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**“That Ain’t You, Chiron”: Representations of Queer
Black (Hyper)Masculinity in Barry Jenkins’s
*Moonlight***

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Abstract

Hegemonic discourses of masculinity impose fixed patterns of behaviour upon individuals' lives. As a result, queer black men often experience social ostracism because of their race and non-normative practices, which makes them resort to hypermasculine performances to vindicate their masculinity. *Moonlight* (Jenkins 2016) is a film that focuses on Chiron's marginalisation as a result of his homosexuality, and the later construction of his hypermasculine identity. Adopting an intersectional approach, the aim of this paper is to analyse the traumatic episodes and moments of queer kinship in Chiron's life, as represented in *Moonlight*, that influenced the construction of his hypermasculinity. This analysis demonstrates that Chiron's hypermasculine performances were prompted by the rejection he suffered from his social environment due to his non-normative sexual preferences. Likewise, it is argued that the queer experiences of friendship and sexuality with those who showed the protagonist appreciation and respect, based on non-normative kinship, were significant factors in the protagonist's process of identity formation.

Keywords: queer, identity, kinship, hypermasculinity, *Moonlight*

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Introduction

Historically, the legitimisation of hegemonic masculinity¹ has established heteronormative constructions of gender, influencing scholarly research on the analysis of the restrictions that such constructions impose on individuals, and arguing against its fixation (see Butler 1988). With the increasing visibility of non-heteronormative practices within society, traditional concepts of gender are being deconstructed, broadening the interpretations of what constitutes maleness, and, in turn, recognising that there is no such thing as a single construction of masculinity.

*Moonlight*² (Jenkins 2016) is a coming-of-age film that explores Chiron's process of identity formation throughout the different stages of his life. Its three-act dramatic structure considers the protagonist's childhood in "I. Little", his adolescence in "II: Chiron", and his adulthood in "III. Black"³, referencing the protagonist's nicknames during these periods, respectively. The first two parts portray Chiron as an introverted man, bullied at his home and school for his homosexuality, which leads him to befriend a drug dealer who approves of him and appreciates him. The last part deals with a hypermasculine Chiron who is now a drug dealer himself, repressing his sexual desires to comply with society's heteronormativity. Although some scholars have analysed several aspects of black hypermasculinity in this film (Keenan 2018; Jordan and Brooms 2018), little attention has been paid to the causes that motivate the construction of Chiron's hypermasculine identity. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate that Chiron developed a performance of hypermasculinity, as represented in *Moonlight*, as a consequence of the humiliation and lack of support that he suffered in his social environment due to his non-normative sexual preferences. However, while the film focuses on his hypermasculinity, it also represents queer kinship with those who showed the protagonist respect and affection, which also has an impact on his adult life. In order to do this, it will be analysed how some of the traumatic episodes and moments of queer kinship that took place during Chiron's early years shaped his hypermasculine persona later in his adulthood. The film is relevant because it locates queerness at the centre of the black community, providing thus an important examination of the intersectionality of blackness, masculinity, and sexuality.

¹ The concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by Connell in 1987, theorises traditional masculine practices that emphasise the subordination of women and non-traditional constructions of masculinity (Connell 2013, 183).

² The film *Moonlight* is based on the semi-autobiographical play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* (2003) by playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney.

³ The sections of this paper have been divided using Roman numerals, with the purpose of providing a closer relation to the film.

Throughout this paper, the protagonist will always be referred to as Chiron, being Little or Black mentioned only in instances in which the use of these specific nicknames is relevant to the analysis or in direct quotes.

The following analysis is threefold. The first part will focus on “I. Little”, and it will address the issue of identity construction, as represented in the film, paying especial attention to the role of kinship in the creation of emotional bonds for the protagonist’s self-esteem. The second part, considering “II. Chiron”, will deal with the representation of the protagonist’s queerness, drawing on the concepts of trauma, homosexuality, and hegemonic masculinity, discussing how these concepts relate to blackness. The third part will contemplate “III. Black”, exploring how the performance of hypermasculinity often compels black men to accommodate to the heteronormative idea of black masculinity. Considering this cultural context, some brief references to the relevance of the soundtrack in the latter part of the film will be pointed out.

Given the focus on gender, sexuality and racialisation, and class to a lesser extent, the methodology of this paper is to read the characters in *Moonlight*, particularly Chiron, adopting an intersectional approach⁴. Therefore, this paper is framed within the disciplines of Cultural Studies and Masculinities Studies. While previous readings of *Moonlight* have related Chiron’s gendered performance and homosexuality to femininity, this paper will emphasise instead that the film illustrates diverse constructions of masculinity beyond the traditional standardisation of the hegemonic heteronormativity that perpetuates the jeopardisation of social, racial, and sexual minorities.

I. Identity and Kinship

Identity is a construction by means of which people define themselves and others. According to Barker, identity is “a discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names through citation and reiteration of norms or conventions” (2004, 93-94). Therefore, identity construction is based on the repetition of social guidelines. Furthermore, identification is “a process of articulation” (Hall 1996a, 3), being articulation “a ‘complex structure,’ a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities” (Hall 1996b, 38). Given that some of the aspects that delineate identity are “gender, ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality” (Allen 2012, 88), identity is thus an articulation of discourses. Consequently,

⁴ Black feminist critic Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to highlight the importance of race and gender when analysing violence against women of colour, as opposed to white women’s experiences (140). Nowadays, intersectional theory takes into consideration more identity markers, such as religion, class, ethnicity, migrant condition, physical disability, language, etc. (Vardeman-Winter and Tindall 2010, 225).

individuals “do not have a single social identity, but a variety of social identities” (Taylor and Spencer 2012, 10), connected to a need for identifying a mutual bond with other people that can establish a sense of kinship, since belonging to a cultural group is “a fundamental aspect of identity” (Cheek and Cheek 2018, 468). Hence, identity is composed of several intrinsic facets that contribute, both individually and collectively, to personal growth, along with producing a sense of group membership through kinship.

Although Jackson and Warin acknowledge that diverse aspects influence identity formation, they argue that gender is at the basis of identity construction because of its salience during the most significant phases of human life (2000, 375). Nevertheless, this statement is problematic on many levels. On the one hand, the complication lies in considering other identity markers in a lesser degree than that of gender, as these characteristics may be confused with gender, be analysed only from a gendered perspective, or even be completely neglected, as Butler explains: “By claiming that some identifications are more primary than others, the complexity of the latter set of identifications is effectively assimilated into the primary one, and the ‘unity’ of the identifications is preserved” (2013, 330). On the other hand, gender is not fixed, but fluidly constructed through the repetition of acts that constitute social normative patterns of behaviour (Butler 1988, 519; Charlebois 2010, 18). That is, one *does* gender (Lorber 1994, 13). Thus, another approach to tackle this issue is to consider gender not as pivotal, but as converging regularly with other identity markers, such as sexuality and race, in the process of subject formation, exploring how such components intersect.

In this sense, intersectionality refers “not to dimensions within categories but to dimensions across categories” (McCall 2005, 1781), dealing with “the mutually constitutive relations among social identities” (Shields 2008, 301). Furthermore, comparable to gender and identity, “intersectionality itself is constantly under construction” (Collins and Bilge 2016, 70), inasmuch as its components are not rigid, immovable qualities. By reason of *Moonlight* being about a Black character who is homosexual and poor, the film explores issues of gender, sexuality, class, and race, introducing what Walcott considers “something new about Black men, and in particular Black queer men’s intimacies and masculinities” (2019, 337).

Moonlight is a coming-of-age film (Bradley 2017, 51; Kroenert 2017, 42). The first part, “I. Little”, deals with Chiron (Alex Hibbert) struggling to define his sexual orientation, yet lacking his mother’s affection. Heatherington and Lavner explain that non-judgemental support from family members, especially parental figures, is essential when coming out (2008, 334). Hence, since Chiron does not receive from his mother the support he needs to understand his sexuality, the uncertainty regarding who he is increases.

As mentioned above, kinship is an important aspect of identity construction. Whereas Paula (Naomie Harris), Chiron's drug-addicted mother, "constantly bullies and intimidates him, and trivializes and belittles his existence" (Bradley 2017, 50), the drug dealer Juan (Mahershala Ali) and his girlfriend Teresa (Janelle Monáe) give Chiron their affection. When Chiron introduces himself to them, he explains that, although his name is Chiron, everybody calls him "Little" (Jenkins 2016, 09:24). However, Teresa states that she will call him by his name (09:35). A person's first name is an important marker connected to their feeling of identity (Windt-Val 2012, 273), and naming has the psychological effect of validating that identity (Watzlawick et al. 2016, 3). Hence, by recognising Chiron's name as the way of addressing him, not only is Teresa accepting him for who he is, but she is also approving of him, which consequently encourages Chiron to understand himself.

Moreover, Juan represents "a sort of mentor and caretaker" (Fong 2018, 89). White and Peretz assert that heterosexism forbids men of expressing feelings or emotions, because this leads to their categorisation as feminine or homosexual (2009, 406). Into the bargain, society "frown[s] strongly upon the demonstration of intimacy between men" (Lewis 1978, 108), perpetuating hegemonic discourses of masculinity, and demeaning both women and not-so-manly men (Connell 2013, 185; Kareithi 2014, 26). However, despite society's normative guidelines, Juan and Chiron build an affective friendship, based on relational resemblance of the things they have in common, which emphasises their kinship:

Juan: Let me tell you something, man. There are black people everywhere. Remember that, okay? No place you can go in the world ain't got no black people. We's the first on this planet. I been here a long time. But I'm from Cuba. Lot of black folks in Cuba. You wouldn't know that from being here, though. I was a wild little shorty, man, just like you. Runnin' around with no shoes on when the moon was out. This one time, I run by this old, this old lady. I was runnin', hollerin', cuttin' a fool, boy. This old lady, she stopped me. She said... "Running around catching up all that light. In moonlight, black boys look blue. You blue. That's what I gon' call you. Blue." (Jenkins 2016, 19:30)

The described scene takes place at the beach, under a blue sky and surrounded by a blue ocean. Brinckmann explains that colour in film is not reproduced with actual naturalness, but generated with a specific function, contributing to intentionally marking characters as either similar or different (1973, 18). Moreover, blue is associated with masculinity, but also with trust, tranquillity, understanding, and it is related to the sky and oceans (Morton 1997). Juan's speech, which attaches emotional significance to the beach, contains three significant points that question the hegemonic discourse of masculinity, destabilising traditional conventions. Firstly,

he establishes with Chiron male-male intimacy, creating non-normative kinship through something they have in common: their skin colour. Secondly, he compares himself to Chiron, using Chiron's nickname to accentuate their affinity: "a wild *little* shorty, man, *just like you*" (emphasis added). Finally, he explains how someone else employed a colour to describe him alluding to his skin colour, something that Chiron will imitate later in his life with the use of Black, highlighting that the non-normative esteem Chiron had for Juan during his childhood influenced him throughout his life. This last point is significant for Chiron's adulthood, and it will be retaken and discussed in more depth later.

As opposed to Juan, "Paula is unavailable and inconsiderate to young Chiron" (Keenan 2018, 2). The blues of the previous scene are contrasted later with pink lights surrounding Paula while she presumably screams at her son "[y]ou're a faggot!" (Walcott 2019, 340; Jenkins 2016, 30:05). Pink, apart from being associated with femininity, is also related to softness, gentleness, and love (Koller 2008, 405). Nonetheless, this scene uses pink to mark Paula's antipathy and exhibit her hatred, challenging the traditional associations of pink while stressing the disparity between Paula and Juan. Although Paula's voice is muted, the shot switches between her and Chiron, to finally show a plane charged with Paula's hysteria externalising the rejection of her son. This evidences how Paula "connects her son's gay identity to his tendency to be bullied" (Jordan and Brooms 2018, 146), justifying his marginalisation as a consequence of his homosexuality. Whereas Chiron remains passive, his mother's disrespect "only adds to [his] pain and deeply affects him in the future" (Keenan 2018, 4). The next day, when Chiron asks Juan about the meaning of "faggot", he reflects on the question before answering:

Chiron: What's a faggot?

Juan: A faggot is... A word used to make gay people feel bad.

Chiron: Am I a faggot?

Juan: No. No. You could be gay, but you gotta let nobody call you no faggot . . .

Chiron: How do I know?

Juan: You just do. I think.

Teresa: You'll know when you know . . .

Juan: You ain't gotta know right now, aight? Not yet. (Jenkins 2016, 33:26)

Juan and Teresa's response demonstrate that they accept and respect Chiron's sexual orientation without criticism or painful judgements. Besides, their way of addressing his concern vindicates Chiron's role as the agent in charge of his own identity, while at the same time they prioritise self-respect and encourage group acceptance, stimulating a stronger sense of kinship.

II. Queerness

Queer is a complex term, to say the least. The definitions around this term are varied, even contradictory in some cases. Teresa De Lauretis coined the term “queer theory” in 1991, with the aim of proposing readings of gay and lesbian identities resistant to heteronormative discourses beyond traditional approaches of sexual deviance (Jagose 2009, 157). Although queer must be understood differently from gay, lesbian, and bisexual, it is also an inclusive term (Doty 1993, xiv), used to refer to sexual identities that have been made peripheral in comparison to heterosexuality. Therefore, queer means “‘not normal,’ or, more specifically, not heterosexual” (Dilley 1999, 457). What is relevant about queer theory, however, is that it considers other marginalising discourses in addition to non-heterosexuality, such as racism, when challenging “the very system that sustains heteronormativity” (Goldman 1996, 174).

Traditionally, society has established patterns of behaviour for men and women based on biological distinctions related to sexual reproduction. This classification influences the categorisation of gender roles, by means of which men and women’s performances are standardised according to the functions they are to develop within a determined social structure (Diekman and Eagly 2000, 1171). Thus, gender roles are taken-for-granted facts based on individuals’ personalities that define femininity and masculinity as fixed constructions (Carrigan et al. 1985, 555). Critics have found such delineations of gender unsatisfactory, claiming that gender is not fixed (Butler 1990, 9–10), and that delimiting the boundaries of gender neglects what does not meet with society’s conventionalisms, as Demetriou points out: “[sex role theory] fails to acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of femininities and masculinities and includes whatever is inconsistent with the normative sex role in the category of ‘deviance’. In this way, male homosexuality . . . appear[s] as the product of some personal eccentricity or imperfect socialization and the power that is exercised over [it] is tacitly concealed” (2001, 339).

Scholars sustain that heterosexuality and homophobia perpetuate the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, since the prescriptions of what being a man means reinforce heteronormativity (Garlick 2003, 157; Donaldson 1993, 645). Stereotypically, masculine traits are “being more aggressive, competitive, and dominant than women; while women are characterized as being more gentle, tender, and aware of others’ feelings than men” (Gerber 1984, 907). Since the absence of masculine attributes is understood to constitute femaleness (Spence and Helmreich 2014, 6), non-heteronormative masculinities, including male homosexuality, are commonly associated with femininity (Kluczyńska 2017, 1372), being queer identities undermined by oppressing discourses. At the beginning of “II. Chiron”, Terrel

(Patrick Decile), the school bully, says that Chiron (Ashton Sanders) “forgot to change his tampon”, and that he is “just having woman problems” (Jenkins 2016, 36:30), demonstrating how he correlates Chiron’s homosexuality to womanhood.

Firstly, intolerance towards non-heteronormative sexual identities leads to ostracism, as Blackwell et al. point out: “[H]omosexuals [are] the targets of unjust discriminatory practices that single them out in a uniquely predatory fashion” (2004, 30). Such discrimination, in many cases, is based upon prejudices regarding queer people’s personalities (Case et al. 2008, 24). Hence, queer individuals experience social intolerance as a consequence of challenging the same structures that have oppressed them.

Secondly, hegemonic discourses establish non-white as non-normative. The literature on racial bigotry and the consequent trauma is hugely extensive. Nevertheless, Butts outlines that traumatic and post-traumatic disorders related to ethnic discrimination within the African-American community in the US are an effect of the colonisation period and the institution of black slavery (2002, 338). Likewise, Wiecek argues that the stereotypes associated with Blacks continue to materialise structural racism in Western societies, resulting in the segregation of people of colour (2011, 5). As a consequence, “[b]lack queers have often felt that they, and their desires and stories, are invisible to society” (Matebeni 2013, 408). Thus, by being not only black, but also queer, these individuals suffer diverse levels of hatred from different discriminatory angles. In Chiron’s case, he is “rejected because of his skin colour, his sexual interests, and his sensitivity feel” (Ricco 2019, 23).

Queer masculinity, Heasley explains, refers to “ways of being masculine outside heteronormative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine” (2005, 310). Although Juan dies at some point between “I. Little” and “II. Chiron” (Jenkins 2016, 46:55), Teresa keeps reminiscing him and comparing him to Chiron, emphasising their queer kinship: “You [Chiron] and Juan. Y’all two, thick as thieves” (41:40).

Whereas in “I. Little”, Juan could be considered an example of queer masculinity different from Chiron, in “II. Chiron”, Kevin (Jharrel Jerome) presents traits of his personality that can be considered as traditionally masculine, as well as some not-so-masculine ones. Haywood argues that men have an urgency to quantify and describe their sexual experiences that is connected to their sense of masculinity (1996, 244). However, gossip and secrecy are more frequently related to women’s behaviour than to men’s (Levin and Arluke 1985, 282). The first encounter between Kevin and Chiron in this part of the film illustrates Kevin’s

ambivalence in these aspects, while Jenkins provides another non-normative example of masculinity different from Juan and Chiron:

Chiron: What you doin' here?

Kevin: Detention, man. Aimes caught me with this trick in the stairway . . . I just wanted some quick head, you know, but this chick all like: "Hit that shit, Kevin. Hit it with that big dick." . . . So, I started banging her back out, dawg . . . I almost had my ass suspended . . . I talked it out, though . . . So, I just got detention. It's cool . . . That stay between us, aight? . . . I know you can keep a secret, dawg . . . See you, Black. (Jenkins 2016, 37:50)

Jernigan and Daniel state that "[m]embership in a racial and ethnic group can influence perception, impact, and recovery when one has experienced a trauma" (2011, 125). As opposed to their classmates, Kevin does not discriminate Chiron for his sexual orientation, but treats him as an equal, and by calling him "Black" he highlights something they both have in common, in the same way that Juan did: their skin colour.

The intimacy between Chiron and Kevin goes beyond friendly nicknames. Under the moonlight, in front of the beach, covered by blue shadows, accompanied by the sound of the waves and a smooth breeze, the two characters share a moment filled with their affects⁵ and feelings. Ahmed relates the concept of affect to that of emotion, claiming that "[t]o be emotional is to have one's judgement affected" (2014, 3). Moreover, "emotions *do things*, and they align individuals . . . through the very intensity of their attachments" (2004, 119). Therefore, affect as emotion is relevant considering that it stresses the importance of kinship in linking individuals through emotional connections. When Chiron explains to Kevin that he frequently cries, and that such crying overwhelms him, Kevin empathises with him (53:00). Next, when Chiron confesses that he does not understand his thoughts, Kevin encourages to disclose to him what he thinks about (53:38). Immediately after, preceded by petting and kisses, Chiron has his first male-male sexual experience when Kevin masturbates him, being thus Kevin's sexual fluidity externalised. This scene has been analysed as "blue", considering being blue in Juan's story as a metaphor, meaning that "under the cover of night, Black boys could drop their guard, shed masculine pretenses and personas that they use to survive, and become vulnerable, beautiful, and free to be themselves by the water, a romantic symbol in this movie about Black male liberation from societal pressure and complexes of what Black men should be" (Jordan and Brooms 2018, 148).

⁵ Although some scholars make a distinction between *affect* and *emotion* (see Clough and Halley 2001), this paper will follow Ahmed's position, using both words as close synonyms.

Their episode at the beach is severely ravaged by the violence attached to hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Kevin is coaxed by Terrel to physically brutalise Chiron in front of the school “as part of a beating ritual” (Allen 2017, 596). Kevin must perform the aggression in order to “preserve his own social status” (Fong 2018, 94), and to avoid having other people, especially Terrel, questioning his masculinity. After the attack, it is Chiron’s masculinity that is questioned by the school principal, who criticises Chiron’s passivity and describes violence as a normative trait related to masculinity: “[i]f you were a man, there’d be four other knuckleheads sitting right next to you” (Jenkins 2016, 62:43). This leads Chiron to respond violence with violence, striking Terrel twice with a chair, and reasserting his masculinity through aggressiveness (65:00). As a consequence, Chiron is arrested (65:25). These series of assaults “catalyze [Chiron’s] transformation to the adult Black” (Sexton 2017, 176).

III. Hypermasculinity

Juan’s impact on Chiron was huge. The film begins with Juan driving a car on his way to meet a dealer that works for him, and “III. Black” opens equally with Chiron (Trevante Rhodes), who is now a drug dealer in Atlanta, in the same situation: driving a car approaching a man who works for him (Jenkins 206, 67:09). Both cars have a crown in the dashboard, which accentuates this resemblance. Up until this point, the film’s soundtrack has been orchestral. However, the music now changes to the rap song “Cell Therapy” by rapper Goodie Mob, which is characteristic of African-American gangster culture (Hunnicutt and Andrews 2009, 614). Also, adapting the way in which Juan was referred to by the old lady, Chiron goes now by the name of “Black”, Kevin’s nickname for him in the previous act. In doing so, it is evidenced how the queer kinship that Chiron had with Juan, and later with Kevin, influenced his adult life.

“III. Black” explores the hypermasculine performance of Chiron’s identity and his after-prison life. Firstly, the black colour symbolises power, depression, and the unknown (Morton 1997). Secondly, O’Donohue et al. define hypermasculinity as the exaggeration of stereotypical manly behaviour that heightens male dominance and legitimises traditional conceptions of gender roles (1996, 134). Hence, hypermasculinity is closely linked to toughness and roughness, given that macho personalities are rooted in violence (Mosher and Sirkin 1984, 150). As the white gaze, according to Hooks, constructs black manhood placing it outside the norm, and objectifying it as the brute and uncivilised (2004, xii), black men have to become hypermasculine to vindicate their masculinity, because just by being non-white, they already fail to meet with society’s hegemonic expectations of masculinity and, as a result, black men “become the stereotypes that others project onto them” (Wynter quoted in Walcott 2019, 339).

Additionally, in some cases, the sudden embodiment of hypermasculinity can be connected to experiences of trauma (Winlow 2014, 44). As for queer black males, Ward argues that hypermasculinity represents, very frequently, a vehicle to mask their desire for non-normative sexual intimacy (2005, 499). Consequently, Chiron's hypermasculinity can be understood as a way of coping with the traumas he suffered throughout his childhood because of his homosexuality (Allen 2017, 598), whereas at the same time his hypermasculine persona echoes Juan's behaviour, because "Juan was the only man in Chiron's life that he looked up to . . . a man that Chiron respected and loved" (Keenan 2018, 5).

The performative acts that construct gender provide both the social audience and the performers the perception of that gender identity as true (Butler 1988, 520). Furthermore, since building muscle is also building masculinity (Pronger 2002, xi), muscularity is the means through which some men construct an identity for society to validate as masculine (Wiegerts 1998, 148). Chiron is a corporeally different man in this third act, who has "gained several pounds of muscle, carries a gun, and reveals a gold grille over his teeth when he opens his mouth" (Copeland 2017, 688), with the purpose of obtaining society's approval by legitimising his masculinity through bodybuilding and a tough appearance.

Nevertheless, Chiron's hypermasculinity is confronted when, years later, he receives an unexpected call in the middle of the night from Kevin (André Holland), who apologises for the earlier assault and admits that he thought about calling him after someone played a song at his workplace that reminded him of Chiron (Jenkins 2016, 71:40). The call finishes with Kevin inviting Chiron to visit his workplace, where he will cook for him and "maybe play that song for [him]" (74:30). Although Chiron is physically different, his attitude has the function of "closely guarding the same emotional flames lit during his childhood" (Kroenert 2017, 42), because the following morning, Chiron wakes up, realising that he ejaculated while he was asleep, after his conversation with Kevin (Jenkins 2016, 76:05). Thus, Chiron's intention of embodying "conventional representations and performances of his Black masculine identity catch up with him and begin to affect his social life and his emotions" (Jordan and Brooms 2018, 146).

Afterwards, Chiron decides to visit Kevin in Miami. Once they see each other at Kevin's workplace, their meeting is permeated with complexity and affection (Allen 2017, 596). Kevin does not recognise Chiron at first, because of his change of appearance. However, after looking into each other's eyes, Kevin is able to see beyond Chiron's hypermasculine façade, and it is demonstrated that although Chiron personifies his masculinity with a magnified excess of

stereotypical masculine attributes, his character recollects the earlier stages of what constituted his identity:

Kevin: What about you, bro?

Chiron: What about me?

Kevin: Nigga... Tell me somethin'. I mean, what you're doin'? . . .

Chiron: All right... Straight up?

Kevin: Yeah, nigga, straight up.

Chiron: I'm trappin'.

Kevin: What?

Chiron: Yeah. When they sent me to Atlanta, put me straight into juvie for beatin' the old boy... Met this dude in there. When I come out, he put me on the block. Did good at it and rose up. It is what it is.

Kevin: Bullshit, man. That ain't what it is. That ain't you, Chiron. (Jenkins 2016, 90:48)

Followed by his assertion, Kevin reveals that the song that triggered his phone call was Barbara Lewis's "Hello Stranger" (1963). Encompassing the two characters in an ambience of reminiscence, the role of this song is to highlight the physical change in Chiron's appearance while conveying a "powerful reminder of the bond between two childhood friends" (Baird and Thompson 2017, 2), because of its lyrics, which provide comments of intimacy while allowing Kevin to silently underline his apologetic intentions: "It seems so good to see you back again . . . Because I still love you so, although it seems like a mighty long time" (Lewis 1963).

Towards the end of the film, Chiron and Kevin go to the latter's house, where Kevin changes from his white workwear to a blue shirt. According to Sexton, this is significant because the moment in which they reconcile, the treatment of blue recalls Chiron's scene at the beach with Juan, and thus "blue remains a significant motif throughout the film" (2017, 93). Kevin's interest to interpret Chiron's identity is once again manifested when he requests Chiron to define himself:

Kevin: Who is you, man?

Chiron: Who, me?

Kevin: Yeah, nigga. You . . . Who is you, Chiron? (Jenkins 2016, 101:25)

Subsequently, Chiron confesses to Kevin that he has tried to avoid remembering the last time they saw each other, when he got arrested, with the aim of "forget[ting] all those times" (102:35). Immediately after, Chiron admits that he "built [him]self hard" after his imprisonment (102:50), proving that the hypermasculine performance of his identity was an effect of the lack of affection caused by the social rejection and the prejudices people had regarding his non-

normative sexual practices. In a related manner, Kevin recognises that society's heteronormativity also oppressed his queer identity, imposing on him behaviour patterns that limited his sexual fluidity: "[I] [n]ever really did anything I actually wanted to do . . . [A]ll I could do was to do what folks thought I should be doing. I wasn't never really myself" (103:15). At this point, Chiron reveals that Kevin has been his only sexual partner: "You're the only man that's ever touched me. You're the only one. I haven't really touched anyone since" (104:32). Finally, the film ends with an intimate cuddling moment next to the beach, in which, under the moonlight, the two characters underscore their queer kinship and reaffirm their masculine identities outside the boundaries of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

Moonlight is a film that gives visibility to the lives of black queer characters, deconstructing traditional conceptions of maleness, while at the same time it displays the diversity regarding the ways in which black masculinities can be represented beyond heteronormative stereotypes. This paper has demonstrated that the hypermasculine performance of Chiron's identity was a result of the rejection and ostracism that he experienced from his social environment throughout his childhood and adolescence, which led him to consider Juan as a role model. Given the fact that Juan epitomised an example of a man that was upheld and admired by Chiron, their queer kinship influenced the shaping and eventual performance of Chiron's hypermasculine identity. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of kinship and its connection with a sense of belonging when it comes to identity formation and self-esteem. Therefore, by highlighting the physical characteristics that these two characters have in common at the beginning of the film, Jenkins marks their affinity, which is later emphasised when reviewing the similarities in their adult lives.

Moreover, the episode of male-male sexual intimacy between Chiron and Kevin illustrates the queer masculinity of another black character. Taking into account that prejudices against black people are aggravated when they do not comply with heteronormative practices, Kevin is an additional example of how queer black men have to oppress and camouflage their non-heteronormative sexual desires with different hypermasculine performative acts, such as aggression and violence, to obtain the approval of their community and avoid social exclusion and criticism. Finally, considering the importance of group acceptance for traumatic experiences, particularly within the African-American community, Chiron and Kevin shared an atmosphere of mutual appreciation, which influenced Chiron's adulthood, allowing them to build a mutual bond through the establishment of queer kinship.

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