

Film Analysis: Masculinity in Moonlight

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Abstract

My project is an analysis of masculinity in the film 'Moonlight.' I look at scenes of the movie moonlight and analyze how the characters depict masculinity. I did this project for my Art of Film class last semester and plans to include it in my digital portfolio. The project includes commentary over some of the scenes in the film and an explanation of how the characters represent masculinity. The character Juan did not seem to follow typical roles of masculinity, as he takes on a more nurturing role and stresses the importance of being your own person, despite the labels that others try to put on him. Chiron, on the other hand, does try to follow the typical roles of masculinity. He does not let anyone in, and he pushes down his emotions to appear strong. Only by shedding these masculine roles is he able to become vulnerable and have his emotional needs met. When looking at other reviews for this project, I noticed a video essay on YouTube titled "The Lover Within: How Moonlight Relates to ALL Men" by the creator Tom Linden. This video had a similar analysis to mine while also tying themes in the movie to general tropes and archetypes of masculinity. While it was strange that he was trying to put masculinity into archetypes, the review made insightful comments on the effects of men denying themselves loving relationships, as demonstrated by Chiron. In general, the film explores how the social expectations of masculinity can affect a young man and warp his behavior. Chiron becomes closed off from others and does not express much emotion throughout the movie. Only at the end is he able to shed these expectations and allow himself to be vulnerable, and in the process have his emotional needs met. This can serve as an important lesson for men, showing them that is okay to open up and express the way they feel.

I created this sample last semester in my English 240 Art of Film class. I created it as part of our final project, and I choose "Moonlight" as that was the film that stood out to me the most out of what we watched. For the project, we needed to select scenes from the movie and analyze what the film is saying and how it relates to the theories discussed throughout the semester. I choose

to look at the representation of masculinity in the movie through the main characters.

I found that the character Juan stands out in many ways. He does not fit into the typical role of a drug dealer and demonstrates care for Chiron. He tells Chiron a story from his childhood in Cuba and teaches him an important lesson regarding identity: he needs to determine who he wants to be for himself and not let others determine that for him. As

a man, there are many societal expectations that are placed on Chiron. This lesson will be important for him to navigate those expectations and become the person that he wants to be, not just the person that societal standards demand him to be (Jenkins 2016).

The Character Chiron, on the other hand, does try to take on the societal roles of masculinity. He becomes hard, strong and emotionally unavailable. This is demonstrated through his actions as well as his expression. Chiron does not seem to convey much emotion when he talks, including when he is joking. He lives alone, and we never see him with friends either, implying that he spends the majority of his time alone and without any strong social bonds. We get to see the toll that this takes on him, as the years of neglecting his social and emotional needs weigh him down. Finally, at the end of the movie, he is able to open up and be vulnerable, shedding the harmful masculine expectations he was clinging onto (Jenkins 2016).

I looked at other reviews for this movie and found that many critics also commented on masculinity. The video I looked at, “The Lover Within: How Moonlight Relates to ALL Men” provides interesting insights into the movie, including details I missed such as Chiron’s distant relationship with his mother represent by the way she is listed in his

contacts (Linden 2017). The video did include some ideas and concepts that seemed strange to me, such as the fact that the author puts masculinity into “archetypes.” I understand that the point is to explain these archetypes and present different ways to be a man. Even so, I do not think it necessary to continue to put masculinity into categories or boxes like this. Regardless, the perspective of the review was interesting. He covers many of the issues that I addressed in my commentary, such as Chiron’s isolation and adoption of harmful masculine ideals, so it seemed fitting to include some of this perspective in my analysis (Linden 2017).

In Conclusion, the film “Moonlight” explores how the expectations of masculinity influence the character Chiron. Early in his life, he is taught an important lesson about how he needs to determine for himself who he will be. He spends a large portion of his life trying to conform to the societal expectations placed on men, and at the end of the movie he is finally able to move past these expectations and be vulnerable. This can serve as an important lesson for any man watching the movie. While there are societal standards that teach men to suppress emotion and never be vulnerable, opening up can be a rewarding and necessary action to get our emotional needs met.

References

- Jenkins, B. (Director). (2016). *Moonlight* [Film]. A24, Plan B Entertainment, Pastel, Productions.
- Linden, T. (2017 April 9). *The Lover Within: How Moonlight Relates to ALL Men*. [Video] YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOis3-phW8Q>.

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