

# Beyond Shame in Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight* (2016)

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**Abstract:** Shame is frequently racialized, gendered, and sexualized. The 2016 film *Moonlight*, directed by Barry Jenkins, is a cultural touchstone in these terms. Through its success at the 89th Academy Awards, it brought to mainstream audiences a complex depiction of black, queer masculinities that move beyond shame. *Moonlight* follows a black man through three episodes in his life as he seeks to find agency in hypermasculine spaces wherein his potential queerness and aversion to dominance and aggression leads to isolation and shame. Through the lens of queer temporalities, I show how conventional queer narratives are subverted in *Moonlight* through opportunities of intimacy. I offer an analysis of the film's depiction of queerness as an unfixed category and show how the aesthetics underscore the idea of indeterminacy.

Director Barry Jenkins's Oscar-winning film *Moonlight* (2016) follows Chiron (played by Alex Hibbert, Ashton Sanders, and Trevante Rhodes) as he moves through three episodes in his life—childhood, adolescence, and adulthood—all while navigating the terrains of black masculinity in a society where the dominant discourse rejects any notions of vulnerability among men. At the core of this coming-of-age story is the struggle with hypermasculinity that Chiron faces as a black queer man. As the film progresses, he uncovers various aspects of queerness, kinship, and masculinity that open up opportunities beyond shame and secrecy. Rather than rely on conventions of homosexuality and masculinity where identities are exposed and/or liberated by daylight, I will utilize the framework of queer temporalities in order to show that *Moonlight* embraces the metaphor of night as a vehicle for a narrative that values mutability and indeterminacy.

In the first section, I will outline the meaning of queer temporalities according to Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Jafari S. Allen, with a particular focus on how this concept relates to black masculinities. Since my reading of the film focuses on temporalities symbolized by day and night, the second section focuses on “daylight,” or rather “straight time,” in the film and shows how for queer people straight time is presentist and impoverished. The third section will show how heteronormative temporalities of linearity are subverted through moments of intimacy between characters at night.

## 1. QUEER TEMPORALITIES: QUEERING BLACK MASCULINITIES

*Moonlight*'s central conflict lies in the main character's struggle against the confines of hypermasculinity that dominate the narratives of his life. According to media studies scholar Arzu Karaduman, racial uplift narratives attempt to redeem emasculated black male identities by idealizing hypermasculinity and leaving no room for queerness (62-63). *Moonlight* shows how these notions of masculinity come into play through rigid socialization and how they marginalize the protagonist. According to sociologist Raewyn Connell, marginalized masculinities, rendered powerless by the oppression of white supremacy, will construct “an exaggerated claim to the potency that European culture attaches to masculinity” that is a reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (111). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77).

In white supremacist practices, this patriarchal legitimacy and dominance functions largely to benefit white heterosexual men. Yet marginalized men reproduce exaggerated paradigms of hegemony by asserting dominance over subordinate masculinities (i.e. queer masculinities) and women (114). Still, this claim to hypermasculinity is constantly limited by the economic disadvantages of marginalized groups, and is therefore largely unsustainable (116). bell hooks delves deeper into this argument by showing that black men are conditioned from childhood to believe in this myth of hypermasculinity—to believe that domination, control, and violence are legitimate means of gaining power and authority. Those who do not subscribe to these beliefs are subjected to punitive

force, shaming, and humiliation in order to coerce them into patriarchal thinking (hooks 83).

However, a queer framework allows for a rethinking of coming-of-age narratives and socialization. In *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Jack Halberstam writes,

[...] [I] propose that we rethink the adult/youth binary in relation to an “epistemology of youth” that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity. Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death (2).

Rather than follow the “adult/youth binary” wherein maturation is linearly dictated by normative life events, *Moonlight* sees growth in a symbolic division between day and night. Following Halberstam, I propose that this division can be seen as “a ‘queer’ adjustment of time” (6); “Queer” here refers to “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (6). For performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz, “straight time” is presentist, a temporality wherein the only afforded futurity is related to reproductive time (22). Considering the sun as representative of “natural units of time” (Ferber 211), I will associate daytime with Muñoz’s straight time. Under the sun’s glare, in *Moonlight*, (hyper-) masculinity predominates.

Yet the night offers other opportunities. Considering the moon as representative of the feminine (Ferber 130), I will associate the night with black queer temporality. Black queer studies scholar Jafari S. Allen also refers to the night as a queer temporal sphere in opposition to straight time wherein “what is putatively most important happens in the daytime, or in which one ‘grows out of’ same-sex ‘play’ or finally ‘settles down’ into heteronormative or homonormative sociality” (28). Thus, the night becomes a vehicle for a narrative that values “mutability, metamorphosis, inconstancy, [and] fickleness” (Ferber 130) over rigid boundaries. Furthermore, for Karaduman, *Moonlight* conveys temporality in “aesthetics of suspension” as she highlights “linear/out-of-joint time” specifically related to Chiron’s mother, Paula, as a means of ambiguity (64). She argues,

The suspended act of abjecting and shaming queerness by the mother's parenthetical screams in the film aporetically opens up a space, an interval for the possibility of black queer sexuality (Karaduman 72).

This aesthetic act of suspension extends beyond these parentheses—the not-knowing if the mother, Paula's violent screams wherein she may or may not scream the word "f\*ggot" at her young son—and speaks to the overall ambiguity of sexuality within the film.<sup>1</sup>

In and out of "the closet" is the metaphor most often used in narrating nonheterosexual life, whereby coming out signifies fully knowing oneself and announcing it to the world. But as black queer studies scholar Marlon B. Ross argues in "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm," the closet paradigm falls short. Ross explains,

[...] "claustrophilia," a fixation on the closet function as the grounding principle for sexual experience, knowledge, and politics, and this claustrophilic fixation effectively diminishes and disables the full engagement with potential insights from race theory and class analysis (Ross 162).

Ross notes that "the closet" is often "the essential vehicle for narrating homosexuality as a necessary progress from dark secrecy to open consciousness" (162) and the concept of coming out of the closet as "a compelling way of fixing homosexual identity exactly because it enables this powerful narrative of progress" (163). Ross also criticizes the closet as an imposition of a white concept on black life. Jeffrey McCune further elaborates on this notion by explaining "the DL":

"Coming out of the closet" has been the contemporary niche phrase to articulate the universal threshold experience of sexual self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Recently, however, we have seen the emergence of black men who have discreet sex with other men, who engage in low-key queer activity and describe themselves as being on the "down low" (DL). These men challenge this overdetermination of the closet as a container of shame, pain, discomfort, and anxiety—offering a counternarrative of discretion as a tactic of survival (McCune, "'Out' in the Club" 299).

The DL then is not synonymous with 'closetedness' at all and subverts the idea that being in the closet is a space of shame for queer black men. The film subverts this

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1 For a close reading of the mother-son relationship in *Moonlight*, see Arzu Karaduman's "'Hush-Hush, I Will Know When I Know': Post- Black Sound Aesthetics" (2017).

fixation on and obsession with homosexual identity as secrecy and exposure with its depiction of queerness: firstly, by not limiting the character's sexuality through the coming-out process, and secondly, not reducing them to their sexual identity.

## 2. IN DAYLIGHT: UNMASKING MASCULINITIES

Hegemonic masculinities are shown to thrive in the daylight in *Moonlight*. The most poignant example of this occurs in the second part of the film "ii. Chiron." By this time, Chiron's high-school-aged peers have embraced a reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, here performed by oppressing Chiron for his perceived queerness. Terrel, in particular, represents a type of black masculinity that categorically rejects queer identities (Johnson 136). His homophobia and sexism are introduced in the first sequence of part ii: "Hey, yo, that n\*\*\*a forgot to change his tampon. I'm sorry, Mr. Pierce. He just having woman problems today" (*Moonlight* 00:36:27). When Chiron attempts to rebut, Terrel threatens to "fuck [Chiron] up" (*Moonlight* 00:36:45).

In this brief altercation, hegemonic masculinity targets both men and women by ridiculing the feminine. This degradation of women is further emphasized in a separate confrontation in which Terrel ridicules both of Chiron's mother figures, Teresa and Paula. At this point, Chiron's anger erupts.(00:47:21). Terrel responds: "Now, I ain't with that gay shit. But if you fuck with me, I'll give that ass more than you can handle, have you runnin' to your crackhead-ass mama" (*Moonlight* 00:47:24). Terrel threatens rape as a punitive consequence to Chiron's self-defense, which cannot be seen as queer ambiguity, but rather as a forceful feminization and therefore humiliation of Chiron.

The first part "i. 'Little'" depicts and affirms hooks' claim that this type of domination and power-play is taught to boys from a young age. One scene begins on a bright day with a horizontal pan shot of the all-boys group, including Chiron, sweating and panting (00:13:16). His desire to participate is shown by the way he mimics the predatory stances and aggressive glares of his peers. Introduced by the disruptive, loud horn of a passing train, the next shot shows the boys kicking a ball, shouting, and laughing loudly. From a wider angle, we see Chiron positioned away from the group, but running after them and having trouble keeping up. Gradually, the shots become confusing; portions of bodies fight or play, underscored by

laughter. The friendships between these boys are presented as desirable; they laugh, touch, and enjoy themselves.

The atmosphere shifts as the point of view switches back and forth between characters. The boys nudge the ball intimidatingly towards Chiron as he becomes increasingly confused by the impending threat. The group crowds in on Chiron until Kevin intercepts the ball and leads them away. What at first seems like another means of excluding Chiron soon becomes an obvious rescue mission.

The next scene begins with a blurred shot that focuses as Kevin asks “Why do you always let people pick on you, man?” (00:15:08). According to Kevin, the others do not have to stop picking on Chiron, he must stop letting them. Aggression here is less of a characteristic and more of a fact of life, and Chiron’s ‘softness’ is the issue. They wrestle in order to prove Chiron’s toughness. In another series of shots, portions of the boys’ bodies grasp at each other while they breathe heavily. In some shots, they link limbs, conveying intimacy; in others, they push away from each other (00:15:08-57). These movements show a contradiction of masculinity. While bodily closeness is desirable, it is only attainable through physical struggle. The scene ends with both boys on their backs, panting. As Kevin stands up, he says “See, Little. I knew you wasn’t soft,” conclusively marking physical violence, toughness, as a feat of masculinity (00:15:58). Here, the film shows how hypermasculinity assumes that strength and dominance are not formed organically, but through rituals of initiation, group mentalities, and survival practices. Chiron’s inability to play hard places him outside of the group and, therefore, outside of acceptable masculinity. In line with the argument proposed by Allen, the day is depicted as the time to settle into normative gender roles.

These rites of passage are depicted with far more severity in the second part. After an intimate, vulnerable night between Chiron and Kevin, masculine rituals and survival tactics lead to a violent betrayal of trust. The next day at school Terrel asks Kevin to participate in a “game” of “knock down/stay down,” in which a victim is continuously beaten as long as they do not stay down after they are knocked down (00:58:50). Of course, Terrel chooses Chiron as the victim. Kevin, initially hesitant, ultimately decides that his pride, reputation, and position in the group are worth the trade-off. Chiron, however, refuses to stay down, ostensibly forcing Kevin to beat him up. By not giving up, he challenges Kevin’s participation in this violent practice. As Kevin urges Chiron to stay down, it is clear that he is aware of the harm he is causing and that his participation is due to peer pressure.

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The general acceptance of violence as an inherent part of masculinity becomes glaringly visible in the principal's office after the bloody beating. She unconditionally accepts violence as a feature of masculinity and diminishes its severity. Chiron ultimately sees no other way but to fight back by storming into class and breaking a chair on Terrel's back. Induced by years of exclusionary practices, isolation, and brute violence, Chiron's one violent act leads to his incarceration. In the last sequence of the second part, Kevin watches Chiron being arrested. As they make eye contact, the camera focuses on Kevin's expression, which gives away that he realizes his complicity.

Yet, *Moonlight* does not disavow the day and masculinity entirely. Early on, Chiron is offered an alternative initiation into masculinity through Juan. The film opens with Juan driving in his light blue Chevrolet, wearing a wave cap and a gold watch. On his dashboard rests a shiny golden crown (00:00:39), which in the third part will be referenced by Chiron (1:07:09). We learn that although he is a drug kingpin, contrary to stereotypes, he is kind and respectful to those around him. Juan takes Chiron under his wing and invites him into his home, where he and his girlfriend Teresa care for him. In a pivotal scene, Juan teaches Chiron how to swim. In one long take, Chiron's hesitance and facial expressions show competing desires. Will he remain on safe ground or move into unfamiliar waters? The latter would include displaying vulnerability—a trait he was just taught to hide by Kevin.

"Here, let your head rest in my hand. Relax. I got you, I promise. I'm not gon' let you go. Hey, man, I got you" (00:18:00). Juan gains Chiron's trust by guiding, reassuring, and supporting him. With his head cradled in Juan's hand, the scene echoes a baptism, symbolizing self-discovery and coming-of-age (Hanke 21). In this rite of passage, Chiron learns that expressing vulnerability can create opportunities for intimacy.

Juxtaposed with the strict, yet contradictory rules and roughness of the ballgame scene, the motion of the water conveys softness and fluidity. Chiron can take his time in the water and become accustomed to the environment without force. Physical contact between men does not have to be violent or a point of shame, rather it can be an expression of love and support. Juan forges this opportunity for Chiron by offering an alternative model of masculinity. Thus, the ocean becomes a queered space, which then queries masculinity in a move towards vulnerability and gentleness among men.

### 3. IN MOONLIGHT: INTIMACY AND INDETERMINACY

Vulnerability and trust become spatialized through recurring scenes by the ocean. Even after Juan passes away, the beach where he once taught Chiron to swim has been imbued, for Chiron, with trust and safety. Thus, the beach becomes the location of another pivotal, intimate moment in the second part. When Chiron's mother Paula sends him away for the night (00:39:35), he escapes to the beach. Chiron's loneliness and isolation is visually translated in this scene as he is centered in almost every shot (00:48:11).

Soon after, Chiron is serendipitously joined by Kevin. Kevin, still Chiron's only friend, remains ambiguous. While he shows empathy and support to Chiron, he also embraces features of hypermasculinity, such as objectifying language towards women (00:37:56). In this scene, his initial approach to Chiron is cryptic. Statements such as "You was waitin' for me?" (00:49:43) and "You tryin' to put on a show for me, Black?" (00:50:10) can be interpreted as either amicable banter or as flirtation; this ambiguity of speech continues in the third part. Chiron's confusion on the terrain of masculinity from the first part is echoed when he asks "What kind of dude goes around giving other dudes nicknames?" (00:50:27). Chiron here notes the queerness of nicknames, implicitly questioning Kevin's sexuality.

This scene moves beyond the laughter and initiation that followed Chiron's isolation and confusion in the childhood ball game depicted in part i by showing the two boys beginning to speak more intimately. This once again focuses the beach as a space that allows for expressions of vulnerability. Therefore, even though Kevin says he does not cry, Chiron feels no shame when he says that he cries "so much sometimes it feels like [he is] about to turn into droplets" (00:53:09). This progression leads to a kiss that sets in motion a tender love scene. An aesthetic of intimacy is achieved by centering the boys' lips as they kiss to only the diegetic sounds of the ocean. As they break from the kiss, their eyes speak volumes: Chiron cannot look at Kevin, but Kevin's desire is clearly focused on Chiron (00:54:37). The camera pans across the soft fabric of their clothes, exuding gentleness (00:54:48). This gentleness is continued in a shot showing Chiron gripping the sand tightly before it falls loosely around his hand.

Kevin's sexuality can be read within the framework of down-low sexuality presented by McCune. Like Chiron, Kevin never openly states his sexuality as the closet paradigm would require. However, unlike Chiron, Kevin lacks instances of



shame regarding his sexuality. McCune elaborates this dynamic further in *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*, stating that the DL provides “an articulation of a politics of discretion” as well as a way of protecting oneself from becoming “a spectacle” (8). McCune makes clear that the DL is something that “cannot be mapped onto carceral structures” like the closet, nor does it articulate a need for escape, but rather the DL is “an unmarked space that provides sexual autonomy and agency” (11). It is precisely Kevin’s sexual autonomy and agency that enable this intimate sexual act to the point that “*Moonlight* boldly normalizes the two teenage boys’ sexual experience as both beautiful and mundane” (Kannan et al. 293). The DL as a space free of shame is reiterated when Chiron apologizes to Kevin after he ejaculates, and Kevin responds, “What you got to be sorry for?” (00:53:57).

Yet, their intimate connection is disrupted when Kevin succumbs to hypermasculinity the very next day, in the harsh sunlight, as he beats Chiron. This disruption leads audiences into the third part, which takes place almost exclusively at night. Years after the violent betrayal, Chiron and Kevin reconnect as adults in “iii. Black.” From a physical perspective, Chiron has changed completely: He is extremely muscular and wears a wave cap along with gold fronts to display his wealth and power. He now goes by ‘Black,’ Kevin’s nickname for him that he used to despise. Black not only imitates Juan’s appearance, but also his gentleness. Kevin contacts Chiron and, importantly, on his own volition, apologizes for his assault in the second act (01:13:02). After apologizing, Kevin invites Chiron to the restaurant where he cooks. In a conversation, they connect over their common history of incarceration. This parallelism indicates more than the overrepresentation of black men in the US prison system. As Karaduman explains, queer maturation has an emphasis on “relations that grow along parallel lines rather than upward and onward” (67). Thus, this common history implies a deeper bond between the two. This connection becomes clearer as Chiron’s hypermasculine facade begins to fade when they meet in person. This is shown most explicitly when Chiron removes his fronts in order to eat the food Kevin has prepared for him. In this act, Chiron symbolically removes an aspect of his hypermasculine performance, thus literally letting his guard down for Kevin (01:27:48). Here, we also see that Kevin has no issue embracing ‘feminine qualities’—he prepares food with love and care and happily serves it (01:26:18) and even claims femininity: “Hey, these grandma rules, man. You know the deal. Yo’ ass eat, yo’ ass speak” (01:31:11). Not only does he openly embrace a

traditionally feminine role, but he imbues femininity with power, correcting his previously sexist perception of, and language towards, women.<sup>2</sup>

This playful dynamic shifts when Chiron explains his progression from juvenile detention to drug dealing. When Chiron implies there is no other option, saying “it is what it is,” Kevin responds with genuine disappointment and anger (1:32:02). This confrontation is interrupted by the service bell. As Kevin tends to the diner, his body language signifies his disappointment: sighing, shaking his head, and glaring at Chiron. He then asks Chiron: “Why you got them damn fronts, man?” (01:33:08), on the one hand ridiculing the fashion choice, on the other criticizing his facade. This disapproval affects Chiron deeply. A shot that centers him from behind, sitting alone in the booth, parallels those from the second act that convey isolation and loneliness. As he stares despondently out of the diner at the passing cars, a lingering shot of his facial expression depicts competing emotions. He must either accept Kevin’s criticism, maintain his hard act, or leave.

Choosing to stay, Chiron opens himself up to the possibility of pain by asking Kevin why he called him. At first, Kevin’s anecdote about a man playing a song on the jukebox that reminded him of Chiron seems trite and a misrepresentation of his true feelings. This notion is reversed through one long take; the unbroken gaze and purely diegetic sound once more create an aesthetic of intimacy. As Kevin gets up and leaves the shot, Chiron’s expression initially conveys further disappointment and exhaustion with the situation. As the camera slowly pans away from Chiron and across the empty diner, the audience only hears the diegetic sounds of Kevin turning on the jukebox. The song he plays—“Hello Stranger” by Barbara Lewis—is from the point of view of a speaker who is thrilled to re-encounter a former lover after a long time and professes to still be in love with them. Kevin uses music to express his honest feelings in a way that he could not find the right words for. The lyrics also foreshadow the impending, intimate reconciliation, at first not with words, but with affectionate looks and smiles.

However, the narrative does not allow them to reconcile without verbal emotional expression. The film does not end on a masculine practice in which “men are the primary enforcers of the gender stereotype of the non-expressive man” (Gaia

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2 In relation to black queer theory, this identification has some significance: In his essay “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” E. Patrick Johnson uses his grandmother’s vernacular expression “quare,” which serves to signify someone she perceives as “slightly off kilter” to theorize racialized sexuality (126).

600), but takes measures to destabilize it by showing expressions of intimacy in its final scenes.

At his home, Kevin, with a shy grin on his face, asks Chiron if he recalls the last time they saw each other, suggesting that he is thinking of the night at the beach. However, Chiron responds: "For a long time, I tried not to remember. Tried to forget all those times. [...] When we got to Atlanta, I started over. Built myself from the ground up. Built myself hard" (1:42:30). Thus, Chiron claims his current embodiment of masculinity as a conscious performance, a front to protect him from hypermasculine violence. Then, to avoid the topic of his own vulnerability, Chiron asks Kevin about his past. Kevin admits, "I wasn't ever really myself" (1:43:25). The sentiment echoes a statement by Juan in the first part: "At some point you gotta decide for yourself who you gon' be" (00:20:52). Kevin explains that being a father and moving away from hustling has made his life more satisfying and authentic. This honesty creates space for Chiron to open up further: "You the only man that's ever touched me. You're the only one. I haven't really touched anyone since" (01:44:34). As he expresses himself, he seems fearful of rejection or ridicule. However, Kevin simply smiles at him.

The final shot of this sequence, where Kevin cradles Chiron's head on his couch as they lay together, conveys an expression of intimacy that echoes Kevin's cradling of Chiron's head on the beach in the second part (00:53:57). Ending on such ambiguous terms, leaving the audience unsure if their intimacy turns sexual, locates the night as intimate, but also indeterminate.

## CONCLUSION

Although *Moonlight* progresses almost entirely in a linear fashion, it maintains a non-normative sense of temporality by allocating specific emotional formations and progressions to both daylight and moonlight. Aesthetically, the day, or rather the sun, is a means of exposure: The high visibility it produces makes Chiron vulnerable to the dangers of the toxicity surrounding him. Being in constant sight means being a target, as the scenes with Terrel show. This leads to a state of hyper-vigilance and his performance as the hypermasculine 'Black' in part iii. The aesthetic of night, in contrast, visualizes a sort of flattening of distinctions as visibility and thus surveillance becomes reduced. Under the moonlight, nearly

everything looks blue. Where the sun exposes one to the confines of hegemonic masculinity, the moon protects those who choose to be vulnerable.

The exposing factor of ‘coming out’ is therefore allocated to the day. In moonlight, however, Chiron never needs to come out, for there is no ‘secret.’ Ross’s findings show that in many black communities “the emphasis is not on a binary of secrecy versus revelation but instead on a continuum of knowing that persists at various levels according to the kin and friendship relations within the community” (180). Throughout the film, Paula, Juan, and Teresa all show levels of ‘knowing.’ Kevin’s fearlessness at the beach conveys a ‘knowing.’ Even Terrel claims to know, albeit in an endangering way. Thus, for Chiron, coming out “would not necessarily indicate a progress in sexual identity, and it would not necessarily change [his] identity from closeted to liberated as conceptualized in the dominant closet narrative” (Ross 180). Despite these levels of ‘knowing,’ Chiron’s sexual identity is not necessarily accepted. Jared C. Sexton explains as follows,

The protagonist wonders [...] about matters of desire, intimacy, and pleasure, rather than arriving at, or even approaching, any final product in that regard. [...] This wondering sensibility jars against the knowing attitude of those around him who seem to be saying, in one way or another, that a resolution, or at least some resolve, is on the horizon (Sexton 179).

Queer temporality is based on anticipation and desire precisely because it is related to the realm of the “not yet here” (Muñoz 25-26). Sexton’s argument takes this a step further and essentially insists that black queerness needs no sense of arrival at all, thus eliminating the “yet.” It is this lack of “arriving at” that undermines any intention to fixate queerness and sexuality, as well as any notions that coming out would be a viable solution to Chiron’s despair, which not only comes from his perceived queerness, but also from the pains of hegemonic masculinity, parental rejection, and institutional racism:

By transcending our sex lives, *Moonlight* makes room for an incredibly rich portrayal of what sexual identity is and means for queer men—specifically for black queer men who face expectations of hypermasculinity [sic] (Lee).

Lee argues further that “By taking sex out of the equation, *Moonlight* allows queerness to surface in other ways.” He reads Chiron’s solitude as an acceptance of “the sadness of isolation in exchange for a moment’s peace from the hyper-

vigilance he's developed to survive." Queerness in *Moonlight* is not just about expressions of sexuality: The harsh realities that queer black men face contain moments of liberation through intimacy.

In the final scene, we see Chiron as a boy looking out onto the ocean, then turning to gaze behind him (01:46:02). We know that this Chiron will experience violence, shame, and abandonment. Muñoz's call for dreaming of better futures is reflected in this glance as it alerts us to "a queer feeling of hope" (28). Muñoz puts it poignantly: "The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging [...]" (27). In Allen's queer temporality, "one can project imaginations into the future and cut into the past—all in the pursuit of an elaborated litany for thriving" (28). Therefore, this cut into the past simultaneously beckons a future beyond these normative paradigms that contains moments liberated from shame.

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