

ABSTRACT

This research studies the portrayal of female masculinity in contemporary superhero cinema through Yelena Belova in *Thunderbolts* (2025). The representation of gender in media remains shaped by persistent stereotypes, and in the superhero genre, this dynamic is reinforced through hegemonic masculinity, which normalizes male dominance in power, leadership, and heroism itself, while marginalizing alternative expressions such as female masculinity. Although female heroes have become more visible, their access to masculine traits is often constrained by expectation of femininity, which limits their representational scope. This study addresses the lack of research on Marvel Studios' phase five productions and explores whether contemporary superhero narratives challenge or reproduce these norms.

This research aims to identify the characteristics and visual elements that construct female masculinity through Yelena Belova and analyze how these representations reinforce or diverge from hegemonic masculinity and gender stereotypes. Grounded in the theories of Raewyn Connell's hegemonic masculinity and Jack Halberstam's female masculinity, and supported by theories of media representation and semiotics, this research employs a qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. The analysis focuses on eight scenes and one sequence, analyzing mise-en-scène, dialogue, and camerawork.

The findings reveal that Yelena embodies physical dominance, leadership, and emotional restraint, while also displaying controlled vulnerability. Her characterization produces four myths: the masculine female hero, emotional repression as strength, the necessity of purpose in heroism, and recognition as validation. This research ultimately demonstrates that even though *Thunderbolts* (2025) expands the representation of female masculinity, it continues to operate within existing gendered frameworks, which reflects both progress and limitation in one of Marvel Studios' current superhero narratives.