are public spaces outside of home and work where people interact and develop social ties (e.g., cafes, coffeeshops). The social interactions, networks, and ties developed at these locations may inevitably established informal social control to combat potential criminal behavior. A relevant extension beyond third places are "social conduits" (Wickes et al., 2019), which are land use features such as public or private places (e.g., community clubs, neighborhood restaurants) that encourage social interactions (Corcoran et al., 2018). Both third places and social conduits theorize certain institutions promote social interaction and provides informal neighborhood social control. In summary, this theoretical framework offers insight explaining why certain businesses/institutions may provide neighborhoods with protective neighborhood effects such as elevated informal social control. Therefore, this qualitative investigation aims to identify the mechanisms that occur at Black-owned barbershops and beauty salons in reducing crime and their impact on the community they serve.

Barbershops and Beauty Salons in Black Communities

It is proposed that barbershops and beauty salons in predominantly Black communities may provide neighborhood virtue (Boehme, 2022). Historical literature suggests that both barbershops and beauty salons have been important historical and socio-cultural institutions for American Black communities dating back to the pre-Civil War era (Brawner et al., 2013; Harris-Lacewell, 2010; Mills, 2013). During the pre-Civil War era and throughout Reconstruction, the barbershop and beauty salon served as a valuable place of solace and important financial institution for African Americans (Mbilishaka, 2018). Barbers and beauticians were activists during the Civil Rights Movement and provided connectivity and conversion nodes (Mills, 2013; Slate, 2022). These businesses have continued to this day as a place where adversity and resilience testimonials are securely shared (Mbilishaka, 2018; Wood & Brunson, 2011).

Thus, while clients might initially seek their hair salon for physical care, research suggests one also visits the barbershop and beauty salon for

socio-cultural connection, kinship, and refuge (Mbilishaka et al., 2021; Mills, 2013). Further, these locations are important for the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black men and women; an American population who have disproportionately faced a long history of oppression and disenfranchisement (Lemons, 2011; Wood & Brunson, 2011). For example, Releford et al. (2010) stated that "unlike other community settings, the barbershop, by its very nature, invites men of varied backgrounds to let their hair down without judgment, prejudice or expectation. It is our country club" (p. 3). Similarly, the Black beauty salon also offers a safe place for open discussion, where beauticians and other frequenter patrons are trusted and confided in (Randolph et al., 2021). Moreover, these locations are places within the Black community where political and social capital is developed and maintained (Wood & Brunson, 2011).

Culture performance is achieved through "the signaling of cultural traditions, the nature of talk and social play, the acknowledged awareness and concern of issues relative to the community, and the negotiated understanding of Black hair and Black hairstyles" (Alexander, 2003). Barbershops and beauty salons in predominately Black neighborhoods not only provide trusted hair-cutting services, but they also actively welcome and encourage enculturation among community patrons.

Recently, the medical literature has begun to highlight barbershops and beauty salons as focal points for public health information and intervention (Balls-Berry et al., 2015; Victor et al., 2019). For example, in a randomized controlled trial by Victor et al. (2019), the authors found a significant blood pressure level reduction among Black male patrons of barbers trained in blood pressure health promotion by clinical nurses. Other health promotion literature has found success in endorsing healthy lifestyles within barbershops and beauty salons (see Palmer et al., 2021). Mbilishaka (2018) outlines the intervention called "PsychoHairapy," which bridges mental health care professionals with beauticians in order to train hair care professionals to improve clients mental health. Thus, the historical, cultural, and public health literature have all suggested that barbershops and beauty salons are impactful, respected businesses within the Black community.

Present Study

While there is a growing body of historical, cultural, and public health literature regarding the importance of barbershops and beauty salons to the Black community, there is limited scholarship centered around the potential impact these locations have on crime within the neighborhood. With the exception of

one geospatial analysis (Boehme, 2022), no other investigation has evaluated potentially deterrent criminological impacts Black-owned hair salons have on their neighborhood. We conducted 13 in-depth, qualitative interviews of Black owners of barbershops and beauty salons in two Southeastern metropolises to shed light on the mechanisms that may prevent, deter, or reduce crime within their neighborhood. Importantly, this research explored other indirect benefits these businesses may have on disenfranchised neighborhoods. Identifying trusted establishments within historically disadvantaged communities and the mechanisms at which these develop is vital to understanding neighborhood informal social control processes among otherwise high-crime areas. We also propose timely and important policy recommendations derived from our findings as it relates to supporting these businesses during times of unprecedented crisis.

Methods

Research Setting and Study Context

This research was executed in two similarly sized American Southeastern cities. The two cities share similar racial demographics and historical violent crime rates.[1] Each barbershop and beauty salon had their own storefront, were nested within the metropolis of the city (e.g., center city), and predominantly served local residents. Each barber shop and beauty salon owner and their respective enterprise were well-established in their communities.[2] We interviewed barbershop and beauty salon owners because they were perceived as the most invested employee, were most physically present at the business, and have the greatest knowledge of their business, neighborhood, and clientele who frequented. Further, the owners demonstrated an investment in their city, community, and perceived themselves as community leaders.

We utilized a purposeful homogenous sampling strategy (Suri, 2011), which involved "picking a small, homogenous sample, the purpose of which is to describe some particular subgroup in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 235). The research team identified all barbershops and beauty salons in the two cities' predominantly Black areas (based on census data) through previous knowledge of the cities and google searches.[3] We attempted to achieve an equal gender distribution of participants by making the same number of "cold calls" to each business type. However, the final sample consisted of 13 Black participants: eight male owners of barbershops and five female owners of beauty salons.

Interviews were executed either face-to-face at the business location or virtually via WebEx.[4] Each participant was provided a written consent form and an invitation to participate in advance, which provided information

regarding the study's purpose, a notice of voluntary participation, a notice of interview and record keeping confidentiality, and information on University Institutional Review Board. We used an exploratory, semi-structured interview format (Creswell & Poth, 2016), which allowed for participants to guide the interview after asking a question or probe (Stuckey, 2013). We asked broad questions centered around owner's perceived role in the community, perspectives on COVID-19 and other health related concerns, owners' experiences as business owner's business, crime concerns, if and how participants intervened on crime, and participants' perceptions of their business's overall ambience. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Nine participants allowed researchers to record, while four preferred interviews without recording. For the unrecorded interviews, extensive notes were taken and used in the analysis. Each participant received a US$25 Visa gift card incentive. Data were collected between June and August 2021.

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in NVivo version 12. Researchers utilized open-coding techniques, whereby researchers independently read and coded the first four interview transcripts with respect to the relevant topics discussed above. We then reconvened to develop a preliminary codebook, which involved open discussion relating to major codes, their definitions, and direct quotes from the transcripts assigned to each representative code. We then independently recoded transcripts as well as four additional transcripts per the new codebook, before meeting to amend the codebook. We uncovered four emergent themes from the data. Emergent themes allow researchers to "characterize experiences of individual participants by general insights from the whole of the data" (Bradley et al., 2007, p. 1761).

Several measures were undertaken to ensure valid findings. From study inception, we maintained an audit trail to track team thought processes in project development, to reflect upon our position as researchers and how these perceptions and biases might have impacted our data analysis/interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Rodgers & Cowles, 1993). We considered our own demographics, cultural background, personal experiences, and other life events and how that impacted our approach to the research study and interpretation of the data. For example, non-Black research team members acknowledged their racial demographics may result in some participants hesitation in responding to certain questions. Other factors such as education, accent, and attire may have impacted participant responses. Nonetheless, consistent reflective conversations were had by the research team throughout the study. This is important to note because a researcher's experiences may shape the meanings and context of the interpreted data (Dodgson, 2019). To acknowledge our individual experiences' potential influences we used

bracketing during the coding process to mitigate any personal assumptions or inadvertent biases that emerged during the data analysis process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Multiple coders analyzed the data independently, increasing triangulation and reliability of the codes and subsequent findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Even more, a diverse team of researchers with various racial/ethnic backgrounds, education levels, and gender identities conducted the research further contributing to reflexive conversations throughout data collection and analysis (Mathijssen et al., 2021).

Four authors who conducted the study were residents of either North or South Carolina, one of which had a "southern" accent. The racial composition of the researchers consisted of two white women, two Black women, one white man, and a Filipino man. The research team's educational level varied from doctorate ($n=3$), masters ($n=1$), and undergraduate ($n=2$) attainment. Notably, two-thirds of the research team frequented Black-owned barber or beauty salons. However, for Black researchers, the importance of barber and beauty salons was magnified due to the historical role these businesses have had in their own lives. Lastly, one researcher had an established rapport with an owner due to their years-long hair cutting relationship. With these influential components considered, efforts were made by all researchers to acknowledge our role in the research process and mitigate any bias during data analysis and interpretation. Finally, we drew upon previous research and theory validate potential findings where appropriate (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Findings

At the conclusion of the analyses, four emergent themes arose from the data; (1) The Barbershop and Beauty Salon: Community Anchors and Safe Havens, (2) Barbers and Beauticians: Violence Interrupters, (3) Barbers and Beauticians: Life Counselors, and (4) COVID-19 Disruption and Lessons of Resiliency. Although these themes are distinct and presented separately, they are also interconnected. Each participant was given a culturally appropriate pseudonym to protect their identity.

Theme 1: The Barbershop and Beauty Salon: Community Anchors and Safe Havens

The first theme highlights the value that the business itself provided a community anchor and safe haven within the neighborhood they serve. Not only do the participants service the individual clients at the business, but their location serves as an important institution for the broader community. Both

Kam and Eugene stated that they look to hire youth who did not have intentions to go to college or formerly incarcerated individuals to provide opportunities for, and support those in the community. As Davon demonstrates, the barbershop/beauty salon supports the local community:

> We service everybody and we just take everybody down that I can muster up. We'll service the community just from the barbershop standpoint and we give away free haircuts, back to school give aways, different bookbags and all that stuff and we'll throw in a haircut like first day of school. We'll make sure we cut the hair make sure they look good on the first day that sort of thing and we do the same thing around Christmas time

Sheena states that "I definitely see myself as I have a responsibility to give back to the community in which I do business." Eugene acknowledges that there is a reciprocal relationship between his business and the community, by suggesting that his outreach efforts garner the respect from the community. Overtime this relationship of barber/beauty salon with the community establishes this perception as a community anchor, or a location the community can rely on. This is echoed by Kristi who has worked in both barbershops and beauty salons

> We have a role in the community for one because so many people do confide in us. I've actually worked in a barbershop for 4 years as well so what a lot of people don't know is that when students are preparing to go to college that the barbershops and hair salons fundraise quietly. We do help pull together money, scholarship monies. I've worked with different you know people that have done back to school drives and my salon personally does provide hair styles and haircuts for children going back to school. Now a lot of us don't do it on a public scale because we don't have the ability to offer a lot [in] a very large capacity but you know whether the community or whether the news or the public knows it, we do offer a lot of services. . . Especially with the barbershops they do a lot with the children with school supplies, clothes, shoes, hair styles, haircuts you know. I had a gentleman that I worked with, and he owns a barbershop that I used to work with and for Christmas we would give away hair styles to single mothers that couldn't afford [it]. . . because a lot of people want to feel confident, and they want to look good they may not be able to afford it so we do step in and help them that way

Importantly, these locations are a "safe haven" for community members. Carmisha explains that her beauty salon is a "family and community-oriented establishment." While Mike further emphasizes this point below:

> Just try to kinda let them know that this is a safe place. Like outside of church the barbershop should be a place where you should come and feel safe and you

shouldn't be tense because you think that somebody else, whether it's barber or another client gonna cause you harm or ill will. So, I just try to settle things that way and if not then either one or both of them won't be welcome back to the shop. Like hopefully that's not the case but that's the furthest extent that we would probably take

Thus, barbershops and beauty salons are community anchors and safe havens because they are a safe and important business to mobilize resources that support the community. Community residents may visit barbershops and beauty salons not just to get their hair cut, but for leisure activities, kinship, and to feel safe.

Theme 2: Barbers and Beauticians: Violence Interrupters

Due to the role these businesses play within Black neighborhoods, the owners build trust and respect at the business and in the neighborhood, which allows them to effectively intervene in potentially dangerous behavior. Most study respondents provided testimonials of directly intervening in violent or potentially violent behavior while working at the barbershop or beauty salon. Intervening in potential criminal behavior may be in part because of their investment in their business, the clients, "regulars" who frequent the barbershop/beauty salon, and co-workers. Participants consistently conveyed a sincere investment in their community and a belief that it is their responsibility to serve as a catalyst for the Black community, including intervening in violent behavior. Head barbers and beauticians admitted to spending a substantial amount of their days at the business location, which allows them to develop a sense for when potential "beefs" that started between clients/regulars. This familiarity with those who frequent the location allowed barbers and beauticians to recognize verbal and non-verbal cues as to whether two or more clients/regulars had an existing conflict that emerged outside of the barbershop/beauty salon and within the neighborhood. They would then intervene by de-escalating a potential violent situation. Jermaine stated that if someone looks like they are getting into something illegal, he will immediately intervene. While Davon discussed how important it is to "read the room" in the context of people he knows, or people he does not recognize who walk into his business acting "off" or disturbed. He further expands upon this notion below:

You can tell when somebody just ain't gonna do right. . . if I know you a thug or whatever you wanna be out there in the street cut that off for 15 or 20 minutes. . . long enough to get you a haircut and then you can do what you gonna do outside of [here] you know what I mean?

Clients or regulars who are upset, frustrated, or angry are encouraged to take a few moments to calm down. While some barbers/beauticians may allow clients to "cool off" and come back in a few minutes, others discussed a "zero tolerance" policy for the day. For example, Lamar would kick people out of his barbershop as they were walking in because he could tell they were angry/confrontational and require that they come back tomorrow in a better mood. Nonetheless, the participants demonstrate a sense of responsibility for the safety of those who frequent the business.

Other barbers and beauticians would take note if their clients where in violent situations in their personal lives. Kam would vocally tell his clients to not get into "twitter-wars" or other social media "beefs" that could result in violent encounters within the community. Sometimes owners would support clients who have been victimized in the past. For example, Kristi provided a testimonial in which she and her co-workers have helped clients who are victims of domestic violence. Kristi states "we've worked together to move them out to try to secure them a hotel room." Actions like Kristi and her co-workers may have interrupted future criminal victimization by getting those out of harm's way. When clients conspire in engaging in potentially violent behavior within the neighborhood, Alisha, an ordained minister would rely on teachings from Christianity to make clients think about the long-term impact of violent actions and teach clients to treat everyone with respect. Further, Davon provides a testimonial describing a potentially violent encounter that was occurring outside the premises of his barbershop:

> Now this particular incident I was coming back from lunch, and I pulled to the back of the building and a gentleman was running out of the adjacent business. The guy let him out the back and he had some guy out front that was trying to get to him so he wanted me to get involved and I told him simply will not because I don't know what's going on and don't bring that here. Now if it were something where somebody ran in and they were needing help and I could see that they were in distress, I would help them. But I had to think about the safety of the clients, the staff, and myself cause I wanna go home to my family

The importance of direct intervention in violent criminal behavior appears to have much to do with pride, investment, and responsibility. Bobby best describes this pride and responsibility when he says, "*our* job is to protect the people that's in here you know." As Bobby shows, it is not only the investment of the owner himself, but also Bobby's co-workers and others who may casually frequent the business. Bobby further expands that "depending on how bad the situation is I try to kinda deescalate and just calm both of them down."

While the drive to protect their business and investment in the community motivates head barbers and beauticians to informally intervene in violent activity, it should be noted that such motivation may also be in part due to the lack of trust in police. As Bobby states "well about us being black and brown in here, the majority, I'm gonna try to diffuse it myself cause the police getting involved, it's more than likely gonna go a different way. So as long as I can see that there is no imminent danger like somebody [no one] has a firearm you know anything like that then it can be diffused." Mike further supports this sentiment by stating that "it would have to be really bad for me to call the cops you know." Therefore, barbers/beauticians often rely on the informal mechanisms in de-escalating (or interrupting) volatile or criminal behavior for a multitude of reasons. This theme demonstrates the nuanced and dynamic mechanisms centered around informal mechanisms at local institutions.

Theme 3: Barbers and Beauticians: Life Counselors

All respondents discussed experiences and situations where they provided life advice to their clients. Many barbers and beauticians believed themselves to be, to an extent, counselors or life coaches for their clients. While clients may come to get their hair cut, they may also frequent the barbershop or beauty salon to vent to the barbers/beauticians about their job, family, seek life advice, gang involvement, and other conflict in their lives. For example, Davon describes providing life counseling to gang-involved individuals:

> The ones I'm talking to the most are the ones that to some people that are unreachable. Those the ones I target you know when you got your pants all the way on your ankles and you talking about guns and all this kind of stuff. Those are the ones I reach out to cause I know you got something good in there somewhere and if nobody tries to find it you'll never show it. I got ex-gang members that's got jobs now and they'll come and tell me "Mr. D [I] appreciate you, now I'm working at chik-fil-a. You know I'm tired of the streets man." They say, "well you didn't even know it but it's because of you that I went and got a job." And that's [what] it's all about.

As life counselors, barbers/beauticians may talk crime-involved clients out of their lifestyle which may ultimately improve the safety of their client individually as well as the neighborhood. Mike states that the "barber is you know [the] pillar in the community that everyone frequents you know and barbers. . . we're people that are pretty much at every milestone of your life." Kristi demonstrates that barbers and beauticians talk clients through

alternative ways of handling situations through their own person experience and by being a "soundboard." Below she expands further:

> Younger people do confide in us and so you know there has to be a certain level of wisdom and decorum in how you handle situations. . . We have young ladies that are thinking of being intimate you know it's our responsibility to say um you want to do this responsibly and you know I'm very vocal and transparent about this you know the things that I could've or should've done differently and letting them know you have to be responsible for the consequences that may come

The merits of these talks do not just have an immediate impact but also the potential for a long-term impact on their clients. Owners took prideful ownership in their discussions either shaping the lives of youth and/or reformulating the current lives of older clients. Further, owners feel that by helping one client, they may be indirectly helping that client's family and loved ones. Said best by Alisha, "If I plant one seed that's replanted, I feel like I'm doing a part in the community." Alisha further explains below:

> Some of the young men in the community, I try to tap into 'what are your gifts?' I will be honest this may sound crazy, but I tell people a young man who is a drug dealer is one of the best entrepreneurs there is. So, if I can say something to teach you how to change that hustle into a legal hustle because a lot of these kids are broken and don't understand their gift. So, if I can flip it to "okay well shoot you should be opening your own x y z [store], or you should start to own l m n o p, and this gives some of our kids, young people, purpose. It gives them positions outside of gang affiliation, outside of street hustling, outside of robbing. . . I am a mentor so a lot of in particular mostly young girls, but I talk to young guys too, but in particular that's what I'm tapping into.

Another role that participants took pride in, is their perceived role as casual mental health therapists or psychologists. Sheena states, "I guess it helps I have a degree in psychology." While Alisha further expands upon this point.

> One of the other pieces I must add to our conversation is the mental health piece. . . clients that sit in the chair I helped people through all of these transitions. . . I considered going to school for psychology to be more professionally equipped. Because I [have] had people suicidal, professional women suicidal because of you know dealing with COVID, dealing with children at home you know, homeschooling while you're still trying to do conference calls. . . I had women literally on the verge of suicide and I was probably more the responsibility of being that one person that they can say something to connect if they want to live a little bit longer

The mental health support that barbers and beauticians provide to their clients may indirectly impact whether their clients engage in crime as well as supporting the overall mental health of the community. As Jazmine states "sometimes people ask what I do for a living, and I say I'm a stylist *and* I'm a counselor." Through providing mental health individualized "therapy" and life counseling to their clients, barbers and beauticians are a trusted source who create a safe environment where clients can come to de-stress and improve their mental health, life conditions, and potentially change client's life trajectory.

Theme 4: COVID-19 Disruption and Lessons of Resiliency

Since this data was collected as COVID-19 cases were increasing, it became a consistent topic of conversation throughout the interviews. Like many businesses (and individuals), the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected barbers and beauticians and the success of their businesses. The sentiments of the participants came to no surprise when they suggested that they could not provide the same services and benefits during the abrupt shutdowns at the onset of the pandemic. Carmisha states, "we were just shut down period, there's nothing anyone could do so it did it hit us pretty rough" and her clientele dropped significantly. Alisha mirrors her experience by giving the below testimony.

> This is a business where we felt like we're recession proof for the most part and for probably the first two months there was absolutely no income coming in, no stimulus. . . All of the money began to come in, unemployment, all of that began to come in closer to time for us to reopen so there was a window of about two months where we as stylists had absolutely no income because of course when we stopped, our money stopped.

The sense of "community" that these locations provide appeared to be lost during the pandemic. Not only were the business locations shutdown during the early parts of the pandemic, but there were substantial impacts even when the locations re-opened due to the clients and owners' hesitancy to go back to the barbershop/beauty salon. For instance, Kristi shared "I did lose a lot of clients during that time period because I was following the rules." Even upon returning to the barbershop and beauty salons, many of their operations were crippled or they had to revamp their business model, further impacting their anchor in the Black community. Lamar stated that he often held cookouts in "dangerous" parts of the neighborhood to bring the community together; however, the pandemic also prevented such gatherings from happening. For

example, Davon could no longer host events that would bring the community together. Davon further expands below:

> I invited everybody [to] come on by you know and. . . we give away a few things you know what I mean. My mom hosts a community rally where she lives, she's the former president of her neighborhood and I take my barbers. I get some of my students from the barber school and we. . . cut hair for the community for free of course you know what I mean we serviced sometimes the police officers there.

Since the barbers/beauticians were not allowed to open their business during the COVID-19 shutdowns, their ability to intervene in violent behavior, provide life advice, and create a safe haven for the community was interrupted. Thus, there may have been an immeasurable impact on these communities due to the shutdowns of these valuable local institutions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic introduced substantial strife to many Americans, participants demonstrated many forms of resiliency during this tough time. First, resiliency came in the form of support for co-workers and clients. Frederick would not charge his co-workers their daily fee to rent the chair within his barbershop while also providing PPE to clients throughout the pandemic. Second, head barbers and beauticians had to get creative financially to keep the business afloat. Allison looked to the stock market for other financial opportunities, while Frederick began selling t-shirts to make additional income. Third, resiliency manifested in changing their mindset from the negativity that was brought on by the pandemic to a positive state of mind. Bobby would instill in his clients that you have to find "positivity. . . in something that's so negative." Jermaine would emphasize to youth that during this time of crisis, it is a good opportunity to get a degree and advance yourself through education. Sheena, in the context of adapting to the pandemic, states "somehow we're able to help you evolve. . . I'm all about evolution because if you're not evolving, you're dying, there's no such thing as standing still."

The perseverance and resiliency demonstrated by head barbers and beauticians throughout the pandemic may "wear off" on their co-workers, clients, and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic may have highlighted the strong character (e.g., resiliency) demonstrated by head barbers and beauticians, these characteristics seemed "built-in." While the COVID-19 pandemic brought about negativity and obstacles, it also highlighted the value of these individuals and the business to the community. The testimonials of resiliency provided by the participants are established through lived experiences and growing up in similar communities that they serve.

Barbers and beauticians feel obligated to create a safe have within their community through violence interruption and providing support to their clients.

Discussion

The present study examined 13 Black barbershop and beauty salon owners to refine the societal mechanisms in which hair salons impact their communities. While there is some literature that has documented the historical and public health importance that barbershops/beauty salons provide to the Black community, no qualitative study has sought to understand the criminological (or crime preventative) mechanisms these locations provide. Boehme (2022) found that street segments with barbershops/beauty salons was associated with lower crime counts than streets with other businesses (but no barbershop/beauty salon). However, limited scholarship has examined the mechanisms that occur within these locations which may offer a crime deterrence impact at the location and nearby. Four themes emerged from the participants' interviews; (1) The barbershop and beauty salon: community anchors and safe havens, (2) barbers and beauticians: crime interrupters, (3) life counselors, and (4) COVID-19 disruption and resiliency.

This study contributes to the "local institutions" (Peterson et al., 2000) and "third places" (Oldenburg, 1999) theoretical perspectives. While the endogenous nature of businesses and crime makes research complicated (e.g., businesses may not open in high crime neighborhoods) (Wo, 2016), we build upon local institutions and third places by offering the concept of "community anchors." Many participants admitted that their business was in a "bad" area of town due to crime and gang activity. Yet, they mentioned that their business was a "safe haven" even within a high crime area. Thus, the concept of "community anchors" extends the concept of local institutions and third places by suggesting that even in high crime areas, there are still institutions that provide virtue to an otherwise disadvantaged community (Boehme, 2022; also see Slocum et al., 2013). Beyond crime deterrence, Black-owned barbershops and beauty salons are places where community events are held (e.g., police-community meetings, neighborhood cookouts) and resource distribution (e.g., public health information during the pandemic, school supplies for children) as evidenced by participant testimonies. Therefore, these locations are a place where neighborhood cohesion and ties are built, establishing itself as a community anchor and safe space. This study builds on previous local institution research by demonstrating that there are other important social institutions beyond the church, school, and recreation center (Peterson et al., 2000). Moreover, while historically disadvantaged communities lack the necessary local institutions to build informal social control,

there still remains important institutions within these communities that are reliable, supportive, and protective of the community. Importantly, community anchors are entrenched and "fit" within the culture and environment of the neighborhood.

The barbershop and beauty salon are a valuable institution because the community respects and trusts the owners of these businesses. It is this trust and respect that allowed barbers and beauticians to be "violence interrupters," as it became evident that the participants deterred potential violent behavior and created an environment where violent behavior is unacceptable at their business. Interestingly, participants never mentioned that crime "started" at the barbershops/beauty salon. Instead, it was neighborhood conflict and "beefs" that may have spilled into the business but was inevitably deterred by participants. While not the direct theoretical framework used within this study, findings build upon the "place management" perspective (Eck & Madensen-Herold, 2018) by providing qualitative context into effective place management. For example, it is important to note that the 13 participants knew most every person who entered their location (clients, frequenters, etc.), which allowed the participants to identify "strangers" or suspicious behavior. This familiarity with patrons may contribute to the "buy in" by head barbers/beauticians for their clients and the client's immediate network. The participants discussed how often and how many hours they spend at their businesses allowing for consistent oversight of co-workers, clients, frequenters, and the ability to interfere in any potential questionable behavior. Linning and Eck (2021) suggested that more qualitative place management research is needed to better understand practices enacted for effective management at businesses/land uses and within the neighborhood. Future studies should measure the impact owners/place managers' physical presence duration, patron rapport, and neighborhood buy-in impact the crime in their immediate vicinity. The present study qualitatively sheds light on how local institutions develop and how owners keep clients, co-workers, and neighborhood residents safe at their location.

All participants believed that they were life counselors and a "sounding board" for their clients and other visitors. For example, clients seemed to ask for "validation" of important life decisions of clients (e.g., relationships, employment, higher education) before making such impactful choices. Participants believed that this was an important "duty" of their job as a barber/beautician because they take responsibility in supporting their clients through counseling, mental health advice, and boosting self-esteem. In a sense, barbers and beauticians can be thought of as "old heads" (Anderson, 2013) who are well-respected within their community, provide mentorship to youth, and support the neighborhood (Carter et al., 2017). In parallel with this

concept, barbers and beauticians seeks to impact clients and youth's lives in a positive manner, such as preventing clients from engaging in criminal activity. Participants believed that these efforts inevitably improved the well-being of the clients and the community they serve. These extended, routine visits, including the welcome act of socializing without an appointment, afford these service providers ample opportunity for kinship and mentorship to develop between owner and client. From a policy perspective, "Psychohairapy" (Mbilishaka, 2018) is one promising program that runs mental health resources through the beauty salon. Black Americans disproportionately suffer mental health issues due to structural racism, economic hardship, and other adversities; yet, they are less likely to seek mental health care than their white counterparts (Ault-Brutus, 2012; Del Toro, 2021; Jordan & Dixon, 2021; Oates & DeMaris, 2022). In this regard, we suggest that other counseling or treatment services, such as cognitive behavior therapy, mentorship programs, and life skills training could also run through the barbershop and beauty salon. Furthermore, some participants mentioned that they would like to be professionally trained on how to speak with clients about their mental health concerns. Thus, not only can programs be administered through these businesses, but we suggest also training barbers and beauticians to provide them the necessary skills needed to better handle the mental health of clients and their community, especially in the middle of a pandemic that has exacerbated American's mental health crisis (Kämpfen et al., 2020). Supporting the mental health of clients and the community may have an indirect impact on crime, since research has shown that those who suffer from mental health issues may be more susceptible to criminal offending and victimization (Gottfried & Christopher, 2017; Khalifeh et al., 2015).

Throughout the pandemic the participants demonstrated the resilience needed to make it through the challenges and stressors associated with the lockdowns. According to Ugwi (2020), less than 2% of businesses that received CARES Act funding were Black-owned. While only one participant stated that they received such financial governmental support, participants demonstrated an internal strength to push through "tough times" that could potentially empower those they serve. Barbers and beauticians found other avenues to economically survive while also supporting their co-workers and the community. It became apparent that these demonstrations of resiliency were only highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, resiliency appeared to be an inherent characteristic of the participants due to their lived experiences. Thus, while COVID-19 highlighted the participants willingness to serve and lead, their role as a servant leader was engraved long before the pandemic. From a policy perspective, we suggest that government officials work together with these leaders to support historically disadvantaged communities.

Due to the historically strained relationship between police and communities of Color, African Americas are likely more reluctant to call police when needed (Rios, 2011). As presented above, this study underscored how barbers and beauticians have intervened in potentially dangerous altercations; likely motivated in part by the potential adverse consequences that may ensue if they were to call the police on fellow Black clients or co-workers. Since the barbershop and beauty salon is a trusted place, we suggest that police agencies collaborate with Black barbershops and beauty salons to discuss ongoing strain between police and Black communities. Scholars have suggested that police should "team up" with local institutions for positive nonenforcement outreach opportunities and implementation of "third party policing" efforts with local institutions/businesses (Cherney, 2008; Roussell & Gascón, 2014). This may help build better relationships between the police and Black communities through the police's support of local businesses, legitimate collaboration, and trust-building efforts. As demonstrated by our findings, barbershops and beauty salons may be an important institution within Black communities for police to initiate such outreach efforts, understand the needs of the neighborhood, and develop positive rapport with the Black community. As an extension of the police, the mayor and local legislators can additionally reach out to these businesses to understand the political, public, and social concerns of the neighborhood, as these are commonly discussed topics at the barbershop/beauty salon (Mills, 2013).

Although a select number of public health promotion initiatives have run through these locations, only one participant mentioned that they were contacted to disseminate public health resources throughout the pandemic. Therefore, we suggest that in a time of public health crisis (e.g., future pandemics), resources (e.g., hand sanitizers, masks, and other informational documents) should be provided to these community anchors to effectively disseminate information to the surrounding neighborhood. For example, several participants mentioned hesitancy of the COVID-19 vaccine among the American Black population, and the owners' perceptions of historical mistrust in governmental public health initiatives and "misinformation" circulating which affected vaccination rates in their local neighborhoods (Bajaj & Stanford, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021). Of note, almost all barbers and beauticians described a desire to host a state health department vaccine or testing site in their business, even if they were not vaccinated themselves. Public health officials should recognize the altruism and trusted source Black hair business owners offer, and they should be given a "voice" in disseminating empirical science on such controversial topics. While not directly related to crime, these institutions are a trusted source for a wide range of societal topics which further drives home how important these businesses are to their

communities. This inevitable creates a milieu within the neighborhood as a safe place from violence and deviance.

A few study limitations are worth noting. The study findings cannot be generalized to all Black barbershops, beauty salons, owners, and social networks uncovered within this project. The current primary data collection research was executed in two Southeastern cities; therefore, Black-owned barbershops/beauty salons in different geographic areas are likely to exhibit cultural and historical differences. Future research should geographically expand these investigations into other regions and ethnic populations. Lastly, we grouped men and women clientele-based hair businesses together in this analysis. While we found aligning themes among barbershop and beauty salon owners, future research should take an intersectionality approach to parse out client gender differences and the virtues these respective gender-based businesses provide the community.

In closing, the present study uncovered important social institutions with the Black community, barbershops and beauty salons. Whereas the church has been a historical beacon within the Black community, the barbershop and beauty salon may also offer a safe place where resources are mobilized, life events are discussed, and cohesion is built. Individual barbers and beauticians as well as the location itself are well-known, trusted, and reliable meeting places within the Black community. This familiarity between the patron and their barber/beautician combined with the recurring frequency in visits and engagement naturally creates an informal environment for these businesses to become a community anchor. These findings contribute to the local institutions literature by highlighting how these places emerge as such valuable locations. Future place-based and neighborhood crime scholarship should consider the protective impact that these businesses may have on neighborhood crime rates. Policy makers and police should support these community anchors to aid in creating safer and healthier communities.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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ORCID iD

Hunter M. Boehme https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3231-0428

Notes

1. City #1 population: 416,147 (49% White, 39% non-Hispanic Black). City #2 population: 324, 833 (39% White/37% non-Hispanic Black).
2. Some provided years (5+) while others said they have been here for a "long time."
3. Predominantly Black areas consisted of block-groups that were 50% or more Black/African American.
4. In-person or virtual interviews depended on the participant's comfort of in-person/virtual interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Author Biographies

Hunter M. Boehme is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of South Carolina.

Tameka V. Williams is a Senior Associate with Justice System Partners. At JSP Tameka facilitates leadership training and provides technical assistance to criminal and juvenile justice agencies to help transform their systems.

Natalie Brown is a recent graduate in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Carolina.

Lekendra Kidd is a second-year doctoral student within the Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice at the University of South Carolina.

Bryceson Hernandez is a recent graduate in the Department of Nursing at North Carolina Central University.

Melissa S. Nolan is an assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of South Carolina.