An Evaluation of Moonlight's Intersectional Pedagogy: How Does Identity Affect Leadership?

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I grew up as white, catholic, American, heterosexual male in a top 5% income household in a safe neighborhood, with some life-altering, yet not terminal medical issues. Because of this privilege, I was able to focus on my unlimited education to the near exclusion of all else for the first two decades of my life, allowing me to fall in love with learning, with challenging intellectual discussions, with *magis,* and with *cura personalis*. Yet as my undergraduate career draws to a close, I find myself questioning how those circumstances affected what I learned, questioning if and how the self-awareness I thought I had gathered may have been misinformed. What obscured history, even from the past 100 years, have I been allowed to neglect through unconsciously following a dominant narrative educational system? The rioting response to the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among many other black people, at the hands of the police gives urgency to my search for stories and perspectives forced down by the dominant narrative's will to standardize and suppress (Sabur et al., 2020). Yet even as this critical moment in the fight for racial equality passes, I notice a failure of empathy, a failure to listen, a failure of self-awareness, a failure of servant-leadership among my white friends and family, myself

included. My social media feed fills with opinions and instructions of white people on how to best respond and be supportive of those struggling, while almost no one publicly admits to a lack of knowledge and even fewer openly show dedication to learning the perspectives hidden behind the media. Perhaps this seeming failure of the values of servant-leadership (which include listening, empathy, awareness), and by extension servant-leadership itself (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), drives my interest in evaluating its limitations and capacity for effecting social change in situations of oppression through the 2016 film *Moonlight* (Jenkins).

A HISTORY OF RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN HOLLYWOOD

Moonlight (Jenkins, 2016) centers on the story of a queer black boy/man at three crucial, different stages in his lifetime (Little, Chiron, and Black), as he grapples with his sexuality growing up in a lower class, Miami neighborhood. Many have lauded it as groundbreaking since its release, but in order to understand how it dismantles the dominant narrative, we must explore the history of depictions of intersectionality on the silver screen. While constructions of gender, sexuality, and race have reflected and informed the opinions of the general public since the invention of film itself, the major stereotypical constructions of each facet of identity trace back to different time periods. As Bogle (1997) outlines, the most common representations of black people in film can be simplified down to five major stereotypes (a few with variations) that can be identified in film as early as Edwin S. Porter's 1903 *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The tom is the persecuted, yet faithful and submissive middle to old-aged black man, most clearly identified by its namesake (Bogle, 1997), the Uncle Tom of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Porter, 1903), but also traceable in some of the roles of Sidney

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Poitier, such as John Prentice in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Kramer, 1967), and Danny Glover, such as Langston in *Sorry To Bother You* (Riley, 2018) where the stereotype is undermined quite effectively. The coon is the simple-minded, cowardly, buffoonish, amusing black person, often seen as either a pickaninny (i.e., the kid version; Bogle, 1997), in roles such as Prissy from *Gone With The Wind* (Fleming, 1939) and Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Porter, 1903)*,* or the harmless, naïve, comical philosopher Uncle Remus (Bogle, 1997), undermined in Danny Glover's role in *To Sleep With Anger* (Burnett, 1990), but never more degrading than as the unreliable, crazy, good for nothing pure coon (Bogle, 1997), most clearly portrayed in Rastus from *How Rastus Got His Turkey* (Wharton, 1910). The tragic mulatto was often featured as a young woman on her way to marriage with a white man but diverted at the last minute by the knowledge of her blackness (Bogle, 1997), seen most clearly in Peola from *Imitation of Life* (Stahl, 1934). The mammy comes in the form of the big, asexual, fiercely independent, middle aged woman, most famously associated with the roles of Hattie McDaniel (Bogle, 1997), especially Mammy from *Gone With The Wind* (Fleming, 1939) yet also found in roles such as Delilah from *Imitation of Life* (Stahl, 1934). Lastly, but perhaps most pertinent to America's current political turmoil, the hypersexual, savage, violent, brutal black buck lusts exclusively and extremely for white women (Bogle, 1997), found most clearly in Gus and Silas Lynch from *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), which originated the stereotype. While some may be inclined to call the actors who engaged with such stereotypes sell-outs for only going after roles which perpetuated stereotypes about them, it is important to acknowledge that the alternative of fighting the stereotyping often resulted in their Hollywood careers being destroyed, such as in the

case of Butterfly McQueen. These stereotypes were not just a few of the available roles for Black people; they were the only roles available to black actors for the better part of the first century of narrative filmmaking and continue to pose difficulties to black actors and filmmakers looking for more complex representation (Bogle, 1997).

On the other hand, queerness did not appear as a particular negative stereotype until the days of the Motion Picture Production Code, which expressly forbid "sex perversion or any inference to it" (Quigley & Lord, 1929, p.595). While the earliest depictions of queerness on film are found in the Dickson Experimental Sound Film (Dickson, 1894), portraying two men dancing together, and in the pansy, sissy men and butch femme of silent comedies, films of pre-code Hollywood offered little in the way of progressive depictions of queer people, often opting to make fun of queers rather than openly attack or degrade them (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Ellis, 2019; Russo, 1987). However, after Quigley and Lord labeled depictions of homosexuality as contributory to the degradation of moral standards in society, Hollywood began to portray queers with much more subtle and open hostility. Throughout the years of the Production Code, filmmakers developed the technique of (queer)coding, in which filmmakers would use stereotypes of queer people to evoke queerness, which could slip past the Production Code Administration (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006; Ellis, 2019; Russo, 1987). Often filmmakers would specifically code their villains, so as to reinforce public association of queerness with villainy, evil, disgust etc., a practice seen quite blatantly in Disney films such as *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Reitherman et al., 1961) with Cruella de Vil, *Sleeping Beauty* (Geronimi et al., 1959) with Maleficent, and *Peter Pan* (Geronimi et al., 1953) with Captain

Hook, as well as in Hitchcock films such as in *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940)*, Rope* (Hitchcock, 1948)*, North By Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959), and *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) with Mrs. Danvers, Philip Morgan and Brandon Shaw, Philip Vandamm, and Norman Bates, respectively. Since the code's dismantling, stereotypes of queer people still exist in mainstream cinema, but have taken on other forms such as queerbaiting practices where queer representation is hinted at, but never explicitly confirmed*,* so as to not alienate more conservative audiences (Ellis, 2019), such as with Sherlock and Watson in *Sherlock* (Gatiss et al., 2010-2017) and Captain Marvel in *Avengers: Endgame* (Russo & Russo, 2019), and queercatching marketing techniques where queer characters are "confirmed" or "promoted" in marketing for films and books, only for the character in the text to lack any sort of meaningfully depicted queerness (Ellis, 2019), such as Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) franchise, Lefou in *Beauty and the Beast* (Condon, 2017), and Valkyrie in *Thor: Ragnarok* (Waititi, 2017). That said, the past 40 years have also shown new progress through the development of the indie film scene, in which many queer filmmakers have been able to portray their experiences more openly.

By contrast, the 20th and 21st centuries have shown more progression of LGBTQ and racial minority rights, more widespread acceptance of people who identify as LGBTQ or as a racial minority, and more openness around discussing such topics, such as the legalization of gay marriage (Levy, 2019) or the Civil Rights movements and the current movement against police brutality (Sabur et al., 2020).

INTERSECTIONALITY AND LEADERSHIP THEORY

Unfortunately though, it appears that the inquest into leadership differences as a result of identity has been rather limited and

misguided as most theories tend to push for the universal approach and view of leadership over a specific approach and view. As of Jackson & Parry (2011), identity had primarily been used to refer to the characteristics or traits of a leader, and discussions about identity in the context of societal power relations seem to have only extended to gender difference. Watson & Johnson (2013) place leadership of people who identify as LGBTQ under the category of authentic leadership, suggesting that leading as a LGBTQ person is intrinsically tied to "knowing one's true self and acting in accord with that true self" (Jackson & Parry, 2011, p. 117). Parker (2005) presents a more promising construction of leadership which acknowledges the impact of intersectionality and calls for more inclusive frameworks and more diverse authors for leadership studies, yet her move to re-envision "21st Century leadership as meaning-centered" (p.xxiii) still pushes back towards a universal theory of leadership, gives more benefits to people who rank higher in the societal matrix of privilege by allowing them to reap knowledge from the less-privileged, and fails to acknowledge the dangers of cultural appropriation to less-privileged populations. Recent sociological studies on intersectionality such as Kimball et al., (2018) provide more empirical insight into how less-privileged identities can co-construct within people and how dangers that may apply to one identity or another can multiply in intensity alongside the co-construction.

Servant-leadership is one of these models which is hailed "universal," largely due to the perceived benefit it offers to practitioners through enacting its core values of listening, empathy, awareness, healing, love, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Reynolds, 2014; Tilghman-Havens, 2018). While such practices may indeed prove

beneficial to people of all backgrounds, the essence of how these theories teach people how to lead ultimately gives privileged people more to benefit from than those who live outside of the world of privilege, as "depending on the gender, race and social identity of the leader, servant-leadership may or may not be experienced as Greenleaf intended" (Tilghman-Havens,, 2018, p.104). Intriguingly though, while each provide solutions to this issue, both neglect to take into account the positionality of us, the authors of leadership theory, myself included, within the system of privilege and how our positionality might make us rather unsuited to appreciate the dangers of our ideas, actions, and leadership theories for those whose intersectional identity places them outside of the dominant narrative (Tilghman-Havens, 2018; Reynolds, 2014). In "fixing" servant-leadership, both authors have failed to fully engage one of its core values, awareness (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). In other words, the picture of leadership of/for less privileged members of our society constructed by more privileged members of our society is not wrong but incomplete in its appreciation of the complex effects identity can have on leadership. Hence, by engaging the intersectionality of race, queerness, and disability in *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), I hope to broaden the perspective on leadership of those outside our societal matrix of privilege.

A QUICK THEORETICAL AND PERSONAL NOTE ON INTERSECTIONALITY

However, to address my concern for the intersectional identity of the author, I must elucidate my current place in our societal matrix of privilege and my own experiences of struggling with identity before I can effectively engage with *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) as an intersectional text, fully recognizing that a white man's struggles is one of the last personal narratives the world needs to hear. For

clarification on how to understand my intersectionality, the intersectionality of *Moonlight*'s characters, and the intersectionality of leadership itself, I offer the definition of intersectionality from Collins and Bilge (2020):

> Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, […], nation, ability, ethnicity, and age—among others—as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (p. 4)

As I leave Gonzaga, one of the realizations I have come to is that my overcommitted lifestyle (math, film, ministry/spirituality, service, tutoring) has left a rather indelible mark on my body. While my own choices greatly affected the severity of this invisible mark, one of the few relatively unprivileged areas of my life, health/ability, offers a reason for concern. Around age four, my body became the host to a condition known as panhypopituitarism, a rare disorder according to the NIH, which affects people in rather subtle ways, fatigue being the most significant byproduct in my lifetime (Gounden & Jialal, 2020). I don't like to think of myself as *disabled* for a combination of pride and not wanting to discredit the comparative impact other more severe conditions may have on the people who carry them, but I still recognize that when my friends respond to my statements of exhaustion by saying they "know the feeling," it is as ableist and empathetic as their lack of education on my condition allows them to muster. However, by ignoring my body's response to my overcommitted lifestyle and only affording it

relief by taking shortcuts, I've found myself somewhere with uncertain roads back or forwards, a moment which may afford another climactic experience of finding myself through losing myself in a manner resonant with how Greenleaf (2013) interprets following the "guide […] who only has at heart your getting lost" from Robert Frost's *Directive* (p. 24). This experience with my own body affords a personal interest in discussions of bodies in film and social justice.

However, if I am to give a more complete framework of my fascination with the film and social justice in question, I must also acknowledge the impact of my own queerness. While I have been fully aware of my bisexuality for the past 18 months and out for arguably 12 months, I have not yet fully unpacked the circumstances which led to the realization of my sexuality. I do however recognize that the most interesting part of my realization was that the initial feelings of attraction towards men that I had were primarily physical, almost animal, in spite of my body's inability to produce testosterone on its own (aka. one of the more significant hormones necessary in having a sex drive). Since my realization and coming out, I have also recognized that my "sexual awakening" brought about a fundamental change in the way I see the world, others, and myself. Furthermore, I find this perspective and confidence ever-changing as my attraction melds from person to person, and I continue to explore other gender and sexuality non-conforming aspects of myself.[1] Because of this limited experience with unprivileged identities, the primary foci of my analysis will be queerness and disability, yet I will attempt to engage with race as well. Importantly, as there are no white characters in the film, this will leave my analysis of the film incomplete, in accordance with my limited understanding of critical race theory and intersectionality.

MOONLIGHT: THE CALL OF QUEERNESS

As many will recognize, one of *Moonlight*'s (Jenkins, 2016) most revolutionary moves is its engagement with the experience of black queerness. Van Leer (1997) comments that "African American culture [is] usually assumed to be heterosexual, and gay culture [is] usually thought to be white" (p. 158), assumptions informed by the stereotypes of race and queerness depicted on the silver screen, implying that to exist as both queer and black is a breach of social taboo. While *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) combats this social taboo through an assortment of choices, it is not the first, nor the only film to do so (Walcott, 2019). Rather it is among the first to receive widespread acclaim and acceptance through a theater run which raked in $65.3 million at the box office, making back its $1.5 million budget nearly 45 times over (Box Office Mojo, 2017). The clearest and most centralized manner in which *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) combats the social taboo of black queerness is through the identities of its main characters, Chiron and Kevin, both of whom are given a rather fluid and unlabeled sexuality by way of the film's three act structure delineated across moments in their lives. Imbued with a hyper-focus on the characters through comprising 90% of the film's shots with close-ups and medium close-ups, Jenkins intentionally avoids the voyeurism to which such a narrative film might lend itself by focusing just as much on the specificity of the "cruelly beautiful" world Chiron lives in, ascribing to, in Jenkins words, "the theory that in order to be universal, you have to be specific" (as cited in Ventrella, 2016a). One might say that by avoiding such voyeurism, Jenkins has engaged the servant-leadership values of awareness and listening (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), as such cinematographic choices acknowledge a rise in voyeurism of police violence against black bodies and the greater negative impact it has upon people of color

(Duong, 2020; Reign, 2016). While these broad strokes paint an identity independent gateway to empathy for the audience, edging on a call for servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), a functional understanding of intersectionality clarifies that the film's leadership is not completely the work of empathy, but the work of people whose experiences mirror those depicted in the film.

*Moonlight'*s (Jenkins, 2016) call for empathy extends through many more subtle moments and references in the film, yet as we consider these filmmaking choices, we find the call also embeds itself within the intersectional identities of our characters. For example, the color blue pervades throughout the film, and while one could understand and analyze the film on colors alone, at its most generic level, this blue is a baptism (Barsam & Monahan, 2019; Sasso, 2017). This baptism is visually appealed to most directly in the image which has come to epitomize the film, Juan teaching Little how to swim, both in water and life (Jenkins, 2016; Ventrella, 2016b). We see the theme of baptism reappear in moments which highlight his solitude such as when Chiron and Black wash their faces in two slightly different toned blue-lit bathrooms and Little bathes himself, in moments which highlight risk such as when Kevin and Chiron first explore their sexuality on a beach under the moonlight, many of the costume choices of the second act, and the color of Chiron's school (Jenkins, 2016). Furthermore, the last shot of the film in which Little looks back at us, bathed in moonlight, evokes the name of the source material (Ventrella, 2016b) and a story in which Juan told Little "In Moonlight, Black Boys Look Blue," suggesting that Chiron has found himself at last (Jenkins, 2016; Ventrella, 2016b). What turns this baptism into a call is the soundscape of the film. The sound of waves appears in many of the scenes mentioned above, as the opening to the film, when Black

chooses whether to follow Kevin into his apartment, and evoked in some of the more disorienting moments of the film for Chiron and the viewer, such as when the other kids slam on the doors of Little's hiding place and when Chiron runs into Paula trying to get back into the house to find money for drugs (Jenkins, 2016). Also, the main musical theme of the film becomes closely associated with Chiron finding himself as it often plays over moments when Chiron is in a liminal, or physically moving space, such as trains or cars, symbolizing Chiron's internal movements as well as when he gets beat up on high school grounds (Jenkins, 2016; Ventrella, 2016c). However, as we experience Chiron's baptism with full knowledge of his feelings at each evocation, it also baptizes us into queerness. By leading his audience into an experience of queerness, Barry Jenkins opens a vacuum in which the audience is asked to explore their own sexuality and gender, as opposed to just experiencing Chiron's sexuality. Similarly, entering into a relationship or leadership dynamic with a person who identifies as LGBTQ may cause us to find new aspects of our own sexuality and gender, not unlike how Greenleaf (1977/2002) calls us to self-awareness, but more specific.

However, Chiron's wandering nature, always trapped between who he is and who he needs to be to survive in his world, makes it clear that he knows himself even less than the audience does. Furthermore, while Chiron may practice more empathy and love than he thinks he does, particularly with regard to his mother's drug addictions, he lacks any coherent commitment to many other values of servant-leadership, such as building community, growth in people, and healing (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). In fact, throughout the entire film, only Juan, Kevin, and Teresa show some conception of servant-leadership, and the characteristics of servant-leadership are only shown when Chiron needs their guidance. Since Chiron is the only

person in the world of the film who experiences love, empathy, and healing from those characters, we know that the term *servant-leader* would not be an appropriate way to label Juan, Kevin, or Teresa. While *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016) itself may be practicing and advocating some characteristics of servant-leadership through inviting it's audience into an experience of empathy with characters who practice some characteristics of servant-leadership, the infrequent use of these characteristics and complexity of its characters makes it clear that servant-leadership is too narrow a lens to describe the leadership with which *Moonlight* and its characters engage, necessitating another view of leadership which can encapsulate the complexity which can be imbued by queerness, race, and disability, namely a more intersectional view of leadership.

Perhaps even more significantly, *Moonlight'*s (Jenkins, 2016) call stems from its characters' racial identities while minimizing the significance of race in the film's ability to connect with a "universal" audience. One could even argue that race is a defining aspect of the world, as the diner sequence is the only part of the film in which white people make an appearance. Additionally, throughout the film, Jenkins minimizes even the mention of race by constraining commentary on possible experiences of racism to one-liners, such as when Paula mentions that she "ain't seen [Teresa] since the funeral," implying that it was Juan's funeral and raising the question of how he died. Essentially, Jenkins is interested in presenting an experience of queerness within a world that is black rather than examining blackness within a world that is queer (see *The Watermelon Woman* for an examination of the latter; Dunye, 1996), normalizing race in a manner rarely seen on film. This normalization of race affords Jenkins an escape from the racial stereotypes of old Hollywood because many of the racial stereotypes observed by Bogle (1997) are

defined by the character's relationship to white people. While race is not as centralized as queerness in *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), the film still executes leadership impacted by black skin through treating it similarly to how almost all films have treated white skin, a move made radical by the lack of critically and commercially acclaimed films preceding it which have done so and made possible by the work put into color toning the film so that people may appreciate the nuances and beauty of black skin in a previously unseen way (Barsam & Monahan, 2019). This move can also clue us into how servant-leadership is/can be *universal*, namely that it functions so more in its effect than its use. In the case of *Moonlight,* Jenkins (2016) has created characters with which anyone can empathize, yet it was his own blackness and access to friends who identify as queer and black which allowed him to create such a specific world and it may be that people who identify with one or more of Chiron's identities find something more specific to empathize with or critique (Walcott, 2019). Though the film is undoubtedly self-aware in a manner befitting servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), the self-awareness is intrinsically tied to its interest in telling a story about black queerness, the identity of our characters. Hence, servant-leadership is broad enough to describe the leadership *Moonlight* engages and advocates yet not specific enough to capture the nuance of Jenkins work.

By all appearances, Chiron as a teenager is not a leader. As Sasso (2017) notes, the frequent yellow lighting in this section and plaid yellow shirts he wears emphasize his lack of courage, his cowardice, something most people would not list among the traits of a leader. He does not stand up to his bullies for most of the second act and makes no efforts to act on any of his potential queer desires until at least the climax of the act in the scene with Kevin on the

beach (Jenkins, 2016). On the beach, Kevin controls the entire interaction. When Chiron says something truthful, Kevin's always one step ahead of him with his retorts, and when they move in for a more erotic invitation, Kevin clearly remains in control by cradling Chiron's head in his hand and arm, and giving Chiron a hand job with his other hand. Many people interpret this scene as confirmation of Chiron's gayness, when in fact all this scene confirms is Kevin's interest in guys, as Chiron is just following his lead. When we get the haunting line from Black towards the end of the film "You're the only one who's ever touched me," it mainly serves to confirm that their previous sexual encounter was significant for Chiron, yet one can also read the line as one of Chiron's few acts of true leadership, opening up in a self-aware, love-driven way. Both moments are certainly directed and acted well enough to give no indication of whether Chiron ever even thought of the moment on the beach as consensual.

On the other hand, both the second act beach scene and the sequence in the diner and Kevin's apartment feature Kevin listening, empathizing, loving, and serving Chiron in prime form (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). His forward snipes are playful and loving, clearly trying to get Chiron to open up, and when he offers comments such as "that breeze feel good as hell, man" or "feels so good it make me want to cry" (Jenkins, 2016), it's clear that he's trying to help Chiron open up, to help Chiron heal, to help Chiron make himself whole (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Kevin also knows enough of Chiron to know when to press hard, such as his comments in the diner and his apartment of "Who is you, Chiron?" and "That ain't you, Chiron" and when to be softer and more open, such as the beach scene and after Chiron confesses "You're the only one who's ever touched me" (Jenkins, 2016). Even Kevin beating Chiron up on the school

grounds could be seen as teaching Chiron to stand up for himself, in a manner not quite congruent with servant-leadership. Importantly though, Jenkins never shows us inside Kevin's house, so we never really know what makes him tougher and Chiron softer, but nonetheless, it's clear that Kevin shows up when Chiron needs him in a manner which can be largely understood through servant-leadership. With servant-leadership, one can understand how Kevin is a leader for Chiron, but with intersectionality, one can understand why Kevin is such an effective leader for Chiron. Kevin serves Chiron with empathy made effective because they are both black queer guys in a poor neighborhood, which tells Chiron that Kevin knows what he goes through as much as anyone. Kevin's own self-awareness and confidence effectively helps Chiron to become more self-aware because Kevin is already sure of himself as a black queer guy. Kevin heals Chiron effectively through their sexual encounters because his knowledge of the difficulties of being a queer black guy also tells him what Chiron needs. Thus Kevin's leadership shows us another way in which intersectionality can fill out a picture that servant-leadership might be able to start.

Furthermore, by requiring Chiron to open up in order to complete his journey of self-discovery, the film provides an equally significant opportunity to see intersectional experiences become an even more relevant measure for leadership than servant-leadership. While Kevin is a leader for Chiron, the emphasis on Chiron's point of view throughout these events makes Chiron a leader for the audience. The lack of confirmation around Chiron's sexuality gives the audience a vacuum to imprint onto and examine their own sexual and gender identity within the context of the film, evoking once more the awareness of a servant-leader (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Tilghman-Havens, 2018). We find this style of leadership tied to

sexuality perhaps most often during adolescence and college, when people start to reach sexual awareness (Zhu & Chan, 2017). When this happens, those who physically and sexually mature more slowly can become social outsiders due to a physically different appearance or lack of sexual interest, which, especially in smaller communities, can lead to others around them imprinting a sexual identity onto them and using the sexually unmatured to explore their own sexuality, either mentally or physically. Think of the people whose love interests everyone supposedly "knew" before they did. Did that attraction ever genuinely come from the person himself, herself, or themselves, or was there a component of everyone wanting to see what it would be like (i.e., if and how the sexually unmatured would fail) if the sexually unmatured person was attracted to such a person? This complicates the leadership dynamic because the sexually unmatured person is the one impacting others, yet they may not be doing so of their own volition. While they are leading others to awareness and healing (Greenleaf, 1977/2002; Jackson & Parry, 2011; Reynolds, 2014; Tilghman-Havens, 2014), the sexually unmatured person can often end up more confused and hurt than they were before the interaction, not to mention the dangers of non-consensual sexual interactions, which increase with intensity of the sexual imprinting. If the interaction is not bringing healing to all, can we truly call it servant-leadership on the part of the sexually unmatured person?

This concept of the sexually unmatured allows us to enter a discussion of the co-construction of disability and queerness in leadership, as delayed physical sexual maturity can often become a disability, either in a medical or functional sense. The classic film joke to prove someone's gay, since at least the time of *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1969) is a failed sexual encounter/arousal by a

member of the opposite sex, giving us the history/basis for viewing sexual immaturity as a functional disability when portrayed on the silver screen. While I commend Jenkins for his avoidance of a very cliched and outdated joke, disability remains one of the relatively unexplored categories in *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), only really ever being hinted at a few times throughout the movie. One could argue Chiron has an implicit functional disability in his lack of sexual activity and lack of control when he finally engages sexually, but the evidence is less compelling for us to think of any lack of sexual maturity in Chiron as a disability. To the exceedingly sexually mature person, manipulating the vacuum I described previously can be an easy process. Thus, the only way we can truly think of sexual immaturity as a functional disability is if there is some psychological or physical impedance to engaging in sexually mature interactions, which does not apply to Chiron, as we are given no reason to think his lack of sexual activity amounts to anything more than cowardice in the second act. However, we are given enough evidence to think of Little and Black as functionally disabled in this way. Little is made functionally disabled in a very physical manner in the locker room scene of the first act, which implies that Little has smaller sex organs than the other boys in the room, that he has not started puberty yet through the acting in the scene. On the other hand, Black's functional disability is clearly more mental, brought on by the lasting effects of being sexually aroused, then attacked by Kevin in high school, brought on by trauma. Rather than make his own identity and name for himself, he has taken on the nickname Kevin gave him in high school, and we also learn that he has never been with anyone else. Exacerbated slightly from what medical studies have concluded to be the impact of late sexual maturity (Zhu & Chan, 2017), the reappearance of color yellow in gradually less

subtle ways clarifies the mental block Black has constructed around his traumatic interactions with Kevin in High School specifically, but more widely the chance for any sexual interactions to be successful. Because of this mental block in conjunction with his traumatic memories of Kevin, Black continues to fear that any sexual interaction he has will result in physical pain for him; hence his functional disability of being mentally impeded from sexual interactions. Considering the whole film, the amount of exploration of sexuality and disability co-constructing one another may be lacking, but where it does appear, Jenkins, (2016) gives a fairly accurate, functional exploration.

Where disability affects queerness within an intersectional construction of leadership can be mapped across four continua proposed by Kimball et al. (2018) of queer ideals, queer performativity, punishment, and intersectionality. Their description of the four continua follows as such:

> First, students expressed *queer ideals* which reflected diverse thinking about, and rejection/adoption of, restrictive gender and sexual norms, binaries, and labels. For some students, this continuum was theoretical, while for others, it was personal. The second *queer performativity* continuum encompassed the different ways students enacted their gender and sexuality *queer ideals* through everyday language and behavior. The third continuum represents varying levels of concern regarding *punishment* when adopting *queer ideals* and engaging in *queer performativity.* The fourth *intersectionality* continuum explicates variations in student propensity to discuss and/or reflect upon their single and/or intersecting gender, sexual, and disability identities as intersectional (e.g., mutually constituting, reinforcing). (Kimball et al., 2018)

Depending on the person, placement along and engagement with each continua can vary, which further clarifies the need to specify a theory of intersectional leadership beyond the umbrellas of authentic leadership or servant-leadership, as the first two continua (and arguably the fourth) are the only areas in which we see the constructive ideals of such leadership theories embodied. In fact, the third continuum regarding *punishment* gives reason to question the extent to which authentic leadership or servant-leadership alone are viable leadership methods for people who identify as LGBTQ and disabled, as it suggests that many queer and disabled people have reason to not strive for self-awareness and that self-advocacy may not always bring healing, to name a few examples of how "servant-leadership may or may not be experienced as Greenleaf intended" (Tilghman-Havens, 2018, p.104). When someone's very identity can destroy their efficacy and reputation as a leader, can you really blame them for ignoring or not emphasizing those parts of their personality to be able to sustain their ability to lead others? Solomon (2017) takes this one step further to frame this sense of hiding for self-protection as the central thematic concern of *Moonlight*'s title, suggesting that "to moonlight is to pretend to be something [one] is not." By the spectra across each of the four categories, we find that disability enhances the complexity of queer experiences and increases the subtlety in evaluating intersectional leadership, as it removes the need for a person to act in a queer manner or universally publicly identify as queer in order to practice leadership pertaining to their identity as queer.

Furthermore, we can map many of the categories proposed by Kimball et al. (2018) as generated by the intersection of disability and queerness onto the intersection of race and queerness and observe Chiron act in ways that intersect with each category. After

Little asks Juan about the f-slur, we can feel the question of how he identifies is always on his mind, which would be significant under any circumstances, but is made much more pressing by living within a largely heterosexual black world (Jenkins, 2016). As Chiron and Black, we get a couple instances of the characters engaging in queer behavior, but for the most part, fear of getting beaten up or hurt by his black schoolmates or drug dealers due to engaging his queer side causes him to suppress his queerness. Furthermore, we can recognize these as a result of the intersection between Little/Chiron/Black's queerness and race because the type of disability he has is very functional and temporary, whereas the primary manner in which disability and queerness co-construct each other is when the disability is more permanent and life-controlling. In *Moonlight*, Little/Chiron/Black's race is the permanent and life-controlling aspect of his identity, so it is the primary part of his identity that co-constructs with his queerness. However, because race is more a part of the setting of the film rather than specific to Chiron, most of the race-impacted leadership is occurring across the film, rather than just in Chiron's character. Obviously, much more nuance exists around the impact of race on leadership, but given my personal lack of experience with race as a social barrier, I find myself unqualified to comment further on lessons of queer leadership intersected with race as found in *Moonlight.*

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to his inaugural book on servant-leadership, Greenleaf (1977/2002) offers several concerns about servant-leadership, of which the most pertinent to my concerns is "for the individual in society and his or her seeming bent to deal with the massive problems of our times wholly in terms of systems, ideologies, and movements" (p.19). While his recognition that

systems, ideologies, and movements are made by and up of people and that personal improvement is at least as important as and often a predecessor for societal change are certainly true, his concern remains embedded in an one-way understanding of the leadership dynamic wherein the leader affects society, ignoring the effect which society may have on the leader. Intersectionality complicates this one-dimensional view of leadership by asserting that one's identity affects one's place in society which impacts the person in a unique manner, even if that person is a leader (Parker, 2005). While it has not entered discussions of intersectionality yet as having a significant impact on one's experience of the world and justice system, geopolitical location could be considered as another aspect of intersectionality, especially in the world of today's protests where we see a wide variety of police response to protests.

One can find many insights about servant-leadership and intersectional leadership in *Moonlight*'s (Jenkins, 2016) exploration of queerness, race, functional disability, and beyond the scope of this paper, class and masculinity. By evoking an intersectional, co-constructed queerness through a well-balanced flow between vacuums and baptisms of fluid sexuality pertaining so many different identities, *Moonlight* calls out for us to search for the "queer within us all," just as any effective, intersectional leader identifying as queer would do. While the experience of queerness is the primary focus of *Moonlight*, ignoring the impact of racial identity of *Moonlight*'s characters in their experience of queerness oversimplifies the levels of fear, loneliness, and discrimination in the lives of its main characters. Indeed, the article is limited in addressing the impact of race in *Moonlight* by the knowledge and identity of its author. Furthermore, to leaders or scholars of leadership who engage with the text, *Moonlight* offers the

opportunity to examine their own practices and assumptions about leadership, to see if there may be virtue to viewing and learning from intersectional leadership as its own style.

NOTE

[1] While I no longer identify as Catholic or Christian, my belief system still carries heavy influences from such religions. However, *Moonlight*'s interaction with religion is rather minimal, so I will not go into detail on my intersectionality with religion.

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