

**Final Essay**

Brian S. Lockhart

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

SSC 301: Contemporary Issues in the Social Sciences

Dr. Joyce Clapp

"Moonlight" is a poignant film that portrays the journey of a young man named Chiron as he grapples with his identity, sexuality, and sense of belonging in the world. This powerful narrative offers an exciting and new exploration of the Black LGBTQ+ experience, providing a fresh perspective on self-discovery and the challenges marginalized individuals face in society (Moonlight | Kanopy, n.d.).

One of the most vital elements of "Moonlight" is its examination of the roles of prejudice and implicit bias in shaping the experiences of its characters, particularly Chiron. Prejudice is defined as a collection of unfavorable attitudes, beliefs, or stereotypes that a person holds about a specific social group, frequently leading to unjust treatment or discrimination (Intro – SSC301, n.d.). Implicit bias, on the other hand, consists of unintentional attitudes that may or may not align with an individual's conscious views or values; in contrast, explicit biases are present but not necessarily conscious (Teachman et al., n.d.). From a psychological perspective, it is relevant to ask how prejudice and implicit bias shape the characters in "Moonlight" and the ways these biases impact Chiron's experiences throughout his life.

Throughout his life, Chiron encounters various forms of prejudice and implicit bias. For example, his drug-addicted mother, Paula, is influenced by biases that view drug addiction as a moral failing rather than a disease, leading her to neglect Chiron. His mentor, Juan, a drug dealer, is also affected by implicit biases that perceive Black people as criminal and dangerous, contributing to the harsh environment in which Chiron grows up.

In examining the impact of prejudice and implicit bias on individuals, change and stability can be observed through various aspects of a character's life, as seen in "Moonlight." Chiron's evolving understanding of his identity, development of coping mechanisms, and shift in

relationships with others exemplify change. At the same time, stability is evident in his persistent feelings of isolation, the impact of past traumas, and the enduring influence of certain relationships. By analyzing how his perception of himself, adaptation to challenges, and interactions with key characters change over time, alongside the consistent presence of loneliness, long-lasting effects of prejudice, and the significance of influential relationships, we can assess the complexity and resilience of Chiron's character in the face of adversity.

From a sociological perspective, we might examine how Chiron meets or challenges gender roles, the influence of different theoretical perspectives on gender roles in our understanding of society, and how these perspectives relate to the film. Chiron challenges gender roles by embracing his sensitivity and introspection and defying societal expectations of heterosexuality. Both conflict theory and symbolic interactionism can be applied to Chiron's experiences in "Moonlight" as he navigates societal expectations and challenges gender norms.

The movie highlights the influential convergence of race and gender, demonstrating how social expectations and theoretical frameworks, such as conflict theory—a macro-level perspective asserting that social inequality is preserved and perpetuated by the powerful who utilize their resources and influence to dominate, indicating that substantial social change is necessary to minimize or eradicate inequality (Barkan, 2019). Furthermore, symbolic interactionism—a micro-level perspective that centers on how individuals define their roles through interaction and underscore the significance of symbols in forming the reality of individual interactions—affects people's experiences and their approach to these expectations (Barkan, 2019). Chiron's journey serves as a vivid illustration of how these elements mold a person's life. He grapples with solitude, seclusion, and defying societal gender standards, ultimately discovering empowerment and self-acceptance.

To assess change or stability within this sociological context, we would look for evidence of shifts in social attitudes or opportunities available to Chiron and other characters in the film over time, such as changes in societal acceptance of different gender expressions or sexual orientations. Alternatively, we would examine the persistence of social inequality and the impact of systemic issues on the characters' lives as indicators of stability.

From a geographical standpoint, two important concepts represented in the film are the sense of place in rural, urban, and suburban communities and splintering urbanism. When examining "Moonlight," one might ask about the distinction between these types of communities and determine the classification of the film's setting, exploring how this environment influences the movie's events.

Another strength of "Moonlight" lies in its cinematography and evocative sense of place, set in a low-income, predominantly black, and Hispanic neighborhood in Miami. The setting plays a crucial role in shaping the events and character relationships in the story, highlighting the social and economic struggles that inner-city communities often face, such as poverty, crime, and limited opportunities (Part 1: City A – SSC301, n.d.; SSC301\_Geography\_CityB, n.d.; SSC301\_Geography\_CityB-Technopole, n.d.).

We should ask ourselves what defines rural, suburban, and urban communities; furthermore, what type of community setting is portrayed in "Moonlight." One specific difference between rural, suburban, and urban communities is their population density, with rural areas featuring low densities and a predominantly agricultural economy, suburban areas having moderate densities and a mix of residential and commercial spaces, and urban centers boasting high populations with primarily industrial and commercial activities (Parker, 2018). "Moonlight"

accurately captures the social and economic struggles of many inner-city communities and draws attention to these pressing issues by setting its story in an urban environment.

The movie's setting in the Liberty City neighborhood is integral to Chiron's life experiences and difficulties, heavily impacted by the poverty and crime-ridden conditions. Limited resources and opportunities contribute to a hostile and dangerous atmosphere, shaping Chiron's development and the relationships between characters. Community and familial bonds formed during difficult times are central themes throughout the film, heavily influenced by its specific community setting. The drug trade's prevalence in the community profoundly impacts characters like Chiron's mother and Juan, his mentor and father figure.

The concept of splintering urbanism underscores the growing complexity and multi-layered nature of infrastructure systems, which not only impacts cities' physical and social aspects but also, through urban development patterns and access to networked infrastructure, intentionally disadvantages specific groups to concentrate resources for greater overall economic benefits, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities and fostering a multi-tiered society (*Geography – SSC301*, n.d.).

To assess change or stability in this context, one could look for shifts in the urban landscape, such as gentrification or changes in the built environment, which influence the characters' lives and experiences. Alternatively, stability can be seen in the continuous presence of an unequal distribution of resources or opportunities across different locations and the long-lasting importance of the geographical setting in influencing and molding the characters' lives.

From a psychological perspective, "Moonlight" is an emotionally captivating film that delves into the impact of prejudice and implicit bias on individual experiences. Focusing on

Chiron's journey of self-discovery, the film effectively addresses the complexities of identity, and the challenges marginalized individuals face in society.

From a sociological perspective, "Moonlight" is an emotionally resonant and insightful film that effectively explores complex sociological themes and the impact of social structures on individual lives. It provides an intimate look at the intersections of race, class, and sexuality, contributing to a richer understanding of the human experience.

From a geographical perspective, "Moonlight" presents a visually striking and evocative portrayal of the Liberty City neighborhood in Miami. The rich cultural landscape of Liberty City adds depth and dimension to the film, shedding light on a lesser-known area of Miami. The film's sense of place powerfully conveys the influence of geography on the characters' experiences, highlighting the social and economic struggles faced by inner-city communities.

Although "Moonlight" primarily focuses on Chiron's journey, it authentically portrays the complexities of identity, sexuality, and self-discovery within a marginalized community. The film's unique narrative structure, divided into three acts showcasing Chiron's life as a child, teenager, and adult, allows for an in-depth examination of his character development and various challenges.

One potential limitation of the movie is the limited screen time given to certain characters, such as Chiron's mother, Paula, and his mentor, Juan. While they are essential in shaping Chiron's life, their personal stories and motivations are not fully explored. This lack of depth may leave some viewers questioning these characters' backgrounds and roles in perpetuating or combating prejudice and bias.

Overall, "Moonlight" is a powerful, moving, and thought-provoking film that explores identity, relationships, and the challenges marginalized individuals face in society. Focusing on Chiron's journey through self-discovery, the movie provides a unique and compelling narrative that resonates with audiences and generates meaningful discussions about prejudice, implicit bias, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

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