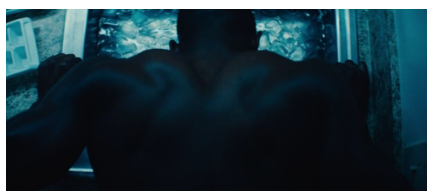


## Color in *Moonlight*

*Moonlight*, directed by Barry Jenkins is centered around Chiron who struggles to form his identity while growing up in a neglected household in Miami. While he gains support from Juan, who fills in as a father figure for Chiron, and his love interest Kevin, the majority of his environment challenges the true identity of Chiron, forcing him to fit the heteronormative mold of an traditional African American man. To portray this concept, Jenkins utilizes production design and lighting to create visual motifs through color. Themes of toxic masculinity, sexual confusion, and seeking identity which are all reflected in a transformation of color schemes, specifically through the use of blues, reds, yellows, and blacks throughout the film.

Out of all of the colors, the color blue plays the most significant role in defining the characters of the film. In the first two acts of the film, Chiron is associated with the color blue by having a blue backpack and wearing blue clothing, which attaches the emotional characteristics of calmness, tranquility, and seureness with his character. As seen multiple times in the film, his timid nature is a cause of conflict, leading other kids to push him around and challenge Chiron to stand up for himself.



Jenkins uses blue as a visual metaphor for being “soft” and shying away from conflict, something that is frowned down upon in a masculine culture. Another important aspect is Chiron’s connection to water as a source of comfort. With water being linked with the color blue, Chiron uses water to seek refuge from being neglected as a child and center his

emotions. Water can be seen when Juan teaches Chrion how to swim, when Chrion draws his own bath, and when Chrion washes his face in a sink of ice-filled water. Much like water, Chrion is attracted to environments and characters linked with the color blue for the same pursuit of comfort.

One of the supporting characters associated with the color blue is Juan, who plays a significant role in the first act of the film. After opening the movie by rescuing Chrion from being chased by a group of bullies, Juan develops a



relationship with Chrion as a father figure and a role model after discovering how much the two of them have in common. As a child, Juan was forced into the nickname of “Blue” from his peers much like how Chrion was nicknamed “Little”. His rejection of the color blue in his adulthood foreshadows Chrion’s transformation out of blue later in the film, as they both are driven out of



their calm demeanors to fit a more aggressive lifestyle typically associated with men. Despite his rejection of blue, Juan is surrounded by blue objects in the film, including his blue car in the opening shot of the film, the blue furniture in his house, and his girlfriend Teresa being dressed in blue.

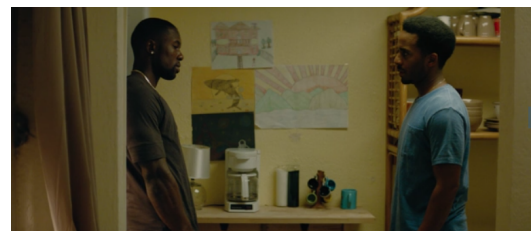


This is meant to both represent him as a symbol of security for Chrion and to show how he denies his true identity that

is shown in the environment around him.

The other character mainly associated with Blue is Kevin, who acts as Chrion’s love interest throughout all of the stages in his life. Kevin stands as the one form of consistency throughout the film, always representing a blue hue amongst the transformations of the other

characters. Starting as a child, Kevin wears blue clothing when confronting Chiron while playing kill the carrier. From the beginning, Kevin established himself as a safe person for Chiron to openly express himself and question his sexuality. While in high school, Kevin is shown yet again wearing blue and against blue backgrounds. His personality of hyper-heterosexuality appears to be performative and is in contrast with his color, as he brags about his sexual encounters with a woman and is pressured into punching Chiron by his schoolmates, yet is ultimately revealed to be true during his intimate encounter with Chiron at the beach. Finally in his adulthood, Kevin instigates a future relationship with Chiron after inviting him to his restaurant. Kevin changes out of his uniform into a blue shirt, revealing that he is the same person Chiron knew as a kid and still has romantic feelings for him.



To contrast Chiron and his allies, the main antagonistic forces of the film are represented with the color red. This is most notable with the bullies who chase Chiron in the opening scene and with his high school bully Terrel. Red is typically associated with aggression and courageousness, character traits that foil Chiron's personality and are more masculine in nature. Terrel verbally attacks Chiron in the classroom for being weak and taunts him after class in the road, instigating him to man up and defend himself. These acts of aggression are reflected in his wardrobe, as he wears a red shirt and red shoes in



these scenes respectively. Red also occurs when Terrel convinces Kevin to display his masculinity by fighting anyone he says to, showing how the influences of masculinity can corrupt the true identity of the characters of the film.

Chiron's mother is also associated with the color red, although she fluctuates between the colors red and blue depending on her motives for interacting with Chiron. His mother is introduced wearing a blue nurses uniform while she gives the impression that she is concerned for Chiron's whereabouts when he did not make it home the night before. She also wears blue when



she tries to manipulate Chiron and coax him into giving her money for drugs, as well as wearing

blue at the end of the film when she apologizes for how she treated him as a child. However, the majority of the time his mother is portrayed with the color red. She wears a red shirt when purchasing drugs from Juan, showing that she is an antagonistic force for both Chiron and for Juan. Also, she



verbally abuses Chiron while a red-tinted light is illuminated from her bedroom. This shows that Chiron's living space is not a safe environment and his relationship with his mother is not as tender and nurturing as he needs it to be.



Within the second act of the film, Chiron begins to transform out of the blue he was associated with as a child and enters a more dangerous yellow-tinted environment. Yellow, being associated with hazardous changes and uneasiness, is visible throughout his wardrobe for most of





the second act as he wears a yellow and blue flannel. It also appears in his nightmare where he depicts Kevin performing sex with a female, having a strong yellow light shine on his face during the dream sequence.



Also, after being punched by Kevin and scolded by his lawyer for not being man enough to defend himself, he is beginning to break from the pressure of toxic masculinity as he decides to finally fight back. During this decision, yellow props can be seen in his

bathroom alongside yellow lighting to emphasize the risky decisions he is about to enact. The transformation from blue to yellow is further present in the third act as blue completely leaves the visual design of Chiron, yet the yellowness of masculinity is present in his gold chain and his teeth.

To finish off his color transformation, Chiron morphs from blue to yellow to black, having the color black dominate the design of his character in the third act. Black has been associated with “hardness”, or being tough enough to survive in the stereotypical African American roles of modern American society.



Black has been associated previously in the film with Juan, who is a drug dealer sporting a black durag. Chiron makes the decision to follow in the footsteps of Juan and become a successful drug dealer as well. His attire is converted entirely to black clothing as an adult, as well as driving a black car, sporting the license plate “BLACK305” as well. The color black represents





Chiron's conformity to masculine culture, living the lifestyle his environment forced him into by rejecting his true identity. Towards the end of the film, Kevin questions his character, stating that he never expected him to turn out

this way since he lives in extreme opposition to his true nature. Chiron's identity is further questioned by his mother, who says that she wished his heart would not turn black like her's did. Blackness is used to show the rejection of one's identity in the film and the embracement of heteronormative and masculine characteristics.



*Moonlight* is an example of how the colors of a film can be used as a transformative arch for characters, especially Chiron, and how powerful the use of color association can impact the story. Jenkins uses the triadic scheme of blue, red, and yellow to create contrast between the characters of the film and visually define the themes of the film.