

## BEING BLACK AND QUEER IN *PARIAH* (2011) AND *MOONLIGHT* (2016)

Shuri Mariasih Gietty Tambunan<sup>1,\*</sup>, & Gertrud Nimas Cemara Tunggal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Literature Department, English Studies Program

Universitas Indonesia

Pos-el korespondensi: [shuri.mariasih@ui.ac.id](mailto:shuri.mariasih@ui.ac.id)<sup>1\*</sup>, [nimascemara@yahoo.co.id](mailto:nimascemara@yahoo.co.id)<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRAK

Representasi ras dan seksualitas komunitas Afrika-Amerika dalam film Hollywood selalu menjadi persoalan. Namun dalam perkembangannya, Hollywood telah memberi lebih banyak panggung untuk representasi komunitas Afrika-Amerika. Dimulai pada pertengahan tahun 1990-an, komunitas Afrika-Amerika mengubah representasi mereka di layar lebar menjadi sebuah komunitas yang berdaya melalui New Black Realism. Film-film yang rilis pada tahun itu bercerita tentang kehidupan remaja Afrika-Amerika yang berusaha untuk bertahan hidup dan melawan isu mengenai ras. Namun apakah perubahan tersebut benar menantang stereotip di khalayak ramai masih patut dipertanyakan. Melalui dua film Hollywood berjudul *Pariah* (2011) dan *Moonlight* (2016), artikel ini melihat karakter LGBTQ Afrika-Amerika untuk meninjau bagaimana kedua film memperlakukan atau menegaskan stereotip yang telah dibangun oleh Hollywood. Dengan menganalisis unsur naratif dan sinematografi kedua film, stereotip terhadap kaum LGBTQ Afrika-Amerika tetap terlihat negatif walau kedua film juga berusaha untuk bernegosiasi dengan stereotip tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** *Afrika-Amerika, film, LGBTQ, ras, stereotip*

### ABSTRACT

*The representation of race and sexuality particularly African Americans in Hollywood has always been problematic. In its development Hollywood has been including more representations of African-Americans. With New Black Realism, which started in the midst 90s, the African-American communities change the screen with a more empowering portrayal of the community. A common theme is usually focusing on African-American youth in surviving and negotiating with the current issues concerning race. The question to be asked is to what extent do these changes actually challenge stereotypes? By analyzing two Hollywood films, Pariah (2011) and Moonlight (2016), this article looks into the representation of African American LGBTQ characters to see how the films problematize or affirm stereotypes that have been constructed by mainstream Hollywood. By analyzing narrative elements and the cinematography elements, this research reveals even though the films try to negotiate with stereotypes, they eventually affirms how stereotypes of African Americans LGBTQ are still seen in negative way.*

**Keywords:** *African-American, film, LGBTQ, race, stereotypes*

### INTRODUCTION

One cannot be both homosexual and African-American at the same time. This sentiment is reflected through the portrayal of both minority groups in mainstream

American films. “The history of Hollywood is filled with examples of

racism, perhaps none more lethal than consistent toxic stereotypes like Mammy and others that have polluted the minds of those who accept Hollywood fiction as historical fact” (Boyd, 2020). As a part of mainstream media, Hollywood has always been a significant actor within the popular culture industry that (re)produces racism in many ways. Benschoff and Griffin (2009) argue that classic Hollywood films encourage all its spectators to recognize themselves as the white protagonists. For example, white actors played African-American characters in blackface make-up constructing certain images of African-Americans. In consequence, the African-American community is often subjected to exaggerated images with stereotypical features and these have become into archetypes in films.

Over the years, the African-American community is always making their move in trying to show that they are more than just media stereotypes. In 1970s, homosexuality visibility in media and Blaxploitation films rose. The term was coined by Junius Griffin, then-head of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to critique the poor portrayal of African-Americans in films (The University of Manchester, 2012). However, both LGBTQ and African-American characters were still portrayed stereotypically as supporting characters (Harris & Mushtaq, 2013). Since 1990s, the African-American community emerges in the New Black Realism era, where the films are more focused on the discussion of empowerment and self-discovery (Copeland, 2017). The new era also represents African-Americans while deconstructing stereotypes in mainstream American films. (Stallings, 2015). The protagonists in New Black Realism films are usually young black males facing unpleasant conditions (Bausch, 2013; Copeland, 2017). While New Black Realism films are seemingly focusing on males, Missouri (2015) argues that director Darnell Martin repositions the conditions to young black females. Given the above, it is safe to say that New Black Realism films are rooted in black youth facing unpleasant circumstances.

The two case studies for this article, *Pariah* (2011) and *Moonlight* (2016), reflect how Hollywood is transforming its representation of African-Americans. *Moonlight* is crowned as the first film with all-black casts for 2017 Oscar’s Best Picture (France, 2017). Though it is quite a breakthrough for Hollywood to have an all-black cast in films that portray issues concerning LGBTQ, there are only few scholarly articles that talk about racial and gender representation in the two films. Roach (2019) and Bradbury-Rance (2016) argued black maternal figure in *Pariah* plays as sexual obstacle for the main character, Alike. As with *Moonlight*, Copeland (2018) said that the film examines how African-American males are forced into Black masculinity. Rahmatiah (2017) discuss the identity status in the film, in which the main character has achieved the domain of career, physical, and sexual identity after experiencing various explorations. Another attempt to read more about *Moonlight* is conducted by Kannan et al. (2017). The context of their discussions was mostly on the American discourse of racism particularly concerning the dynamics of Obama-Trump’s politics. Unlike previous research that focuses on each film, this article compares both films to further problematize the portrayal of racial and LGBTQ youth in the New Black Realism era.

*Pariah* tells a story of a 17-year-old black girl named Alike who lives in Brooklyn with her family. It is directed by Dee Rees in 2011 and set its step to the screen on the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. *Pariah* focuses on how Alike struggles to come out to the society, especially to her faithful Christian mother, Audrey, regarding

her lesbian sexuality. On the other hand, *Moonlight* follows an identity discovery journey of Chiron. The film is cut up into three parts, “Little, Chiron, and Black,” as each piece tells the story of Chiron’s life from childhood to adulthood where he, finally, embraces his identity including his sexuality. Chiron lives with his mother, Paula, who does not pay much attention to him. Chiron finds his parental figure in Juan and his wife, Teresa. Juan is a Cuban-American drug dealer who saves little Chiron from his bullies. They accept Chiron and always become his guardian. Both films reflect an intersection problem of identity namely between race and sexuality, which is the main problem in this research article.

Both films are reflecting on how one cannot be both homosexual and African-American at the same time without experiencing any forms discrimination. This shows how African-American films breakthrough in Hollywood is still problematic. By doing textual analysis of *Pariah* (2011) and *Moonlight* (2016), the research question to be asked is to what extent the conflicts in the two films affirm or challenge the stereotypical portrayals of African- American LGBT characters in Hollywood? By analyzing narrative elements and the cinematography elements, this article explores how both films seemingly negotiate racial and homosexual stereotypes. There is an effort to challenge the dominant ideology and portray a more empowering depiction of African Americans and homosexuality in *Pariah* and *Moonlight*. However, research findings also show that both films succumb to mainstream stereotypical portrayals in Hollywood.

### **African-American Stereotypes and Portrayal of Homosexuality in Mainstream American Films**

Hollywood has always been problematic representing African Americans and homosexuals. Even before the Classical Hollywood films (1930s to 1950s), African-Americans have been portrayed in an exaggerated and disrespectful way. There are five stereotypes of African-Americans that often appeared in mainstream films (Benshoff and Griffin, 2009, Harris & Mushtaq, 2013). They are the Coon or Sambo (a foolish and lazy African-American), Uncle Tom (an African-American slave who faithfully served his white master), Mammy (the female version of Uncle Tom who is often portrayed as an overweight female and asexual), the Jezebel or Tragic Mulatto (a young mixed-race and oversexed female), and the Black Buck (a hyper-masculine and brutal African-American who often threatened the whites) (Tyree, 2011). In its development, Hollywood starts to have a more diverse representations of race though still problematic. In the 1930s-1940s, more African American actors were included in many mainstream films even though never as the leads (Billson, 2020). By the end of 1940s, American films started to make more films that touch “racially aware”

issue, such as *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Pinky* (1949), although the dominant point of view is still from the whites (Benshoff and Griffin, 2009, Hughey, 2009).

In recent times, there are new and emerging stereotypes of African- Americans women in today’s media (Tyree, 2011). The freak, also known as the chicken head or the hood rat, is an African-American woman with “dangerous” sexual behaviors, often depicted as “the jezebel”. This gold-digger archetype is usually an uneducated woman who thinks love and sex is her primary commodity. Another stereotypical portrayal is the welfare mother is a lazy woman who likes to use government assistance and make sure the poverty will pass down to her children. The last stereotype probably is the most famous one is the angry Black woman, a high-tempered mother, and a hard-working woman. Yuen (2010) mentions more stereotype, the “ghetto” character or the “crack mother”, a drug user character or an incapable mother due to drug use (Carpenter, 2012).

Boylorn and Hopson (2014) add the welfare mother can be a bad black mother because she relies on government assistance and uses her children as a mean to do so (Boylorn & Hopson, 2014).

Similarly, African-American men stereotypes also experienced changes. Tyree (2011) argue that the new stereotypes include the clown, the brute (someone very brutal and uneducated), the pimp (a term for someone who has prostitution business), the dunce (reflective of the coon, they are foolish and lazy), the absentee father (a common myth about how African-American children grow up being fatherless, in which the fathers are absent from home and family issues (Levs, 2017; Richardson, 2019), and the pretty boy (an antithesis term for masculine man and an archetype to homosexuals). Other examples of African- American stereotypes are the Oreo and homo thugs, who are harsh men who are involved in gangster activities, and they are typically associated with hip-hop culture (Tyree, 2011).

Meanwhile, the portrayal of homosexuality could be seen from its historical milestone in the 1970s when the visibility of homosexuality in media increased drastically (Lawrence, 2016). Generally, homosexual characters' portrayal in films is heavily based on stereotypes such as the sissy, the sad young man, and the unnatural woman (Smelik, 1998). Diamond (2005) stated lesbians are often portrayed as masculine, hostile, and unattractive, or as Smelik (1998) called it a dyke or mannish woman. Raffanti (2010) argued that one of the main stereotypes of gay men is loosely based on Oscar Wilde, whose idea believed that they are effete, delicate, and effeminate. Chung (2007) and Diamond (2005) stated that the media portrayal of gay and lesbian characters is often misleading. On the other hand, Moore (2015) states that Between Women TV network have been trying to make a positive impact in the mainstream masculine black lesbian portrayal.

The portrayals of LGBTQ African-Americans are still in stereotypical roles. In their research on Blaxploitation films, Harris and Mushtaq (2013) found out that there are two stereotypes of LGBTQ African-Americans. Blaxploitation is a film that focused on black narratives starred by black casts "in an action- adventure genre in urban settings" (Guerrero, 1993 in Bausch, 2013). The first one is the jester that is often a mockery of standard gender performance or a

parody of heterosexuality. The second one is the scoundrel used, sometimes comically, as an antagonist or character who is not to be trusted. The male scoundrel is depicted as the villain, while the female is described as someone sexually aggressive. The scoundrel, then, is used to demonize alternative sexuality. Stereotypes are problematic due to their tendency to generalize misconceptions in society and reinforce imbalance of power (Tyree, 2011), yet they still exist and develop over time. While the industry keeps releasing more African-American films, the question if those films are still dictated by the Hollywood formulas that rarely challenges the dominant ideology remains.

### **The Homophobic Mother in *Pariah* (2011)**

This subsection of the article problematizes how racial stereotypes and homophobia are represented in both films. Roach (2019) argue that the bad black mother stereotype has become the "barometers of black ideological" and become a trope in popular films. The character Audrey in *Pariah*, Alike's mother, is a homophobic maternal figure who is portrayed as strict, hard-working, religious and overprotective of her daughters. The homophobic black maternal figure is a part of the bad black mother trope, and is an emergent archetype in the contemporary black LGBTQ coming-out narrative (Roach, 2019). The film's narratives portray how the LGBTQ character runs

away from the maternal figure to gain their sexual liberation. This shows the notion that it is hard to achieve such freedom in the African-American community.

In this part of analysis, there are some examples from the film that reflect Audrey's homophobia. Audrey collectively gives signs of her homophobia throughout the film. Depicted as overprotective, she takes part in choosing who Alike should be friends with. Audrey does not like Alike's best friend, Laura, not only because she is a runaway, but also because she is presumably a part of the lesbian community. This resulted in how Audrey assumes how Laura affects her daughter's sexuality; hence, she introduces Bina to Alike to make sure Alike spends less time with Laura. At the end of the film, where Alike is caught in a fight with her parents, Audrey refers to Laura by "butch-ass [Alike's] girlfriend" (*Pariah*, 1:10:48) and calls Alike as "nasty ass dyke" (*Pariah*, 1:10:55). "Butch" and "Dyke" are homophobic and misogynistic slurs that are often used to derogate lesbians (Montclair State University LGBTQ Center). "Butch" refers to a lesbian who prefers masculine appearance (Jones, 2012), and "Dyke" refers to the masculine lesbian (Montclair State University LGBTQ Center). In Daley et al. (2007), both terms are used to address LGBT youth often used by bullies. Romeo et al. (2017) argues that young people use the slurs as "a logical consequence of [the victim's] certain behavior." This reflects Audrey's heteronormative values as she uses this term to address Alike. On top of that, Audrey also beats up on Alike right after Alike comes out.

The cinematographical element particularly the lighting in this particular scene relies on low-key lighting, where everything is in very dim light representing dramatic and mysterious ambiance (Jasenka, 2020). This type of

lighting directs the mood to be full of drama and mystery in *Pariah* and make the spectator uneasy.



Fig. 1 Audrey and Arthur fighting (1:10:28)



Fig. 2 Audrey and Arthur fighting (1:10:47)



Fig. 3 Alike appears to stop the fighting (1:10:38)



Fig. 4 Alike joins in the fighting (1:10:50)



Fig. 5 Alike comes out to her parents (1:11:25)

Turner (1999) explains that the use of low-key lighting can show hidden motives within a character. Interestingly, the lighting on Alike always in nearly dark light, as if to say that Alike is the mystery waiting to be solved. The lighting on Alike is very dark as Alike appears on the screen for the first time (fig. 3). The lighting is somehow indicating that her presence is not crucial during Audrey and Arthur's fight. In figure 4, the light finally falls on Alike when she tries to separate her parents. However, the spectator cannot see her face clearly in fig. 5, where Audrey and Arthur are asking about her sexual preference. Alike comes out to her parents, and the mystery is solved.

Nevertheless, the lighting on Alike is still dark as if to show that it is not the answer that Audrey wants to hear, and this reflects her homophobia. Throughout the film, her struggles to turn Alike into a woman in her view also reflects her homophobic views. From my analysis of the camera angles in this

scene, the camera on both Audrey and Arthur is often in low-angle (see fig. 1 and 2), whereas the camera stays in a straight-on angle on Alike (see fig. 4). I argue that the angles portray the parents as the powerful characters who have the authority in the household.

Audrey's constant attempt to impede Alike's sexual disclosure could be seen as signs of Audrey's homophobia. For example, trying to get rid of Alike's tomboy look, disliking Alike's friendship with Laura because she knows Laura is a lesbian, and introducing Bina as a way for Alike can spend less time with Laura. The core of her homophobia is then revealed at the end of the film when she uses the slurs to Alike. Although the film does not give a background story on Audrey, she is portrayed as a conservative and religious person, which could be interpreted as why she is homophobic even though it does not elaborate on this. Roach (2019) identifies Audrey as an emergent archetype of homophobic black maternal figure, which also can be found in Tyler Perry's *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006) and Lee Daniels's *Precious* (2009). Since *Pariah* (2011) is a semi-autobiographical film, the film could portray the "reality" in African-American middle-class and religious families. However, as a form of popular media, as the film continues to portray homophobic black maternal figures, it could shape a certain perspective towards the archetype that could threaten black sexuality

freedom.

### The “Not-So-Ghetto” Crack Mother in *Moonlight* (2016)

On the other hand, *Moonlight* does not portray Paula, the mother figure, as homophobic. Paula does not even have much screen time in the film either as the film focuses more on Chiron’s conflict within himself. At first glance, Paula’s character conforms to the welfare mother archetype in which a poor woman makes use of government assistance for her living. Paula is a licensed practical nurse with an average amount of income monthly. There is a part where Paula is asking money from Chiron to buy her drugs. However, in my analysis, I argue that there are not enough evidence from the film to say Paula conforms to the welfare mother archetype (Tyree, 2011). However, the film does show Paula has an addiction to drugs. Throughout the film, the spectator could see Paula’s addiction from buying the drugs from Juan, getting high at her own house in front of Chiron, and asking money from Chiron to buy her drugs. Through these scenes, I argue that Paula’s character affirms the “ghetto” or the crack mother (Yuen, 2010; Carpenter, 2012).

To further support my argument that Paula’s portrayal highlights the “ghetto” or crack mother stereotypical characterization, I am going to explain my analysis of two particular scenes showing Paula when she is under drug influence. The first scene shows Paula and young Chiron in their house in a reverse-shot as both of them are just looking into each other without saying a word. The music sounds dramatic and intense. Paula inaudibly screams at Chiron but he does not respond and looks at her with a blank stare. The scene ends with Paula walks into a room and closes a door. Chiron’s eyes and expression build more moods into the scene. If we put both the music and Chiron’s expression into one element, the scene somehow tells about how Chiron has experienced the same situation several times that he does not have any energy left to deal with the situation.



Fig. 6 Paula looking at Chiron (30:09)



Fig. 7 Chiron looking at Paula (30:04)

The lighting in this scene is motivated lighting as it imitates the natural source. The color around Paula, however, has a different mood than Chiron with his kind of warm and comfortable atmosphere. The purple color plays a vital role in Laura. Purple has been claimed as one of the colors to represent bisexuality by many film fans (Pierpoint, 2018, Perrin, 2018). For example, in *Black Mirror*’s “*San Junipero*” (2016) or Janelle Monae’s “*Make Me Feel*” video. Bisexual lighting is claimed as a mirror of the bisexual pride flag. Rather than saying purple represents bisexuality (Pierpoint, 2018, Perrin, 2018), the color represents an ambivalence, as Bellantoni (2005) spoke about the film *Blow-Up*. Purple represents Paula’s ambivalence about her feelings toward her son –anger, love, and disappointment– pushed by the effects of the drugs.

The second scene also shows a similar portrayal on how as a mother figure, Paula is represented as the crack mother. In this scene, teenage Chiron comes home from

Teresa's house and finds Paula locked herself out of their own house. The scene starts with a diegetic sound. Paula asks Chiron why he did not come home last night. Chiron looks confused as he is unable to answer since Paula is the one who tells him not to stay at home during the night. The non-diegetic sound starts to fade when Paula is complaining that she cannot keep up with her grown son and she starts asking Chiron about Teresa. The sound that is used is the sound of people shouting in a heated situation. The sound starts getting louder when Paula is frantically asking Chiron to give her the key. It abruptly stops when Paula impatiently opens the door without Chiron giving her the key. The non-diegetic helps the scene to be more intense, along with Paula's panic and paranoid expression and Chiron's confusion.

If in the first scene young Chiron does not have the energy left to respond to Paula under drugs influence and decides to walk out on it, the second scene shows how teenage Chiron is surprised looking at his mother's condition. The two scenes with Paula under drug influence have two different moods. The first scene makes the spectators not only sympathize with young Chiron but also shows Chiron's rebellious side as he walks out on her. The second scene, showing that teenage Chiron is still obedient to his mom, makes the audience sympathize with teenage Chiron.

However, in my readings on the film, Paula might be portrayed as incapable of taking care of her son, but she is also portrayed as a mother who loves Chiron dearly and this problematizes the stereotypical representation of the

"ghetto" or crack mother. Paula shows possessiveness in one of the scenes as she tries to hide little Chiron behind her from Juan. In the end, Paula asks for forgiveness for her negligence and tells Chiron that she has always loved him. The mother and son relationship is reunited creating a happy ending for both characters. All in all, Paula's portrayal is ambiguous since it does not comply completely with the stereotypical "ghetto" or crack mother African American mothers.

Research findings show that both maternal figures are on one hand affirming African Americans female stereotypes in mainstream media even though there are also some ambiguities. Audrey and Paula also show that black maternal figures have the power to control the family. The mothers hold the key role in breaking the familial bonds, yet at the same time, they also hold the key to put everything back. Although for Audrey, the efforts to do the latter do not meet with her husband and youngest daughter's satisfaction. While Paula can reconcile her relationship with her son tenderly, Arthur and Sharonda seem to force it, for they still cannot cope with Alike's bitter departure. Both *Pariah* and *Moonlight* picture an unstable mother-son/daughter relationship in the story which are commonly found in films with African American characters (Gault, 2019).

### **Hostile Lesbian and Effeminate Gay in *Pariah* (2011) and *Moonlight* (2016)**

Lesbian and gay are often portrayed as hostile and effeminate (Raffanti, 2010; Diamond, 2015) in mainstream media. My analysis show that the main characters in *Pariah* and *Moonlight* confirm these stereotypes. In *Pariah*, the LGBTQ woman nightclub that Alike and Laura frequently go to is located in a rough neighborhood as Arthur, Alike's father, says so. His job as a police detective allows him suspect the area so that he tells his daughter not to go there because it is dangerous.

*"Cause it's a rough neighborhood. You know, right that I had a case over there. You wanna be careful, stay away from that element. In case it ever comes up."*  
(*Pariah*, 53:27-53:43)

The nightclub's location is tacitly implying the black LGBTQ women who go to the club are dangerous and aggressive. Seeing from what Canfield (in Pasulka, 2016) has



said about “masculine” black LGBTQ girls are often treated aggressively by the police, Arthur is afraid if there is a case that will ever happen in that area again, the police will take and treat his daughter aggressively. *Pariah* reflects hostile lesbians through the location of the lesbian nightclub and the dialogue between Alike and her father. It is slowly telling the spectators that lesbians are still seen as hostile in society.

On the other hand, in *Moonlight*, Chiron’s bullies point out at his outfit is showing an example of how Chiron is different from other boys in the neighborhood. Terrell and Pizzo are picking on Chiron’s jeans, says that:

“You see how tight this nigga jeans be? Nigga nuts must be chokin’ in them tight ass jeans, boy I swear”  
(*Moonlight*, 47:46-47:55).

This represents that the other boys conform to patriarchal ideology that men are not supposed to wear tight clothes. Both Terrell and Pizzo are highlighting the ideology by pointing out Chiron’s straight cut jeans, which seems tighter than what other boys’ in the neighborhood are wearing. Terrell and Pizzo’s mocking towards Chiron and his tight jeans portrays the stereotype of effeminate gay. Wearing tight clothes for males is still seen as uncommon and does not follow the males’ dress code for some people. Because Chiron cannot fully carry out his male persona, he is socially ‘punished’ by Terrell and Pizzo, who always mock him.

While for Alike, the punishment is not directly given to her, but the fact that her father has the thought of lesbians is dangerous shows that the whole lesbian community is punished by the stigma. While analyzing American films released from 2001 to 2015, Kronz (2015) found that male characters who cross-dressing are mocked for taking female persona. Although Chiron is not cross-dressing, his situation is somehow similar as he is being mocked by Terrell and Pizzo for not wearing the supposed dress code for boys. Punishment for LGBTQ characters also happen in *Boys Don’t Cry* (Dir. Peirce, 1999). Based on a real event, *Boys Don’t Cry* tells a story of Brandon Teena, a female-to-male transsexual, who was raped and murdered when people discovered he was a Trans. (Benshoff and Griffin, 2009).

Both films show how lesbian and gay are still seen as hostile and effeminate. The lesbian community is seen as hostile through the depiction of the lesbian night club location. In *Moonlight*, the effeminate gay shows through Chiron’s way of dressing. The main characters conform to perform the stereotypes and are punished for doing so.

### **Representation of Masculinity vs. Femininity in *Pariah* (2011) and *Moonlight* (2016)**

Traditional masculinity is defined as male with the toughness, success-status, and anti-femininity (Burn & Ward, 2005). Raffanti (2010) argues, “Hollywood masculinity equates with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, and in control.” On the other hand, gay males often look like someone with a small, weak figure (Raffanti, 2010) or as an anti-thesis of masculinity. Plummer (2007) argued that African-American men are often portrayed as sexually aggressive, hyper-masculine, and well-endowed. There is also a concept of conventional femininity (Curtin et al., 2009), which suggests femininity associates with sexual passivity, ignorance, and objectification. For example, males will always be looked at as muscular and have high self-confidence, while females are expected to be soft or emotional. Both gender roles also have to respect their own ‘dress code’ by wearing specific clothing that resembles the gender. This subsection of the article problematizes how the films portray masculinity and femininity.

Masculinity is one of the stereotype of lesbian (Diamond, 2015), which is very similar to Smelik’s (1998) mannish woman. Throughout the film *Pariah*, Alike and

Laura wear clothes that look boyish constructing a masculine look. In the bus scene, when Laura has gotten off the bus, the camera shifts from the medium shot to close shot on Alike to bring the audience's focus to her change of expression.



Fig. 8 Alike and Laura waiting for the bus while chit-chatting (02:53)



Fig. 9 Alike on the bus from the lesbian nightclub to home (04:57)

In the first picture, Alike is seen smiling so widely with Laura while waiting for the bus. However, her expression changes when she is alone on the bus heading home since she will meet her mother, Audrey, who does not like the way she dresses and concern about her femininity. Then, the spectators see Alike changes her clothes on the bus for Audrey, to conform to gender roles and social expectations. When she gets home, Audrey is angry about the curfew, but calms down quickly when she looks at Alike's shirt as she says, "Well, at least you were cute" and "[the shirt] really compliments your figure" (*Pariah*, 06:57).



Fig. 10 Audrey compliments Alike's shirt (06:57)



Fig. 11 Audrey compliments Alike's shirt (06:49)

The clothes-play does not happen only once in the film. When Alike goes to school, the first place she comes to is the girls' toilet to change her clothes. This weird action is later brought up by Bina, Alike's love interest, when they are walking home from school.

*Bina: Didn't you have on a different shirt earlier?*

*Alike: Yeah, I had on a different shirt.*

(*Pariah*, 45:15-45:26).

Alike needs to change her clothes at last every time she tries to be herself –by wearing the clothes she wants–because Audrey forces her to. Audrey says that she is "tired of all this whole tomboy thing Alike's been doing," (*Pariah*, 25:19). There is one scene where the family is about to go to church, and Audrey forces

Alike to change her pants and a slightly loose shirt to a pink blouse and skirt because for Audrey, "you're not going to church in that" (*Pariah*, 24:24). This is one of Audrey's attempt to make Alike looks attractive and dress according to the gender roles. Alike once asks Laura to buy her a strap-on penis because she wants to try to get to know a girl. She needs it because, as quoted in the film, it is "just for my image" (*Pariah*, 19:18). Alike believes that having a "penis" could enhance her masculine look.

In the second film, *Moonlight*, Chiron is called "faggots" and always called with the name "Little" instead of his real name by his friends. Ciro (2019) argues that the slur "faggots" does not only insult someone's sexual identity but also attack someone's strength or competence. Chiron is physically smaller than other boys in his neighborhood. In one scene where Chiron plays football with his seems-to-be friends,

the spectators see them surrounding the camera making a half-circle form. When the camera pans, the spectators can see how Chiron is the tiniest among the other boys. Through the low angle, the camera is trying to assert the power to the boys, though when the camera arrives at Chiron's spot stays on the eye-level angle and shows he does not have the same power as the other boys but rather equal with the spectators.



Fig. 12 Chiron's 'friends' (13:21-13:23)



Fig. 13 Chiron among his 'friends'(13:18-13:19)

Despite the bully, Chiron never fights back. Kevin, his only friend and love interest, says implicitly that it is because Chiron makes them thought that he is soft due to his small figure (*Moonlight*, 15:15-15:18). This situation shows that Chiron cannot perform his gender physically because his appearance is much smaller than the other boys in the neighborhood; hence, he is socially 'punished.'

Chiron finds his father figure in Juan. Physically, Juan is tall and muscular. Also, it seems that Juan is respected and feared by his occupation, especially by his dealers. Juan represents Raffanti's (2010) Hollywood masculinity and Plummer's (2007) view on African-American masculinity with his muscular physique, capable and reliable for Chiron, and has power in his job.



Fig. 14 Little Chiron and Juan (17:26)



Fig. 15 Juan in his car (00:39)

In the last part of the film, titled "Black," Chiron has become a grown-up man who finally settles down for his life. It seems that Chiron looks up to Juan too much that he almost becomes him. Just like Juan, adult Chiron has a big and bulky figure, seems to be respected in his neighborhood, and even drive the same type of car. Through his physical traits, Chiron is finally no longer being punished by society but rather is accepted. In addition, Chiron's occupation as a drug dealer also seems to play a role in being respected and feared by the neighborhood, and, of course, Chiron also has his dealers who pay respect and fear him.



Fig. 16 Adult Chiron (01:23:21)  
Chiron's car (01:39:00)

Fig. 17 Kevin (right) and Chiron (left) in

Both *Pariah* and *Moonlight* exhibit the traditional concept of masculinity. The female character in *Pariah* is a lesbian youth who struggles to be fully herself in front of her family. Alike portrays a lesbian stereotypically with her masculine style. She refuses to wear clothes that compliment her figure and wears clothes that feel comfortable for her instead, even though the clothes that she chooses are clothes that usually associate with males' dresses, namely loose t-shirt and loose pants or jeans. Alike enhances her masculine look by buying a dildo to enhance her image. On the other hand, Chiron in *Moonlight* complies with the concept of masculinity when he turns into an adult at the end of the film. Chiron was once punished by his surroundings due to his small physique. Growing up, Chiron follows the idea of traditional masculinity, with his muscular physique and his success in drug dealing. This way, he will not be punished any longer. All in all, the main characters are upholding masculinity to perform their LGBTQ woman identity and male African American identity according to the dominant ideology.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis highlights how the mother figures in both films are still portrayed stereotypically. Audrey is described as a homophobic black maternal figure and Paula as the "ghetto" character. However, they are also portrayed as the dominant role in the family. The analysis also highlights how both characters are conforming to the stereotypical image of lesbian and gay, which performs their self against the gender roles in the New Black Realism era. Hence, the analysis suggests that even though we have arrived in the New Black Realism era since the 1990s, where the main plot focuses on empowerment, stereotypes towards the LGBT community are still found in the character portrayals. Based on Diamond's stereotype of lesbians (2005), Alike prefers to wear and look masculine, thus makes her follow the stereotype that lesbians are masculine and unattractive. Alike's father's perspective on the location of the lesbian nightclub Alike frequently goes to depicts the concern towards the lesbian community in which they often stereotyped as hostile. Whereas in *Moonlight*, Chiron follows the stereotype of gay men by Raffanti (2010) that are effete, delicate, and effeminate through the bullying he goes through because of his small, weak physique and the jeans he wears. However, both films do not exhibit the concept of femininity. Both characters are showing the masculine side through their appearance. While Alike still portrayed stereotypically as a lesbian, Chiron represents the 'reality' a gay man has to choose to be accepted.

In conclusion, Alike and Chiron are portrayed to be in a dilemmatic position about whether to deny their sexuality or to cut the relation they have with their family and community. Alike chooses the latter as she runs away from home after being beaten up by her mother for coming out and finally decides to move out and continues her study at Berkeley. Meanwhile, Chiron seems to choose to deny his sexuality by fronting his manly figure and talking about girls with his mate to be blend in with the neighborhood. Plummer (2007) stated that the African-American LGBTQ community has to choose between two options, denying their sexuality and cutting bonds with their family or their community. This happens because they tend to internalize the negative stereotypes of LGBT and the heteronormative standard for sexual behavior (Ciro, 2019; Plummer, 2007). One cannot be both homosexual and African-American at the same time. As

quoted from Carbado (1999) (in Ciro, 2019), “Real Black men and real Black women are resolutely heterosexual. In some sense, being out as Black gay or lesbian in the Black community is race negating.”

Both films as a part of the new black realists focus on stories about black youth confronted by unpleasant circumstances. From the analysis, we can see how *Pariah* and *Moonlight* tell the narrative of African-American youth with problems to be solved. Alike, in *Pariah*, is confused about how she tells her parents about her sexuality without giving more fractures to her almost-broken family. In the latter, Chiron is on a journey on finding his identity amid constant bullying and lack of parental figure. New Black Realism is not only a medium for African- American communities to spread their wings wider in the industry, but it is also a place where they can either affirm or contest stereotypical images.

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