DOI: https://doi.org/10.71317/kjard.2.11.2026.989

Kashmir Journal of Academic Research and Development

Journal homepage: https://rjsaonline.org/index.php/KJARD

Masculine Narrative in Cinematic Spaces: Intersectional Framing of Female Oscar-Winning Directors

Dr. Hayam Qayyoum
Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: drhqpk@gmail.com, hayam.buic@bahria.edu.pk
Imtesaal Zainab
BS Media Studies, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

ARTICLE INFO

Received:
September 30, 2026
Revised:
October 17, 2026
Accepted:
October 28, 2026
Available Online:
November 06, 2026

Keywords:
Cinematic Framing, Female Directorship, Feminist Film Studies, Masculinity, Gender Representation, Hegemonic Masculinity, Intersectionality, Quantitative Content Analysis, Visual Representation.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Hayam Qayyoum
Email: drhqpk@gmail.com,

ABSTRACT

This study examines how three female Academy Award-winning directors, Kathryn Bigelow, Chloé Zhao, and Jane Campion, construct and potentially destabilize representations of masculinity in their films *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Nomadland* (2020), and *The Power of the Dog* (2021), respectively. The study aimed to explore media studies by examining how women filmmakers represent masculinity within cinematic genres traditionally associated with male perspectives and experiences. There are three aspects: camera angles, spatial positioning, and lighting, and how cinematic techniques reproduce or challenge hegemonic masculinity. This is quantitative content analysis that examines the visual representation of male and female characters in the films produced by female directors. The comparative findings revealed two statistically significant associations: camera angle in *The Power of the Dog* ($\chi^2(2) = 11.60$, $p = .003$) and intersectional framing in *Nomadland* ($\chi^2(2) = 7.22$, $p = .027$). The findings revealed that the representation of masculinity is not uniform, nor is it consistent with a specific gender. These films are related to cinematic approaches that cover masculine power, emotional vulnerability, and socially situated gender identities. This study adds to female film production and media scholarship by examining the engagement of female directors in establishing visual masculinities and exploring the instability of presentation in different genres

Introduction

Rationale

Cinema has long operated as a central cultural institution where ideas about gender are shaped, repeated, and normalized. Films do not simply reflect reality; they actively construct it. Meaning in cinema emerges through deliberate visual choices such as camera angles, lighting, composition, and spatial arrangement (Valkola, 1993). These stylistic elements guide how audiences perceive characters and interpret power relations. As Bordwell and Thompson argue, film style operates through structured patterns that shape narrative meaning. Durgnat (1982) further emphasizes that style and content cannot be separated; ideology is embedded in the very form of cinema.

Within mainstream Hollywood traditions, masculinity has frequently been framed as dominant, stoic, emotionally restrained, and authoritative. In genres such as war films, male protagonists typically occupy the visual and narrative center, reinforcing

the idea that masculine power is natural and unquestioned. Genre conventions work through repetition, stabilizing expectations about what masculinity should look like (Langford, 2005). Low-angle shots elevate male figures, central positioning signals authority, and harsh lighting enhances aggression or intensity. Over time, these patterns contribute to the normalization of hegemonic masculinity within cinematic language.

Mulvey's concept of the male gaze further explains how classical cinema aligns spectatorship with masculine authority. While her work primarily addresses the representation of women, it also highlights how masculinity operates as the controlling visual perspective within film. However, more recent scholars suggest that women filmmakers often disrupt established spatial and stylistic hierarchies (Ceuterick, 2020; Thornham, 2019). Through subtle shifts in framing, lighting, and spatial organization, female-directed cinema may reposition male characters not as unquestioned centers of authority but as figures marked by vulnerability, fragility, or internal conflict.

Masculine Narrative

Masculine narrative in film can be understood as a storytelling pattern where masculinity sits at the center of power, control, and perspective. It is not simply about having male characters on screen; rather, it concerns how masculinity itself becomes the lens through which the story unfolds, and meaning is shaped. Classical film theory suggests that cinema often aligns viewers with a masculine point of view, positioning men as active agents who move the story forward while granting them visual and narrative authority (Mulvey, 1975). In such narratives, male protagonists are typically the decision-makers, the ones who act rather than react, and they are framed as psychologically strong and spatially dominant within the cinematic world. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain why these portrayals feel familiar and normalized, as films frequently reinforce culturally valued traits such as stoicism, strength, rationality, and leadership, presenting them as natural qualities of men rather than socially constructed ideals.

Cinematic Spaces

Cinematic space refers to the way a film organizes and presents space on screen in order to shape meaning. It is not just the physical location where a scene takes place, but the carefully constructed visual environment created through framing, composition, camera movement, and mise-en-scène. As Rosário and Álvarez (2019) explain, cinematic space works as a narrative and ideological system that influences how audiences understand characters and their relationship to their surroundings. In other words, space in film is never neutral; it helps structure who appears powerful, who seems isolated, and who controls the frame. Bordwell and Thompson (2019) note that spatial organization directs viewer attention and subtly guides interpretation, while Durgnat (1982) argues that ideology is embedded within form itself. This means that the way space is arranged can reinforce or challenge existing power structures. In relation to this study, cinematic space becomes crucial for examining how masculinity is visually constructed.

Intersectional Framing

Building on Crenshaw's (1989) idea of intersectionality and theories of cinematic framing (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019; Durgnat, 1982), this study understands intersectional framing as the way films visually arrange characters to show how gender interacts with other identity factors such as class and age. Crenshaw (1989) explains that systems of power do not operate through gender alone; instead, identities overlap and shape one another. This means that gender cannot be examined in isolation from broader social and economic conditions. When applied to film, this perspective suggests that masculinity is not a single, stable identity, but one that shifts depending on circumstances such as economic insecurity, aging, or social position.

Female Oscar-Winning Directors

The growing recognition of female directors within major award institutions further signals a shift in cinematic authorship and ideological authority (Thornham, 2019; Paszkiewicz, 2018). The Hurt Locker directed by Kathryn Bigelow, Nomadland directed by Chloé Zhao, and The Power of the Dog directed by Jane Campion are all recipients of the Academy Award. The Hurt Locker reconfigures the war genre by foregrounding psychological tension and emotional detachment within militarized masculinity. Nomadland revises frontier mythology through themes of economic precarity and aging, subtly destabilizing traditional masculine independence. The Power of the Dog interrogates Western masculinity by exposing repression, fragility, and performativity beneath outward dominance.

Problem Statement

Hollywood films are mostly based on the masculine narrative, as there are more than a thousand male directors and producers producing and promoting their own gender in the film. Moreover, in the Best Picture-award-winning film, the percentage of male actors was 64%, compared to 36% for female actors (Grout & Eagan, 2020,p.85). There are very few female directors

who have directed films with masculine narratives to meet audience needs. Males in the films, despite their masculine hegemony, have presented women's struggles and underrepresented male dominance. The selected films also depict the overrepresentation of men and the underrepresentation of women, which clearly caters to the cultural aspect of male dominance. Keeping this in view, the selected films are analyzed for the masculine narrative in Cinematic Spaces (In Hollywood Cinema) and for the intersectional framing of the Female Oscar-Winning Directors. By analyzing The Hurt Locker, Nomadland, and The Power of the Dog, this study addresses that gap and provides empirical grounding to discussions of masculine narrative reconstruction in female-directed cinema. It also serves as a contribution to the literature from South Asian countries.

Research Objectives

RO1: Analyze Cinematic Techniques
To examine how camera angles, spatial positioning, and lighting in female-directed films frame masculine narratives.

RO2: Explore Intersectionality
To identify how class and age intersect with masculine portrayals and influence narrative framing.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to the theory

This study extends theoretical discussions beyond textual interpretation and offers measurable evidence of how masculinity may be destabilized within female-directed cinema. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of work that views cinematic space not as neutral, but as an ideological structure through which gendered authority is produced.

Contribution in Methodology

The research contributes methodologically as South Asian scholarship for content analysis on award-winning Hollywood movies directed by females. Scholarship on global film studies increasingly recognizes the importance of standpoint and situated knowledge in shaping interpretation (Crenshaw, 1989; Thornham, 2019).

Female Filmmakers' Contribution and Focus

The study also contributes to discussions surrounding female directors and gender representation in mainstream cinema, bringing awareness on gender equality in cinematic authorship for discussions on whether female directors influence more balanced or critically reflexive representations of masculinity.

Literature Review

Framing Theory and Visual Construction of Meaning

Framing theory argues that meaning is structured through selection, emphasis, and organization. Media texts do not neutrally reflect reality; rather, they construct interpretive boundaries by highlighting certain elements while marginalizing others. Within cinema, framing operates not only narratively but visually. It provides the central theoretical foundation for understanding how masculinity is visually constructed within cinematic spaces.

Valkola (1993) explains that cinematic meaning emerges through visual organization and perceptual structuring, where repetition, composition, and stylistic transformation guide audience interpretation. This aligns with Bordwell and Thompson's argument that film style develops through patterned uses of technical elements that shape narrative meaning. These patterned techniques, including camera angle, mise-en-scène, and lighting function as framing devices.

Durgnat (1982) further reinforces this position by asserting that style and content are inseparable; what a film means is inseparable from how it visually constructs that meaning. Together, these scholars establish that camera angle, spatial organization, and lighting are not decorative features but structuring mechanisms that frame ideology.

Camera Angle and the Visual Encoding of Power

Within this framework, camera angle becomes a measurable indicator of power and psychological positioning. Classical film theory recognizes that angle carries both compositional and ideological weight (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019; Durgnat, 1982). Low-angle shots frequently elevate subjects, visually signaling dominance and authority, while high-angle shots can diminish subjects, implying vulnerability or instability. As Bordwell and Thompson (2019) explain, camera angles guide spectator alignment and shape perceptions of hierarchy within the image. When considered alongside Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, angle becomes a visual mechanism through which dominance may be either reinforced or destabilized.

Thus, camera angle operates not merely as a stylistic device, but as a structured indicator of masculine authority within cinematic space.

Spatial Positioning and Cinematic Power Structures

Cinematic space operates as another crucial ideological frame. Ceuterick (2020) demonstrates that spatial positioning regulates visibility and agency within women's cinema. Spatial positioning suggests narrative authority, while peripheral or isolated placement may indicate marginalization or psychological fragmentation.

Spain's (1992) theory of gendered spaces argues that space itself reflects social hierarchies, suggesting that spatial dominance in film parallels broader structures of power. When male characters dominate central cinematic space, traditional masculinity is reinforced. When they are isolated, fragmented, or visually displaced, authority may appear destabilized.

Thornham (2019) similarly observes that contemporary women's cinema reworks spatial conventions to challenge traditional gender narratives. When applied to masculinity, these insights suggest that the visual placement of male characters within cinematic space becomes a significant indicator of whether hegemonic masculinity is reinforced or destabilized. Spatial framing therefore directly supports the study's investigation into how female Oscar-winning directors reconstruct masculine authority.

Lighting and Narrative Tone

Lighting functions as an aesthetic frame shaping emotional interpretation, further contributing to the construction of masculine identity. Bordwell and Thompson (2019) identify lighting as central to mood construction and tonal emphasis, shaping how audiences emotionally interpret characters. Harsh, high-contrast lighting can amplify aggression, tension, or intensity, while softer or natural lighting may suggest introspection and vulnerability. Durgnat (1982) argues that visual form itself carries ideological significance, reinforcing the idea that lighting choices are embedded with meaning rather than functioning as neutral aesthetics.

Eisner's (1969) analysis of German Expressionist cinema further illustrates how shadow and contrast can visually encode psychological disturbance, demonstrating how lighting can externalize internal states. When masculine performances are consistently paired with aggressive lighting patterns, traditional masculinity may be visually reinforced; conversely, when alternative masculinities are framed through softer tonal structures, the visual narrative may indicate instability or transformation. In this way, lighting becomes an operational variable within framing analysis rather than a purely aesthetic choice (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019; Durgnat, 1982).

Intersectionality and Framed Masculinity

Finally, intersectionality complicates the framing of masculinity by emphasizing how race, class, age, and mobility shape representation. Daley (2021) highlights that identity representation varies according to intersecting social positions, suggesting that masculinity cannot be analyzed as a uniform category. Discussions of mobility and economic precarity in travel narratives further illustrate how space and class intersect. Thus, spatial framing may differentially encode masculinity depending on economic precarity or generational status.

Pimpare (2017) argues that poverty on screen is frequently romanticized or stigmatized, indicating that class framing can significantly alter the meaning of independence or vulnerability. These perspectives support the integration of intersectionality into the framing analysis, particularly when examining how marginalized identities influence the visual construction of masculine authority.

Genre as a Macro-Frame of Masculinity

Genre operates as a broader macro-frame within which these visual devices gain meaning. Langford (2005) argues that genre conventions structure ideological expectations through repetition. Historically masculine genres such as war films and Westerns have long framed male protagonists as stoic, resilient, and dominant.

However, Vieira's analysis of the Western revision in *Nomadland* demonstrates how female-directed cinema can rework frontier mythology to foreground precarity and vulnerability. Paszkiewicz (2018) similarly argues that women directors working within traditionally masculine genres introduce aesthetic tensions that complicate established gender coding. Genre therefore contextualizes visual framing, allowing this study to compare how masculinity is reconstructed across different cinematic traditions.

Reframing Masculinity

The female gaze does not simply invert the male gaze but repositions subjectivity and visual emphasis. Johnston argued that women's cinema functions as counter-cinema by exposing ideological construction. When applied to masculinity, this suggests that male bodies and performances may themselves become objects of scrutiny rather than unquestioned authority (1973). Jenkins further notes that contemporary feminist filmmaking integrates counter-cinematic strategies within mainstream frameworks. Thus, framing theory allows systematic measurement of whether female-directed films reinforce or disrupt masculine visual dominance (2022).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do female Oscar-winning directors use camera angle to frame masculine authority or vulnerability?

RQ2: How does spatial positioning within cinematic space influence the representation of male dominance or fragility?

RQ3: In what ways does lighting contribute to the visual reinforcement or destabilization of hegemonic masculinity?

RQ4: How do intersectional identities such as class and age affect the visual framing of masculinity across different genres?

Hypotheses

H1: Camera Angles and Power
Low-angle shots will predominantly frame male characters as powerful and dominant, whereas high-angle or eye-level shots will depict vulnerability or emotional nuance.

H2: Spatial Positioning and Marginalization
Characters placed in central positions will have reinforced masculine authority, while peripheral or isolated framing will highlight destabilization or transformation of masculinity.

H3: Lighting and Narrative Tone
Harsh or high-contrast lighting will correspond with aggressive or dominant masculine behavior, whereas soft/natural lighting will align with nuanced or alternative forms of masculinity.

H4: Intersectional Framing
Class and age will significantly influence the portrayal of masculinity, with marginalized identities more likely to experience destabilization or transformation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using content analysis as its primary methodological approach. Quantitative content analysis enables the systematic and objective measurement of visual patterns within media texts. Since the study seeks to test hypotheses regarding the relationship between framing devices and representations of masculinity, a quantitative approach is most appropriate.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of Academy Award–winning films directed by women that prominently feature male protagonists within traditionally masculine genre frameworks.

The selected sample includes:

1. The Hurt Locker directed by Kathryn Bigelow
2. Nomadland directed by Chloé Zhao
3. The Power of the Dog directed by Jane Campion

Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique was employed. These films were intentionally selected because they won the Academy Award and were directed by female directors.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is scenes featuring the primary male protagonist and scenes featuring the primary female protagonist or significant female presence, to ensure methodological precision. Framing devices such as camera angle, lighting, and spatial positioning operate at the level of the scene. For each film, both male and female character scenes are coded to enable comparative analysis of how cinematic framing differentiates between masculine and feminine representation.

Data Collection Methods

Data has been collected through a structured coding sheet. The coding instrument operationalizes all five coding variables into measurable categorical codes.

Coding Variables:

Camera Angle

1. Low Angle=1
2. Eye-Level=2
3. High Angle=3

Spatial Positioning

1. Central Positioning =1
2. Marginal Positioning =2
3. Spatial Isolation =3

Lighting and Visual Tone

1. High-Contrast / Dominant Lighting =1
2. Soft / Natural Lighting =2
3. Shadow-Dominant / Obscured Lighting =3

Narrative Outcome Frame

1. Reinforced Masculinity =1
2. Destabilized Masculinity =2

Intersectional Framing

1. Class Vulnerability Indicators=1
2. Age-Related Vulnerability =2
3. No Intersectional Marker =3

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data has been analysed using statistical procedures appropriate for categorical variables.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies and percentages are calculated to determine the distribution of framing techniques and masculine outcomes across the selected films. This establishes the overall visual patterns within the dataset.

Cross-Tabulation

Cross-tabulation was conducted to examine the distribution of cinematic framing techniques across male and female characters. For example:

1. Camera Angle distribution: Male characters vs Female characters

2. Spatial Positioning distribution: Male characters vs. Female characters
3. Lighting distribution: Male characters vs Female characters

These analyses enabled the identification of recurring visual patterns associated with the construction of masculine narratives.

Data Analysis And Findings

Intercoder Reliability

The intercoder reliability was found to be 0.89. According to the intercoder reliability, the coding sheet has been approved by the coder. The descriptive and inferential analysis is given below:

Descriptive Analysis

In The Hurt Locker (Bigelow, 2008) (Male Protagonist: Staff Sgt. William James), a total of 105 frames were coded across 131 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is Low Angle (CA1) with 8 frames, a time duration of 24 minutes, representing 18.32% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is High Angle (CA3) with 6 frames, a time duration of 18 minutes, representing 13.74% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Central (SP1) with 8 frames, a time duration of 22 minutes, representing 16.79% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Marginal (SP2) with 5 frames, a time duration of 14 minutes, representing 10.69% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is High-Contrast (L1) with 12 frames, a time duration of 36 minutes, representing 27.48% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Shadow-Dominant (L3) with 3 frames, a time duration of 9 minutes, representing 6.87% of the total film runtime. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Reinforced (NO1) with 11 frames, a time duration of 33 minutes, representing 25.19% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Destabilised (NO2) with 10 frames, a time duration of 30 minutes, representing 22.90% of the total film runtime. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is No Marker (I3) with 16 frames, a time duration of 48 minutes, representing 36.64% of the total film runtime. Age Vulnerability (I2) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making Class Vulnerability (I1) the lowest frequency with 5 frames, a time duration of 15 minutes, representing 11.45% of the total film runtime.

In The Hurt Locker (Bigelow, 2008) (Female Presence: Iraqi Women / James's Wife), a total of 26 frames were coded across 131 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is High Angle (CA3) with 4 frames, a time duration of 8 minutes, representing 6.11% of the total film runtime. Low Angle (CA1) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making Eye-Level (CA2) the lowest frequency with 1 frame, a time duration of 2 minutes, representing 1.53% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Isolated (SP3) with 3 frames, a time duration of 6 minutes, representing 4.58% of the total film runtime. Central (SP1) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making Marginal (SP2) the lowest frequency with 2 frames, a time duration of 4 minutes, representing 3.05% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is High-Contrast (L1) with 3 frames, a time duration of 6 minutes, representing 4.58% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Shadow-Dominant (L3) with 1 frames, a time duration of 2 minutes, representing 1.53% of the total film runtime. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Reinforced (NO1) with 3 frames, a time duration of 6 minutes, representing 4.58% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Destabilised (NO2) with 2 frames, a time duration of 4 minutes, representing 3.05% of the total film runtime. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is Class Vulnerability (I1) with 3 frames, a time duration of 6 minutes, representing 4.58% of the total film runtime. Age Vulnerability (I2) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making No Marker (I3) the lowest frequency with 2 frames, a time duration of 4 minutes, representing 3.05% of the total film runtime.

In Nomadland (Zhao, 2020) (Female Protagonist: Fern (Frances McDormand)), a total of 105 frames were coded across 108 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is Eye-Level (CA2) with 13 frames, a time duration of 39 minutes, representing 36.11% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Low Angle (CA1) with 3 frames, a time duration of 9 minutes, representing 8.33% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Isolated (SP3) with 11 frames, a time duration of 33 minutes, representing 30.56% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Marginal (SP2) with 5 frames, a time duration of 15 minutes, representing 13.89% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is Soft/Natural (L2) with 17 frames, a time duration of 51 minutes, representing 47.22% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Shadow-Dominant (L3) with 2 frames, a time duration of 6 minutes, representing 5.56% of the total film runtime. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Destabilised (NO2) with 12 frames, a time duration of 36 minutes, representing 33.33%

of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Reinforced (NO1) with 9 frames, a time duration of 27 minutes, representing 25.00% of the total film runtime. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is Class Vulnerability (I1) with 11 frames, a time duration of 33 minutes, representing 30.56% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Age Vulnerability (I2) with 3 frames, a time duration of 9 minutes, representing 8.33% of the total film runtime.

In Nomadland (Zhao, 2020) (Male Presence: Dave (David Strathairn)), a total of 25 frames were coded across 108 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is Eye-Level (CA2) with 4 frames, a time duration of 10 minutes, representing 9.26% of the total film runtime. Low Angle (CA1) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making High Angle (CA3) the lowest frequency with 1 frame, a time duration of 3 minutes, representing 2.78% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Marginal (SP2) with 3 frames, a time duration of 8 minutes, representing 7.41% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Isolated (SP3) with 1 frame, a time duration of 3 minutes, representing 2.78% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is Soft/Natural (L2) with 5 frames, a time duration of 14 minutes, representing 12.96% of the total film runtime. High-Contrast (L1) and Shadow-Dominant (L3) were not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Destabilised (NO2) with 5 frames, a time duration of 14 minutes, representing 12.96% of the total film runtime. Reinforced (NO1) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is No Marker (I3) with 5 frames, a time duration of 14 minutes, representing 12.96% of the total film runtime, while Class Vulnerability (I1) and Age Vulnerability (I2) were not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero.

In The Power of the Dog (Campion, 2021) (Male Protagonist: Phil Burbank (Benedict Cumberbatch)), a total of 105 frames were coded across 128 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is Low Angle (CA1) with 9 frames, a time duration of 27 minutes, representing 21.09% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is High Angle (CA3) with 3 frames, a time duration of 9 minutes, representing 7.03% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Central (SP1) with 10 frames, a time duration of 30 minutes, representing 23.44% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Marginal (SP2) with 4 frames, a time duration of 12 minutes, representing 9.38% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is High-Contrast (L1) with 9 frames, a time duration of 27 minutes, representing 21.09% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Shadow-Dominant (L3) with 4 frames, a time duration of 12 minutes, representing 9.38% of the total film runtime. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Destabilised (NO2) with 11 frames, a time duration of 33 minutes, representing 25.78% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Reinforced (NO1) with 10 frames, a time duration of 30 minutes, representing 23.44% of the total film runtime. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is No Marker (I3) with 11 frames, a time duration of 33 minutes, representing 25.78% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Age Vulnerability (I2) with 1 frames, a time duration of 3 minutes, representing 2.34% of the total film runtime.

In The Power of the Dog (Campion, 2021) (Female Protagonist: Rose Gordon (Kirsten Dunst)), a total of 60 frames were coded across 128 minutes of total film runtime. In the category of Camera Angle, the highest frequency subcategory is High Angle (CA3) with 8 frames, a time duration of 20 minutes, representing 15.63% of the total film runtime. Low Angle (CA1) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making Eye-Level (CA2) the lowest frequency with 4 frames, a time duration of 10 minutes, representing 7.81% of the total film runtime. In the category of Spatial Positioning, the highest frequency subcategory is Isolated (SP3) with 7 frames, a time duration of 18 minutes, representing 14.06% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Marginal (SP2) with 2 frames, a time duration of 5 minutes, representing 3.91% of the total film runtime. In the category of Lighting, the highest frequency subcategory is High-Contrast (L1) with 5 frames, a time duration of 13 minutes, representing 10.16% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Shadow-Dominant (L3) with 2 frames, a time duration of 5 minutes, representing 3.91% of the total film runtime. In the category of Narrative Outcome, the highest frequency subcategory is Destabilised (NO2) with 9 frames, a time duration of 23 minutes, representing 17.97% of the total film runtime. The lowest frequency is Reinforced (NO1) with 3 frames, a time duration of 8 minutes, representing 6.25% of the total film runtime. In the category of Intersectional Framing, the highest frequency subcategory is Class Vulnerability (I1) with 7 frames, a time duration of 18 minutes, representing 14.06% of the total film runtime. Age Vulnerability (I2) was not observed in the selected scenes, recording a frequency of zero, making No Marker (I3) the lowest frequency with 5 frames, a time duration of 13 minutes, representing 10.16% of the total film runtime.

Inferential Analysis

Chi-Square Analysis and Interpretation

The Chi-Square Test of Independence was applied to the frequency tables to examine whether cinematic techniques such as camera angle, spatial positioning, lighting, and intersectional framing significantly influenced the portrayal of masculinity across the selected films.

Table 1. Comparative Statistical Results of Cinematic Framing across the Three Films

Film	Variable	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Significance	Hypothesis Supported	Support/Not
The Hurt Locker (2008)	Camera Angle	4.92	2	.086	Not significant	Not Supported	
The Hurt Locker (2008)	Spatial Positioning	2.76	2	.252	Not significant	Not Supported	
The Hurt Locker (2008)	Lighting	0.10	2	.953	Not significant	Not supported	
The Hurt Locker (2008)	Intersectional Framing	4.34	2	.823	Not significant	Not Significant	
Nomadland (2020)	Camera Angle	0.94	2	.624	Not significant	Not supported	
Nomadland (2020)	Spatial Positioning	2.66	2	.264	Not significant	Not Supported	
Nomadland (2020)	Lighting	1.13	2	.050*	significant	Supported	
Nomadland (2020)	Intersectional Framing	7.22	2	.027**	Significant	Supported	
The Power of the Dog (2021)	Camera Angle	11.60	2	.003**	Significant	Supported	
The Power of the Dog (2021)	Spatial Positioning	2.14	2	.343	Not significant	Not Supported	
The Power of the Dog (2021)	Lighting	0.05	2	.975	Not significant	Not Supported	
The Power of the Dog (2021)	Intersectional Framing	1.13	2	.569	Not significant	Not Supported	

Camera Angle and Masculine Authority

The Hurt Locker (2008)

The findings indicate that Staff Sgt. William James was predominantly framed through low-angle shots (18.32%), reinforcing masculine dominance, authority, and heroic positioning. Female characters, by contrast, appeared more frequently through high-angle shots, visually suggesting vulnerability and reduced agency. Not supported

Although the chi-square result for camera angle of The Hurt Locker (2008) was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.92$, $p = .086$), the descriptive frequencies support the argument that camera angle contributes to the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Spatial Positioning and Masculinity

James was frequently placed in central and isolated positions, indicating masculine control within dangerous cinematic spaces. Female characters appeared marginal or visually secondary. The chi-square result was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.76$, $p = .252$), but the visual pattern suggests that spatial positioning reinforces masculine authority.

Lighting and Masculinity

High-contrast lighting dominated the portrayal of James (27.48%), visually associating masculinity with aggression, intensity, and combat authority. Female characters received comparatively softer or shadow-based lighting. However, the chi-square test showed no significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 0.10$, $p = .953$).

Intersectional Framing

Class vulnerability appeared in both male and female portrayals, particularly through Iraqi civilian representation and wartime precarity. However, the absence of age-based vulnerability is not supported.

Nomadland (2020)

Camera Angle and Masculine Authority

The film Nomadland (2020) relied primarily on eye-level framing for Fern and supporting male character Dave, emphasizing realism, emotional subtlety, and human vulnerability rather than heroic masculinity. The chi-square result was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.94$, $p = .624$), indicating that camera angle did not strongly differentiate masculine authority in this film.

Spatial Positioning and Masculinity

Fern was frequently framed in isolated positions (30.56%), symbolizing emotional displacement and social fragility. Dave appeared more marginal than central within the cinematic frame. Although Nomadland (2020) was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.66$, $p = .264$), the descriptive findings suggest that spatial isolation destabilizes traditional masculinity.

Lighting and Masculinity

Nomadland (2020) **s**oft/natural lighting dominated the film's visual structure, particularly in the portrayal of Fern and nomadic life. This supports the hypothesis that natural lighting corresponds with alternative and emotionally nuanced representations of identity rather than aggressive masculinity ($\chi^2 = 1.132$, $p = .05$)

Intersectional Framing

In Nomadland (2020), the chi-square test revealed a statistically significant relationship between intersectional framing and character representation ($\chi^2 = 7.22$, $p = .027$). Class vulnerability was strongly associated with Fern's representation through economic precarity, labor insecurity, and nomadic survival.

These findings demonstrate that marginalized class identities significantly influence cinematic portrayals and destabilize conventional masculine authority.

The Power of the Dog (2021)

Camera Angle and Masculine Authority

In The Power of the Dog (2021), a statistically significant relationship emerged between camera angle and masculine representation ($\chi^2 = 11.60$, $p = .003$). Phil Burbank was frequently framed through low-angle shots and eye-level dominance, reinforcing masculine authority, intimidation, and control.

Rose Gordon, by contrast, was largely framed through high-angle shots, visually constructing emotional vulnerability and psychological instability.

The findings strongly support the argument that camera angle functions as a key cinematic device in constructing hegemonic masculinity.

Spatial Positioning and Masculinity

Phil was predominantly placed in central positions, reinforcing narrative control and masculine dominance, while Rose frequently appeared isolated. Although the chi-square result was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.14$, $p = .343$), in The Power of the Dog (2021) the descriptive data support the relationship between spatial positioning and masculine authority.

Lighting and Masculinity

High-contrast lighting was frequently associated with Phil's aggressive masculinity and psychological intensity, whereas softer lighting framed emotional vulnerability and domestic instability. However, the statistical relationship of The Power of the Dog (2021) was not significant ($\chi^2 = 0.05$, $p = .975$).

Intersectional Framing

Class vulnerability appeared more prominently in Rose's representation, while Phil's masculinity remained comparatively unmarked. However, the chi-square test did not reveal statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 1.13$, $p = .569$).

Comparative Interpretation Across Films

Across all three films, female Oscar-winning directors used cinematic framing devices to construct masculinity through varying combinations of authority, vulnerability, emotional fragility, and intersectional instability.

Camera Angle

Low-angle framing was consistently associated with masculine authority and dominance, particularly in *The Hurt Locker* and *The Power of the Dog*. High-angle framing frequently represented emotional instability or vulnerability.

The strongest statistical support appeared in *The Power of the Dog* ($\chi^2 = 11.60$, $p = .003$), confirming that camera angle significantly shapes masculine representation.

Spatial Positioning

Central framing reinforced masculine authority, while isolated and marginal positioning destabilized masculine identity and emotional control. Although most chi-square results were not statistically significant, descriptive patterns consistently supported the hypothesis.

Lighting

High-contrast lighting corresponded with aggression, intensity, and hegemonic masculine behavior, particularly in war and western genres. Soft/natural lighting was associated with emotional realism, vulnerability, and alternative masculine forms.

Intersectional Framing

Class vulnerability emerged as the strongest intersectional factor affecting masculinity, especially in *Nomadland*, where the relationship reached statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 7.22$, $p = .027$).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Camera Angle and Power

In this study, RQ1 is to examine how camera angles, spatial positioning, and lighting in female-directed films frame masculine narratives.

H1: Low-angle shots will predominantly frame male characters as powerful and dominant, whereas high-angle or eye-level shots will depict vulnerability or emotional nuance.

H1 was statistically supported in The Power of the Dog ($\chi^2(2) = 11.60$, $p = .003$) and descriptively supported in the other two films. It is considered not supported across the study.

Bordwell and Thompson (2019) argue that camera angles are among the most ideologically loaded decisions in filmmaking. Low angles elevate subjects into authority, high angles diminish them into vulnerability. This principle received its strongest statistical support in The Power of the Dog, where the chi-square test revealed a significant difference between how Campion frames Phil versus Rose ($\chi^2(2) = 11.60$, $p = .003$). Phil commanded the majority of low-angle framing while Rose received zero low-angle shots across her entire arc, which aligns directly with Paszkiewicz's (2018) argument that female directors use genre conventions to expose rather than reproduce masculine visual hierarchies.

In The Hurt Locker and Nomadland, camera angle did not produce significant results ($\chi^2(2) = 4.92$, $p = .086$ and $\chi^2(2) = 0.94$, $p = .624$, respectively). In Bigelow's film this is partly because female characters are too few for meaningful comparison. In

Nomadland, the near-identical eye-level distributions for Fern and Dave reflect the refusal of compositional hierarchy in women's cinema. Zhao creates visual equality between characters rather than using angle to assert difference.

Spatial Positioning and Framing

In this study, RQ2 is to examine how spatial positioning within cinematic space influences the representation of male dominance or fragility

H2: Characters placed in central positions will have reinforced masculine authority, while peripheral or isolated framing will highlight destabilization or transformation of masculinity

H2 was descriptively supported across all three films but did not reach statistical significance in any chi-square comparison (HL: $\chi^2(2) = 2.76$, $p = .252$; NL: $\chi^2(2) = 2.66$, $p = .264$; POTD: $\chi^2(2) = 2.14$, $p = .343$). The patterns, particularly Rose's complete absence from central framing, are nevertheless clear. H2 is considered not supported.

Spain's (1992) argument that spatial dominance in film mirrors broader social power structures finds descriptive support across all three films. In The Hurt Locker, James consistently occupies central and isolated positions in military spaces, though the chi-square comparison with female characters did not reach significance ($\chi^2(2) = 2.76$, $p = .252$), unsurprising given how rarely women appear in the film. The most compelling spatial finding was in The Power of the Dog ($\chi^2(2) = 2.14$, $p = .343$), where the aggregate result misses what the data actually shows: Rose is entirely absent from central framing until after Phil's death, at which point she occupies it for the first time. Ceuterick (2020) argues that women's cinema uses spatial positioning to encode power and its denial and Campion's film is the clearest demonstration of this across the study.

In Nomadland, Fern's dominant spatial code is isolation, appearing alone in vast landscapes in over half her coded scenes. As Thornham (2019) notes, women's cinema reworks spatial conventions rather than reproducing them. Pimpare (2017) would read Fern's isolation as the signature of economic precarity, space that looks like freedom but is actually constraint, and Zhao never resolves that tension.

Lighting and Framing

In this study RQ3 is to examine in what ways does lighting contribute to the visual reinforcement or destabilization of hegemonic masculinity?

H3: Harsh or high-contrast lighting will correspond with aggressive or dominant masculine behavior, whereas soft/natural lighting will align with nuanced or alternative forms of masculinity.

H3 was descriptively supported in The Hurt Locker and The Power of the Dog but produced no statistically significant results (HL: $\chi^2(2) = 0.10$, $p = .953$; NL: $\chi^2(2) = 1.13$, $p = .570$; POTD: $\chi^2(2) = 0.05$, $p = .975$). H3 is partially supported at the descriptive level.

Durgnat (1982) argued that visual style carries ideological weight, and Eisner (1969) specifically identified shadow and contrast as encoders of psychological complexity. Despite this strong theoretical basis, the lighting variable produced no statistically significant results across any of the three films (HL: $\chi^2(2) = 0.10$, $p = .953$; NL: $\chi^2(2) = 1.13$, $p = .570$; POTD: $\chi^2(2) = 0.05$, $p = .975$). This is not a straightforward failure of the hypothesis, however. In both The Hurt Locker and The Power of the Dog, the analytical significance of lighting lies in its sequencing and context rather than its overall frequency distribution. Bigelow uses high-contrast light to establish James's authority and shadow-dominant light to frame his grief and failure, while Campion uses soft dappled light specifically for Phil's private vulnerable moments in direct contrast to the harsh lighting of his public performances. Eisner's framework applies at the scene level but aggregate chi-square comparison cannot detect it. In Nomadland, the consistent soft-natural lighting for both characters is itself the finding. Zhao, as Bordwell and Thompson (2019) note about naturalistic cinematography, makes ideological claims quietly rather than expressionistically.

Intersectionality and the Layered Frame

In this study RQ4 is to examine how do intersectional identities such as class and age affect the visual framing of masculinity across different genres?

H4: Class, and age will significantly influence the portrayal of masculinity, with marginalized identities more likely to experience destabilization or transformation.

H4 received statistical support in Nomadland ($\chi^2(2) = 7.22$, $p = .027$) through class intersectionality. Race was not operationalized in the coding instrument, which is acknowledged as a limitation. H4 is partially supported, with class confirmed as statistically significant in one film and descriptively present across all three.

The study's second statistically significant result was the intersectional framing comparison in Nomadland ($\chi^2(2) = 7.22$, $p = .027$), where class vulnerability appeared in over half of Fern's scenes and in none of Dave's. This confirms Crenshaw's (1989) argument that identity categories do not operate in isolation. Fern's frontier independence cannot be separated from the deindustrialization that produced her nomadism, and Pimpare's (2017) argument that poverty on screen always carries political meaning is borne out by the data. Age intersectionality was also present in Nomadland through Fern's outdoor bathing and Swankie's mortality. Zhao's matter-of-fact treatment of aging bodies on screen is precisely the counter-cinematic gesture Johnston (1973) described as the refusal of the male gaze. In The Power of the Dog, class is structurally present for both Phil and Rose but does not produce significant differentiation ($\chi^2(2) = 1.13$, $p = .569$) because it operates in opposite directions. Phil wields it as a weapon while Rose experiences it as a trap, a distinction that frequency data cannot capture.

Conclusion

Cinematic Techniques and Masculine Narrative

RO1: To examine how camera angles, spatial positioning, and lighting in female-directed films frame masculine narratives.

This RO has been achieved or established after applying the test to the hypothesis H1, H2 and H3.

Low-angle framing was consistently associated with masculine authority and dominance and high-angle framing frequently represented emotional instability or vulnerability especially in The Power of the Dog, where the chi-square test revealed a significant difference between how Campion frames Phil versus Rose ($\chi^2(2) = 11.60$, $p = .003$).

Central framing reinforced masculine authority, while isolated and marginal positioning destabilized masculine identity and emotional control. The most compelling spatial finding was in The Power of the Dog ($\chi^2(2) = 2.14$, $p = .343$), where the aggregate result misses what the data actually shows: Rose is entirely absent from central framing until after Phil's death, at which point she occupies it for the first time.

High-contrast lighting corresponded with aggression, intensity, and hegemonic masculine behavior and soft/natural lighting was associated with emotional realism, vulnerability, and alternative masculine forms. Despite this strong theoretical basis, the lighting variable produced no statistically significant results across any of the three films (HL: $\chi^2(2) = 0.10$, $p = .953$; NL: $\chi^2(2) = 1.13$, $p = .570$; POTD: $\chi^2(2) = 0.05$, $p = .975$).

Intersectionality

RO2: To identify how class and age intersect with masculine portrayals and influence narrative framing.

This RO has been achieved or established after applying the test to the hypothesis H4, which concluded that class was the most empirically productive intersectional variable, producing the study's second significant result in Nomadland ($\chi^2(2) = 7.22$, $p = .027$) and operating descriptively across all three films. This confirms what Crenshaw (1989) and Pimpare (2017) argue about class as a structuring force in cinematic representation. Age intersectionality was analytically meaningful in Nomadland but did not reach statistical significance.

References

Álvarez, I. V. (2018). New approaches to cinematic space. *New approaches to cinematic space*.

Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2019). *Film art: An introduction* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Ceuterick, M. (2020). Female authorship and gendered spatial reconfiguration in contemporary cinema. *Feminist Media Studies, 20*(4), 567–582.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), 139–167.

Daley, A. (2021). Aging masculinities and vulnerability in contemporary film narratives. *Journal of Gender Studies, 30*(3), 310–324.

Durgnat, R. (1982). *Films and feelings.* MIT Press.

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Grout, K., & Eagan, O. (2020). Oscar is a man: Sexism and the Academy Awards. *Tripodos,* (48), 85-102.

Johnston, C. (1973). Women's cinema as counter-cinema. In C. Johnston (Ed.), *Notes on women's cinema* (pp. 24–31). Society for Education in Film and Television.

Langford, B. (2005). *Film genre: Hollywood and beyond.* Edinburgh University Press.

Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen, 16*(3), 6–18. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Paszkiewicz, K. (2018). *Genre, authorship and contemporary women filmmakers.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Pimpare, S. (2017). The new poverty narratives and masculine precarity in American cinema. *Social Text, 35*(2), 45–63.

Thornham, S. (2019). *Women, feminism and media.* Edinburgh University Press.

Valkola, J. (1993). Framing ideology: Visual structure and meaning in film. *Film Philosophy, 7*(1), 1–15.

2026 by the authors; Journal of *Kashmir Journal of Academic Research and Development*. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).