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## Supergirl

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# Supergirl

## Abstract

This is a film review of *Supergirl* (2017), directed by Jessie Auritt.

## Keywords

Orthodox Judaism, Powerlifting

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## Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



*Supergirl* (2017), dir. Jessie Auritt

Jessie Auritt's first documentary film (*The Birdman*, 2013) introduced us to the charming and quirky owner of Rainbow Music in the East Village. At 70, Bill, known throughout the neighborhood as the Birdman, does not work for the money, but because he loves the work; helping customers find the music they want to hear.

In *Supergirl*, Auritt introduces us to another fascinating character, Naomi Kutin. At the beginning of the movie, Naomi is a nine year old Orthodox Jew who is setting world records for, of all things, power lifting. Watching this pre-teen grunt and huff, just like the behemoths of power lifting, is so odd that it is almost comical. But, then you realize that this isn't funny. Naomi is just as serious about power lifting as any 300 pound muscle-bound giant. And, when we take Naomi seriously, we get to see a remarkable young woman navigating her sport and her life, both of which include their trials and tribulations.

As we follow Naomi on her pre-teen journey we learn about the sport of power lifting (fascinating in itself), about what teens must do to compete at the highest levels of their sports, about Orthodox Judaism, about being exceptional, and about being part of a family. And, we learn that in the end the most important strength we can develop is "strength of character." *Supergirl* is a fascinating look into each element of Naomi's life.

For those interested in religion, *Supergirl* provides what I would call a subtle or even gentle introduction to Orthodox Judaism. This is not a theological or academic or political introduction to Orthodox Judaism. And because of this it seems to me that it is a more honest introduction and a more enlightening introduction. It's as though you simply asked your neighbor what he's doing this weekend. Your neighbor tells you that he's got to get a haircut, pick up the dry cleaning, and that he's going to watch the football game and have dinner at his parents' house on Sunday. This is what we want to know about our neighbor. In *Supergirl*, we learn in just this way that the Kutin family says prayers three times each day and that they eat only kosher food. They observe the Sabbath on Saturday, and on that day they do not drive, nor do they use any electrical devices that are not on a timer. The children attend a Jewish school, women are to dress modestly, and some Orthodox Jewish men wear a small cloak under their shirts with fringes (*tzitzit*) hanging from each corner. (My favorite scene in the film is when Naomi's mother takes her shopping for her Bat Mitzvah dress. When you see the dress Naomi selects you know she has a strength of character.) Finally, we learn that not all Orthodox Jews follow the same rules and that some Orthodox Jews would prohibit a young girl from participating in any athletic competition. For various reasons there may be other things that we would want to learn about Orthodox Judaism,

but the introduction we get from watching *Supergirl* is an important one in a country that prides itself on its diversity and in a world that seems more intolerant with every passing day.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (For full disclosure, I contributed in a small way to financing this film.)