

# Passage

Vol. 9 No. 1, April 2021, pp. 86–108.

Available online at:

<https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/psg/article/view/>

## Gender Hegemony in Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

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### ABSTRACT

The issues regarding gender hegemony in literary works have been widely discussed; yet only few relate the issue to non-human characters. Non-human characters, in this case, are characters which are technologically made and thought-driven being with a lesser capacity for emotion. This study was conducted to investigate how gender hegemony for non-human characters is constructed in a film. The non-human characters that were analyzed are K and Joi from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), a science fiction film directed by Denis Villeneuve. K is portrayed as a male synthetic being called the *replicant*, while Joi is portrayed as a female holographic digital companion called a *DiJi*. To investigate gender hegemony among the characters, this study applied Schipper's (2007) framework of gender hegemony, Boggs and Petrie's (2008) theory of characterization, and Heintz and Stracey's (2006) film elements to analyze the hierarchy of masculinity and femininity in the film. The analysis revealed that the gender hegemony in the film is constructed through the exploitation of characterization, particularly between K and Joi who are presented with stereotypical hierarchical gender characteristics. These stereotypical characteristics created a gendered hegemony revolving around three major themes, namely love, loyalty, and revenge. Further exploration implies that, because the gender hegemony is very embedded in the film, the filmmaker could not offer an alternative of male-female relationships for non-human characters.

**Keywords:** *Blade Runner, femininity, gender hegemony, masculinity, non-human characters*

### How to cite (in APA style):

Nugraha, R., & Noorman, S. (2021). Gender hegemony in Denis Villeneuve's blade runner 2049 (2017). *Passage*, 9(1), 85-108.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human beings tend to take actions based on common sense. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, common sense can be defined as a sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts (“Common sense,” n.d.), which most people take for granted. However, common sense actually is driven by a dominant group in a society, which in turn influences the mass to follow it. This phenomenon was addressed by Antonio Gramsci through the concept of hegemony (Laitin, 1985, as cited in Kendie, 2006). According to Gramsci, hegemony is also exercised by the dominant force through, not just coercion, but also through the consent of the dominated themselves (Cortes-Ramirez, 2015). A contemporary example of common sense that came from hegemony would be buying a gift for someone who just had a birthday. The idea of buying a gift for someone who just had a birthday has been instilled in many people to the point that the idea becomes common sense to most people.

Hegemony also exists within the sphere of gender. Hegemony in gender was first addressed by R.W. Connel with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which can be described as the legitimation of men’s dominant position over women’s subordination (Connel, 2005). Later, the concept was adopted by Mimi Schippers who addressed it under the concept of gender hegemony, which is described as a gender hierarchy that situates hegemonic masculinities above a range of femininities (Schippers, 2007). According to Schippers (2007) hierarchy exists between masculinity and femininity, and that its legitimation can result in domination and inequality between genders.

The hierarchy between masculinity and femininity can be linked to the hegemony of society’s expectations regarding gender roles. Based on the sex and each society’s beliefs and values regarding gender, the interactions between the individuals and their environment signals the behaviors that are

believed to be appropriate for certain sex (Blackstone, 2003). This gender-based-appropriateness was mainly naturalized based on numerous natural or unnatural differences between each sex. However, gender is not something that a person acquires all of a sudden. Gender is a symbol as well as a social construct that varies depending on the culture and their meaning along with the way of expressing them, depends greatly on societal values, beliefs, and “preferred ways of organizing collective life.” (Wood, 2008, p. 24).

Furthermore, the belief of gender-based-appropriateness can lead to stereotypes. In most cases, men are perceived as more agentic, specifically more competent, assertive, independent, skillful, and achievement-oriented while women are often thought to be less agentic than men. On the contrary, women are usually perceived to have better qualities in communal aspects, such as being friendly, warm, unselfish, interdependent, sociable, expressive, and relationship-oriented while men are typically seen as inferior to

women in terms of these communal aspects (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989 as cited in Eisenchlas, 2013). These stereotypes assume that each gender has attributes that complement each other (Cameron, 2003; Jost & Kay, 2005 as cited in Eisenchlas, 2013). This assumption regarding complementing attributes naturalizes the belief of male dominance over female inferiority, thus it becomes acceptable to both men and women (Jost & Kay, 2005; Rudman & Glick, 2001 as cited in Eisenchlas, 2013). Consequently, masculinity and femininity are then assigned by what members of society thought about the meaning of being male or female (Stets & Burke, 2000). This means that the characteristics of masculinity and femininity are produced from stereotypes of males and females.

Thus, the hegemony of the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity, where masculinity usually balances the weakness of femininity, produces stereotypes where femininity is considered to be inferior and is expected to complement masculinity. Moreover,

according to Glick, Wilkerson, and Cuffe (2015), with the complementarity of gender roles, women who present themselves as feminine offers highly identified men a chance to establish their masculinity, for instance, by offering protection to “damsel in distress.” This could mean that the performance of “damsel in distress” and the performance of offering protection to “damsel in distress” can be identified as an instance of gender hegemony.

Such a situation can be seen in numerous Hollywood films, For example, in the *Spider-Man* trilogy (2002-2007) directed by Sam Raimi, the damsel-in-distress situation can be seen between the main character, Spider-Man, and his love interest, Mary Jane Watson. In the three movies, Mary Jane Watson, who is portrayed with stereotypically feminine traits, has been put into deadly situations about seven times and always ended up being rescued by Spider-Man in a heroic fashion (Bogarosh, 2013). Another example of a damsel-in-distress situation can

be seen in *Kick-Ass* (2010) which was adapted from a Marvel comic book of the same name. In the film, the character Hit Girl defies traditional gender stereotypes. While Hit Girl is portrayed as a capable girl, the movie eventually puts her in a damsel-in-distress situation when Dave, the main protagonist, heroically rescues Hit Girl near the end of the film (Kinnunen, 2016). Nevertheless, in recently made films, the damsel-in-distress situation is starting to diminish and the portrayal of female characters is often replaced with a portrayal of a heroine. Such portrayal can be seen in *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2012-2015) which are adapted from the same novel written by Suzanne Collins. The trilogy gives an alternative picture of a hero that mirrors the existence of women and their equality in society as can be seen in the portrayal of the main character, Katniss Everdeen who represents the ideal quality of today’s women (Chusna & Suzanna, 2015).

Even though recent films tend to portray women equally to men,

several films still portray stereotypical gender roles. Such stereotypes exist in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), a film directed by Denis Villeneuve. The film reveals many scenes that seem to portray the female character, Joi, as a hologram female who exists mainly to help a *replicant* (a name for cyborgs in *Blade Runner* universe) male character, K. This fulfillment of one's desire is in line with the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity. Although the film offers a unique circumstance by introducing the hologram 'species', it does not seem to present new possibilities of gender roles. In addition, this portrayal indicates how pervasive gender stereotype is.

Studies regarding gender representation and hegemony in literary works have been conducted in the past by several researchers. For example, Shen (2017) analyzes the representation and construction of femininity in a Chinese school story entitled *Tomboy Dai An* (2017). Another study, which is conducted by Mulyani (2017), analyzes the

construction of masculinity of children in a film entitled *The Little Rascals* (1994). Meanwhile, Abedinifard (2016) analyzes gender-centered ridicules through the power dynamics of Connell's theory. As for previous studies that address *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), the studies are mostly concerned with futurology and the cinematic aspect of the film. For example, Taşkale (2020) analyzes the social and cultural critique projected through the film by looking at its aesthetics. Meanwhile, King (2020) analyzes cinematic elements of *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) to identify the quality status of Hollywood films.

From the examination of the studies mentioned above, the researcher found that the issues of gender for non-human characters are rarely discussed. For this reason, the researcher attempts to fill the gap by analyzing this issue in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) by applying the framework of Schipper's (2007) gender hegemony to analyze the hierarchy of masculinity and femininity in the film. This study also

considers not only the narrative aspect of the film but also the *mise-en-scène* and film techniques.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To examine the construction of gender hegemony in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), this research employed a qualitative method and textual analysis. A qualitative method was chosen because the research aims to uncover the construction of hegemony and the current paradigm of gender ideals. Since the phenomenon appears to exist within a film, this present research specifically was conducted in the form of textual analysis by analyzing shots and dialogues of the film.

The source of the data is taken from a science fiction film directed by Denis Villeneuve entitled *Blade Runner 2049*. The film is set in futuristic Los Angeles. It follows the story of Officer K, a newer model *replicant blade runner* who is tasked to find and 'retire' the last remaining of the older model *replicants* that are still active around the city. Throughout his quest, K is often accompanied by

Joi, a hologram female designed to please that he always brings with him. Because K and Joi's romantic engagement seems to imply gender hegemony, these two characters are then demanding to be investigated.

To collect and analyze the data, several steps had to be performed. The first step is by segmenting the film into sequences. These sequences are then selected further according to the hegemony identified between the selected characters. Then, the researcher looked into the kind of persuasion and consent in the hegemony from dialogues, action, appearance, etc of the selected characters according to Boggs and Petrie's (2008) methods of characterization. Afterward, the persuasion and the consent of the hegemony were analyzed further by referring to Schipper's theory of gender hegemony (2007).

After that, the researcher created a table of segmentation for the sequences which indicates hegemony and a table of hegemony to find out about the potential meanings that the hegemony creates. The table of

segmentation consisted of the duration of the sequence, the title of the sequence, the narrative description, and cinematic aspects employed in the sequence, which refer to Heintz and Stracey's (2006) film techniques, along with the remarks for each sequence. Meanwhile, the table of hegemony consisted of the identified hegemony in the sequences, the characters who persuaded and consented, as well as the potential meanings from the hegemony.

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

From the analysis of the data, several significant findings can be inferred. The researcher discovered that gender hegemony in *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) is constructed by exploiting characterization. Exploitation means that there are non-human characters who are forced to act or do like humans. The exploitations are mostly visible in the external action of the main (non-human) characters K and Joi, the actions are defined as actions that are visible to the audiences, thus, in this research is called external actions. External actions reflect the quality of the characters' personalities

(Boggs & Petrie, 2008). Therefore, K and Joi's personalities are also revealed in the analysis. In addition, dialogues also reveal each other's personalities.

Other than through the characterization, the gender hegemony in the film is also constructed through the exploitation of cinematic aspects, particularly through props and costumes. In addition, two supporting characters, namely Mariette and Luv, are revealed to be contributing to the construction of gender hegemony as they maintain the gender stereotypes by exhibiting the attitude of *femme fatale*, which in turn, signifies a perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, from the analysis, it was disclosed that gender hegemony in the film revolved around the themes of love, loyalty, and revenge: with love-based gender hegemony makes up approximately 80% of the gender hegemony. Besides themes, the film's gender hegemony also evidenced attitudes that indicate stereotypical gender characteristics. The characteristics might have legitimized the dominant positions of men and the subordinate positions of

women. The construction of gender hegemony, its themes, and stereotypical gender characteristics will all be elaborated in the following section.

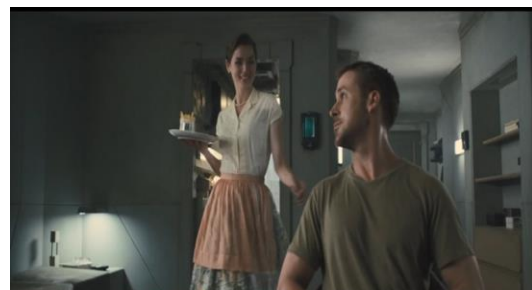
### **Love-based Gender Hegemony**

First of all, love is a theme that is frequently used in the analysis. Love in the film can be described as the expression of affection between characters. This is characterized by a character's action which displays various forms of affection towards another character. The display of affection can be identified in the following nine sequences. These nine sequences can be categorized into the displays of servitude, physical intimacy, support, and devotion based on either K or Joi's external actions.

Displays of servitude are evidenced in nine sequences. The first one can be seen in the sequence of "K's Homecoming". In this sequence, gender hegemony is indicated when Joi serves a holographic steak to K and lights up his cigarette. Here, Joi seems to be persuaded to do these actions out of love, as she can be seen doing the actions happily without K telling her to do so. In this particular scene, Joi is

indicated to perform a traditional gender trait, namely nurturance (Thomas, 2001). The nurturing attitude can be seen in the way she cares about K's well-being by serving him a holographic steak to entertain him, and lighting up his cigarette to keep him content. K buying Joi the *emanator* is also an indication of a hegemony where K's love towards Joi has driven K to provide something to Joi. This can be seen in how K presents the *emanator* as a gift for Joi. Being a provider is one of the traditional masculine characteristics (Chafetz, 1974, as cited in Levine, 1998).

Furthermore, some of the cinematic aspects of the scene also indicate hegemony. In the middle of this sequence, Joi wears an outfit similar to the dress mainly worn by housewives in the 1950s, while K wears a blank olive undershirt, as can be seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Joi serves a "dinner" for K (Villeneuve, 2017, 00:18:00)



Here, Joi's 1950's housewife dress supports the hegemony as it gives Joi the impression of a character who conforms to a traditional gender role of women. In the 1950s, the most common expected roles of women were domestic-based. The roles are mainly illustrated by the portrayal of women in the 1950's advertisements which mostly features them performing a domestic-related activity (Catt, 2014). Thus, from the association of Joi's 1950's housewife dress with domesticity, it can be said that Joi's choice of costume supports the occurring hegemony as the costume symbolizes conformity towards the traditional domestic role of women. Meanwhile, K can be seen wearing an undershirt. K's costume in this sequence accentuates his physique. The undershirt worn by K appears to be accentuating his muscularity. K's muscularity accentuated in the sequence reflects an ideal body image of a male. A male with a muscular physique is considered as a culturally ideal masculine male body. According to Wiegers (Wiegers, 2003, p, 153, as cited in Dewing, 2007), muscles have

been represented as "the distinctive symbol of masculinity." In addition, according to Dewing, a muscular physique is not only regarded as comparable to physical strength. A muscular physique can also be compared with "emotional strength" and "strength of character", which in turn can be further compared with a sense of control and resilience (Dewing, 2007, p, 16). Based on the association of muscular physique with masculinity, therefore, it can be said that K's muscular physique seen through his undershirt in the sequence reflects traditional masculinity.

Furthermore, the dialogue between Joi and K when she is serving him also resembles a typical conversation between a wife and a husband as can be seen below.

Joi: "*Voilà! Bon appétit!*"

Joi: "I missed you, baby sweet."

K: "Honey, it's beautiful."

Joi: "Just put your feet up. Relax."

Joi: "Was a day?"

K: "It was a day."

(Villeneuve, 2017, 00:18:02 - 00:18:46)

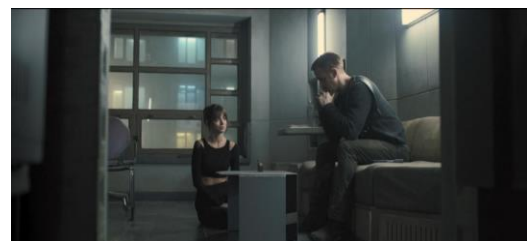
In the dialogue, Joi can be seen expressing her care towards K. Joi being caring towards K supports the concurring gender hegemony. The dialogue also shows Joi's emotional vulnerability, which is one of the characteristics of traditional femininity (Gates, 2006).

This characteristic of emotional vulnerability as the result of servitude display also appears in the other two sequences. In the sequence of "Searching the Missing Boy". A gender hegemony in the sequence is indicated when Joi is attempting to wake K up as he is losing his consciousness. Here, Joi is persuaded by K to be caring for him because of love as can be seen in how she looks afraid the moment K loses his consciousness. In addition, she is also portrayed to be emotionally vulnerable here judging by her expression as the hegemony occurs.

The next display of servitude which also reveals vulnerable emotion can be seen in the sequence of "K's Existential Crisis". In the sequence, the gender hegemony is indicated when she attempts to pacify K. The hegemony is particularly driven by

love as can be seen from how Joi is assuring K that he is "special" and "wanted". It appears that Joi wants to make him feel better by assuring that being a human is better than being a *replicant*. Here, Joi pacifying K also indicates a traditional feminine attitude, namely being nurturing. According to Thomas (2001), nurturance is a characteristic of traditional femininity. Joi crying as she pacifies K also indicates vulnerable emotion. Thus, in K and Joi's romantic relationship, not only is Joi's position subordinate to K, but she is also emotionally vulnerable. In other words, Joi's role emphasizes this gender hegemony.

Stylistically, by analyzing the shot in the sequence of "K's Existential Crisis", particularly the medium camera shot utilized at the beginning of the sequence. It shows K to be more dominant than Joi as can be seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Joi consoles K in the apartment (Villeneuve, 2017, 01:14:47)

In the shot, Joi can be seen sitting in a kneeling position on the floor while K is sitting on a sofa. This positioning somehow makes K looking more powerful than Joi. Again, being dominant is a characteristic of traditional masculinity (Chafetz, 1974). In addition, both Joi and K's posture seen in the shot also follows the traditional gender non-verbal behavior. According to LaFrance and Vial (2016), men and women are stereotypically believed to exhibit contrasting repertoires of non-verbal behavior. In terms of posture, men are believed to adopt "more relaxed postures" and "more expansive body postures", while women are believed to maintain "more restricted postures with legs close together and arms close to the torso." (p. 149). Thus, it can be said that Joi's kneeling position and K's sitting posture as seen in the sequence, reflects the stereotypical gender non-verbal behavior.

Another display of servitude can be seen during the sequence of "Joi Attempting to Make Love". In the sequence, gender hegemony is exercised through Joi and Mariette's

willingness and consent to satisfy K. Moreover, Joi's willingness also indicates her as a character with romantic tendencies, which is a traditional characteristic of femininity (Gates, 2006). This attitude can be seen in how she appears intimate to him when she is seducing K shortly before they have sex. K's willingness towards Joi's offer to have sex with her also indicates a traditionally masculine attitude, namely virility (Gates, 2006), as can be seen when he eventually grabs Joi closer without hesitation as they are about to kiss. In addition, Mariette can also be seen participating in the hegemony, when she willingly merges with Joi. Mariette's participation in the hegemony between Joi and K suggests that Mariette also supports the hegemony in this sequence.

The next display of servitude can be seen in the next sequence of "Joi's Sacrifice". In the sequence, a gender hegemony driven by love is indicated when Joi begs K to move her permanently to the *emanator*. Here, K is persuaded by Joi to move her permanently to the *emanator* because she wants K to survive. In addition, Joi

also exhibits a traditional characteristic of femininity when the hegemony occurs as can be seen in her motive to sacrifice herself. Sacrifice is one of a traditionally feminine trait (Thomas, 2001). Also, K warning Joi about the danger of being permanently inside the *emanator* indicates a masculine attitude. He appears to be trying to save her by telling Joi about the possibility of her death. According to Gates, being heroic is a traditional characteristic of masculinity (Gates, 2006).

Another display of servitude can be seen in the sequence of “Joi’s Death”. During the sequence, Joi is persuaded by K with his love for her to help him survive as can be seen in how she decided to appear when K is beaten down to the floor. In addition, Joi also shows a traditionally feminine trait during the hegemony by sacrificing herself as she distracts Luv and eventually being destroyed by her. Again, sacrifice is one of a traditionally feminine trait (Thomas, 2001). Furthermore, Luv can also be seen participating in the hegemony as she beats K up. Luv beating K up is what starts the hegemony of this

sequence in the first place, as can be seen from how Joi decides to appear because of what she does to K.

Meanwhile, a display of physical intimacy can be seen in the sequence of “Testing the Emanator”. In this sequence, the hegemony can be seen when Joi takes K’s hand to let him feel her face. Here, Joi is persuaded by K to do these actions out of love, as can be seen in Joi’s expression of gratitude towards K for his gift. Moreover, Joi also shows a feminine trait, namely emotional vulnerability (Gates, 2006) as can be seen in her emotion as she expresses her gratitude to K. Joi appears to be turning very intimate as she let K feel her face.

In addition, the camera shot utilized shortly before the hegemony occurs in the sequence highlights the



**Figure 2.** Joi and K looks at each other (Villeneuve, 2017, 00:21:55)

contrast between K and Joi in terms of appearance as can be seen in Figure 2.

The long-shot that is utilized in the scene highlights K and Joi's contrasting stature, K appears to be looking more powerful beside Joi, while Joi appears to be looking less powerful beside K. The difference in stature indicates that K is more dominant than Joi. This domination supports the hegemony that happens shortly after the shot changes. Moreover, being dominant is a characteristic of traditional masculinity (Chafetz, 1974).

The third kind of love-based gender hegemony is a display of support. This can be seen in one sequence, namely "Birthdate Investigation". Gender hegemony occurs in the scene when Joi convinces K about the possibility of him being the child that he is looking for. Here, K is persuaded by Joi to believe that the date from the farm and the wooden horse toy is connected. The hegemony appears to be driven by love as can be seen from her characterization, particularly in how she gently delivers her idea to K. Her gentleness can be

seen in the way she delivers the dialogue shown below.

Joi: "Your memory?"

Joi: "The date carved beneath. 6, 10, and 21. Coincidence?"

K: "A dangerous coincidence."

Joi: "I always knew you were special."

Joi: "Maybe this is how. A child. Of woman born. Pushed into the world. Wanted. Loved."

K: "Well, if it were true... I'd be hunted for the rest of my life by someone just like me."

(Villeneuve, 2017, 00:56:19 - 00:57:11)

When Joi delivers her lines in this dialogue, her tone is affectionate. She delivers her lines quietly and calmly to K while smiling. In addition, Joi also attempts to entice K by telling him that being a human child means that he is "wanted" and "loved". Joi's enticement in the dialogue supports her persuasion. This also means that Joi is exhibiting feminine traits considered as traditional, namely being gentle and intuitive. According to Thomas (2001), gentleness and

intuitiveness are the traits considered as traditionally feminine.

Lastly, a display of devotion can be identified in the sequence of “K’s remembrance”. Here, K is persuaded by Joi, in this case through the advertisement, to avenge her death by killing Luv. While the pistol K got from Freysa in the previous scene is given to be used to kill Deckard, the advertisement of Joi, as well as the flashback somehow encourages him to avenge Joi when he looks at the pistol in the sequence. His attitude during the hegemony also indicates a traditional masculine characteristic, namely by having a violent thought as can be inferred from his motive to avenge Joi. Violence is one of a traditionally masculine trait (Gates, 2006). Moreover, the pistol that K received from Freysa also indicates the traditional masculine characteristic of K. According to Taylor (2008), as time passed, firearms have culturally shifted from being a “tool for survival” into a “symbol of masculinity” (p. 114). Therefore, the pistol that K keeps, as can be seen in the sequence, symbolizes K’s masculinity.

In addition, from the cinematic aspects utilized in the sequence, the long-shot used one time during the sequence also shows a contrasting image between K and Joi as can be seen in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** K watches an advertisement featuring Joi (Villeneuve, 2017, 02:17:32)

As the long-shot shows K and the advertisement of Joi side by side. K appears to look less powerful besides the giant Joi advertisement. It can also be seen that Joi here is portrayed to be naked. The depiction of giant naked Joi here supports the hegemony in the sequence, as can be seen in how Joi nudity coincides with her persuasion and how her nudity attracts K to consent towards Joi’s persuasion. According to Windsor (2015), attracting men with specific physical characteristics is a hegemonic action.

From the findings above, it is revealed that love-based gender hegemony in the film is mostly constructed through

the display of Joi's servitude towards K. This portion then signifies a subservient attitude of the female character towards the male character.

### **Loyalty-based Gender Hegemony**

In the analysis, it is revealed that loyalty in the film, can be described as the quality of being faithful towards a person. This can be characterized by the expression of one character's fidelity. This loyalty is a part of hegemony. It can be identified in the sequence of "Spying Attempt" based on K's external action.

The loyalty-based gender hegemony identified in the sequence of "Spying Attempt" is a display of faithfulness. The hegemony in this sequence can be seen when K attempts to intimidate Mariette, taking off Mariette's hands from himself twice, and picking the *emanator* from his pocket. These actions seem to be motivated by his loyalty to Joi because he appears to be reserved towards Mariette. Here, K is persuaded by Joi to be loyal to her by keeping himself reserved towards women other than Joi. K also further proves his fidelity by showing Mariette that he has a significant other, that significant other being Joi, by

picking his *emanator*. Moreover, K's faithfulness towards Joi in the sequence also indicates a traditional masculine characteristic, namely trustworthiness. Being trustworthy is a traditional masculine characteristic (Chafetz, 1974).

In addition, K's dialogue in the sequence also shows a traditional masculine characteristic as can be seen in the dialogue shown below.

Mariette: "Wanna buy a lady cigarette?"

Mariette: "Oh, you don't even smile."

K: "Didn't you hear your friends? Don't you know what I am?"

(Villeneuve, 2017, 00:44:50 - 00:44:55)

Before the dialogue between K and Mariette starts, one of Mariette's friend warns her that he is a *blade runner*. Shortly, Mariette's friends decide to leave, while Mariette insists to stay. In the dialogue between K and Mariette, when K says "Didn't you hear your friends? Don't you know what I am?" he is trying to intimidate Mariette by showing how dangerous

he is by pointing out Mariette's friends' warning about him. This means that K is asserting his dominance. Being dominant is one of the traits of masculinity (Chafetz, 1974).

K having to show his loyalty towards Joi in this sequence suggests that the scene perpetuates a gender stereotype of men where they are believed to be prone to infidelity. In addition, Mariette's role in this sequence and another sequence in the previous section suggests that her existence in the film is pivotal. Mariette maintains the gender stereotypes in the film. She maintains the gender stereotypes by portraying the attitude of *femme fatale*; a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations ("Femme fatale," n.d). This attitude can be seen from some of her actions, such as her spying attempt through flirtation in the sequence of "Spying Attempt" and her seductive act in the sequence of "Joi Attempting to Make Love". According to Barnes-Smith (2015), a *femme fatale* is an archetype of stereotypical female characters. *Femme fatale* characters are usually portrayed to exhibit attributes such as

being beautiful, manipulative, cold, calculating, as well as knowing how to take advantage of their femininity "in a way that can destroy men" (Mercure, 2010, p. 113). Therefore, Mariette's actions shown in the sequence of "Spying Attempt" and "Joi Attempting to Make Love" signifies a *femme fatale* attitude.

Furthermore, stylistically Mariette's femininity can also be seen through the costume that she wore in the sequence of "Spying Attempt" and "Joi Attempting to Make Love" as can be seen in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Mariette's coat (Villeneuve, 2017, 00:44:18)

In the sequence of "Spying Attempt" and "Joi Attempting to Make Love", Mariette can be seen wearing an intricate fur coat. The complex nature of the coat worn by Mariette signifies femininity. According to Steele (2004), characteristics such as "ornamentation, rich materials, and complicated draperies" in elaborate



and expensive fashions symbolizes the artificial signs of femininity (p. 319).

### **Revenge-driven Gender Hegemony**

In the analysis, it is revealed that revenge in the film, can be described as the quality of being vengeful. This can be characterized by the display of violence by a character towards another character who harms their beloved ones. It is identified in the sequence of “Rescuing Deckard” based on K’s external action.

The revenge-driven gender hegemony identified in the sequence of “Rescuing Deckard” is another display of devotion. In this scene, K and Luv can be seen fighting. Luv stabs K in the middle of the fight. However, K eventually gets the upper hand by ambushing Luv and successfully kills her by drowning her to death. Despite both K and Luv showing an aggressive attitude, K’s win over Luv in the fight indicates a bias towards masculinity.

In addition, as the hegemony occurs, there is a low-level angle used in this scene that is shown from underwater, behind Luv’s shoulder, as

she is being choked and drowned by K as can be seen in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** K chokes Luv under the water (Villeneuve, 2017, 02:25:20)

The angle of the shot shows K looking down upon Luv as he chokes her to death. The angle as well as his strength to strangle Luv down underwater indicates that K is more powerful than Luv. Being dominant is again, a characteristic of traditional masculinity (Chafetz, 1974).

Based on this sequence and another sequence in the previous section, Luv’s existence in the film is also pivotal. Luv also maintains the gender stereotypes in the film as she is portrayed as a *femme fatale*. This *femme fatale* portrayal can be seen particularly in the sequence of “Rescuing Deckard” and “Joi’s Death”. In the sequences, Luv is portrayed as a malevolent woman who attempts to ruin K’s life by killing Joi and eventually, also attempts to kill him too. Luv’s actions shown in the

sequence of “Joi’s Death” and “Rescuing Deckard” signifies two *femme fatale* attitudes, namely cold and calculating. Luv destroying Joi to demoralize K and her attempt to also kill him indicates that she exhibits a cold and calculating attitude.

Furthermore, like Mariette, Luv’s femininity can also be seen in the film, particularly through the costume that she wore during the sequence of “Searching for the Missing Boy” as can be seen in Figure



**Figure 7.** Luv’s tailored dress and earrings (Villeneuve, 2017, 01:03:36)

In the sequence, Luv can be seen wearing a white tailored dress as well as earrings. Initially, the costume indicates Luv’s attempt at *power dressing*; a style of dressing in which business people wear formal clothes to make them seem powerful (“Power dressing,” n.d). However, while Luv’s dress indicates power, her earrings instead indicate that she is still

feminine. According to Piller (2001), “discreet jewelry” in *power dressing* signifies a “sophisticated” brand of femininity (p. 171).

Based on the findings, it is revealed that the characterizations of the main characters as well as some cinematic aspects used by the filmmaker, such as prop, costume, shot, and angle are contributing to the construction of gender hegemony throughout *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). The construction of the gender hegemony in the film itself also reveals the legitimization of stereotypical gender traits through the hegemony between K and Joi. In addition, the findings also show that other supporting characters, specifically Mariette and Luv, are contributing to the gender hegemony and at the same time also perpetuates gender stereotypes as they are portrayed as a *femme fatale* in the film.

The legitimization of stereotypical gender traits through K and Joi’s relationship implies the filmmaker’s attempt to humanize these non-human characters by incorporating conventional images of man and woman into them. K is

portrayed as a *replicant*, a synthetic being engineered by humans in the film to be used for certain labors. Meanwhile, Joi is portrayed as a *DiJi*, a customizable holographic digital companion also created by humans in the film. The humanization of these artificial beings is further realized when the filmmaker establishes a narrative and cinematic aspects that purposely shows both K and Joi as an emotional being.

Considering that film is a medium that can reflect cultural values, this humanization of non-human characters might be done by the filmmaker so that the audience of the film would be able to empathize with K and Joi, in this case by making them exhibit the traditional image of men and women respectively. One of the important aspects of storytelling is the establishment of character. By establishing a compelling character a storyteller would be able to make their audience invested in their story. The audience's investment in the story can also help a film to gain popularity among the masses.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research aims to find out the construction of gender hegemony in the film *Blade Runner 2049*. From the findings, it is revealed that the filmmaker presents K and Joi to exhibit stereotypical gender traits. The portrayal of stereotypical gender traits indicates the legitimization of the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women. In addition, Mariette and Luv also perpetuate gender stereotype as they are portrayed as *femme fatale* in the film. The cinematic aspect and supporting characters also contributes to the construction of the gender hegemony in the film. How the cinematic aspect contributes to the construction of gender hegemony can be seen in the prop utilized and a costume worn by Joi in the film. Meanwhile, the supporting characters, Mariette and Luv, contribute to the construction of gender hegemony through their anti-traditional femininity which highlights the hegemony between K and Joi.

Besides that, the perpetuation of gender hegemony in non-human characters implies the filmmaker

attempts to humanize K and Joi, particularly by establishing them as a heterosexual couple with a reciprocal desire for intimacy. Stylistically, the filmmaker also utilized certain cinematic aspects to help them achieve the humanization of K and Joi, such as the 1950's housewife dress that reflects women's traditional domestic role and the emanator that reflects K's loyalty towards Joi. This finding, thus, suggests the filmmaker's attempt to appeal to the general audience who are familiar with the traditional male-female relationship reflected through the film's construction of gender hegemony. In other words, the film does not offer an alternative perspective to the male-female relationship.

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