

BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT AND PATRIARCHY: THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN *MY NAME*

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ABSTRACT. The portrayal of women in action or martial arts television series is frequently bound to patriarchal tropes, often depicting them as weak, powerless characters subjugated by male authority. In the series *My Name* (2021), directed by Kim Jin-min, the narrative follows a female protagonist, Yoon Ji-woo, as she negotiates her survival and identity in a hyper-masculine world dominated by patriarchal values. Utilizing a feminist textual analysis, this study examines how Ji-woo is portrayed through markers of physical power, financial independence, and non-traditional gender roles that disrupt conventional societal stereotypes. Specifically, this study investigates whether Ji-woo's journey reflects individual agency and a reclamation of power, or whether structural patriarchy still dictates her trajectory. The findings indicate that while Ji-woo subverts traditional expectations of female vulnerability, her character arc fails to meet the criteria of radical feminism due to her ultimate reliance on male-dominated institutions and patriarchs for validation. While she relies on male allies and systemic structures to execute her revenge, this dynamic does not inherently negate her feminist agency; rather, it highlights the complex negotiations required when operating within an oppressive system. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *My Name* represents a complex view of contemporary gender roles by celebrating individual female strength while simultaneously illustrating the constraints of a deeply entrenched, male-dominated structure.

Keywords: Female representation, Women's Empowerment, Patriarchy, *My Name*

ANTARA PEMBERDAYAAN DAN PATRIARKI: REPRESENTASI PEREMPUAN DALAM *MY NAME*

ABSTRAK. Penggambaran perempuan dalam serial televisi bergenre aksi atau seni bela diri sering kali terikat pada trope patriarkis, yang kerap menampilkan mereka sebagai sosok lemah dan tak berdaya di bawah kendali otoritas laki-laki. Dalam serial *My Name* (2021) arahan sutradara Kim Jin-min, narasi mengikuti perjalanan tokoh utama perempuan, Yoon Ji-woo, saat ia berjuang mempertahankan hidup dan jati dirinya di tengah dunia yang sangat maskulin dan didominasi oleh nilai-nilai patriarki. Dengan menggunakan metode analisis tekstual feminis, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana sosok Ji-woo digambarkan melalui indikator kekuatan fisik, kemandirian finansial, dan peran gender non-tradisional yang mendobrak stereotip konvensional masyarakat. Secara khusus, penelitian ini menyelidiki apakah perjalanan Ji-woo mencerminkan agensi individu dan upaya merebut kembali kekuasaan, atau apakah struktur patriarki tetap mendikte arah hidupnya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Ji-woo mematahkan ekspektasi tradisional mengenai kerentanan perempuan, perkembangan karakternya tidak sepenuhnya memenuhi kriteria feminisme radikal karena pada akhirnya ia masih bergantung pada institusi yang didominasi laki-laki serta figur patriarkis untuk mendapatkan pengakuan. Kendati ia mengandalkan sekutu laki-laki dan struktur sistemik untuk melancarkan aksi balas dendamnya, dinamika ini tidak serta-merta meniadakan agensi feminisnya; sebaliknya, hal ini justru menyoroti negosiasi rumit yang harus dilakukan saat bergerak di dalam sistem yang opresif. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa *My Name* menyajikan pandangan yang kompleks mengenai peran gender kontemporer dengan mengapresiasi kekuatan individu perempuan, sembari sekaligus menggambarkan batasan-batasan yang ditimbulkan oleh struktur dominasi laki-laki yang telah mengakar kuat.

Between Empowerment and Patriarchy: The Representation of Women in *My Name*

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Kata-kata kunci: Representasi perempuan, Pemberdayaan perempuan, Patriarki, *My Name*

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy operates as a systemic structural framework designed to maintain male institutional dominance and deliberately restrict women's autonomy within the public and private spheres. In gender studies, the intersection of empowerment and patriarchy creates complex theoretical friction, particularly regarding whether individual female advancements truly dismantle structural oppression or merely exist as a localized exception within it. While the empowerment movement encourages marginalized groups to cultivate individual agency, economic self-reliance, and leadership capacity, traditional gender disparities in education, employment, and institutional governance remain rigidly reinforced by deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Walby, 1989). Conversely, structural empowerment strategies actively seek to dismantle these institutionalized inequalities (Sen, 1994). Despite evolving efforts to cultivate gender equality globally, patriarchy consistently functions as a resilient counter-mechanism. For instance, empirical research indicates that while women are increasingly securing external financial independence (Kabeer, 2005), their domestic autonomy remains severely compromised due to persistent, patriarchal household decision-making hierarchies (Mosedale, 2005).

Female representation in crime television series directly reflects broader questions of gender equality and the media's role in constructing social norms. Because crime dramas constitute one of the most widely consumed global media formats, they wield significant power in shaping public perceptions of justice, systemic control, and gender performance (Jermyn, 2017). Historically, mainstream media has either marginalized female characters or confined them to conventional, passive tropes—positioning them as vulnerable victims,

domestic foils, or peripheral romantic interests (Pinedo, 2021a). Alternatively, modern narratives that feature women as complex detectives or central antagonists actively disrupt these outdated archetypes, fostering more inclusive and subversive media landscapes (Bubíková & Roebuck, 2022). Nevertheless, institutional inequalities persist; women remain starkly underrepresented both on-screen and in behind-the-scenes leadership roles within the crime action genre (Lauzen, 2024). Consequently, the genre remains heavily anchored in androcentric perspectives, framing structural justice and systemic violence as exclusively male domains (Jermyn, 2017).

This intersection of empowerment and patriarchal constraint becomes particularly complex within non-Western media landscapes, which frequently negotiate distinct cultural demands. Scholars have heavily interrogated evolving iterations of female agency (Jermyn, 2017), the narrative overlap between violence and femininity (Pinedo, 2021a), and genre-specific patriarchal limitations (Raj & Jayasundara-Smiths, 2023). However, current scholarship on media revenge narratives remains overwhelmingly tethered to Western paradigms of individualized, atomized justice (Pinedo, 2021b).

The South Korean television series *My Name* (2021) introduces a vital disruption to this paradigm by framing revenge not as an issue of isolated personal suffering, but as an inescapable matter of filial piety, family responsibility, and collective honor. This communal imperative offers a unique cross-cultural lens that existing Western-centric models fail to adequately explain, providing a rich opportunity to analyze female trauma as both a deeply personal experience and a symptom of rigid social structures. Historically, South Korean action and crime cinema has functioned as a hyper-masculine

space, relegating women to subordinate roles that validate male dominance (Safira, 2024). *My Name* fundamentally subverts this convention by placing a female protagonist, Yoon Ji-woo, at the absolute center of a high-octane narrative focused on physical power, institutional infiltration, and raw survival. Following its global release on Netflix, the series achieved international acclaim, making it an ideal case study for examining how contemporary South Korean media balances global demands for feminist representation with deeply entrenched domestic gender expectations (Kim, 2021).

Rather than presenting a straightforward tale of absolute liberation, this study argues that *My Name* functions as a site of ideological negotiation, wherein the protagonist's physical empowerment is simultaneously facilitated and constrained by the patriarchal structures she relies upon for her vengeance. Ultimately, the series demonstrates that female agency within hyper-masculine genres is rarely absolute; instead, it must continuously bargain with patriarchal gatekeepers to execute individual will.

To investigate this dynamic, this study addresses the following formal research questions:

1. In what ways does the physical and financial representation of Yoon Ji-woo subvert or reinforce traditional patriarchal expectations of femininity within South Korean action narratives?
2. How do the motifs of trauma and systemic revenge function to complicate Ji-woo's agency, and to what extent is her path toward justice dependent upon male validation and institutional gatekeepers?

By exploring these questions, this study fills a crucial gap in international television scholarship by challenging the universal applicability of Western feminist media frameworks to East Asian action texts. It offers a more nuanced, culturally specific

understanding of how contemporary media can critique entrenched gender hierarchies while operating directly within their constraints.

METHOD

This study utilizes visual narrative analysis combined with feminist semiotic analysis to critically examine the media representation of women in the South Korean television series *My Name* (2021). The primary data corpus consists of all eight episodes of the series, distributed globally via Netflix. Data collection was performed by isolating and systematically coding narrative, textual, and visual elements that directly feature or impact the female protagonist, Yoon Ji-woo.

The analytical procedure was structured around a systematic qualitative coding matrix. Visual and textual data were captured, transcribed, and cataloged based on specific denotative and connotative signifiers, including camera angles, lighting choices, dialogue exchanges, physical costuming, and narrative character arcs. These textual artifacts were categorized into distinct empirical codes focusing on: (a) markers of female physical and systemic empowerment, (b) structural indicators of patriarchal control or institutional masculinity, and (c) visual and narrative moments showing ideological tension or co-optation between the two. To ensure analytical validity, these categorized codes were triangulated alongside contemporary peer-reviewed literature in feminist media studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Visual and Narrative Representations of Female Power

The representation of female power in *My Name* (2021) is built through a complex visual and narrative approach. Yoon Ji-woo, the protagonist, undergoes a dramatic transformation from a vulnerable, traumatized teenager into an exceptionally skilled fighter. The camera work acts as a narrative device to externalize her psychological struggle,

framing her simultaneously as an active, resilient agent and an isolated subject navigating a hyper-masculine criminal underworld.

Episode 1: Subverting the Male Gaze and Constructing Identity

A significant visual transformation occurs when Yoon Ji-woo relinquishes her biological identity to operate under the undercover alias of Oh Hye-jin. The director employs tight medium shots and expressive close-ups that privilege her facial expressions and gestures rather than framing her anatomy.



Fig. 1: Ji-woo's First Day as a Police Officer, Isolated among Male Colleagues
(Source: Kim, 2021)

This deliberate choice avoids the visual objectification typically engineered by the "male gaze," a concept formalized by Laura Mulvey (1975) to describe how media positions women as passive erotic objects for heterosexual male viewers. Instead, the focus on Ji-woo's face reveals her subjectivity and inner conflict, shifting the generic focus from voyeuristic objectification to lived personal experience.

This physical and psychological transformation aligns with Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender identity is not an essential biological truth, but rather a social construct continuously enacted through repetitive performative signs. Ji-woo does not merely change her clothes; she explicitly adopts hyper-masculine postures, deeper vocal tones, and stoic expressions to survive inside institutional spaces dominated by hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005). Her utilitarian black attire and short hair serve as visual signifiers of strategic assertiveness and disguise rather than objects of eroticization. Following Derksen's (2017) framework, this aesthetic shift represents a strategic "female masquerade" in cinema, where a female character deliberately deploys masculine codes to seize narrative control and spatial power. The absolute silence and cold, low-key lighting in this scene underscore that Ji-woo's transformation is not a glamorous spectacle, but an exhausting erasure of her former self, marking an overt resistance to traditional gender tropes in action cinema.

Episode 2: Confrontation and Spatial Agonism

One of the most striking narrative choices occurs when Ji-woo confronts a large group of male adversaries in a closed, claustrophobic warehouse.



Fig. 2: Ji-woo's Confrontation
(Source: Kim, 2021)

This sequence features an intensely choreographed, long-take fight where the camera utilizes handheld framing and a volatile, shaky-cam technique to immerse the audience in the spatial chaos. While female action heroes have historically been sexualized through low-angle trackers, slow-motion framing, or highly revealing costumes (Bowman, 2022), this scene strictly rejects such exploitation. Ji-woo wears functional, layered black tactical clothing, stripped of any sensualized elements. The camera prioritizes her tactical movements, physical wounds, and determined expressions over bodily aesthetics. This execution represents a direct resistance to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975),

positioning Ji-woo as an aggressive, autonomous subject.

This scene illustrates the unforgiving dynamics of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), as Ji-woo must adopt physical violence as her primary language of self-affirmation to establish institutional authority. Within this androcentric framework, violence ceases to be a mere genre element; it becomes a mandatory tool to negotiate power. Her combative prowess demonstrates a violent iteration of gender performativity (Butler, 1990); she performs masculinity through bodily enforcement as a calculated response to a structure that denies her a peaceful existence. Crucially, the text maintains emotional proximity to her through post-fight close-ups that emphasize her exhaustion, bloody bruises, and unresolved trauma. By doing so, the series rejects the limiting "strong but sexy" heroine duality critiqued by Bowman (2022). Ji-woo's strength is never framed erotically, creating a complex representation where women do not need to soften their appearance to remain human, nor erase their vulnerability to be considered powerful.

Episode 3: The Functional Body as a Medium of Transformation

During the underground training sessions supervised by crime boss Choi Mu-jin, Ji-woo's body is framed in a manner that contrasts with traditional action genre tropes. Instead of converting the female form into an object of male visual fantasy, the lens treats her body as a site of grueling labor.



Fig. 3: Training Session
(Source: Kim, 2021)

The camera documents her sweat-drenched physique using realistic, unfiltered medium

shots, refusing to utilize angles that beautify or maximize sexual appeal.

The visual emphasis rests on her exhausting efforts to master physical combat. Her extensive bodily bruising signifies the real-world physical toll and perseverance required to achieve her goals. Thus, her body escapes patriarchal manipulation, functioning instead as the literal engine of her character transformation. This embodies Butler's (1990) performative model, showing that agency is carved out through physical discipline. By lingering on her exhausted, unglamorous state, the series challenges the traditional concept that women on-screen must remain physically pristine, finding narrative strength in raw physical imperfection and psychological resilience.

Hegemonic Masculinity and its Impact on Women in Stories

Episode 4: Institutional Isolation and Intersectionality

On Ji-woo's first day as a plainclothes police officer within the Narcotics Unit, the visual composition illustrates how women are marginalized within spaces dominated by hegemonic masculinity.



Fig. 4: Ji-woo's First Day
(Source: Kim, 2021)

The camera strategically captures Ji-woo from high, wide angles that emphasize her deep isolation, specifically using a long shot that positions her as a solitary, tiny female figure engulfed by a sea of male colleagues. This shot establishes her institutional estrangement, illustrating Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory that hegemonic masculinity not only regulates

male peer groups but constructs rigid social hierarchies that subordinate women. Drawing on Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, this study notes that Ji-woo exists at a volatile crossroads of vulnerability, defined by her gender identity and her highly specific, precarious social class as an undercover operative with a falsified background and hidden criminal ties. Intersectionality posits that systemic oppression cannot be understood through a single lens alone; rather, axis points like gender, institutional rank, and hidden status overlap to compound a subject's marginalization. Ji-woo is not only hindered by institutional sexism but by the severe structural forces that dictate loyalty and class within the police force, forcing her to constantly manage the friction between her true self and the corrupt system.

In line with this, Jack Halberstam's (1998) theory of "female masculinities" provides a critical framework, highlighting how women who exhibit masculine behaviors are historically categorized as transgressive and dangerous in patriarchal cultures. Halberstam argues that masculinity must not be treated as an exclusive property of biological men; when performed by women, it can actively expose and challenge the artificial nature of patriarchal power. Ji-woo's adoption of a masculine performance—evidenced by her stoicism and high-risk field endurance—is a direct subversion of passive feminine norms. However, although Ji-woo appears to have gained entry into the masculine police institution, her empowerment remains circumscribed by hegemonic masculinity's terms, suggesting that apparent progress may still operate within patriarchal limits.

The composition of this scene relies on a highly structured Visual Architecture of Isolation to externalize Yoon Ji-woo's estrangement within her new professional environment. The director arranges a multi-layered frame where multiple dominant Male Officers occupy the uppermost tier of the

social and physical space. Rather than cutting between characters, the scene utilizes a singular, sweeping High-Angle Wide Tracking Shot that acts as the primary tool of visual subordination. This downward camera angle visually compresses the space, casting a literal and symbolic oversight from the male characters down onto the protagonist. At the base of this visual hierarchy rests the Isolated Yoon Ji-woo, positioned as a solitary figure swallowed by the surrounding masculine landscape. By engineering the shot this way, the camera movement and spatial layout work in tandem to explicitly communicate how she is visually marginalized within a deeply masculine institution, turning a simple location into a physical manifestation of her systemic exclusion.

In this scene, Mulvey's (1975) critique of the male gaze remains highly relevant: although Ji-woo inhabits a room full of men, the camera does not objectify her body. Instead, her physical frame is captured to externalize severe mental and physical tension, cementing her status as a complex psychological subject rather than a superficial visual object.

Episode 5: Inter-Masculine Violence and Spatial Metaphors

A crucial narrative climax occurs during a brutal hallway fight between Ji-woo and her former gang rival, Do Gang-jae.



Fig. 5: The Fight
(Source: Kim, 2021)

This sequence symbolizes a violent collision between two distinct models of masculinity: the "female masculinity" (Halberstam, 1998)

embodied by Ji-woo, and the hyper-aggressive, hegemonic masculinity represented by Gang-jae.

Having previously felt deeply threatened by Ji-woo's rapid ascension within the Dongcheon criminal syndicate, Gang-jae overcompensates by adopting an authoritarian, hyper-violent persona. His brutal violence against Ji-woo expresses a profound masculine anxiety that occurs when traditional patriarchal dominance is challenged by an independent woman. This aligns with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) assertion that hegemonic masculinity frequently resorts to compensatory violence when its structural authority feels threatened or lacks validation.

Conversely, Ji-woo performs a form of "female masculinity"—a masculinity constructed through embodied practice rather than biological sex—deploying violence as a strategic response to structural constraints. Her physical capacity redefines her survival parameters in a predatory world. As Butler (1990) notes, gender identity is solidified through the repetition of physical acts; in this narrow space, Ji-woo manifests an alternative masculinity that blurs conventional binaries, using her body to challenge the patriarchal framework.

Furthermore, the narrow, dimly lit hallway where this confrontation occurs is spatially significant. The hallway functions as a metaphor for a liminal space—a tight, transitional arena where the existing masculine order is violently tested. In the framework of spatial theory popularized by Henri Lefebvre (1991), physical space is never neutral; it is socially, politically, and ideologically constructed to reinforce power. Lefebvre posits that spatial design actively controls behavior and reproduces social relations. The suffocating hallway in this scene becomes an ideological battleground where two conflicting gender value systems collide both physically and symbolically, proving that space itself dictates the parameters of her struggle.

Episode 6: Symbolic Violence and the Ambiguity of Autonomy

Episode 6 marks a crucial turning point in Ji-woo's character development, where her emotional and ideological narrative reaches its peak. In this episode, Ji-woo discovers a devastating truth: her late father was an undercover officer operating deep inside a drug syndicate, and the institutional police force played an active role in his abandonment.



Figs. 6a and 6b: Ji-woo's Facing the Bitter Truth

(Source: Kim, 2021)

Consequently, she becomes deeply trapped in a web of power controlled by two competing patriarchal institutions: the Dongcheon syndicate and the metropolitan police. Clinging to her desire for revenge, she chooses to remain loyal to her criminal mentor, Choi Mu-jin.

This decision reflects what Bourdieu (1990) terms symbolic violence: a form of oppression so deeply internalized that it becomes normalized, making dominated groups complicit in their own subordination. Unlike overt physical violence, symbolic violence operates through the unconscious acceptance of dominant ideologies as natural or inevitable. In Ji-woo's case, her continued loyalty to Mu-jin demonstrates how

patriarchal values become embedded in her sense of identity and survival; she perceives submission to a criminal patriarch as her only viable path to agency.

Referring to Bourdieu's (1990) Matrix of Symbolic Violence, a progressive, three-tiered framework explains the operational mechanics of symbolic violence, demonstrating how structural oppression becomes self-perpetuating. The process initiates with Internalization, a foundational stage wherein dominant masculine codes and systemic biases are unconsciously accepted by marginalized subjects as natural, inevitable realities rather than artificial social constructs. This deep psychological conditioning transitions directly into the second stage, Complicity, where the vulnerable subject actively aligns with a patriarchal figure or systemic gatekeeper, sacrificing absolute autonomy in exchange for immediate physical protection, validation, or basic survival. Ultimately, this cycle culminates in Entrapment, a state of permanent systemic confinement where any form of apparent female empowerment or agency remains structurally bound within the logic of violent, male-dominated institutions. By organizing the phenomenon into these specific phases, the matrix effectively illustrates that symbolic violence does not rely on physical force, but rather on the strategic manipulation of a subject's choices, making them active participants in their own subordination.

In these emotionally exhausting scenes—such as when Ji-woo sits in near-darkness staring at her father's old photographs or stands before Mu-jin with a hollow, weeping expression—it is clear how her agency is constructed entirely through trauma and a severed sense of identity. Her psychological wounds are gendered, forcing her to adopt a cold, unyielding exterior because the male-dominated world she inhabits demands absolute violence as currency. As trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1991) observes, trauma in narrative does not merely reflect a past event, but functions as an

intrusive, unhealed history that continuously dictates an individual's current choices.

Caruth argues that trauma forces a cyclic repetition of crisis, as the victim struggles to master a shock they cannot fully process. Ji-woo remains tethered to this criminal syndicate not because she is truly liberated, but because the patriarchal order has destroyed any safe space outside its borders.

Her choice to become increasingly ruthless can also be critiqued through Rosalind Gill's (2007) concept of postfeminist sensibility, which identifies media trends where female empowerment is equated with rigorous self-surveillance, emotional discipline, and choices that appear free but remain bound to dominant values. Gill highlights that modern media often commodifies female empowerment by framing a woman's hyper-independence and adoption of harsh traits as complete liberation, masking the reality that she is still playing by patriarchal rules. Ji-woo appears to be a radically autonomous woman, but her actions remain tied to the logic of masculine violence, rendering her empowerment deeply ambiguous.

Furthermore, her relationship with Mu-jin exposes a complex patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988), where women intentionally accept or manipulate male power to secure protection and resources, even though this compromise ultimately preserves their systemic subordination. Kandiyoti emphasizes that women operating under high-risk patriarchy make tactical compromises with dominant men to maximize security. Ji-woo accepts Mu-jin's violent training and institutional protection as a bargain, demonstrating how narratives of female power in popular media can remain trapped within masculine templates.

Episodes 7 & 8: Narrative Emancipation and Disidentification

The climax of the series represents a pivotal turning point regarding Ji-woo's personal identity and her relationship to the masculine power structure. Upon discovering that her

father's execution was orchestrated by Choi Mu-jin himself—the very patriarch who functioned as her surrogate protector—Ji-woo reclaims absolute authority over her body and narrative trajectory.



Figs. 7a and 7b: *The Turning Point*
(Source: Kim, 2021)

This realization marks her narrative emancipation; she explicitly refuses to continue serving as a tool for the criminal network.

Symbolically, this shift represents a total rejection of "complicit femininity" (Connell, 1998), a condition where women compromise their autonomy and submit to patriarchal figures in exchange for safety, status, or emotional security. Ji-woo's connection to Mu-jin was built on this exact dynamic: he provided her with shelter and combat training, but demanded total ownership over her life goals. By severing this tie, she establishes herself as an independent subject. Her body shifts from a medium of institutional violence into a medium of liberation. Through this final confrontation, the narrative reveals that hegemonic masculinity manipulates affective relationships to maintain structural control, a phenomenon bell hooks (2000) labels "patriarchal violence"—violence rooted in an obsessive drive for domination, frequently masked by the rhetoric of protection, love, and loyalty. hooks notes that patriarchal structures socialize individuals to accept control as a form of care; by exposing Mu-

jin's care as a lie, the text tears down this illusion.

This confrontation reverses the gender logic governing the world of *My Name*. While Ji-woo initially had to silence her emotions and mimic masculine codes to be accepted, she ultimately finds power by destroying that exact order. By executing Mu-jin, she does not merely avenge her family; she dismantles the patriarchal figure who imprisoned her subjectivity. Her actions reflect what José Esteban Muñoz (1999) terms "disidentification"—a subversive survival strategy where minority subjects work within and against a dominant cultural code, utilizing its structures not to validate them, but to transform and dismantle them from within. Muñoz posits that disidentification allows a marginalized subject to repurpose mainstream ideologies as weapons for political and personal subversion. Ji-woo utilizes the very combat skills and criminal tactics taught to her by the patriarchy to systematically destroy its architect.

Cinematically, the series reinforces this liberation through intense close-ups and high-contrast lighting that spotlights her bleeding wounds and unyielding expressions. Her physical body is completely liberated from the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975); it serves as an active narrative landscape where trauma and resistance are displayed. Ultimately, *My Name* avoids the visual exploitation of women's bodies by positioning Ji-woo's physical frame as a site of resistance, trauma, and systemic change. There is no dominant sensualization; instead, the camera operates as an analytical tool to lay bare the emotional and physical reality of a woman conquering a violent, masculine world, successfully opening up critical space for reinterpreting female agency in a genre traditionally reserved for male narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the construction of female agency in the Netflix series *My Name* through feminist media studies frameworks.

Utilizing a multidimensional theoretical approach, the analysis demonstrates that female agency in *My Name* operates through multiple registers: narrative structure, cinematographic technique, and performative identity construction. First, applying Mulvey's (1975) male gaze critique reveals that *My Name* resists the sexualized framing prevalent in action cinema (Bowman, 2022), instead foregrounding Ji-woo's subjectivity through close-ups emphasizing emotional interiority and physical trauma. Second, Tuchman's (2000) concept of symbolic annihilation typically describes women's marginalization in narrative. In contrast, *My Name* centers Ji-woo as the primary protagonist, granting her narrative complexity typically reserved for male characters in crime genres. This dynamic demonstrates that female protagonists in Korean action narratives can occupy central narrative positions while resisting objectification, though such representations remain constrained by patriarchal structures.

To survive within these oppressive systems, Ji-woo deploys masculine codes—physical violence, austere aesthetics, and deep emotional restraint—as strategic survival mechanisms within patriarchal structures. This negotiation exemplifies Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which posits that gender identity is constituted through repeated stylized acts rather than any essential biological truth. Through this subversive performance, Ji-woo establishes that power does not require submission to traditional feminine passivity, but can instead manifest as a non-submissive form of individual expression.

However, Ji-woo's strength remains heavily circumscribed by patriarchal constraints. Analyzed through Rosalind Gill's (2007) concept of postfeminist sensibility, apparent female empowerment operates within rather than against patriarchal parameters. Ji-woo's agency emerges from trauma rather than autonomous choice, suggesting that her empowerment remains

conditioned by the very patriarchal violence she attempts to resist.

This study argues that female empowerment in action narratives constitutes a site of negotiation rather than absolute liberation, wherein protagonists simultaneously resist and reinforce patriarchal structures. Physical capability may signify a temporary survival strategy rather than a permanent structural transformation, demanding a rigorous critical analysis that carefully distinguishes between individual agency and systemic change. These findings contribute to feminist media studies by demonstrating that Korean action narratives navigate gender representation through culturally specific frameworks that complicate Western models of female empowerment. Ultimately, the analysis of *My Name* reveals that representations of female agency in contemporary action genres require critical frameworks attentive to the dialectical relationship between empowerment and constraint, subversion and complicity, and the resistance versus reproduction of patriarchal norms.

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