

Projecting Masculinity and Aesthetically Demoralizing Females in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner
Presenter Cheyenne Miller, English major
Mentored by Dr. Lisa Crafton

Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* showcases from the position of a white male who polices women, ultimately forcing them to abandon any hope of freedom. Deckard represents a typical white male who adamantly remains guilty of projecting high-functioning and degrading masculinity onto female replicants. He seeks out to control these replicant women who will forcefully remain ever so willing to obey him while otherwise punishing female replicants that attempt to achieve any self-empowerment or independence. Deckard performs bouts of sickening corrective rape on Zhora, Rachael, and Pris to fearfully maintain the heteronormative police state that despises empowered women who struggle in a society which does not promote individual identity in the slightest. Scott cleverly depicts these three replicant women to assuage a specifically targeted male clientele, initially beginning by appealing to an average male audience, shifting over to a concise conservative male vantage and eventually then onto the targeted typical 80s-era audience. Even in death, two of the replicant women are sexualized in their aesthetics, and the nature of their deaths are graphic, bloody, and filled with lengthened suffering emphasizing the male need for empowered women to struggle, suffer and submit. Will Brooker argues in his novel *The Blade Runner Experience: The Legacy of Science Fiction Classic*, "With this heightened capacity to deceive, we might say that the female replicant is the ultimate manifestation of the commonplace cultural positioning of women as duplicitous. It seems telling in this light that all the major women characters in *Blade Runner* [sic] are in fact replicants. Subsequently, when these women are 'retired' their deaths are prolonged and bloody punishments in comparison to those of the male replicants, leaving behind butchered bodies where their feminine charms, and the threat they represent, are well and truly razed" (159). In other words, these women classically represent a marginalized 'other' wherein they are considered as outcasts and shunned whenever they attempt anything that could bring them freedom. This assertion supports my argument concerning the overall aesthetics of their death scenes being portrayed as hyper-sexualized, deeming them as merely thoughtless and empty vessels for the satisfaction of the common male gaze. Another argument Brooker details are that the only female representation in the film that stands out whatsoever are feminine replicants that have been deemed unfit for this damned society. In a male-driven dystopian world which emphasizes males as the stronger power-driven force leaves minimal room for women to be empowered and instead leaves them perceived to be, and subsequently treated as, subservient and willing to serve their male counterparts.