

**The American Superhero Reimagined:
Humanity, Moral Politics, and Masculinity in Superman (2025)**

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Abstract

One of the most important cultural icons of the twenty-first century is the superhero. Superheroes serve as symbolic platforms for societies to discuss issues of identity, morality, power, citizenship, and social responsibility through comic books, movies, television shows, digital media, and international fan cultures. Superman holds a special place among these characters. Superman has been one of the most iconic and enduring representations of bravery in contemporary popular culture since his 1938 debut. However, the character's meanings have always changed in reaction to shifting historical contexts. The first movie in the new DC Universe, James Gunn's *Superman* (2025), is a particularly important retelling of the Superman myth because it comes at a time of political division, mistrust of the media, technological advancement, and changing perceptions of masculinity.

This essay uses the overlapping frameworks of myth critique, cultural studies, film studies, and masculinity studies to analyse *Superman* (2025). The article contends that Gunn's film reconstructs Superman as a model of morally upright and emotionally astute masculinity, drawing mainly on Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, Roland Barthes' theory of myth, and modern ideological criticism. The movie emphasizes empathy, vulnerability, civic duty, and democratic participation rather than dominance, aggression, or invulnerability. The movie presents an alternative vision of leadership based on responsibility and group caring through the characters of Lex Luthor, Lois Lane, Clark Kent, and the Daily Planet. The piece goes on to argue that *Superman* (2025) symbolizes greater cultural aspirations for heroism that can both

preserve the aspirational aspects of myth and solve modern social problems. The movie offers a powerful intervention in current discussions about masculinity, citizenship, and moral leadership in the twenty-first century by redefining Superman as a character whose strength comes from humanity rather than superiority.

Keywords: Superman; Masculinity Studies; Superhero Cinema; James Gunn; Film Studies; Media Representation

Introduction

Few fictional characters have attained Superman's cultural standing, widespread familiarity, and symbolic importance. Since making his debut in Action Comics #1 in 1938, the character has grown beyond comic book conventions to become a key figure in contemporary mythology. Superman is more than simply a superhero; he is a cultural icon that has inspired morality, bravery, justice, and social duty in countless generations. The character has remained one of the most important symbols of popular culture despite decades of adaptation and reinterpretation, reflecting shifting social ideals and political concerns.

Superman's incredible versatility contributes to his timeless appeal. Superman has constantly changed in reaction to changing historical conditions, in contrast to historical myths that are fixed within certain cultural traditions. Every generation creates its own Superman, influenced by the issues and goals of the day. As a result, the character serves as an important prism through which academics can analyse shifting perspectives on national identity, leadership, citizenship, heroism, and masculinity.

Superman's beginnings are intricately linked to the social climate of the late 1930s. Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster during the Great Depression, a time of political unrest, economic instability, and mounting worries about dictatorship. At a time when many common people felt helpless in the face of social and economic disasters, scholars have often noted that the character represented dreams for justice and empowerment. Because of his exceptional powers,

Superman was able to step in where institutions frequently failed, giving readers a symbolic character who could fight injustice, corruption, and exploitation.

Superman's cultural connotations grew and changed over the ensuing decades. He came to be identified with patriotic values and democratic struggle during World War II. He frequently served as a representation of American optimism and scientific advancement throughout the Cold War. As filmmakers and authors attempted to balance Superman's traditional idealism with a world that was changing quickly, the character was interpreted in ever more nuanced ways during the post-Cold War era.

These changes are especially evident in the history of Superman movies. Christopher Reeve played the titular role in Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978), which created a depiction of the character characterized by optimism, sincerity, and moral clarity. The film, which was released amid a time of political disenchantment after the Vietnam War and Watergate, gave viewers a comforting picture of bravery based on moral clarity and civic service. Because Reeve's *Superman* symbolized ideals that seemed to be disappearing from modern political life, he became a cultural icon. Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* (2013), on the other hand, depicted a very different historical period. Snyder's picture, which was produced in the wake of the September 11 attacks and amid ongoing discussions about security, surveillance, and state authority, portrayed Superman as a troubled and frequently lonely character who was trying to find his place in a dubious world. This darker portrayal was seen by critics and academics as representative of larger societal concerns about identity, belonging, and authority in the twenty-first century.

Superman (2025), directed by James Gunn, joins this historical lineage at yet another critical juncture in cultural change. Digital communication technology, political polarization, disinformation, climate fear, and changing conceptions of gender and identity are all influencing modern society more and more. Social media has significantly changed how people obtain information and create public personas, while public trust in established institutions has decreased. Concurrently, popular debates about gender performance and toxic masculinity have called into question long-held beliefs about male authority and societal dominance. These advancements offer the cultural background that Gunn's movie needs to be viewed in. The movie explicitly addresses current themes about leadership, accountability, truth, and

masculinity rather than just reviving the Superman franchise for profit. In contrast to many contemporary superhero stories that prioritize violence, cynicism, and moral ambiguity, the final portrayal marks a substantial shift.

The growing use of darker and more psychologically nuanced storylines has been one of the distinguishing features of modern superhero movies. Movies made in the last 20 years usually include heroes who are traumatized, motivated by retaliation, or compelled to deal with ethically dubious circumstances. The normalization of heroic models based on aggressiveness, emotional seclusion, and individual exceptionalism has been facilitated by these narratives, despite their significant critical and financial success. In depictions of masculinity, this tendency is especially noticeable. Superheroes frequently represent masculine authority traits like self-sufficiency, emotional control, and physical dominance. Hegemonic masculinity, the culturally dominant style of masculine behaviour that emphasizes strength, control, and independence, is closely aligned with these depictions, according to masculinity scholars. Even while these portrayals differ throughout books and historical eras, they usually support constrictive ideas about gender and leadership.

Superman by Gunn provides a noteworthy departure from these norms. The movie emphasizes Superman's humanity rather than portraying him exclusively as a warrior or enforcer. His heroic persona is characterized by compassion, empathy, vulnerability, and ethical duty. Although it is still significant, physical strength is no longer the main source of legitimacy. The movie makes the argument that true heroism comes from a desire to help others and act in the best interests of society. This reorientation reflects larger cultural changes about what it means to be a man. A growing number of academics and social observers contend that conventional conceptions of masculinity are insufficient to tackle today's social issues. Cooperation, relationship awareness, and emotional intelligence have been acknowledged as important aspects of male expression. The prevalence of these conversations suggests a rising discontent with cultural norms that only associate masculinity with control and domination.

This change is significant in ways that go beyond gender politics. *Superman* (2025) addresses issues of civic duty and democratic citizenship by redefining heroism in terms that are moral rather than military. The film emphasizes the value of collective institutions in preserving societal trust by focusing on journalism, truth,

and accountability. The idea that democratic societies rely on both remarkable individuals and commonplace acts of civic involvement is reinforced by Clark Kent's position as a reporter, which becomes just as significant as his identification as Superman.

In this sense, Lois Lane is very significant. She shows herself to be a professional equal whose dedication to investigative journalism enhances Superman's own moral goal rather than just serving as a love interest. Together, Lois and Clark stand for interrelated types of public service, proving that heroism may be demonstrated not only via physical action but also through civic duty and intellectual bravery.

The way Lex Luthor is portrayed in the movie expands on these ideas. Luthor, Superman's main foe, represents modern worries about elite power, corporate influence, and technological might. As a result, the battle between Superman and Luthor transcends the conventional fight between hero and villain. It develops into a more extensive ideological conflict between opposing perspectives on social duty, leadership, and power.

This article contends that *Superman* (2025) presents a type of masculinity based on empathy, responsibility, and democratic engagement, so reconstructing the Superman myth for a contemporary cultural time. The study looks at how the movie reimagines heroism in response to modern social worries using theories of masculinity, performativity, myth, and ideology. By doing this, it shows that Superman continues to be an important cultural icon because he maintains an unwavering dedication to justice and human dignity while also adapting to shifting historical circumstances. Gunn's Superman presents a vision of moral leadership for the twenty-first century rather than a sentimental return to an idealized past. The movie makes a significant contribution to current discussions about citizenship, masculinity, and the moral potential of popular culture by redefining strength as caring, power as accountability, and heroism as service.

Literature Review

Superman and the Development of Contemporary Myth

Since comic studies and popular culture studies became recognized academic fields in the second half of the 20th century, the scholarly study of Superman has undergone substantial change. Comic books and superheroes were frequently written

off by early critics as mere entertainment with no intellectual merit. Nonetheless, the growing impact of superhero stories on world culture has prompted academics to acknowledge these works as significant cultural artifacts that offer crucial insights into power, identity, ideology, and social change.

Superman holds a special place among superhero characters due to his fundamental involvement in creating the superhero genre's traditions. According to Peter Coogan, Superman successfully established the narrative and visual grammar that would be used to comprehend later superheroes. His unique abilities, moral mission, covert identity, and civic duty created a model that still influences superhero narratives today.

Umberto Eco's groundbreaking essay "The Myth of Superman" has one of the most significant Superman interpretations. Superman, according to Eco, operates as a contemporary mythological character who inhabits a distinct narrative framework. Despite numerous adventures, Superman stays essentially the same, in contrast to typical literary heroes who experience significant development. This seeming paradox maintains a stable symbolic identity while providing viewers with ongoing freshness. Eco claims that this harmony between change and permanence is the exact source of Superman's cultural power.

Superman's cultural relevance is further revealed by Roland Barthes' notion of myth. Barthes contends in *Mythologies* that contemporary myths convert historically particular values into what appear to be natural facts. By portraying cultural constructs as universal truths, myths function as ideological frameworks that influence public perception. One such legendary system is Superman. His narratives convey presumptions about morality, justice, citizenship, and leadership while also modifying these ideals to fit shifting historical circumstances. Superman's extraordinary longevity can be explained by his flexibility. Superman typically stood for democratic opposition against Nazism in the 1940s. He frequently represented American optimism and scientific advancement throughout the Cold War. Superman interpretations in the post-Cold War era increasingly mirrored worries about identity, terrorism, globalization, and surveillance. The social and political priorities of the historical period are revealed in each variation.

According to Grant Morrison, Superman is arguably the most effective contemporary myth because he represents goals that go beyond certain political

philosophies. Superman symbolizes enduring aspirations for justice, compassion, and moral responsibility, in contrast to many heroes whose popularity is dependent upon specific historical conditions. However, these principles are constantly reinterpreted in light of modern demands. As a result, every significant Superman adaptation serves as a chance to analyse more general societal shifts. This method of mythological reinvention is carried out in James Gunn's *Superman* (2025). The movie reimagines Superman as a character whose authority comes from empathy and accountability rather than unquestionable power, emerging during a time marked by political conflict, media fragmentation, and discussions about masculinity. Examining research on superhero film and ideology is essential to comprehending the importance of this shift.

Ideological Representation in Superhero Film

The emergence of superhero movies as the most popular genre in modern Hollywood has attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Superhero movies are becoming more widely acknowledged by academics as an important platform for cultures to discuss issues of citizenship, identity, power, and authority.

According to Richard Reynolds, superheroes serve as societal reactions to social fears. Their stories frequently surface in times of uncertainty when established institutions don't seem to be able to allay public anxieties. Superheroes offer symbolic answers to seemingly insurmountable issues in daily life. They represent ideals of moral clarity and agency, which are especially alluring in unstable social environments. On the ideological consequences of these narratives, however, academics cannot agree. Some critics contend that by elevating extraordinary people above democratic systems, superhero fiction support conservative political ideals. This viewpoint holds that superheroes often choose unilateral action over group decision-making and legal procedures. Because of their exceptional skills, they are able to resolve issues that regular people cannot, which validates hierarchical frameworks of authority. More complex interpretations are provided by other academics.

According to Jeffrey A. Brown, superhero stories frequently feature ideological inconsistencies that mirror larger societal conflicts. Superheroes oppose corruption, injustice, and institutional failure even though they may support some types of power. Because of this, rather than being clear-cut statements of political

ideology, superhero books often function as forums for ideological debate. After September 11, 2001, the ideological intricacy of superhero movies became especially apparent. Movies made in the ensuing decades often addressed issues of national identity, militarization, security, and surveillance. Characters like Iron Man, Batman, and Captain America served as platforms for viewers to examine moral conundrums pertaining to authority and accountability. Many post-9/11 superhero movies have adopted darker artistic and philosophical approaches, according to academics. Heroes seemed to be more and more plagued by trauma, doubt, and moral ambiguity. These changes increased the genre's psychological complexity, but they also led to an increasing focus on violence and exceptionalism as remedies for societal issues.

These inclinations were mirrored in the Superman portrayed in *Man of Steel* (2013). In a society full of mistrust and terror, the movie showed a hero battling to balance his or her own identity with public duty. The movie received accolades for its emotional impact, but it also drew criticism for prioritizing conflict and devastation above Superman's customary positivity. One could see James Gunn's *Superman* as a reaction to these advancements. The movie aims to reclaim ideals like hope, compassion, and civic involvement without compromising modern relevance, as opposed to completely discarding complexity. This change points to a greater cultural demand for different heroic models that can solve modern concerns through moral responsibility as opposed to only using violence.

Studies of Masculinity and the Superhero Body

The connection between superheroes and masculinity is one of the most fruitful subfields of superhero research. Superheroes offer important chances for analyzing cultural conceptions of gender since they serve as highly prominent images of idealized male identity. Growing awareness that masculinity, like femininity, is socially produced rather than biologically determined led to the development of masculinity studies as a separate academic discipline in the late 20th century. By showing that male identities differ between historical eras and cultural circumstances, scholars have increasingly contested essentialist conceptions of gender.

One of the most significant contributions to this topic is still Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell, institutions, media portrayals, and social customs help societies create dominant kinds of masculinity that gain cultural legitimacy. Strength, authority, competition, emotional control, and

independence are frequently highlighted by these hegemonic forms. Superheroes often exhibit these traits. They are idealized images of masculine authority because of their powerful bodies, exceptional skills, and ability to act decisively. According to Jeffrey A. Brown, the superhero body itself serves as a symbolic location for the expression and reinforcement of cultural standards of masculinity. However, contradictions among these portrayals are becoming more apparent to academics. Despite their seeming strength, superheroes are often marked by emotional repression, trauma, and loneliness. Because of their exceptional skills, they are cut off from regular social interactions, which makes them vulnerable in ways that go against conventional notions of masculinity.

The rise of alternate masculinities in superhero stories has been the subject of recent research. Scholars have noted an increase in interest in depictions that highlight vulnerability, cooperation, emotional intelligence, and nurturing. These changes are a reflection of larger cultural discussions about toxic masculinity and the constraints of conventional gender standards. Superman has a unique place in this environment. Superman has traditionally been associated with gentleness, humility, and selflessness, in contrast to many modern heroes whose identities are defined by trauma or retaliation. However, film versions have frequently found it difficult to strike a balance between these attributes and viewers' expectations of action-packed bravery. Gunn's film is significant because it emphasizes emotional openness as a source of strength rather than weakness. The story supports continuing initiatives to redefine masculinity in more inclusive and morally responsible ways by highlighting empathy and care.

Theoretical Framework

Ethical Leadership and Hegemonic Masculinity

Raewyn Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity serves as the main theoretical foundation for this investigation. According to Connell, masculinity should be viewed as a dynamic collection of social activities influenced by historical and cultural circumstances rather than as a fixed essence. In particular societal circumstances, some types of masculinity become dominant and accepted as ideal manifestations of male identity.

Authority, control, competition, and emotional restraint are traits of hegemonic masculinity. Crucially, Connell highlights that these traits serve as

cultural standards rather than representations of real masculine behaviour. Even if the majority of men do not completely embody hegemonic masculinity, its expectations nonetheless have an impact on them. In the past, superhero stories have been crucial in spreading these beliefs. Heroes frequently gain credibility by demonstrating their physical prowess, strategic acumen, and emotional restraint. Their capacity to take decisive action to resolve issues strengthens cultural links between authority and masculinity.

Connell's framework is used in the analysis of *Superman (2025)* to determine whether the movie upholds or defies these norms. According to preliminary observations, Gunn's interpretation deviates greatly from conventional models by placing a strong emphasis on accountability, cooperation, and empathy. The movie presents power as a duty that needs to be used morally rather than as an end in and of itself. This change is a reflection of larger cultural shifts in leadership conceptions. In addition to traditional forms of power, modern societies place a growing emphasis on relationship competence and emotional intelligence. Therefore, it is possible to understand Superman's bravery as a reinterpretation of masculinity for a shifting social context.

Judith Butler and Heroic Identity Performance

A second essential foundation for comprehending Superman's dual identity is provided by Judith Butler's performativity theory. Butler contends that gender is a performative achievement created through repeated acts and social practices rather than an innate trait. Butler contends that performing gives identities significance. People are identified as gendered subjects because they exhibit culturally understandable behaviours on a regular basis. However, identity is also susceptible to change and reinterpretation because it depends on repetition. This viewpoint is especially helpful when examining superhero stories. Costumes, public personalities, symbolic acts, and secret identities all emphasize how social identity is manufactured. One of the most memorable examples of this phenomenon is Superman and Clark Kent. Conventional interpretations frequently consider Clark Kent as a mask that hides Superman's real identity. This assumption is complicated by a Butlerian interpretation, which contends that both Superman and Clark are performances that shape identity. Neither symbolizes an authentic or pure self-existence apart from social interaction. This intricacy seems to be embraced in Gunn's picture. It highlights

the consistency of Clark and Superman's moral commitments rather than portraying them as diametrically opposed. Both identities share the same values of compassion, honesty, and accountability. As a result, humanity and heroism are inextricably linked.

Ideology, Myth, and Cultural Significance

Lastly, the study makes use of Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Barthes' idea of myth. The importance of cultural texts in creating social meaning is emphasized by both academics. According to Barthes, myth turns ideology into common sense. It normalizes certain beliefs and presumptions, making them seem inevitable and universal. Because he represents cultural ideas related to justice, leadership, and citizenship, Superman serves as a mythological character. This method is supported by Hall's theory of representation, which emphasizes that cultural behaviours create meaning rather than merely reflecting it. By creating stories, symbols, and identities, movies actively influence how the general public perceives the world.

Superman (2025) can be viewed as a cultural intervention rather than just a commercial entertainment product when these frameworks are applied to the movie. The story takes part in current discussions about media ethics, social responsibility, democracy, and masculinity. It presents specific ideas of authority, leadership, and civic duty through its portrayals of Superman, Lois Lane, and Lex Luthor. When combined, Connell, Butler, Barthes, and Hall offer a thorough framework for examining how Superman updates the superhero myth for the twenty-first century. The film's narrative structure, characters, visual symbolism, and ideological relevance are all thoroughly examined in the section that follows using these theoretical stances.

Rebuilding Superman in the Twenty-First Century

The main accomplishment of James Gunn's *Superman (2025)* is the film's brilliant reconstruction of Superman as a 21st-century cultural icon. The movie reinterprets Superman's moral and symbolic importance in light of current societal issues rather than viewing the character as a sentimental holdover from a bygone period of American optimism. The film offers a Superman that can address contemporary concerns about masculinity, leadership, truth, and civic duty through its narrative structure, characterization, visual design, and ideological orientation. Because

Superman has frequently been thought to be challenging to adapt for modern audiences, this restoration is especially important. In a cultural landscape characterized by antiheroes, moral ambiguity, and institutional mistrust, critics have often claimed that the character's idealism is out of date. Because they represent psychological depth, moral ambiguity, and emotional turmoil, characters like Batman, Wolverine, and the Punisher have frequently felt more in line with modern views.

The premise that complexity and idealism are incompatible is questioned in Gunn's film. Rather, it shows that Superman's classic principles can be reimagined without eschewing modern issues. As a result, the character appears emotionally and psychologically credible while maintaining moral aspirations. This change is mostly brought about by the movie's focus on mankind. The story emphasizes Superman's moral obligations and interpersonal connections rather than just his incredible powers. The movie keeps reminding viewers that Superman's significance comes from his decisions rather than his abilities. In this way, the movie moves the focus from spectacle to morality. Action scenes are still significant, but they serve more as character expressions than as aims in and of themselves. Instead, then being a sign of superiority, heroism turns into an ethical behaviour.

The Humanized Superman: Strength from Vulnerability

The movie's depiction of vulnerability is among its most striking features. Vulnerability is frequently portrayed in modern superhero movies as a transient challenge that heroes must overcome to regain authority and control. Narratives of dominance and mastery often seem to take precedence over emotional openness. Gunn's Superman is a notable exception to this rule. Emotional sensitivity is always shown in the movie as a strength rather than a weakness. Because of his empathy, Clark Kent is able to comprehend the effects of his actions and react to other people's needs.

This portrayal is very important from the standpoint of masculinity studies. By equating vulnerability with weakness, traditional hegemonic masculinity sometimes suppresses emotional expression. Men are frequently required to exhibit emotional restraint, independence, and self-control. These expectations contribute to societal contexts that place a low emphasis on empathy and transparency. By highlighting emotional intelligence as a crucial element of moral leadership, the

movie questions these presumptions. Superman's capacity to identify human misery and react with compassion is just as much a source of his heroics as his physical prowess. He stands out from many modern superheroes whose stories emphasize massive battles and apocalyptic dangers because of his concern for common people. The focus on empathy is a reflection of greater shifts in how society views masculinity. A growing number of academics and social critics contend that relational awareness and emotional literacy are essential skills for negotiating challenging social situations. Care is portrayed in the movie as a heroic virtue, which is consistent with these trends. Crucially, Superman's frailty does not lessen his power. Conversely, it strengthens his credibility. Superman is trusted by the public because he shows concern for their welfare rather than because he is untouchable. His humanity, not his supremacy, is what gives him moral legitimacy.

The ideological objective of the movie revolves around this divide. Authority is not justified by power alone. If power is to be used lawfully, it must be accompanied by ethical responsibility. The film redefines strength as the ability to care despite having the power to dominate by emphasizing vulnerability. In contrast to conventional narratives that exclusively associate masculinity with control and invulnerability, such a representation provides a compelling alternative. Superman turns becomes a role model for moral masculinity based on responsibility, empathy, and service.

Clark Kent and Identity Performance

As it involves important issues of identity, authenticity, and performance, the relationship between Clark Kent and Superman has long captivated academics. By highlighting the continuity between Clark and Superman rather than their conflict, James Gunn's film directly addresses these difficulties. Previous interpretations frequently implied that Clark Kent served only as a disguise. Superman stood for the true self, whereas Clark's main purpose was to hide incredible powers. This viewpoint is consistent with essentialist conceptions of identity, which presuppose that social performance has a constant core.

A distinct perspective is provided by Judith Butler's performativity theory. According to Butlerian theory, identity does not exist before performance. Rather, identity develops through social encounters and repeated behaviours. Therefore, it is possible to think of Clark and Superman as separate but related performances that

help create a cohesive identity. This notion seems to be embraced by the movie. Whether Clark is portrayed as a journalist or a superhero, his empathy, modesty, and moral principles never change. Rather than moral identity, the difference between Clark and Superman is related to social function.

There are significant ramifications for masculinity from this continuity. Compartmentalization is frequently encouraged by traditional masculine norms. There are conflicts between men's private and public identities since they are supposed to keep emotional vulnerability and authority apart. This separation is challenged by Superman's blended identity. Clark does not abandon his humanity when he becomes Superman. Superman also doesn't disagree with Clark Kent's ideals. Rather, both identities use distinct behaviours to convey the same moral values. Instead of being opposing roles, journalism and bravery become complementing disciplines.

A more comprehensive view of masculinity is reflected in this integration. The movie implies that authenticity necessitates consistency in various social circumstances rather than breaking identity down into distinct categories. Ethical behaviour must permeate all aspect of life and cannot be limited to specific circumstances. As a result, Clark Kent is no longer only a disguise. He stands for a crucial aspect of Superman's moral nature. Through Clark, the movie shows that heroism starts with common dedication to truth, accountability, and compassion rather than special skills.

Truth, Journalism, and Democratic Citizenship

The renewed focus on journalism in *Superman* (2025) is one of its most important accomplishments. In contrast to earlier adaptations, which frequently prioritized Clark Kent's superhero persona over his career, Gunn's picture puts journalism back at the center of the story. This decision reflects current worries about disinformation, fragmented media, and dwindling public institution trust. The digital era has revolutionized the creation and dissemination of information, opening up new channels for communication while simultaneously making manipulation and misinformation easier. Journalism takes on greater political and ethical significance in this setting.

The Daily Planet is more than just a place of employment. It stands for the public sphere, which is an area where data is collected, assessed, and shared. The

movie emphasizes the value of truth as a democratic principle by focusing on investigative reporting. Clark Kent's identification as Superman is enhanced by his work as a journalist. Both positions entail public service with the goal of safeguarding society. Superman uses action to combat physical threats, while journalism uses information to combat dishonesty and corruption. When taken as a whole, they demonstrate how democratic citizenship is interconnected.

The way Lois Lane is portrayed in the movie expands on these ideas. Instead of serving only as a love interest, Lois develops into a self-sufficient professional whose knowledge and tenacity directly influence the main conflicts of the story. Her research shows that bravery may manifest both intellectually and physically. This representation is especially significant from a gender perspective. Lois's connection to Superman does not define her. She has professional authority, expertise, and agency. Her position reflects changing societal norms about how women should be portrayed in superhero stories.

Lois and Clark's collaboration represent a more expansive understanding of democratic collaboration. Neither character has all the tools required to deal with social issues on their own. Mutual respect, cooperation, and communication are essential to their success. This focus on teamwork sets the movie apart from stories that highlight individual brilliance. Diverse types of participation and knowledge are needed to address social concerns. The upkeep of a democratic society is facilitated by journalism, civic participation, and moral leadership. Superman broadens traditional ideas of heroism by emphasizing these concepts. In addition to using physical force, heroic action also involves seeking accountability and the truth. By doing this, the movie re-establishes a connection between the superhero genre and more general issues of civic duty.

Lois Lane and Partnership Politics

Lois Lane's portrayal represents important changes in both superhero movies and larger societal conversations about gender; it merits special attention. In the past, female characters in superhero stories have frequently been excluded. For male characters, they often functioned as victims, romantic interests, or symbolic rewards. By restricting women's agency and narrative significance, these portrayals upheld established gender hierarchies. Superman carries on the tradition of modern superhero movies challenging these norms. As a skilled journalist, Lois Lane's

contributions are crucial to the story. She is positioned as a key player rather than a supporting character due to her bravery, intelligence, and dedication to the truth. Lois and Clark's relationship is notable because it is based on respect for one another rather than reliance. Both characters have unique areas of skill that increase their combined efficacy. Their collaboration serves as an example of a cooperative rather than hierarchical paradigm of gender relations.

From a Butlerian standpoint, Lois also subverts gender norms by assuming social positions that have traditionally been associated with male power. Public participation, independence, and aggressiveness are necessary for investigative journalism. Lois challenges presumptions about gendered divisions of work and ability by effectively carrying out these responsibilities. This representation's importance goes beyond personal categorization. Lois serves as a representation of democratic engagement. Her dedication to honesty and responsibility supports the movie's larger focus on civic duty. The story illustrates through her acts that active participation, as opposed to passive observation, is necessary for significant societal change. Lois Lane becomes one of the most significant characters in the movie. She expands the variety of identities that are possible within the superhero genre while also embodying ideals that support and enhance Superman's moral mission.

The Crisis of Modern Power and Lex Luthor

Superman's portrayal of Lex Luthor makes its ideological relevance especially clear. Luthor has traditionally been Superman's moral and intellectual antithesis. Luthor pursues power for his own benefit and notoriety, whereas Superman uses it for the benefit of others. This disagreement takes on great significance in the 2025 movie. Luthor stands in for modern concerns about elite control over public life, corporate influence, and technical power. Concerns with the concentration of informational and economic power in private entities are reflected in his character.

Luthor represents a cogent worldview, in contrast to conventional villains driven only by avarice or retaliation. According to him, authority is justified by intelligence and technological prowess. According to him, extraordinary people have the right to mold society in the way that best suits them. This ideology is similar to more general cultural discussions about neoliberalism and technocracy. Modern civilizations depend more and more on technical systems run by large businesses and

highly skilled professionals. Although there are many advantages to these advances, there are also concerns about democratic supervision, accountability, and transparency.

Superman is an alternate authoritative figure. He always denies claims to superiority, even if his abilities are far superior to those of common people. Instead of using his power for selfish gain, he does so in conformity with moral standards. Thus, the struggle between Superman and Luthor goes beyond direct physical battle. It turns into a symbolic conflict between opposing leadership philosophies. Superman places more importance on accountability than Luthor does on control. Superman cherishes people, while Luthor values efficiency. Superman wants to serve, whereas Luthor wants to rule. The movie's larger political issues are made clear by this contrast. Authority must be assessed in terms of ethical commitment in addition to skill. Being in a position of authority does not guarantee legitimacy. Accountability and concern for the general good are the foundations of legitimacy. Superman turns a well-known rivalry into an insightful critique on current social and political issues by framing its main conflict in these terms.

The Cinematic Construction of Hope and Visual Style

The visual dedication to optimism in James Gunn's *Superman* (2025) is one of its most notable features. Gunn's picture deliberately returns to a visual language associated with hope, opportunity, and civic involvement, whereas modern superhero filmmaking has frequently adopted darker aesthetics marked by muted color palettes, dismal imagery, and apocalyptic destruction. This aesthetic decision serves as an essential part of the film's ideological and thematic agenda and is not just stylistic. The significance of visual form in determining narrative meaning has long been highlighted by film experts. Color, lighting, framing, mise-en-scène, and cinematography all actively contribute to the creation of ideological meaning rather than just serving as story illustrations. *Superman* (2025) uses visual design as a means of conveying its reimagining of heroism.

The film's embracing of color is its most obvious element. Superman's classic outfit, which was frequently muted or darkened in earlier renditions, returns to its vivid symbolic presence. The vivid shades of blue, red, and yellow that are connected to the character's comic book beginnings are displayed without reservation. This choice shows that the movie is prepared to recover sincerity as a respectable ethical

and artistic virtue. This decision has more significance than just sentimentality. Throughout the movie, color serves as a metaphor for transparency, openness, and hope. Gunn's visual style implies a dedication to visibility and ethical clarity, in contrast to darker superhero movies that often highlight secrecy and moral uncertainty. The audience is urged to see Superman as a public character who is integrated into civic life rather than as a shadowy, enigmatic figure.

This approach is further reinforced by the film's utilization of public space. Instead of being isolated from civilization, Superman is frequently placed in settings with regular people. Public institutions, neighbourhood areas, and urban landscapes play a major part in the visual story. These locations highlight Superman's ties to society and the movie's larger dedication to democratic principles. Instead of showing Superman as a lone figure, the camera usually frames him in relation to crowds of people. The individualistic inclinations that frequently define superhero stories are challenged by such compositions. The visual focus on community implies that social interactions are the sole context in which heroism has significance. Superman's importance comes from his relationships with others, not from his alienation from them.

The way the movie handles scale is equally significant. The cinematography constantly reminds viewers of the human aspects of Superman's deeds, despite his great talents. Large-scale spectacle is counterbalanced by close-ups and personal character interactions, guaranteeing that emotional connections stay at the heart of the story. Because of this balance, the movie avoids reducing heroism to mere aesthetic splendour. *Superman* (2025) uses these artistic techniques to create a cinematic language of hope that goes well with its thematic focus on civic duty, empathy, and accountability.

Symbolic Transcendence, Myth, and Flight

There aren't many pictures that are more strongly connected to Superman than flying. Flying has been one of the character's most identifiable and potent symbolic qualities since his first appearances. In Gunn's movie, flight serves as a mythological and ideological emblem in addition to being a physical capability. Flight has always been connected to transcendence, freedom, and desire from a mythical standpoint. Stories about flight are a common way for people from all cultures to convey their aspirations to transcend boundaries and reach higher states

of existence. Superman is linked to these more expansive symbolic traditions through his ability to fly.

A helpful framework for comprehending the significance of these images is provided by Roland Barthes' notion of myth. Barthes asserts that myths convert cultural ideals into what appear to be natural truths. Superman's flight serves as a legendary symbol that conveys ideas of promise and hope. The movie frequently depicts moral desire through flight scenes. The ability to overcome fear, division, and self-interest is symbolized by Superman's flight into the sky. These scenarios encourage viewers to envision different social and political structures based on collaboration and moral accountability. Crucially, the movie refrains from portraying flight as a sign of dominance. Superman doesn't fly because he wants to control other people. Rather, flight allows him to defend and serve. This divergence reflects the story's larger ethical focus. Only when extraordinary abilities are focused toward the welfare of the group do they gain significance. The film's reconstruction of the Superman myth is further aided by the recurrent visual of flying. Superman's godlike abilities or extraterrestrial origins were frequently highlighted in earlier renditions. Gunn's moral commitments are highlighted in his interpretation. Flight turns into a visual metaphor for moral ambition rather than a representation of heavenly grandeur. In this way, the movie is consistent with Joseph Campbell's theory that mythological heroes serve as intermediaries between transcendent ideals and everyday life. Superman's capacity for flight symbolizes humanity's aspiration to transcend boundaries, yet his moral obligations guarantee that this transcendence stays linked to social responsibility. As a result, flight serves as a moral metaphor, myth, and spectacle all at once. It reflects the movie's belief that, despite complicated and unpredictable historical conditions, hope is still achievable.

Hope's Comeback as a Cultural and Political Value

The restoration of hope as a significant cultural virtue is arguably *Superman* (2025)'s most significant achievement. Hope is sometimes written down as naive, romantic, or politically ineffectual in today's conversation. Optimism often lacks the intellectual sophistication of cynicism. However, by portraying hope as an active ethical and political activity, the movie questions this presumption. It is necessary to comprehend this issue in light of current societal circumstances. Political divisiveness, environmental fear, economic instability, and a decline in institutional

confidence have all been hallmarks of the early twenty-first century. A general sense of disenchantment and mistrust has been exacerbated by such circumstances. Dystopian stories and ethically dubious protagonists have become commonplace in popular culture, reflecting these developments. Although these tales can offer insightful analyses of societal issues, they can also perpetuate beliefs that significant change is unachievable. Gunn's movie presents a different viewpoint. It does not refute the reality of political complexity or social conflict. Instead, it maintains that optimism is nonetheless vital because of these difficulties. Hope turns into a kind of defense against hopelessness and surrender.

The work of cultural theorists who contend that imagination is essential to social change is consistent with this interpretation. Before alternative futures to be realized, they must first be imagined. Superman serves as a symbolic tool that helps viewers imagine leadership and civic engagement based on moral responsibility. The movie's focus on optimism is especially important when it comes to masculinity. Conventional male values promote detachment as a means of self-defence and frequently equate emotional vulnerability with inferiority. To have hope, one must be prepared to maintain an emotional commitment to the prospect of constructive change. In this way, hope itself turns into a brave deed.

Thus, Superman's optimism is more than just a characteristic of his nature. It is an ethical perspective on the world. His resistance to cynicism shows a dedication to human dignity and the potential of society as a whole. The movie refutes prevailing ideas of decay and inevitability by restoring optimism as a significant cultural asset. It implies that moral behaviour is still feasible under challenging situations. This message contributes to the explanation of Superman's enduring appeal to audiences of all ages.

Conclusion

James Gunn's *Superman* (2025) shows how the superhero myth is still relevant in modern culture. Superman is still a dynamic and flexible character that societies use to discuss issues of morality, leadership, identity, and collective responsibility; he is by no means an antiquated relic of twentieth-century popular culture. According to this article, the movie reimagines Superman in reaction to current social issues pertaining to media ethics, institutional trust, democratic citizenship, and masculinity. By focusing on empathy, vulnerability, accountability,

and civic involvement, the movie challenges prevailing cultural links between dominance and masculinity and presents an alternative picture of heroism.

The analysis showed how the movie reimagines masculine authority by referencing Raewyn Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity. Superman's credibility comes from his dedication to helping others rather than just his physical prowess. It becomes clear that ethical responsibility and emotional intelligence are essential elements of heroic identity. The relationship between Clark Kent and Superman was clarified by Judith Butler's performativity theory. The movie highlights these identities' continuity rather than portraying them as antagonistic. Superman's bravery is based on Clark's humanity, undermining the conventional divisions between strength and vulnerability. The cultural relevance of the film's reworking was further illuminated by Roland Barthes' notion of myth. Superman still serves as a contemporary myth that helps societies express their shared ideals and goals. However, the character's meanings are still dependent on historical context. The 2025 movie specifically addresses modern concerns about leadership, truth, and social disintegration.

The significance of truth as a public value was emphasized by the examination of journalism and democratic citizenship. The movie broadens traditional notions of heroism by reestablishing the Daily Planet and Lois Lane's prominence. In the fight for justice, investigative reporting, civic engagement, and public accountability become just as crucial as actual physical intervention. In a similar vein, Lex Luthor's portrayal turns a well-known adversary into a representation of modern worries about corporate control and technocratic authority. Superman and Luthor's battle symbolize conflicting ideas of leadership, one based on control and dominance and the other on accountability and service. Through its embracing of color, public space, and upbeat imagery, the film's visual style supports these thematic concerns. While the overall aesthetic promotes the possibility of hope in a period frequently marked by cynicism and uncertainty, flight becomes a metaphor for moral desire. In the end, *Superman (2025)* suggests that heroism is characterized by the readiness to act honourably on behalf of others rather than by invulnerability or supremacy.

In modern communities, where issues of citizenship, leadership, and social trust have grown more pressing, such a vision is especially important. Superman's

ability to change without compromising his moral principles is what gives him his enduring power. Every age develops its own Superman in response to shifting societal demands and goals. In response to the challenges of the twenty-first century, James Gunn's rendition presents a hero whose greatest strength is his unwavering dedication to humanity rather than his capacity to fly, lift mountains, or withstand inconceivable dangers. By doing this, the movie underscores the enduring significance of empathy, truth, and hope as the cornerstones of both individual morality and communal existence. Superman is still a myth because he embodies what humanity strives to be, not because he is beyond humanity.

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