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Representation of Jews in the Media: An Analysis of Old Hollywood Stereotypes Perpetuated in Modern Television

Minnah Marguerite Stein



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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REPRESENTATION OF JEWS IN THE MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF OLD
HOLLYWOOD STEREOTYPES PERPETUATED IN MODERN TELEVISION

By

MINNAH STEIN

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Dr. Andrew Opel
Thesis Director

Dr. Martin Kavka
Outside Committee Member

Dr. Arienne Ferchaud
Committee Member

Abstract

Anti-Semitism in the United States is just as prevalent today as it has ever been. How does this cultural anti-Semitism translate into the media? Through portraying Jews as greedy, neurotic, pushy, money obsessed, cheap, and a myriad other negative stereotypes, the media often perpetuates long standing anti-Semitic tropes. This thesis analyzes the prevalence of Jewish stereotypes in modern television through the analysis and discussion of three of the most popular current television shows, getting into the nuance and complexity of Jewish representation. Through the deliberate viewing of *Big Mouth*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Schitt's Creek*, the conclusion is that although an effort is being made to debunk some stereotypes about Jews, there are other Jewish stereotypes that have remained popular in television media. These stereotypes are harmful to Jews because they both feed and fuel the anti-Semitic attitudes of viewers. In telling more nuanced stories about divergent kinds of Jews, the remaining ignorant, homogenous stereotypes will begin to crumble. If people do not have real-life experiences with Jewish people that they can leverage against stereotypical representations of Jews that they see on television, then it remains the job of television producers to create programming that better mirrors reality for its increasingly diverse viewers.

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Introduction

From Mona Lisa Sapperstein pouting her lips and demanding cash from her father with a, “money, please!” in Parks and Recreation; to a family of lizard people disguised as a typical Jewish family in Umbrella Academy, anti-Semitism in television is just as prevalent today as it ever was. The portrayal of Jewish characters as stereotypical or in a manner that reinforces anti-Semitic conspiracy theories may seem out of a history book, but it is something that happens in shows that are consumed on a daily basis. So often there is an urge to study anti-Semitism through a historical lens, but the storm on the Capitol on January 6, 2021, featuring individuals wearing “6 million wasn’t enough” t-shirts, carrying Nazi flags, and “Camp Auschwitz” attire has led many to reflect on the anti-Semitism that happens across the country every day. These brazen, outward displays of anti-Semitism didn’t come out of nowhere, just as they didn’t in 2017 when a mob of white nationalists marched the streets of Charlottesville chanting in unison, “Jews will not replace us!” Whereas there may be an urge to brush these acts off as extremism (which they absolutely are), studies done by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) have uncovered that anti-Semitic attitudes are far more commonplace than one would assume. The ADL found that 24 percent of adult Americans believe Jews are more loyal to Israel than they are to America. And 11 percent of American adults, about 28 million people, harbor deeply ingrained anti-Semitic attitudes. The ADL found that this 11 percent of American adults agree with six or more common tropes about Jews. The most common stereotypes about Jews are: “Jewish power” in business and the “dual loyalty” canard (Anti-Semitic stereotypes persist in America, survey

shows). The dual loyalty canard is the notion that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their home country.

Even in today's modern and more socially aware culture where people are calling out harmful lines of thinking, opinions on Jews have remained fairly consistent to beliefs held by people 55 years ago. One hopeful statistic showed 18 percent fewer people believe these misconceptions today than those who did in 1964 (Anti-Semitic stereotypes persist in America, survey shows). However, there are still 28 million people in America who harbor deeply ingrained anti-Semitic attitudes, identifying Jews as a group of "others." According to the ADL, "in recent years there has been a surge of anti-Semitic incidents, including violent crimes, even as overall anti-Semitic attitudes remain low. This is a stark reminder that it only takes a small number committing violence to create an epidemic. Society must redouble its efforts to fight anti-Semitism and all forms of hate in order to reverse the recent uptick in anti-Semitic incidents and violence" (Antisemitic attitudes in the U.S.: A guide to ADL's latest poll). Despite attitudes, anti-Semitism is just as prevalent today as it has ever been.

Recently, the ADL reported, "A Jewish student of Israeli background at Terra Linda High School was verbally harassed during a classroom 'breakout session' during a Zoom class. The student was told that 'Jews and Israelis deserve to go to hell'" (ADL tracker of antisemitic incidents). These anti-Semitic attitudes that can build and erupt into violence are the creation of a combination of only 15 out of the 50 states requiring Holocaust education (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) and a long history of Jews being repeatedly chosen as the scapegoat. However, the proliferation of anti-Semitic rhetoric exists outside the classroom in another more prominent and far more influential domain that has found its way into every home in America be it through the television, the cell phone or the computer. The representation and

portrayal of Jews in the media is potentially a powerful contributor to the up-tick in anti-Semitism.

With anti-Semitism rising in the United States and globally, there is no surprise that this bigoted attitude toward Jews is often reflected in the media content consumed each day. “Media reflects society because it shows us what’s important to people. TV shows demonstrate fads and hot button issues. News media report what they think is important in the world and what they think people want to hear about. The media is a mirror, showing us the good and bad of what we are. Today’s media reflects society more than ever, in that most media today is profit-based. Because of this, they will give the audience what they want to see or hear, and they will try to make news as entertaining as possible in order to survive the intensely competitive environment in today’s news-world” (litteteacher8). Today’s young people are growing up with access to the Internet and therefore an influx of media. If society is accepting anti-Semitism into popular belief, this will be reflected in the media society consumes.

This thesis analyzes the media that is being consumed by young people through close examination of three modern television shows and evaluation of the appearance of Jewish stereotypes in each episode. How are Jews being portrayed in television? What are the stereotypes of Jews being perpetuated? Are classic Hollywood Jewish stereotypes still perpetuated in television today? These are the questions answered through the viewing and analysis of popular television shows with Jewish main characters.

Outlining the different theories of representation and their influence on our understanding of the impact of mediated images creates a communications studies context for this thesis by describing how the study of communications and media influences the way we understand cultural and ethnic stereotypes. Primarily, cultivation theory is discussed. Cultivation theory

suggests, “people who watch television frequently are more likely to be influenced by the messages from the world of television. The influence goes to such an extent that their world view and perceptions start reflecting what they repeatedly see and hear on television. Television is, therefore, considered to contribute independently to the way people perceive social reality” (In Cultural Communication). Human brains interpret television as if it was real life. Meaning, the representation seen of groups on television gets processed in the brain as if they were people known in real life.

Clearly, representation is a powerful influencer. It has had a long-standing presence in television. How have Jews been perceived historically? Walking through the answer to this question is an important part of setting a baseline for the modern shows being studied through this thesis. To understand modern representation, there must first be an understanding of the history that precedes it. Providing a description of the role Jews have historically played in television shows versus the role they play today allows a deeper understanding of the influence television has on shaping and informing viewers on what it means to be Jewish.

In combination with historical context, it is vital to take into account the intersectionality, or how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap (Coaston) in Judaism. A common misconception is that all Jews are white. According to the Pew Research Center, there are 14 million Jews around the world. Pew Research Center reports, “Geographically, Jews are concentrated primarily in North America (44%) and the Middle East – North Africa region (41%). The remainder of the global Jewish population is found in Europe (10%), Latin America and the Caribbean (3%), Asia and the Pacific (between 1% and 2%) and sub-Saharan Africa (less than 1%).” (Jews). Something often overlooked in discussing Jewish representation in the media is the fact the Jewish faith has diverse members.

The inclusion of Jewish intersectionality allows for deeper understanding of the impact of Jewish representation. Along with intersectionality comes the topic of identity, and for Jews, that includes the “Jewish look.” The Jewish look refers to people being identified as Jewish because they have certain physical features such as a big nose or curly hair. These people are primarily white Jews from Europe, also known as Ashkenazi Jews. Keeping track of the demographics of Ashkenazi-Jewish looking people and how it compares proportionally to the look of Jews who do not look stereotypically Ashkenazi is an imperative part of studying Jewish representation.

When analyzing specific Jewish stereotypes, the paradoxical nature of the stereotypes cannot be overlooked. Jews are greedy/aggressive and weak. Jews are materialistic and cheap. All of the different stereotypes seem to negate one another. The most well-known stereotype about Jews is the “greedy Jew” stereotype. According the ADL, 15 percent of the 800 Americans polled said Jews have too much power in the business world, and 10 percent agreed with the statement, “Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want” (Anti-Semitic stereotypes persist in America, survey shows). ADL research reveals that Americans overwhelmingly believe that Jews control the movie and television industry and will do whatever they can to make sure Jews continue to dominate and lead in this industry. (Anti-Semitic stereotypes persist in America, survey shows). After addressing the long history of this specific stereotype and how it has been weaponized in the past, this thesis examines how this stereotype continues to manifest itself today via the three modern shows being anatomized.

This thesis also examines a relatively new Jewish stereotype, when compared to some of the other long-standing ones; however, it is just as much a part of Jewish representation as its counterparts. It’s the “Neurotic Jew” stereotype. Starting in the 50s and 60s, Woody Allen popularized the idea that Jews are anxious and neurotic through his stand-up comedy. This

stereotype paradox requires deep analysis into the origins of this anxious-Woody Allen-style-Jewish stereotype and how it has manifested in the selected three modern television shows chosen for this thesis.

Revealing intersectionality with paradoxical stereotyping invites the consideration of the intersection of Judaism and gender. There are a couple of specific stereotypes about Jews that only apply to women, and the “Jewish American Princess” (or “JAP”) is the most iconic. This is the idea that Jewish women are spoiled, rich brats. It stems from the greedy Jew narrative, but it is important to discuss the different stereotypes that specifically affect different demographics of Judaism. In an article by Jamie Lauren Keiles, Keiles defines a Jewish American Princess as,

...neither Jewish nor American alone. She makes herself known where these identities collide in a calamity of Coach bags, upmarket loungewear, and entitled dispositions toward luxury and ease...JAP style prioritizes grooming, trepidatious trendiness, and comfort. In any given season, the components of the look are drawn from a subset of mainstream fashion trends. (Keiles).

Because the shows targeted for this thesis cater to a young audience, stereotypes about young Jewish women is an important and influential stereotype to analyze.

In the article “Where did the Stereotype of the Jewish Mother Actually Come From?” by Joyce Antler, Antler describes this specific stereotype as, “...transmitted through myriad popular culture outlets and given intellectual credence by social scientists, [it] became a universally recognized metaphor for nagging, whining, guilt-producing maternal intrusiveness... the Jewish mother was a convenient scapegoat for ambivalent and hostile sentiments regarding assimilation in a new society, changing family dynamics and shifting gender roles.” (Antler). In looking at the intersectionality between gender and Judaism in modern television, the second prevalent female-only stereotype of the pushy Jewish mother comes to light as a principle stereotype to address.

Following a thorough analysis of the modern representation of Jews in three popular television shows, suggestions on what changes should be made to the current model will be made. Attention will be given as to the specific changes that are necessary to achieve this future and why these changes are important.

If children aren't being taught about Judaism and the Holocaust in school and they aren't meeting any Jews while they're growing up, they are getting their ideas about Jews from the media they are consuming. "People exercise cultural preferences when it comes to consuming media, but mass media corporations often decide which stories to tell and which to promote, particularly when it comes to forms of mass media that are costly to produce such as major motion pictures, major video game releases and global news products. More than any other, the field of mass communications transmits culture. At the same time, it helps institutional society try to understand itself and whether its structures are working" (Poepsel). In analyzing modern television, media can be used to understand institutional society and whether the established structures are being reinforced and perpetuated through modern media.

In an interview conducted with Florida State University Communications and Media Professor, Dr. Arthur Raney, he discussed how people who are portrayed more on television are seen as being more powerful, or important, and those with less representation are seen as less important. The representation of Jews in television needs to be addressed because it is contributing to public opinion on this group. Representation isn't a conversation that should be ignored. If people aren't shown Jewish stories, or they are primarily exposed to stereotypes, this creates a context where anti-Semitism expands and reproduces in the United States

Methods

Since the scope of this thesis is from a Communications and Media Studies perspective, it views anti-Semitism through this specific lens to examine the ways in which Jewish misconceptions are spread through the outlet of communications and media. In this thesis, the question that is answered is: Is contemporary popular media perpetuating old Hollywood stereotypes of Jews? In answering this question, the three most popular current TV shows with Jewish main characters were closely analyzed to see if they included the same stereotypes as Jewish characters from the past.

The media that was specifically looked at in this thesis was television. The average American watches five hours of television a day (Koblin). The average American spends nearly a third of their day in front of a television, making the representation of characters portrayed in the shows they are watching have great impact and influence. If people aren't meeting any Jews in their day-to-day lives, and they aren't learning about them in school, then their idea of who Jews are as a culture and religion are coming from Jewish characters in the media. In the book, *The Television Studies Reader* (2010), edited by Robert Clyde Allen and Annette Hill, they write about the accessibility of television and how the fact it is watched at home makes it feel more real than a movie. "Television brings into our homes opportunities for numerous vicarious social encounters every day and leaves it to us to figure out what status those encounters might have in our lives" (Allen, Hill, 369-370). But it's not just broadcast television that people are watching. According to studies done by the Pew Research Center, 61 percent of those aged 18-29 primarily watch television on streaming platforms (61 percent of young adults in the U.S. watch mainly streaming TV). In August of 2020, Statista reported that Netflix is the most popular platform for streaming shows, with 46.55 million monthly active users (Watson). When looking at the

representation of Jews on television in modern times, the different avenues of watching television and the different kinds of viewers those avenues attract must be considered.

Considerable research has already been conducted on the role of Jews in television. In her 2018 thesis *Jews on TV: A Snapshot of Modern Television's Representation of Jewish Characters*, Samantha Maoz researched common stereotypes of Jews and to what extent these stereotypes were present in modern television. Her research concluded, based on a qualitative content analysis of three different shows, that Jewish stereotypes were present in the shows, using outdated stereotypes to define their Jewish characters. Tamara Olson also did a study on the representation of Jewish identity on television. She focused on a soap opera, *The O.C.*, and how aspects of that show perpetuated classic Jewish stereotypes. What differentiates the research for this thesis is its very narrow focus. There is virtually no research that has been done on the representation of Jews on shows that are watched, primarily by young people on streaming services, where the main character is a Jew, but the show is not about being Jewish. Jewish side characters are often stereotypical in nature. In the article "The Mistreatment of Jewish Characters in the Media" by Stefani Chudnow, Chudnow analyzes only the Jewish characters in *Parks and Rec*. This is an example of a show that is not about Jews but has Jewish characters. There are three Jewish characters on the show, and all three of them personify the stereotypes that all Jews care about is money and controlling business. "The father is a rich doctor who scams people out of their money while his children are loud and obnoxious in every scene they're in. Dr. Saperstein's son, Jean-Ralphio, is a slacker, which might have strayed away from the nerdy Jewish stereotype if not for his incredibly annoying behavior. Moreover, his daughter, Mona-Lisa, is stereotypically obsessed with money, always asking the other characters for cash with her catchphrase, 'Money please!'" (Chudnow). This is in contrast to shows like *Unorthodox*,

where people are watching specifically to learn something about Judaism. A viewer watching Parks and Rec does not have the intention of learning something about Jews, but they are being taught subconsciously that all Jews care about is money through the only Jews in the show being portrayed as personifications of classic stereotypes.

Focusing on these types of shows where the characters are Jewish but the show is not about being Jewish allows for a deeper understanding of the messages that are being sent to television viewers about Jewish culture, religion, and persona. In analyzing old Hollywood stereotypes and the impact those stereotypes have, it can be determined if they still exist in the three most popular modern television shows starring Jewish characters.

Schitt's Creek, *The Goldbergs*, and *Big Mouth* are the three most popular television shows that fit the description of having Jewish main characters without the show being about Judaism. *The Goldbergs* is a family show on ABC. According to a Broadcasting & Cable study done in 2018, 60 percent of people who watch *The Goldbergs* are under 44 years old. Of those people, 57 percent are female, which Broadcasting & Cable concludes makes it a sweet spot for young moms (Damata). Parents watch *The Goldbergs* with their children because it is a family show on a family network.

Schitt's Creek had its series finale in 2019 after six seasons. It drew in 1.3 million viewers. After six years of no Emmy's, the last season swept the television awards, breaking records. *Schitt's Creek* is now the comedy show with the most Emmy awards, and it became the first comedy series to win all four acting categories and best comedy show. It was an underdog of a show, but it now has a huge following. Winning several prestigious awards has given the show more attention and influence.

In 2019, *Big Mouth* was the third most streamed show on Netflix (Torres). That made it the first most streamed show on Netflix starring a Jewish character. The target audience for the show is viewers aged 17-25, making it a show with a great deal of impact on young people.

Big Mouth, *Schitt's Creek*, and *The Goldbergs* are a selection of shows that provide a broad sampling of viewers. Because of the nature of themes addressed in the shows, the viewers are diverse in age and taste. Additionally, one show has immense critical acclaim (*Schitt's Creek*), one show is popular amongst millennials on the most used streaming platform (*Big Mouth*), and one show is a family show that younger kids watch with their parents (*The Goldbergs*). Just like the many shows before them, these shows influence their wide range of viewers through their depiction of Jewish characters.

Literature on Jewish stereotypes identify the classic and traditional Hollywood stereotypes of Jews that were analyzed in the three shows for this thesis. In the article "Stereotypes in the United States" by Riv-Ellen Prell, Prell discusses the most common Jewish stereotypes in America and where they come from.

In an American society that was exceptionally hostile to racial and ethnic differences in general, and to Jews in particular, Jewish newcomers reflected on their differences from one another in terms of their own Americanization. American Jews, then, were objects of antisemitic stereotypes at the same time that they generated stereotypes of one another. What united these two processes was Americanization itself. The ideal of a pure and unified American people created the vicious stereotypes of 'outsiders' whom many perceived as 'invading' the nation. Similarly, the privileged position of even slight acculturation became a powerful tool with which Jewish Americans might chisel fine distinctions about who among them was an American and who was not (Prell).

The stereotypes being analyzed in this thesis were born out of the simultaneous, incongruous juxtaposition of Jews as both insiders and outsiders – a reality Jewish people found themselves in when they immigrated to the United States. Greedy, anxious, spoiled, overbearing, and being

identifiable by certain physical features are the stereotypes that have affiliated with the Jewish people.

...Most of these stereotypes traveled with them from Europe, and others blossomed in the soil of American Jewish life. All of them drew on some of the antisemitic caricatures that literally threatened European Jews' lives and well-being. The ineffective immigrant father, the vulgar and noisy Eastern European Jewish woman, and the smothering but loving Jewish mother—all, in large measure, stereotypes created by Jews of different generations and genders—are popular examples...Many of these stereotypes, such as the patriarch, faded quickly from collective memory, no longer serving the needs of acculturated Jews. Others have proved remarkably persistent, even when their specific content underwent change. Long-lived stereotypes, such as the Jewish American Princess and the Nice Jewish Girl, reflect Jews' continuing underlying anxieties about American Jewish life.... These stereotypes are frequently linked to gender, and women are far more likely to fill the canvas of others' imaginations than are men. The prominence of gender and family stereotypes (in contrast with some of the classic antisemitic stereotypes that focus on economic relations) suggests that American Jews most intimately experienced Jewishness in the private domain of family, love, and marriage. That intimacy, however, became a focus for Jews' self-rejection when those relationships became vehicles for stereotypes of undesirable Jewish behavior (Prell).

In combination with analyzing these stereotypes and how they play out on the small screen, personal interviews with professionals in different areas of expertise lend further insight. These areas include media psychology, television writing, and female-Jewish stereotypes.

To get a complete understanding of the character and story development across these shows, every available episode was watched. Only *Schitt's Creek* is a completed show, with six seasons. *Big Mouth* wrapped season four this past year, and so four seasons were watched for this thesis. *The Goldbergs* is in the midst of releasing its eighth season on ABC, so seven seasons were analyzed to ensure this thesis described complete seasons, with no unresolved story lines.

In looking for specific stereotypes when viewing the episodes for each show, repetition was the signifier of a character, situation, or action being stereotypical. Not all stereotypes are understood to be pejorative. Some individuals feel seen by characters who represent what they

would deem as stereotypical. Someone might identify with a neurotic Jew character or an overbearing Jewish mother due to their own relationship with their identity or religion. This is an incredible phenomenon. Feeling like a character in the media gets you or represents how you feel is something everyone should be able to experience. However, there is a point at which a stereotypical character becomes a toxic misrepresentation. For example, there is nothing wrong with having a wealthy Jewish character because some Jews are rich - just like some Jews are poor, and some Jews are middle class. When a character's growth is stunted by an adherence to a stereotype or jokes come at the expense of their identity, a character's stereotypical behavior exceeds validating an underrepresented group and instead becomes damaging. Additionally, stereotypes were identified by their proximity to their Jewishness. All people can be neurotic, greedy, or evil. Jews are no exception. However, the issue results when a character's villainy, neurosis, or greed is shown as a product of their Judaism. If the tone of a joke was, "Everyone knows that all Jews are greedy, and that's what makes this show funny," then, it was found to be stereotypical and did more harm than good.

A personal interview with Jewish television writer Jeffrey Richman occurred on January 23, 2021. He has been working in the industry for over 40 years, having worked on shows including *The Jeffersons*, *Frasier*, and *Modern Family*; his experience gives him a unique perspective to add to this thesis. Although not about Jews, *Modern Family* chronicles a gay couple and their experience adopting a child and later getting married. Richman has experience writing for marginalized characters on television, bring insight from within the writer's room. He also happens to be Jewish.

A second personal interview with Florida State University Communications and Media Professor, Dr. Arthur Raney occurred on February 4, 2021. He teaches the course Mass Media

and Society and runs the communications-psychology studies at Florida State University. He discussed the psychology of stereotypes and how media influences individuals.

This research is important because Jewish stereotypes have become so ingrained in people's minds that the idea that they are ill-informed, bigoted stereotypes has disappeared. We see from research and polling done by the ADL that people actually believe these misconceptions even if they don't consider themselves anti-Semitic.

This thesis explores one of the sources of misinformation and the consequent formation of anti-Semitic ideas about Jews. As a result of Jewish characters being in popular television shows, viewers are being taught things about Jewish culture through the mere existence of these characters. Even if the show isn't about Jewish culture, having Jewish main characters in mainstream television shows influences the ways in which Jews are perceived by audiences. We have called out the old stereotypical Jewish portrayal, but has it actually gone away? Perhaps it has just been rebranded?

Theories of Representation

Philosophers have been studying the idea and impacts of representation since Plato and Aristotle in 300 BC. Both ancient and modern philosophers have been seeing representation in all things, including mankind itself. In *An Essay on Man* by W. J. T. Mitchell, Mitchell writes, “man, for many philosophers... is the ‘representational animal,’... the creature whose distinctive character is the creation and manipulation of signs – things that stand for or take the place of something else” (Mitchell). This is the foundational premise of representation, which can be applied to different areas of study. The idea of embodying something or someone else without actually being it and using signs to allude to the origin of its representation is the basic principle of representation.

Plato and Aristotle were primary philosophers in the development of literary representation, the first kind of representational media study. They agreed that literature is merely a representation of life; however, they differed on their approaches to getting to this conclusion. Aristotle believed that all forms of representation were specific to humans; representation was in our nature. He philosophized that since manipulating signals was key to human nature, it must be key to our understanding of the world around us - we must create representations of the world around us to learn about it. This begins in infancy. Plato, on the other hand, believed representations to be more abstract. He understood representations, literary and otherwise, to be illusions that needed to be controlled because they had a tendency towards evil. Whether the intention is to create evil or not, Plato’s interpretation is closer to our modern understanding of representation than Aristotle. Representation has the possibility of creating as much harm as it can good. People can gain positive reinforcements from characters just as easily

as they can negative reinforcements through the uses of devices such as tokenism and stereotyping.

Aristotle broke the process of representation down into three parts that are still relevant today.

The first part is the object, or the symbol being represented.

The second part is the manner in which the symbol is being represented.

The third part is the means of representation through language, texts, discourses, or images.

In the context of television, the means is a combination of all three because we combine visual representation with a script being read by actors, creating a narrative – or text and language based – representation. Combining images with language to impact audiences means looking at representation on television shows through both the artistic and cultural lenses. When discussing the impact of representation, it is important to consider all three aspects (object, manner, and means) of the act of representing.

The theory of artistic representation is described in the book *Film and Phenomenology: Towards a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (1991) by Allan Casebier. Casebier describes artistic representation through quoting Edmund Husserl. Husserl describes artistic representation as, “the capacity of perceivers to transcend their perceptual acts in recognizing what an art object...depicts” (Casebier, 19). Television exists at the crossroads of communications and art. And as such, there are elements of television that are used to represent something greater than the tangible visual element.

When looking at representation from a cultural perspective, much information is garnered from Stuart Hall and his book *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. In this book Hall writes,

“Culture is about ‘shared meaning.’ Meanings can only be shared through our common access to language. So, language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings...Representation through language is therefore central to the process by which meaning is produced” (Hall, 1-2).

The language that is used in representation of characters is just as important as the visuals in creating meaning.

Analyzing artistic and cultural representation is important when asking questions about the prevalence of stereotypes. John Beverley, in his book *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory*, states representation is all about power. All aspects of representation of groups of people in the media reflect their power, and there are different kinds of representation based on the societal status of a group. Beverley quotes a phrase from the theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak, “If the subaltern could speak – that is, speak in a way that really mattered to us – then it wouldn’t be subaltern” (Beverley, 1). When looked at in the context of Jewish characters, the way they are represented in the media reflects their power in our society. Because they are characters, all of the language they use, language used about them, the way they look, dress, act, etc., – all of the means and manner of representation reflect their power and public opinion on them.

The cultivation theory was hypothesized and developed by George Gerbner in the 1960s. It is one of the pillars of mass media and society and communications theory. Cultivation theory suggests, “people who watch television frequently are more likely to be influenced by the

messages from the world of television. The influence goes to such an extent that their world view and perceptions start reflecting what they repeatedly see and hear on television. Television is, therefore, considered to contribute independently to the way people perceive social reality” (In Cultural Communication). The idea is that although television does not reflect reality accurately, people perceive the scenes they see played out on television to be truthful representations of real life. This can be problematic because according to the New York Times article “How Much Do We Love TV? Let Us Count the Ways” by John Koblin, the average American watches five hours of television a day (Koblin). In the book *Television and Its Viewers: Cultivation Theory and Research*, Morgan and Shanahan write, “This conceptualization of the role of television in our lives is the essence of George Gerbner’s theory of ‘cultivation.’ This simple hypothesis – that watching a great deal of television will be associated with a tendency to hold specific and distinct conception of reality, conceptions that are congruent with the most consistent and pervasive images and values of the medium – may, at first glance, appear to be so thoroughly reasonable and self-evident that one may be tempted to wonder what all the fuss is about... Cultivation theory and research have become a major arena in which questions about the ‘effects’ of television have been debated” (Morgan et al., 2-3). Controversy over the accuracy of the cultivation theory arises because watching television is a very different act for every viewer. Is the viewer watching five hours of news? Or, are they watching five hours of broadcast television programs? Critics argue that this is a very necessary distinction. Morgan and Shanahan go on to say that through the research they have done in their book, “...We...demonstrate that cultivation theory, though by no means flawless, offers a unique and valuable perspective on the role of television in the twentieth-century social life” (Morgan et al., 4).

It is important to recognize the shortcomings of the cultivation theory, as it is not without flaws, and it was also developed in a time when television and television viewership was very different than it is today. However, the core of the theory holds true: people are impacted by the television they watch.

Studies have shown that those who watch television more frequently, often display higher tendencies of being depressed and lonely, sense of alienation, have feelings of mistrust and think that the world is a malicious place. A study conducted in an experimental setting saw the outcome, at the end of the test period, that students who watch more action-adventure programs during a six-month period are more likely to believe that the world was a very dangerous place. They also believe that there is a high chance that they would be personally involved in a violent incident. This is in stark contrast compared to the attitudes of other students who did not watch as many action-adventure shows as the test group. Research by L.J. Shrum has shown that people who watch television frequently are more likely to...give answers that reflect the messages or images that are the most common or repeated on television (In Cultural Communication).

The media we consume influences our thought processes and patterns, thus, influencing how we think about groups being portrayed on television.

Typically, cultivation theory is used in research about violence on television and whether that leads children watching it to act violently, as shown in the above quote. In this thesis, cultivation theory is used to add context to how the portrayal of Jews on television influence viewer's opinion of them in real life. If people are shown negative stereotypes of Jews repeatedly on television, they will tend to believe the things they are seeing are facts. In the interview with Dr. Raney, he pointed out that it is important to remember that people do not always get all of their information on a particular group from the media. When people watch a television show, their interpretation of the messages they are receiving are combined with their real-life experiences. So if a character is being portrayed in a stereotypical manner, audience members who know Jews in real life are able to distinguish between reality and stereotypical representations. However, the danger is when viewers do not have real-life examples to

contextualize the shows they are watching. When there are no real-world examples, cultivation theory comes into play for viewers.

Cultivation theory is very applicable in this area of study because Jews average only 2.2 percent of the population in each state in America (Jewish Population in the United States by State). But, of course, this is just the average. In some places like Washington D.C., Jews make up 8.2 percent of the population, while in Arkansas Jews make up only 0.1 percent of the population (Jewish Population in the United States by State). Because Jews make up such a small number of the population in each state, a lot of people are getting the majority of their knowledge of Jewish culture through seeing them portrayed in the media and not from real-life experiences.

The study of communications and media influences the way we send and receive messages, including those about groups of people unlike one's own. The study of communications explains how representation matters in the media, and more specifically, on television. Through cultivation theory, the importance of representation can be readily observed because of the severe impact it can have. The way people are represented on television informs audiences about those people the same as meeting a person of a particular group in real life. With Jews, the small nature of their makeup of the population in America makes representation on television an important part of understanding who they are as a culture and religion. The people creating television shows about Jews send messages to their audiences, who may not have ever met a Jew, about who Jews are and what they stand for.

Jews on Television

Television development began in the 1920s when Philo Taylor Farnsworth began theorizing how to create one in his high school classroom. “Electronic television was first successfully demonstrated in San Francisco on Sept. 7, 1927. The system was designed by Philo Taylor Farnsworth...Boris Rosing in Russia had conducted some crude experiments in transmitting images 16 years before Farnsworth's first success. Also, a mechanical television system, which scanned images using a rotating disk with holes arranged in a spiral pattern, had been demonstrated by John Logie Baird in England and Charles Francis Jenkins in the United States earlier in the 1920s. However, Farnsworth's invention, which scanned images with a beam of electrons, is the direct ancestor of modern television. The first image he transmitted on it was a simple line. Soon he aimed his primitive camera at a dollar sign because an investor had asked, ‘When are we going to see some dollars in this thing, Farnsworth?’” (Stephens).

In the 1950s, televisions became a household object. Television networks developed and began to work out some of the issues they had in the 1940s. The growing access to television impacted businesses built around previous forms of entertainment, “During the first five years of the 1950s, ownership of televisions skyrocketed, affecting other forms of entertainment available to the public. This time period witnessed, for example, the closing of many movie theaters, as motion pictures competed with television for consumer attention” (Boyd). Programming also became more advanced. There was programming for children and news, with primarily two stations: NBC and CBS. According to Mitchell Stephens’ article, programming combined two previous popular media forms, theater and radio. This led to many dramatic anthologies being broadcast on television, a period of time known as “The Golden Age” (Stephens). Stephens writes, “by 1960...viewers apparently preferred dramas or comedies that, while perhaps less

literary, at least had the virtue of sustaining a familiar set of characters week after week. I Love Lucy, the hugely successful situation comedy starring Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, had been recorded on film since it debuted in 1951 (lasting until 1957). It had many imitators” (Stephens). This led to many dramatic anthologies being broadcast on television, a period of time known as “The Golden Age” (Stephens).

From the start of television becoming an industry, Jews have played a prominent role. Jews worked behind the scenes producing, writing, and acting, and they were also represented on screen through Jewish characters. In the My Jewish Learning article “Jews on Television: Looking at Jews on the Small Screen,” the article discusses different Jewish representation in the early days of television. Variety shows that became popular in the 1950s and 60s moved Jewish humor into the mainstream. Comedians like Mel Brooks, Woody Allen, Milton Berle, and Neil Simon “combined traditional Yiddishism with physical comedy” (Mjl).

The Goldbergs was a situation comedy aired in the 1950s, that revolved around its main character, a Jewish young woman from the Bronx. “The Goldberg family did not hide their Judaism, and the show was influenced by the star, producer, and writer, Gertrude Berg, and her Jewish background. She spoke with a slight Eastern European accent, and her language was often inflected with Yiddish” (Mjl). The Goldbergs worked to normalize Jewish culture and further bring it into the mainstream. After The Goldbergs was taken off the air, few shows featured Jewish characters prominently. But notably, The Dick Van Dyke Show was based on the career experiences of Jewish comedian Carl Reiner though these experiences are reconfigured to fit a white protestant main character. My Jewish Learning reports, “Executives on The Dick Van Dyke Show, which was created and written by Jews, urged the show’s writers to make its New York Jewish main character less ‘ethnic’” (Mjl). Jews could pour themselves into the characters

they created for the small screen but had to conceal their Jewish identity to ensure audiences wouldn't identify them as Jewish.

In the 1970s, television became more interested in exploring different perspectives and portraying an array of identities. This allowed many different audiences to see themselves in the characters on the shows they were watching. Jews were one of these audiences as television shows tackled Jewish issues. As *Jews on Television: Looking at Jews on the Small Screen* puts it, "One of the most popular Jewish characters on television was Rhoda Morgenstern from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and its eventual spin off, *Rhoda*. Played by Valerie Harper, Rhoda made her Judaism explicit. She projected many negative stereotypes—always worrying about her weight and being neurotic about men. The show also famously covered her marriage to a non-Jewish man" (Mjl). Although it was great for Jews watching the show to see a character on television that shared similarities to themselves, the character reinforced negative stereotypes about Jews to the show's non-Jewish audience.

Perhaps the most pivotal show for Jewish representation was *Seinfeld*, which was on from 1989 to 1998. In the 1990s, the observational comedy of Jerry Seinfeld was merged with the neurotic humor of Larry David, and one of the most Jewish shows ever on television was born. *Seinfeld* revolutionized the way Jews were portrayed on television, unabashedly focusing entire episodes on Jewish themes, from attending a bris, to dealing with crazy Jewish parents. *Seinfeld* had immense impact on the shows that came after it, "A number of other shows followed *Seinfeld*'s lead, featuring openly Jewish characters and themes, and some episodes dealt with controversial Jewish subjects. Whether it was the stereotypical portrayal of the materialistic Jewish Long Island girl in *The Nanny*, intermarriage on *Dharma & Greg*, or negative stereotypes about Jewish men on *Friends*, the portrayal of Jews on television did not sit

well with everyone in the Jewish community” (Mjl). Seinfeld was the show that ultimately normalized being Jewish on television. The show was not about being Jewish, it just featured two Jewish main characters and took on Jewish story lines like shows about having a bris, talking to your Rabbi, and attending a Bar Mitzvah. In Jerry Seinfeld, Larry David and the Modern Jew by Daniel Garrihy, Garrihy explains, “Ariel Levy believes that Seinfeld’s decision to portray Jewishness as commonplace rather than emphasizing the otherness of the Jew (à la Woody Allen) helped to create a portrayal of Jew as everyman” (Garrihy). By not making a big deal out of the Jewish identity of some of the show’s main characters, they set a precedent that shows could have main characters that were Jewish and normal, everyday people. As pointed out by Garrihy, not everyone was happy with *Seinfeld’s* portrayal of Jews. They argue that since the show was such a huge success, they should have used the opportunity to show Jews in a positive light and veer away from negative stereotypes. However, others believe that show more explores modern New York life as a Jew in a comedic way (Garrihy). While Seinfeld wasn’t perfect, it was, in many ways, the beginning of a new era for Jewish representation on television.

Regardless of how audiences feel about the portrayal of Jews on Seinfeld, the one thing that is undeniable is that it brought Jewish life and Jewish characters into the forefront of pop culture, influencing the shows that followed. The 2000s realized the normalization of Judaism on television, thanks largely to Seinfeld. More and more shows featured Jewish characters, making less of a big deal out of their Judaism. *Jews on Television: Looking at Jews on the Small Screen* cites shows like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, and *Entourage* as a few examples of these kinds of shows. Shows in the 2000s where Jews are the main characters, but the plot is unrelated to their Judaism are the kinds of shows that were examined in this thesis. When choosing the television shows to study, an

examination of the demographics of viewers and the show's popularity on streaming platforms was conducted along with confirmation the show starred Jews without being a show about Jewish culture or themes. Data was pulled from 2019, and the shows that fit the criteria were *Schitt's Creek*, *Big Mouth*, and *The Goldbergs*. Predominantly a show for adults, *Schitt's Creek* drew in mass viewership for its show finale, and it is the most critically acclaimed television show of all time, giving it great influence as it lives on in perpetuity on Netflix. *Big Mouth* is one of the most popular shows on the most popular streaming service, entertaining and influencing young adults. A show that attracts children and their families, *The Goldbergs* is a popular show entering its ninth season.

The Goldbergs is a family show on ABC. According to a Broadcasting & Cable study done in 2018, 60 percent of people who watch *The Goldbergs* are under 44 years old. And of those people, 57 percent are female, which Broadcasting & Cable concludes makes it a sweet spot for young moms (Damata). Parents watch *The Goldbergs* with their children because it is a family show on a family network. *The Goldbergs* premiered in 2013 and wrapped up its eighth season in 2019. Adam Goldberg created the show to tell stories from his own childhood growing up in Pennsylvania in the 1980s. Growing up, Goldberg carried a video camera with him creating home movies and videotaping his family. In the show, these home videos are reflected by fictionalized characters based on Goldberg's real family to make up each episode. At the end of each episode, the videos Goldberg took as a child play before the credits.

The Goldbergs is set in the 1980s in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, and shows the reality of the '80s through a pre-adolescent's point of view, and later in the series, teenager's, eyes. The show is loosely based on the showrunner's childhood, during which he regularly videotaped events – many of these videos are reenacted throughout the program, with the original version then shown before the end credits. The series stars...Murray and...Beverly. Their two older children are Erica and Barry. The youngest child, Adam, documents his family life with his video camera. Beverly's father, Albert "Pops" Solomon, is frequently around to provide advice or to help out his grandchildren

(often behind his daughter's back). The present-day "Adult Adam" narrates every episode as taking place in "1980-something." The show's episodes are frequently built around the era's pop culture in a non-chronological order, and each season contains references from throughout the decade...Additionally, several 1980s cultural icons guest star as themselves on the show and a number of figures from Goldberg's actual life guest star as fictional characters (The Goldbergs).

In 2015, *Schitt's Creek* went on the air, and it concluded in 2019. Dan Levy and his father Eugene Levy created the show that went on to become an underground hit. The father and son duo also star in the show, playing father and son.

The wealthy Rose family—video store magnate Johnny, his wife and former soap opera actress Moira, and their spoiled adult children David and Alexis—lose their fortune after being defrauded by their business manager. They are forced to rebuild their lives with their sole remaining asset: a small town named Schitt's Creek, which Johnny bought for David as a joke birthday gift in 1991. The Roses relocate to Schitt's Creek, moving into two adjacent rooms in a run-down motel. As the family adjusts to their new lives, their well-to-do attitudes come into conflict with the more provincial residents of Schitt's Creek, including mayor Roland Schitt, his wife Jocelyn, and the motel's manager Stevie Budd (Schitt's Creek).

Schitt's Creek had its series finale in 2019 after six seasons. The finale drew in 1.3 million viewers. After five years of no Emmy's, the last season swept the television awards, breaking records:

1. First comedy show to win all four acting categories in one year
2. First directing duo to win Outstanding Directing of a Comedy Series since 2004
3. Third comedy to win its first Emmy for its final season
4. Fourth live-action series in which all the main actors won Emmys
5. Fourth show to win Best Comedy Series, Actress and Actor in the same year
6. Sixth straight year of Best Comedy Series and Best Actress in a Comedy awards going to the same show
7. Most awarded comedy in a single year (Eng)

Schitt's Creek was an underdog of a show, but it now has a huge following. Winning several prestigious awards has given the show more attention and even greater influence.

While *Big Mouth* and *The Goldbergs* are overtly Jewish, *Schitt's Creek* is subtly Jewish. A viewer could watch the entire season, miss a few references, and not know that the show is about a Jewish family. However, the show holds a special place in the hearts of many young Jews who admire the show. This could be because the show takes Jewish tropes and turns them into a show for everyone, not just Jews. "The focus on family and family relationships is, of course, a central element in the Jewish tradition. The show itself is very much a family affair, Sarah Levy, Daniel's real-life sister, is playing a sunny-yet-flighty waitress at the local cafe. Not to mention that Jews have had the theme of losing everything and starting from scratch in a new place as penniless outsiders trending since the Assyrian exile" (Solovey). The show embraces Jewish tradition and expression in a way that appeals to all and is especially comforting to a Jewish audience. This isn't to say there are no overt references to Judaism in *Schitt's Creek*. In Season 2, episode 5, Johnny and Bob, the owner of the building where Johnny works, have a conversation about starting a business. In the conversation Bob gets the idea to start a bagel business because since Johnny is Jewish, he must be an expert on all things bagels. It is a show that is thoroughly Jewish without always overtly stating it, making it an interesting addition to this thesis to see how stereotypes exist in a Jewish show that avoids explicit Jewish jokes and expression.

The third show examined is *Big Mouth*, a television show about two middle school boys, Nick and Andrew, and their group of friends growing up in Westchester, New York, that premiered on Netflix in 2017. The show is loosely based on the real lives of its creators, Nick

Kroll and Andrew Goldberg, diving deep into the realities of middle school and being young through frank, and often crude/explicit, conversations about puberty.

The series follows a group of 7th graders, including best friends Nick Birch and Andrew Glouberman, as they navigate their way through puberty with struggles like masturbation and sexual arousal all in the suburbs of New York City. Acting as over-sexualized shoulder angels are the hormone monsters: Maurice (who pesters Andrew and Matthew and occasionally Nick), Connie—the hormone monstress (who pesters Jessi and Nick and occasionally Missy) and Mona (who mainly pesters Missy). Throughout the series, the kids interact with people and objects who are often personified and offer helpful, yet confusing, advice in their puberty-filled lives including the ghost of Duke Ellington, a French-accented Statue of Liberty, a pillow capable of getting pregnant, a bar of Adderall, and even Jessi's own vulva. They seek out their destiny as puberty destroys them mentally and physically (Big Mouth).

In 2019, Big Mouth was the third most streamed show on Netflix, according to the Business Insider article “Most Watched Shows on Netflix in 2019” by Libby Torres. That made it the first most streamed show on Netflix starring a Jewish character. The target audience for the show is viewers aged 17-25, making it a show with a great deal of impact on young people.

It should be noted that these shows are all self-reflexive and autobiographical in some way or another. This begs the question: Can these representations be stereotypical if they are just representations of real people? A television show is different from a documentary. At a certain point characters on shows venture outside the structure provided by the real person, becoming a different entity. In the interview conducted for this thesis, seasoned television writer, Jeffery Richman spoke to the creation of characters from the perspective of someone in writer's room. “Don't forget, in a sitcom there's a writer's room. It's not just one person writing; each character is a collaboration. The showrunner is just filtering the suggestions he wants to incorporate. I could pitch things about my family that might fit really nicely into that show and it gets put in or, the showrunner could say, ‘No, I want jokes that fit the paradigm I have given you’ ... You're not necessarily creating characters based on people you know, it's more your experiences that you're

putting on them - or what you want your experience to be. No matter the character, all of the writers are writing for that character. So, my relationship to those two gay characters is going to be different than a 35-year-old straight man's, than a 40-year-old woman's. I think it's a crime to not grow a character." Because of the collaborative nature of television writing, characters are based on people in real life, but they rarely embody those real people wholly. Rather, a character comes from the idea of a real person who is meaningful to the showrunner, and the writing team projects themselves, their experiences, and their loved ones into that character following the guidelines given by the showrunner.

The intent of this thesis is to present a comprehensive mix of shows, each of which is commonly known and popular while also influencing different demographics of the study of communications and media. The final mix includes one show that has immense critical acclaim (*Schitt's Creek*), one show that is popular amongst millennials on the most used streaming platform (Big Mouth), and one show that is a family show that younger kids watch with their parents (The Goldbergs). Just like the many shows before them, these shows influence their wide range of viewers through their depiction of Jewish characters.

The Jewish Look

It would be irresponsible in a discussion about Jewish representation to not discuss the overabundance of white, often Ashkenazi, Jews on television. This common practice leads to a belief by the public that all Jews are white. This is one of the more dangerous aspects of the way Jews are represented on television because, in reality, Judaism is a religion with diverse members. The stereotype that all Jews are white works to erase the multitude of races and ethnicities that subscribe to the Jewish religion.

There are many different sects of Judaism. The religion is divided based on traditions and practices, and it's also divided based on location. There are groups of Jews around the world, but the two largest, as researched by the Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, are German-descended Ashkenazi Jews, comprising over 75 percent of the world's Jewish population, and Iberian-descended Sephardic Jews, comprising up to 20 percent (Demographics of Judaism). In the Washington Post article, "Is Judaism an ethnicity? A race? A nationality? Trump signs an order and provokes an identity crisis", author Julie Zauzmer writes, "It's a religion, yes — but then again, many who identify as Jews aren't religious. It's passed down from parents to children and bears recognizable genetic characteristics — but then again, Jews come in all colors and racial backgrounds" (Zauzmer). According to the Pew Research Center, there are 14 million Jews around the world. And these Jews are not just living in Europe and America. Pew Research Center reports, "Geographically, Jews are concentrated primarily in North America (44%) and the Middle East - North Africa region (41%). The remainder of the global Jewish population is found in Europe (10%), Latin America and the Caribbean (3%), Asia and the Pacific (between 1% and 2%) and sub-Saharan Africa (less than 1%)" (Jews).

Despite the racial and ethnic diversity of this religion, television representation reflects a Judaism that is homogeneous.

All of the Jews on *Schitt's Creek*, *Big Mouth*, and *The Goldbergs* are white (with the exception of Missy on *Big Mouth*, who is African American) and assumedly, Ashkenazi. In addition to the Jews on television lacking diversity, there is also very little discussion within these shows on the lack of racial, ethnic, and even religious diversity. These shows where Judaism isn't at the core of the show uses our understanding of the "Jewish look" to convey a character's Judaism to the audience. Most television shows on network television have a 20 to 30-minute run time. And since anyone can flip on their TV and start watching any episode of a TV show that just happens to be on, television writers have the tricky job of making sure audiences get a full story within that 20 to 30 minutes, and that they understand who the characters are within that story. Dr. Raney said in his interview that the lack of time in television to create a tangible world for a viewer is one of the reasons television shows rely on stereotypical characters. If a character looks, talks, or acts a certain way that viewers associate with a group of people, the audience understands something about that character without having to waste any of the episode's short 20 minutes on it. In other words, stereotypes help audiences quickly identify a character.

To a non-Jewish consumer of media, there are certain physical qualities that signify a person is Jewish, thus creating the "Jewish look." The Jewish look includes primarily frizzy, curly hair and characters with big noses. As Sharrona Pearl put it in her article "The Myth of the Jewish Nose," "The big nose has long served as a visible way to mark this otherwise invisible group of others" (Pearl). Although there is no one way a Jew looks, the media uses these visual signifiers, like big noses or frizzy hair, to tell their audiences that certain characters are Jewish.

When watching the three shows, these physical stereotypes were looked for in the Jewish characters.

In *Schitt's Creek*, Johnny and David are two characters who are assumed to be Jewish because of the way they look, before that fact about them is even revealed. The show is constantly making jokes about it. In *11 Very Jewish Moments You May Have Missed in Schitt's Creek*, author Danielle Kutas writes,

...instead of portraying Jews as one-dimensional characters like Hollywood so often does, Eugene and Dan have managed to create an authentically funny show that addresses Jewish stereotypes about looks, athleticism, and even bagels... While high on dental surgery meds, Patrick calls David the "Jewish Channing Tatum." Of course, this is a major compliment to David, who is thrilled to be compared to People's former Sexiest Man Alive. This is one of many instances the show refers to David (and Johnny) "looking Jewish," a common but false stereotype born out of Western beauty standards. It's such a back-handed compliment —and so ridiculous to think that if David isn't Channing Tatum, he can be the next best thing: the Jewish version. The runner-up nods to 'looking Jewish' include Moira calling Johnny the 'Sephardic Mr. Clean,' referencing his ethnic Jewish roots, and David calling himself 'mildly Hebraic' (Kutas).

This is important because it doesn't lean into stereotypes to get laughs. The jokes are coming from a satiric effort to diffuse the stereotypical looks of the main characters. They recognize that physical Jewish stereotypes exist and use humor to satirize them.

Another good example of this "Jewish representation sleight of hand" is in *The Goldbergs* when Erica peruses her dream of becoming a rock star. In Season 2 episode 17, Erica begins her stage career telling her parents her stage name is now Ricky Gold, saying, "because Goldberg is like, you know" (Armus et al., 2013-present). Erica makes comments about changing her last name for her career twice in the show. What she means by her last name being "you know" is that Goldberg is too Jewish sounding. At first, this comment seemed a failed attempt at satire, trying to show how people change their "ethnic" sounding last names to be more appealing to audiences. Because no other character acknowledges the anti-Semitism that is

attached with this decision, it just reinforces the idea that if a person wants to be successful, they have to have a WASP sounding last name. Possibly noticing the issues with this reoccurring “joke,” *The Goldbergs* corrects its mistake in Season 6 episode 10. Uncle Marvin comes over for Thanksgiving, announcing to his family he is going to be a famous actor. He tells his family that he is now going by his new stage name Mordechai Fishman adding, “Most actors want to change their name to something less ethnic. But when they zig, I zag!” (Armus et al., 2013-present). Through the contextualization of this joke, and the joke they were trying to make earlier with Erica, *The Goldbergs* makes fun of anti-Semitism in Hollywood through satire.

At the same time, the use of physical stereotypes can reinforce to Jewish audiences that the way they look is undesirable. In *The Goldbergs*, Erica isn’t cool at school until she straightens her hair and eliminates all of her “Jewish features.” She was a neurotic, annoying girl with frizzy hair, but after straightening her hair and conforming to “WASP” beauty standards, she becomes one of the most popular girls in school. In Season 2 episode 22, Erica gets pink eye and so she can’t take care of her physical appearance like she usually does. Her hair gets curly again and she has to wear glasses, leading her non-Jewish friends to become embarrassed by her (Armus et al., 2013-present).

Throughout history, Jews have largely been ostracized from society. In the article, “What Does It Mean to be Genetically Jewish?” by Oscar Schwartz, Schwartz writes about learning how his family’s genetic test could show they were Jewish, “Jewish communities remained segregated, by force and by custom, mixing only occasionally with local populations. Isolation slowly narrowed the gene pool, which now gives modern Jews of European descent... a set of identifiable genetic variations that set them apart from other European populations at a microscopic level” (Schwartz). So, although Judaism is a religion, and therefore is diverse,

Judaism has developed distinct genetic features due to isolation. Television shows can cast people who have a certain Jewish look to code a character as Jewish without having to explicitly say they're Jewish or to emphasize their Jewishness. This overuse of a person who looks stereotypically Ashkenazi Jewish, leads to a popular belief that all Jews are white and Ashkenazi.

In the article “We Need to Stop Erasing Mizrahi Jews: The stories and cultures of Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews need to finally be heard and celebrated” by Sarah Boxer, Boxer writes about growing up in America and the focus on Ashkenazi Judaism and culture, “In America, white Jews of European descent are often considered the default in terms of American Jewry. But Jews of all racial and national backgrounds not only exist in America but have unique, beautiful communities of their own with distinct cultural traditions and historical traumas... Non-Jews’ understandings of Jewish traditions all came from an Ashkenazi lens, whether that be bagels and lox or Seinfeld. Non-Jews were (and are) often surprised to find out that Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews even exist” (Boxer). The media focuses on the representation of white Jews and the stereotypes associated with them, but the bigger stereotype being played into here is the idea that all Jews are white.

In the three very disparate television shows analyzed in this thesis, each relies largely on this non-Jew idea of what a Jew should look like to convey Judaism. In “Jerry Seinfeld, Larry David and the Modern Jew” Garrihy writes, “Larry David can be seen as a definite culprit of misrepresentation as not only was the character of George in Seinfeld based directly off of David, but also, David plays a very similar autobiographical character in his show Curb Your Enthusiasm. Marsha Woodbury believes that George stands as the mass media representation of a Jewish man: ‘short, bald, aggressive, obsessive, and constantly trying to overcompensate for

his profound insecurity. George is a stereotype...” (Garrihy). This is very similar to Andrew’s dad, Marty, in *Big Mouth*.

Through the use of the “Jewish look” established in *Seinfeld*, *Big Mouth* tells the audience that the Gloubermans are a Jewish family before their religious identity is ever discussed. They play into tropes of Jews as short, bald, aggressive and obsessive and perpetuate the mass media representation of a Jewish man.

The sole non-white Jewish character in the three shows studied is Missy from *Big Mouth*. Her mother is Jewish, but as she explains in Season 3 Episode 2, “Well, as an NPR woman, who was born Jewish but no longer practices Judaism...” (Fetter et al., 2017- present). So, Missy, although “genetically” Jewish, wasn’t raised religiously Jewish, and therefore doesn’t have any kind of relationship with her Judaism that viewers see in the show. Whereas other characters, like Andrew and Jessi, have storylines that reference their religion, Missy’s religious identity is not a part of her character at all. In the show’s decision to focus on the Judaism of only the white characters, *Big Mouth* plays into white-Ashkenazi tropes and misses a substantive opportunity to expose its audience, Jewish and non-Jewish, to a different Jewish perspective. Of course, part of cultural aspects of Judaism is that someone can be “Jewish” without practicing the religious aspects of it, but without Missy exploring the Jewish part of her identity, we have no other perspective on Judaism than the traditional white perspective.

In Season 4 of *Big Mouth*, Missy does start to question the way her parents raised her, and her relationship with the different parts of her identity (Fetter et al., 2017- present). She confronts her parents about not “allowing her to be black.” Hopefully as Missy’s character develops, audiences will get to see a young woman navigate the Jewish parts of her identity as well. In a show about the complications and difficulties of growing up, it would be nice to

address the cognitive dissonance that can come with being young and understanding one's intersectionality. In the article "'Big Mouth': Ayo Edebiri to Replace Jenny Slate as Missy," Turchiano quotes one of the series creators, Nick Kroll, "It's about Missy's continued evolution as a person — that she has all of these different parts of who she is. There's the sidelines Missy and the more sexually adventurous Missy, mirror Missy, and then also this Missy that she's been discovering [in Season 4] through hanging out with her cousins and really taking a look at her Black identity" (Turchiano). Audiences who very rarely see themselves represented on television are being given the opportunity to see themselves in Missy, and hopefully as the show explores Missy's character, audiences will get to see Jewish Missy.

In Big Mouth Season 2 Episode 1, Missy calls Andrew out for being a white-cis-hero-male with privilege. Andrew replies, "But, I'm not white. I'm Jewish, which is worse to some people" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). Whether or not Jews are white is a widely debated topic, and public opinion on the question of if Jews are white or not has changed throughout history. In the Atlantic article, "Are Jews White?" By Emma Green, Green outlines the history of Jewish whiteness in America writing,

From the earliest days of the American republic, Jews were technically considered white, at least in a legal sense. Under the Naturalization Act of 1790, they were considered among the "free white persons" who could become citizens. Later laws limited the number of immigrants from certain countries, restrictions which were in part targeted at Jews. But unlike Asian and African immigrants in the late 19th century, Jews retained a claim to being 'Caucasian,' meaning they could win full citizenship status based on their putative race. Culturally, though, the racial status of Jews was much more ambiguous. Especially during the peak of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Jews lived in tightly knit urban communities that were distinctly marked as separate from other American cultures: They spoke Yiddish, they published their own newspapers, they followed their own schedule of holidays and celebrations. Those boundaries were further enforced by widespread anti-Semitism: Jews were often excluded from taking certain jobs, joining certain clubs, or moving into certain neighborhoods. Insofar as 'whiteness' represents acceptance in America's dominant culture, Jews were not yet white (Green).

Green writes of the differentiation between physical whiteness and cultural whiteness. And although some Jews were already Caucasian, they still had to “became white” through assimilation.

Because Judaism is an ethnicity as well as a religion, the relationship some Jews have with their whiteness is complicated. “As Jews assimilated into American culture, ‘ironically, investment in religiosity paved the way for greater white identification of many Jews,’ he [Lewis Gordon, a professor of philosophy at the University of Connecticut] said, allowing more religiously observant Jews to think of themselves as white, rather than ethnically Jewish” (Green). Some Caucasian Jews think of themselves as white and others do not. Anti-Semitism to some, as discussed in Green’s article, is proof that Judaism is a race because the violence is based on Jewish characteristics not religious differences.

This line that Andrew says to Missy in Big Mouth about his being Jewish in comparison to his whiteness, is almost a throw-away line, but it carries huge weight. It exposes audiences to a conversation that is much bigger than just some people thinking being Jewish eliminates the privilege they receive from their whiteness. This comment requires the contextual explanation, which has been previously laid out in this thesis. In bringing up this topic, but not actually getting into the history of it, the show erases Jews of color and ignores white privilege. A history of being othered and victims of a “race-based” genocide has led some Jews to feel like they don’t fit in as white. However, it is dangerous to, as Andrew in Big Mouth does, act as though Caucasian Jews don’t benefit from systems of white privilege.

There is also the issue of Jews with interfaith identities. Not all Jews grow up in a household where both of their parents are Jewish- something that is rarely discussed in conversations of Jewish representation. In Season 4 Episode 13, *Schitt’s Creek* ends the season

with a Christmas special (Barnsley et al., 2015-2020). A seemingly odd choice for a family of Jews, but as the episode unfolds, viewers learn that not all of the Roses are Jewish. Moira is Christian and Johnny is Jewish. Neither of them converted to the other's religion, raising their children with aspects of both. In the Christmas special, Stevie says merry Christmas to Patrick but not David. David asks Stevie why he didn't get a merry Christmas, and Stevie replies, "I thought you were Jewish?" David then reveals to Stevie, and the audience, "I'm a delightful half-half situation, which is why it's so annoying that my dad thinks he can boss people around on a holiday that he technically has no authority over."

The Pew Research Center found that one in five adult Americans were raised in interfaith homes (One-in-Five U.S. adults were raised in Interfaith Homes). Having David, a main character on a popular television show, embrace his interfaith identity in such a proud way normalizes something that is so common for many Americans, young and old. For Jews and non-Jews alike, it shows how a person can be confident in their intersectionality and identify primarily as one religion while respecting and participating in another religion. Not to mention, as pointed out by Emily Burack in her article "The 'Schitt's Creek Holiday Special Leans Into Interfaith Identity," Stevie shows audiences how someone can be respectful to people who might not be celebrating Christmas during the holidays (Burack). This is a beneficial lesson.

At the end of the episode, Johnny puts up a menorah next to their Christmas tree- another touching nod to their interfaith family. The Pew Research Center found that in 2013, 71 percent of Jews who were married to non-Jews put up a Christmas tree the previous year (One-in-Five U.S. adults were raised in Interfaith Homes). It is a beautiful episode of the show that celebrates being raised in an interfaith household and the mixing of holiday traditions.

While interviewing Jeffrey Richman, he brought up some of the history of writing Jewish characters but calling them something else so they wouldn't be "too Jewish." He said this can be especially seen in shows like Seinfeld and The Golden Girls, where characters are coded as Jewish but identify themselves as Italian. In the article "Jewish Soul of The Golden Girls," author Debra Nussbaum Cohen describes the character of Dorothy as, "Though Dorothy was identified as Italian-American, I never bought it; the way she spoke, the way she dressed, the way she saw the world and especially her humor all struck me as quintessentially Jewish" (Cohen). This is the same with George in Seinfeld. Both Dorothy and George are written by Jews, played by Jews, embody Jewish stereotypes, but express to the audience that they are Italian. Jeffrey Richman discussed how television writers write what they know. And, if a writer is Jewish, they will write their character as Jewish but proclaim that character to be other in an attempt to exclude them from being labeled "too Jewish." Richman explains this approach, "Being Italian and Catholic was more palatable to the TV audience...Even in pitching shows, there was an unspoken, or sometimes spoken, rule about something being too Jewish. In casting, the rule was: write Yiddish, cast British. Write as the Jewish comedy writer you are, and then cast a complete WASP in that part." The three shows analyzed for this thesis have not reflected this sentiment. These characters are unapologetically Jewish from the first minute they are on screen to the last. There were no Jewish characters masquerading around as anything other than exactly who they were. This is a very positive portrayal because it shows how a Jewish identity can be embraced wholeheartedly- nothing is too Jewish. A character can be Jewish, and it doesn't have to be something that the character hides. Even in some of the less positive portrayals of Judaism in these shows, there is never a single scene where someone is ashamed of

who they are - a Jewish character. This is very powerful, and it signifies progress in tearing down old Hollywood stereotypes of Jews.

However, this being said, there is still more work to be done. Jews are not a monolith, but they are mostly represented as one. In the three shows featured in this thesis, this is evident. The lack of Jewish diversity on television works to erase the existence and ignore the bigotry that Jews of color face. As entertaining as these shows are, their lack of diversity promotes the stereotype that all Jews are white, and all Jews have a certain look.

The Greedy Jew vs. The Anxious Jew

The Greedy Jew stereotype is the most well-known stereotype about Jews. According the ADL, 15 percent of the 800 Americans polled said Jews have too much power in the business world, and 10 percent agreed with the statement, “Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want.” The ADL shows through its research that Americans overwhelmingly believe that Jews control the movie and television industry and will do whatever they can to make sure Jews continue to dominate and lead in this industry (Jews). The history of this stereotype is long and deeply seeded. Even as early as the Middle Ages, Jews were scapegoated as the source for communal money problems. In the article, “Greedy, Rich Jews: an exhibition takes on the millennia-lasting stereotypes” by Giulia Morpurgo, Morpurgo writes,

In the Middle Ages, worries about money-lending – in which both Christians and Jews were involved, despite both faiths considered it sinful – led the Catholic Church, to dissuade its followers to engage in it, to diffuse the characterization of such activity as inherently Jewish, something Christians had to distance themselves from...It was in this ideological and historical context that the figure of Judas acquired an increasingly negative connotation. Since then, it had been interpreted ambiguously, as he might have marked Jesus to death but had previously been his closest confidant and later regretted his betrayal, as written in the Gospel of Matthew. Yet now, Judas turned into the archetypal traitor, his greediness a feature of the whole Jewish people... (Morpurgo).

And with Judas, the “greedy Jew” was born. As time went on, the greedy Jew stereotype snowballed into the stereotype that all Jews are rich and money obsessed.

The birth of this particular imagery is associated with the Sephardi families who resettled in the United Kingdom in the 18th-century: by providing banking services to governments, they reached an extensive political influence. British people feared these new arrivals, and all sorts of rumors spread: in the City, there were even talks that Jews wanted to buy St. Paul’s Cathedral to convert it into a synagogue... Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, most Jews were actually poor. Throughout Europe – especially in the Eastern region, where emancipation laws came late – they were often confined to live in ghettos, could not own property and were restricted from practicing several occupations, as recounted by Professor Monika Richarz in a 2008 briefing to United Nations officers... Yet, in the collective imagination, Jews remained wealthy, globalist capitalists: even Karl Marx, whom many Socialist Jews worshipped, wrote in his pamphlet *On the Jewish Question* (1844), that Jewish spirituality was

nothing but a reflection of their economic life, and essentially equated Judaism to the cult of money (Morpurgo).

The Jewish religion and capitalism have a close tie because of the false narrative being perpetuated for centuries that Jews are responsible for other's financial ruin.

As discussed in the video, *Jews are Cheap*, part of the *That's Racist* series, Rabbi Eliyahu Fink discusses this same fact – that this greedy Jew stereotype is born out of fact. Because Jews were not allowed to own land, they worked in money – banking, art collecting, etc. Their jobs in banking made Jews the ones lending out money and then collecting it. These are the two parts of the stereotype: Jews have all of the money and Jews are always trying to hoard as much money as they can.

The stereotype of Jews as greedy is so dangerous, old, and prevalent in nature that it was no surprise that it made an appearance in two of the three television shows watched for this thesis. The Rose family in *Schitt's Creek* was extremely wealthy when they were running Rose Video back in their glory days. They, of course, then lost everything, had no money, and were living in a motel as a favor from the Mayor of Schitt's Creek. Even as this family desperately tried to get some wealth back, it was because they had nothing – not because they were greedy. The audience gets virtually no idea of how they lived before, only snippets, like in the Christmas scene from the past and the giant family portrait from Season 3 Episode 12 (Barnsley et al., 2015-2020). However, despite their lack of wealth, they dress extremely well, act as though they are above the people in the town where they are living and turn their noses up to things they deem low brow. Although they aren't greedy, they reinforce that all Jews are rich by being entitled and previously extremely wealthy. When audiences only see Jews on the television shows they watch as rich and snobby characters, it reinforces, through cultivation theory, that their beliefs about all Jews being rich are not stereotypes but fact.

At the same time, *The Goldbergs* features a Jewish working-class family in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. They aren't poor, but the story is not defined by the family's wealth, rather by the shows efforts to portray the Goldberg family as a family that appeals to viewers because they are "just like us." They are a hard-working family, and the show spends a lot of time focusing in on the parent's and grandparent's efforts to create a comfortable life for their family while still teaching their children to be driven individuals as well. *The Goldbergs* is a show about the interworking of a suburban family, and a lot of that has to do with finances and family businesses. While they don't struggle financially, they don't have everything handed to them on a silver platter. However, not making the Goldberg family wealthy doesn't mean the show avoids playing into Jewish-greed related stereotypes. Murray is a character defined by his lack of care in every situation except those related to money. He is called cheap by his family and friends on multiple occasions, and in several episodes his children try to get him to hang out with them by pitching him ideas that will offer the least expense. In Season 5 episode 12, the family goes out to dinner for the character Geoff, and the whole event is a spectacle. After the voiceover tells the audience, "It was now decision-making time. And for my dad, the only choice was how to save money." Murray commands his family, "Okay, it's time for Murray's menu rules. Remember no prime cuts, no fancy sides, no out-of-season vegetables, no market price, no salad bar, no items in French, no dry-aged anything, and most importantly...No appetizers of any kind, 'cause that's how they screw ya!" (Armus et al., 2013-present). It would be one thing if they were a family struggling to make ends meet, but this quote is just one of many where Murray is trying desperately to pinch a penny.

In *Big Mouth*, Andrew's family, as well as the other Jewish families, aren't financially insecure, but they aren't wealthy and intitled either. *Big Mouth* actually spends no time

discussing matters related to money. Whereas the lack of attention on financial inequity could be a whole conversation on the intersection of classism and coming of age, for the purposes of this thesis, money is in no way tied to the stories of the Jewish characters. The Jewish characters are defined by their culture in relation to how they interact with others, more so than how their Judaism influences financial family decisions.

One of the keys to eliminating any stereotype is telling lots of stories, in this case, lots of Jewish stories. By having different kinds of stories being told about a group of people, it shows how no group is homogeneous – Jews included. If all three of these shows showed different representations of Jews and their relationship with money, it would show audiences that Jews don't act one way as a group when it comes to finances, because everyone has a different relationship with money. However, two out of the three shows played into the stereotype in minor ways. The issue is where characters are defined by stereotypes and have no development. In *Schitt's Creek*, the characters start off greedy and entitled, but as the show goes on, they learn to forgo their selfish ways and be there for the people who love them over the people who give them status or the appearance of wealth. In *The Goldbergs*, they debunk the stereotype that all Jews are rich, but they reaffirm the stereotype that Jews are cheap through their use of a stereotype to build a character around. Murray without his cheap and laissez-faire attitude is nothing because the “cheap Jew” stereotype is his only personality trait.

In *Big Mouth*, Andrew, Jessie, and all of the other Jewish characters lack any type of relationship with money. There are issues with that, but it shows how Jewish characters can exist in a show without any jokes or references to their relationship with money. Sure, the characters have their quirks, but their multidimensional personalities create complex characters who are

more than stereotypes that audiences expect to see when they see Jews on screen – cheap, greedy, hoarding money, and rich.

Quite unbelievably, it's not only non-Jews who perpetuate Jewish stereotypes. Jews have created an opposing stereotype to describe themselves: the “anxious Jew” who is not rich, but rather cheap and neurotic. In the New York Times article, “Do Jews Own Anxiety” by Daniel Smith, Smith writes,

...who could dispute the fact that, when it comes to unabashed, even triumphalist declarations of collective neurosis, the Jews have had the market locked down for a long time — so much so, in fact, that they are the only ethnic group I know of that members of other ethnic groups will unabashedly declare to be suffering from collective neurosis. The relationship between the Jews and nervousness is by now so widely accepted that it barely registers. The Chosen People, at least in the American consciousness, are the very image of anxiety...When you think about the personification of anxiety — think quickly, without reflection — whom do you think of? If you are anything like me, what jumps first to mind are the great fretful Jews of American fiction and film: the harmless Tevye, portly shtetl hero of ‘Fiddler on the Roof,’ foreshadowing decades of New World pathology to come with his Talmudic indecision (‘On the other hand ... on the other hand ... on the other hand’); Philip Roth’s Alexander Portnoy, the son of dotting Newark Jews, raging to his analyst about his inability to reconcile his id and his superego, begging for help (‘... it hoits, you know, there is pain involved, a little human suffering is being felt ...’); the Coen brothers’ Barton Fink, a nebbish idealist with a paralyzed will, nightmarishly unnerved by the conflict between his artistic ambitions and the vulgarity of Hollywood; and of course, above all, Woody Allen, in almost any of the 40-plus movies he has appeared in (Smith).

Jews have funneled their rejection of being seen as rich and greedy into perpetuating the idea that they are anxious.

The greedy Jew and the anxious Jew are also tied together through historical context. In the video, *Jews are Cheap*, part of the *That's Racist* series, Jewish comedian Randy Sklar explains, “Jews have this thing where, wherever they go, someone is going to try and take their stuff” (Aolonoriginals). Jews are perceived as greedy because they are more cautious with who they give their money to for fear of it all being taken, and they are also perceived as anxious because they fear what they have is going to be taken away. As such, this collective anxiety does

come from a real place, but the lack of explanation and understanding of it creates a negative connotation. Smith argues that Jews feel group anxiety because of the stress that comes with being born Jewish – “you are urged and expected to act as a kind of personal repository for nearly 6,000 years of collective memory and as a bearer of an entire people’s hopes for surviving into the limitless future” (Smith). But more importantly, and probably, it comes from a place of rejecting, almost satirizing, the stereotypes that have been given to Jews historically.

...celebrating anxiety exhibits pride. Anti-Semites stereotype Jews as hopelessly head-bound and urbanized, lacking in old-fashioned pastoral virility, and a lot of Jews spend a lot of time and energy trying to put the lie to that stereotype. But for centuries being Jewish has also meant a willingness to question, discuss, scrutinize, interpret, dissect and argue over every last niggling aspect of human existence. Exegesis — endless, mind-numbing exegesis — is the soul of the Jewish religion (Smith).

Smith argues, that this can be a slippery slope because it allows Jews to think of themselves as intellectually superior because their anxiety comes from an overactive brain, always problem solving and questioning reality (Smith). Despite the rationale used, the anxious Jew trope seems alive and well.

Anxiety is a trait that is largely associated with Jewish people and Jewish characters. From Woody Allen’s stand up in the 50s and 60s (and his countless film roles), to Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*, Jewish characters are usually nervous. In *Big Mouth*, Andrew is the nervous Jew. He is afraid of everything, constantly worried about other people’s perceptions of him. In Season 3 Episode 9, Andrew and his classmates are about to take a standardized test, and while waiting to go into the testing room Andrew exclaims, “Oh! My anxiety-based vertigo’s kicking in. Jessi, be a dear and press right in the meat between my thumb and forefinger” (Fetter et al., 2017- present). He’s not just an anxious kid, he’s an anxious, Jewish kid. This could not be clearer than when seen next to a photo of Woody Allen:

Andrew's look evokes Woody Allen's vibe. He not only looks like Woody Allen, but he is also anxious, neurotic, obsessed with death, and sexually distressed just like Woody. Additionally, he also plays the clarinet, which Woody Allen also famously plays. Andrew's character plays into all of the tropes of the "nervous Jew" that were brought into the mainstream, and normalized, in large part, by Woody Allen, his films, and his characters. Andrew modernizes the nervous Jew, showing how the stereotype can exist in 2020 and in a middle school child. Through blatant references to Allen, *Big Mouth* uses self-deprecating humor and historical allusions to poke fun at the stereotype that Woody Allen embodies.

In Season 1 Episode 6, the opening credits roll and the show fades in on Andrew playing the clarinet in a jazz hat as he auditions for jazz club. When the other members deliberate over whether or not he should get into the club, Missy says, "He reminds me of a young Woody Allen playing a surprise gig at the Carlyle Hotel" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). They then cut away to Andrew and the Hormone Monster who says, "Woody Allen? Oh ho! That guy is 85 pounds of pure sex" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). Cutting back to the group of jazz club members deliberating, Caleb says, "Woody Allen was accused of molestation. He says he didn't do it, but he did marry his stepdaughter. It is both very complicated and very simple" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). They decide to let Andrew into the club, and after Andrew calls out his Hormone Monster, named Maury, for suggesting something too lewd to say to Missy, Maury replies, "I'm off my game. The Woody Allen stuff really threw me. That guy's a hero. I mean not artistically, just personally speaking" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). This scene was discussed in the interview with Jeffrey Richman, and his immediate reaction was shock over how weird the reference was. "It seems very 'inside baseball' to make that character Woody Allen at a moment when Woody Allen is off-putting to a lot of people." Many would likely agree. With the #METOO movement,

Woody Allen has been the subject of much backlash, criticism, and protest. He is not someone people want to talk about or work with. For example, Amazon refused to release his last film, and his publisher dropped his book deal. But even still, there is something so inherently Jewish about Woody Allen and his comedy that *Big Mouth* couldn't stay away from the topic. To them, the controversy gives them an added challenge for pulling off the Andrew-Allen correlation, and the result was effective and extraordinarily Jewish. It is sarcastic, ironic, satirical, and manages to pull off getting into the nuance within two sentences. According to the My Jewish Learning article "What is Jewish Humor?," "First and foremost, Jewish humor snickers in the face of authority. And...while it's often about subversion, Jewish humor also tends to navel-gaze, philosophize, [and] ponder" (Mjl). *Big Mouth* makes a joke about an ultra-controversial Jewish figure because, although off-putting, Jewish comedy is all about using humor to undermine someone's power – a maneuver *Big Mouth* has done masterfully.

Furthermore, In Season 1 Episode 8, *Big Mouth* explains why "head pushing" is not ok through a *Seinfeld* reference (Fetter et al., 2017- present). The show cuts from the characters at a party where one high school student has been accused of head pushing, to Jessie, Nick, Andrew, and Jay in Monk's Diner (the famous hangout spot from *Seinfeld*), explaining what a head-push is. Jessie explains to Nick and Andrew, through an impression of the *Seinfeld* character Elaine, that a head-push is, "When a man pushes a woman's head to try to get a blowjob" (Fetter et al., 2017- present). The three characters then discuss why this is not ok through Nick impersonating Jerry, Andrew impersonating George, and Jay impersonating Kramer – three other main characters in *Seinfeld*. This is a great scene for a number of reasons. Mainly, because it educates the show's young audience on sexual assault – what it is and why it's not ok – in a way that keeps audience's attention and makes the informational content engaging. It also uses a reference

to another relatively modern television show that has sexual relationships as a main theme to continue the conversation on sexual relationships. What is of special interest is the calculated move to provide a Jewish perspective to this scene with the choice to have Andrew portray the character George – the character discussed earlier as the epitome of the stereotypical Jewish man. The choice to make Andrew George from Seinfeld says a lot about his character. When you combine this with the strong allusions to Woody Allen, you have a character who plays predominantly into every prominent Jewish male stereotype.

Even though the character Andrew in Big Mouth is as stereotypically Jewish as he can get, the show provides context for the jokes made about his religion. Andrew has an actual relationship with his religion, something a lot of Jewish characters on television do not get to have. In Season 2 Episode 3, Andrew feels ashamed, and so he goes to his Rabbi for advice (Fetter et al., 2017- present). Andrew also celebrates Passover with his family, and in Season 3 Episode 5, the story of Passover is told to the audience in a tongue-in-cheek and sexually explicit way (Fetter et al., 2017- present). This makes the story of Passover both entertaining and engaging for their audience that includes Jews and non-Jews. The entire episode is a Passover allegory. Although it is one of the edgiest episodes of the show’s four seasons thus far, it allows audiences to both connect with a Jewish tradition and also see that although Andrew makes jokes about his religion, it is still a very big part of who he is. This addition balances the humor with education in a way that connects audiences with the Jewishness of the material instead of laughing at the absurdity of Jewish culture and/or stereotypes.

In The Goldbergs, Geoff Schwartz is the epitome of nervousness, but this show takes a different approach on the classic stereotype. Geoff’s character plays into the “nice Jewish boy” trope. TV Tropes describes it as, “They also tend to be self-deprecating, studious, and brainy.

Although he may still love to argue, even when he's arguing, you can still tell he's nice. It's reasonably likely he's a cheapskate, but he's probably not actually greedy. They're usually portrayed as smart, reliable, and gentle, with a boyish charm because these are qualities favored in Jewish culture as an ideal husband. Often overlaps with Jewish and nerdy” (Nice Jewish boy). Geoff is a people pleaser and often takes abuse from his girlfriend who uses him as an emotional doormat. Geoff is just another aspect of the weak Jew who cannot stand up for himself and spends his days putting himself down while lifting others up. Because his character is one-dimensional, he works to perpetuate the stereotype that Jewish men will get bullied by their partners and just take it. In other words, they are weak.

The nervous Jew came into being as a rejection of the greedy Jew, and although opposing stereotypes, both remain in pop culture. Whereas the greedy stereotype has somewhat faded in television, the wealth stereotype remains. As for the stereotype that Jews are anxious, one of the most popular shows right now stars a hyper-anxious, Jewish main character – Andrew Glouberman. Through references to the history of the nervous Jew, *Big Mouth* makes fun of the stereotype to their audience who understand the references. But, to audiences unaware of Woody Allen and his style of comedy, it reinforces the idea that Jews are riddled with anxiety. In *The Goldbergs*, the nervous Jew takes the form of the nice Jewish boy stereotype.

Playing into tropes with no attempt at self-awareness continues to perpetuate dangerous stereotyping. The wealthy Jew stereotype perpetuated in *Schitt's Creek* feeds into the larger idea that Jews are in control of everything – the media, politics, the economy, etc. That is a very strong and direct correlation. If people think all Jews are rich and therefore control the world, then that belief gets reinforced and proven correct through the representations of rich Jews on television. Fortunately, in *Schitt's Creek* there is a real effort to portray Jews economically as

“just like us.” Sure, the Jews in *Schitt’s Creek* are snobs who came from enormous wealth, but they become more self-aware as the show progresses. A notable improvement is the fact viewers have access to a variety of stories being told on television right now that are straying from the very ingrained greedy, wealthy Jew stereotypes that in the past were so commonplace to the point of being expected. The Jews in *The Goldbergs* and *Big Mouth* come from middle-class families. Modern television is showing Jews in a variety of economic situations, rejecting the idea all Jews are rich and in control. Some Jews are rich. What is important is media doesn’t show all Jews as rich because it fuels dangerous anti-Semitic rhetoric.

The Pushy Jewish Mother and the Jewish American Princess

There are a couple of specific stereotypes about Jews that only apply to women, and the “Jewish American Princess” (or “JAP”) is one of them. This is the idea that Jewish women are spoiled, rich brats. It stems from the “greedy Jew” narrative, but it is important to discuss the different stereotypes that specifically affect different demographics of Judaism. The definition of the Jewish American Princess comes from the article “Reconsidering the Jewish American Princess,” by Jamie Lauren Keiles,

The JAP is neither Jewish nor American alone. She makes herself known where these identities collide in a calamity of Coach bags, upmarket loungewear, and entitled dispositions toward luxury and ease...JAP style prioritizes grooming, trepidatious trendiness, and comfort. In any given season, the components of the look are drawn from a subset of mainstream fashion trends. (Keiles).

In Season 5, episode 8, of *Schitt's Creek*, Alexis does a dance routine to the theme song of her old TV show as part of an audition for a local play.

I'm a Lamborghini.
I'm a Hollywood star.
I'm a little bit tipsy when I drive my car.
I'm expensive sushi.
I'm a huge, huge yacht.
I'm a little bit single, even when I'm not (Barnsley et al., 2015-2020).

As farcical as the lyrics to the song are, it reaffirms the idea that Alexis is a Jewish American Princess. When she does her audition, she is telling the audience, “I am Alexis, and the most important thing about me is that I am rich.” She is the textbook definition of a Jewish American Princess. She walks around town in high heels, designer labels, and flashy jewelry, regaling stories of her well-traveled and lavish past. Through her clothes and her treatment of others, she flaunts the wealth her family once had like any Jewish American Princess would do.

Being called a Jewish American Princess is offensive. It's a negative descriptor connotating a spoiled, rich Jewish girl who never had to work for anything. When audiences see a Jewish woman being portrayed as Jewish American Princess in TV shows and movies, it is misleading because Jewish women, just like all women, are so much more than that. However, looking at Alexis as the complex character the writers created, shows viewers a multi-dimensional character who is far more than simply being a Jewish American Princess. Through watching *Schitt's Creek*, viewers see being a Jewish American Princess isn't just about being one thing. It's about owning who you are and your success and being driven to succeed. Alexis isn't the only spoiled Rose child. Her brother David is equally spoiled, wears designer labels, and opens Rose Apothecary, but he isn't labeled a Jewish American Princess. This offensive moniker is reserved exclusive to describe a Jewish woman.

According to the book *Sexuality and The World's Religions*, by Machacek and Wilcox, the Jewish American Princess stereotype did not emerge until after World War II. The characteristics of a Jewish American Princess were popularized by some Jewish male writers in the 1950s. They wrote books with spoiled, snobbish Jewish women as their main characters, and the Jewish American Princess was born (Machacek, Wilcox). During that time, the Jewish Princess was more correlated with male insecurity than how Jewish women actually acted. "In these early years, the Jewish American Princess was first known as the Jewish Princess, or JP. Her existence said more about Jewish male insecurity than the actual inner lives of Jewish women. In the eyes of men, she represented one thing; due to the inequities of cultural production, we don't know much about what she meant to women. In any case, in this first iteration, the Jewish American Princess was defined by her sexual manipulation and acquisitiveness. Depending on what you had and what she wanted, she might decide to put out,

or not” (Keiles). The Jewish Princess was sexually manipulative and would use men to get what she wanted - money.

As time went on, the Jewish Princess became the Jewish American Princess, a reference to Jewish assimilation into American suburbia. She still lusted after money and was completely dependent on “Daddy” or a husband to pay her way. As the Jewish American Princess became a more flushed out caricature, she also became the butt of jokes, and therefore popularized, becoming a household stereotype inside and outside of Jewish communities.

Like the nature of all stereotypes, the Jewish American Princess was created to tear a group of people down. It diminishes Jewish women for their appearance, their Jewishness, and their success. It undermines their achievements and hard work, insinuating they have to depend on others if they want to get anywhere in life. The Jewish American Princess label makes young Jewish women feel like they need to change the things about themselves that lead to them being called a JAP. That’s the consequence of the Jewish American Princess stereotype. In the article, “Jewish Women Campaign Against ‘Princess’ Jokes,” published in the New York Times, the author writes about how escaping this label requires young women to conceal or distance themselves from their Jewish identity (Jewish Women Campaign Against ‘Princess’ Jokes). To not be perceived as a Jewish American Princess, young Jewish women are forced to distance themselves from what really bothers people about the Jewish American Princess stereotype- having a Jewish identity.

Conversely, the characters on *Schitt’s Creek* don’t care if people like them, and they definitely don’t care about what other people say about them. They own exactly who they are, and no character does that better than Alexis. In another show, an annoying, rich, young female character would just be an annoying rich girl. Her religion would not be part of what makes her

annoying. It is evident the characteristics that make someone a Jewish American Princess are characteristics that exist in some people no matter their identity.

Viewers of *Schitt's Creek* get to see the evolution of Alexis from just Jewish American Princess to so much more. Alexis was born into wealth and is spoiled, but that doesn't mean she's not ambitious. She gets a job, finishes her high school degree, goes to college, and starts her own business. In Season 6 Episode 11, Alexis also solves an entire escape room by herself in a matter of seconds using knowledge acquired during her well-traveled past, proving she more than meets the eye (Barnsley et al., 2015-2020). Through making Alex a complex character with multiple dimensions, Jewish American Princess doesn't define her, it is just one part of her. As she grows and develops as a character, we see how being rich and spoiled can be separate from being Jewish.

Erica, on *The Goldbergs*, on the other hand, is an example of how a character's one dimension can promote negative Jewish American Princess stereotypes. Erica is obsessed with materialistic wealth, constantly begging her parents to buy things for her. This is often portrayed through Erica's manipulation of the people around her. In Season 4 Episode 6, Erica takes advantage of her mother's desire to hang out with her so she will buy Erica a dress she wants. Erica's character does play into tropes of daughters being Jewish American Princesses (Armus et al., 2013-present). Of all of the Goldberg children, the daughter is the materialistic one. Because Erica is not based on a real-life member of the Goldberg family, the creators made the decision to add a daughter who is, at times, solely interested in getting what she wants. They could have made Erica another son, but they chose to make the greedy one a daughter. She plays her parents to get things, and she domineers her boyfriend who submits to her every whim and will. In Season 6 episode 23, Erica's boyfriend, Jeff, is upset about them going off to different colleges,

making himself physically ill over the stress of possibly losing her. Erica goes to her mom for advice over the situation and her mom assures her, “You’ve locked down every Yenta’s dream- a man so concerned with your future that he’s made himself sick” (Armus et al., 2013-present). This story line feeds into the Jewish American Princess idea that Jewish young women pick romantic partners that they can manipulate and push around for their benefit. The show could have attempted to sidestep playing into stereotypes by not mentioning yentas in the same sentence as Erica and her stereotypical boyfriend. However, by referencing how this situation is a *Yenta’s* dream, they firmly tied Erica’s behavior to Judaism and reinforced the Jewish American Princess stereotype.

Erica also plays into the trope of Jewish American Princesses being their father’s favorite. In Season 1 Episode 4, Erica’s father asks her to watch her brothers while the parents are out to dinner. Erica replies, “What do I get out of it?” Marty tells her she’ll get her father’s gratitude, and Erica blows it off insinuating this means nothing to her. Then, Marty says, “20 bucks” (Armus et al., 2013-present). To which Erica replies, “Love you, Daddy.” Erica is completely dependent on “Daddy” to pay her way, and she lusts after money.

In the context of the show, Erica’s character is supposed to operate as a device to show how being materialistic is bad. Every episode where she cons one of her parents or acts spoiled ends with her learning a lesson about the importance of family and treating others with respect. In the Season 4 Episode 6 example used earlier, Erica apologies to her mother and they have a mother-daughter bonding shopping trip. Erica learns to respect and embrace her mother, even if she can be embarrassing at times (Armus et al., 2013-present). The choice to make the character who teaches this lesson a young woman and to have this be virtually the only function of her

character reinforces the idea that Jewish young women are entitled and greedy for material things.

The other stereotype about Jews that only applies to women is the “pushy Jewish mother.” In the article “Where did the Stereotype of the Jewish Mother Come From?” by Joyce Antler, Antler describes this specific stereotype as,

...transmitted through myriad popular culture outlets and given intellectual credence by social scientists, [it] became a universally recognized metaphor for nagging, whining, guilt-producing maternal intrusiveness... the Jewish mother was a convenient scapegoat for ambivalent and hostile sentiments regarding assimilation in a new society, changing family dynamics and shifting gender roles (Antler).

If one really wants to understand the caricature of the pushy Jewish mother, they will have to look no further than Beverly Goldberg on *The Goldbergs*. As they put it on the show, she “mixes in” every other character’s life. She is overprotective, using guilt-tripping to get what she wants from her children who just want personal space. In the article, “‘Have you met a nice Jewish boy yet?’ An Analysis of *The Goldbergs* and Its Portrayal of a Jewish Mother” by Rachel Kierszenblat, Kierszenblat describes it,

Beverly Goldberg, the loud jumpsuit wearing matriarch of the family, is a prominent source of comedy. She is obsessed with her children, calling them pet names and smothering them. This self-professed ‘smother’ wants nothing more than to keep her family together while cooking them shrimp parmesan and calling them ‘schmoopy.’ Beverly embodies many of the stereotypes of the Jewish mother seen on other television shows such as *Seinfeld*, *Will and Grace*, and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. In mainstream media (especially on television), many Jewish mothers are portrayed with similar characteristics. They pester, speak loudly, and suffocate family members, often interfering in their children’s affairs long after they have left home as adults. These mothers demand grandchildren and often attempt to spoil them. Stereotypical Jewish mothers love to cook in large quantities and encourage their children and family to overeat. A lot of these stereotypes come from Jewish comedians, and media created by Jews (Kierszenblat).

Beverly Goldberg is a character defined by her overbearing nature. The show even coins a term for her to define her by her behavior, “the smother.” Her character is completely defined by the

“Jewish mother” stereotype. Her every action fall within the parameters of the “Jewish mother,” just under the guise of “smother” to shut down any accusation of leaning into a stereotype. In this sense, she is very similar to Barbara Glouberman in *Big Mouth*.

A Jewish mother herself, Barbara instills fear in her child, constantly reminding him of all of the ways in which he could get hurt or die. In Season 4 Episode 8, Andrew thinks he killed his grandfather because he doesn’t understand how death works (Fetter et al., 2017- present). His mother assures him he did not kill his Zadie, as Andrew calls his grandfather, telling Andrew, “That’s not how death works. Death is completely random and uncontrollable. And, it lurks around every corner. Disease, murder, car accidents...Every time you close your eyes, Andrew, there’s a chance you’ll never wake up again” (Fetter et al., 2017- present). This sends Andrew into a full-on spiral, and in the next episode, it is revealed to the audience that Andrew’s greatest fear is unanticipated death.

Kierszenblat goes on to quote Adrienne Baker to give context for where this Jewish-maternal stereotype comes from writing,

Adrienne Baker, author of ‘The Jewish Mother: Is that why so many Jewish women become counsellors?’ agrees. ‘There is a powerful cultural expectation, deriving partly from the religious emphasis on women’s traditional gender roles...It is a history in which the woman’s place as wife and mother has been central in maintaining the continuity of the Jewish people (Baker, 1996, p. 89)’. Beverly Goldberg and other Jewish mothers are shown as the emotional center of the family, as they pass on traditions from their own mothers. In Judaism, the religion passes onto the children through the mother, who is often responsible for enforcing and teaching Jewish traditions to their own families (Kierszenblat).

The portrayal of Jewish mothers on television comes from a place of misogyny and a historically patricidal society. The pressure put on mothers to preserve Jewish culture has been caricatured into an overly obsessive, toxic, mother. “...there is almost an obsessive, overbearing stereotype of Jewish mothers in media. This can lead to people who have never met Jewish mothers (or

people) thinking that all Jews are similar to what they see on TV. Even worse, it can affirm the already negative expectations of Jews from those who dislike Judaism and Jews as a whole. If the people of your religion are constantly played as jokes, it can be hard to also take the religion and its people seriously” (Kierszenblat). The misogyny reflected in these Jewish female characters doesn’t just come from within the stereotype, but it also comes from within the writer’s room.

As discussed with television writer Jeffery Richmond, a lot of underdeveloped female characters in sitcoms comes from a lack of women in the writer’s room. The myth that “women aren’t funny” has been a persistent force for the past 300 years. “Then, as now, the claim was used to write off women who were actively trying to be funny, as well as declare that underdeveloped comedic capacities were simply another sign of women’s natural inferiority. Through the years, the claim that women aren’t funny has also transmuted from a fairly mainstream opinion to an ‘edgy’ one...When these women-aren’t-funny comments come up nowadays, they’re followed by an immediate public outcry and can be countered by listing off examples of numerous women who have built careers being funny on TV and in movies” (Moss). All of the years of believing in women’s inferiority has created a struggle for women to get into comedy writing rooms. In 2016, a study was done on the impact of the writer’s room on diversity. The research was done by, “TV writer Lyle Friedman, data scientist Matt Daniels, and researcher Ilia Blinderman, examined four thousand films reviewed on the website that lists movies that do or don’t pass the Bechdel test. For a movie to pass, it must include two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. The team gathered the information from films between 1995 to 2015 from the site, then broke it down in terms of the gender of the writers, producers, and directors on each film” (Webb). It found, “that movies in which women were involved in

the production were far more likely to pass the Bechdel test (Webb). The study also found, much like what Richmond discussed in his interview, that writers write about themselves and their own experiences, no matter what the story or who the character is. When looking at different scripts, the study found “Entries included: ‘JANE pours her gorgeous figure into a tight dress, slips into her stiletto-heeled fuck-me shoes, and checks herself in the dresser mirror...’ Clearly if we want female characters with more depth than having the ability to make jeans look good, changes need to be made in the writing room” (Webb). Of the 55 writers credited to *The Goldbergs* on IMDb, 22 are women, which is less than half. And although that is a high number of women writing for a television show, men have more episode credits than the women. For example, Aaron Kaczander is credited with writing 57 episodes. This is an overwhelming number of episodes being written by a man. This could be one of the reasons for the lack of female character development on the show. As the writers reflect their own experiences in their writing, male characters like Barry and Adam on *The Goldbergs* grow and develop more than Erica, who is a stunted character.

The ideas that Jewish women are both entitled princesses and overbearing crafty mothers comes from misogynistic stereotypes of young women and mothers. *Schitt’s Creek* shows how the term Jewish American Princess can be reclaimed to be an expression of embracing success through making the show’s Jewish daughter a complex character. Meanwhile, *The Goldbergs* show the danger of one-dimensional characters written with personalities tied to negative stereotypes of Jewish young women.

Analysis

Growing up Jewish, my parents made sure I was fully educated on everything that had to do with my culture and that I possessed a firm understanding of my roots. I vividly remember Sundays at my grandparent's house, immersing myself in all things Jewish – crowding around the television watching *Jews in America* one week and *If You Don't Laugh, You'll Cry* the next week, listening (very loudly!) to the Yiddish Radio Project, and learning Yiddish words from my grandparents who grew up first-generation American, Orthodox Jews from the Jewish ghetto in the Bronx. From baking homemade challah with my mom every Friday when I was in preschool to attending services every Friday at shul, being Jewish is part of my everyday existence. My Jewish identity has always played an influential role in who I am, even when I didn't recognize it, because my parents and grandparents created an environment that embraced me with Jewish religion, culture and history. I also had the privilege of growing up in a large Jewish community, with lots of Jewish friends. I was never alone when I ate my matzoh peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch during Passover or missed school for religious holidays. There were plenty of houses on my street without Christmas decorations at the holidays. Being Jewish, in my childhood, was just as normal to me as being Christian is for other kids. However, now, I recognize how fortunate I am to have had this experience.

When I went to college, I made friends who confessed to me that before me, they had never met anyone Jewish. While this was shocking to hear, this new perspective also had the effect of, for the first time in my life, making me feel like an "other." Growing up, there were 30 kids in my Hebrew School class, and a large majority of them graduated from my high school – where there were only 100 students in my graduating class. Coming from a background where roughly 30 percent of my grade was Jewish, I couldn't imagine what it would have been like to grow up not

knowing a single Jew, let alone being a kid growing up who was the only Jew at school. I quickly got a taste of what that isolation likely feels like, being the only Jew in my college circle of friends.

Through my conversation with Dr. Arthur Raney, I came to learn that when you watch television, your brain interprets what is on television like it is real life. This means, that if you don't know any Jews in real life, your brain interprets Jews you see on television as though you knew them personally. My friends who had never met a Jewish person before learned almost everything they knew about Judaism from media – watching TV and movies. They had anti-Semitic views and weren't even aware of it. This was the impetus that led me to dig deeper into Jewish representation on television.

My background in the history of Jewish representation in the media is extensive, as I have consumed so much media on the topic since my early years. This is a perspective most television viewers (both Jews and non-Jews) probably don't have. Whereas I am able to understand and appreciate a lot of the nuance and allusion in modern Jewish comedy shows, not all viewers are operating from the same vantage point. I had seen *Schitt's Creek*, *Big Mouth* and *The Goldbergs* before I began this thesis. I re-watched every episode of each show with a critical eye. Prior to analyzing the shows for this thesis, I admit I had not put that much thought into the jokes related to being Jewish. There are a lot of jokes in all three shows analyzed that attempt to poke fun at the stereotypes that exist about Jews. I took these jokes at face value. I assumed that because I understood what the writers were trying to convey, other viewers would as well. Upon reflection, I'm not so sure anymore. If a joke on a television show isn't a joke everyone is going to understand, is it really working?

Through my interview with Jeffery Richmond, I gained a perspective on this question from someone who has been writing for television for over 40 years. For the joke to be effective at being

both funny while knocking down a negative stereotype, you have to be “calling attention to it, to make fun of the stereotype – isn’t it stupid people think we act this way? But if you’re doing it to get a laugh, it’s terrible.” There is an effective way to make jokes about stereotypes and an ineffective way that doesn’t work. I agree that unless it’s satire, it’s ineffective. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines satire as, “a trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm, used to expose and discredit vice or folly” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Satire is a technique used to highlight the ineptitude of those who perpetuate misconceptions, ignorance, and other flawed ways of thinking through comedy. In order for this approach to work, the audience has to understand that the joke is: Isn’t it funny people actually think this about Jews (or whoever the subject is)? If writers aren’t conveying this message through their jokes, they are, in fact, doing the opposite of what they were trying to do. They are perpetuating negative stereotypes.

I can’t speak on behalf of the shows I have analyzed, so I can’t say for certain that the goal of some of the Jewish jokes in the three shows analyzed were to satirize Jewish stereotypes. The creators of each of the three shows are Jewish, so I cannot imagine that they included negative portrayals of Jews for the purpose of reinforcing negative Jewish stereotypes. However unintentional, their lack of appropriate use of stereotype as a “filmic” device works against their original goal. For example, in both *The Goldbergs* and *Big Mouth*, Christian families are portrayed as perfect families with no conflict or issues, and Jewish families are portrayed as being loud and aggressive. Since this is a theme that existed in two shows about Jewish families, created by Jewish people, it can be assumed that this was meant to play off the way Jewish families are perceived and portrayed by the media. However, only one of the shows was able to successfully pull it off – *Big Mouth*. As described in the Matrix Education article, “Literary Techniques: Satire | How to

Analyze Satire,” the satirical techniques are irony, hyperbole, vivid language, parody, colloquialism, and antithesis. These techniques add dimension to satirical situations.

In *Big Mouth*, hyperbole is used to create obvious contrast between characters. Nick’s family is Christian, and they are kind to each other to such an extreme that it can often make the audience uncomfortable. Nick’s parents take him out to dinner as a Valentine’s Day date, his mother requires he pay the “snuggle tax” before leaving the dinner table, and in Season 1 episode 6, after finding out Nick skipped school to go into New York City, his father says to him, “I’m very disappointed in you, Nicholas. But, I’m even more disappointed in myself, and there’s going to be consequences. I’m taking away my credit card and giving it to you. Here you go. In case you ever get lost in the city again” (Fetter et al., 2017- present). Then, he assures his wife that this was him being the bad cop in their parenting partnership. This was not only a hilarious moment, but it was also a moment that highlights how outrageously functional Nick’s family is. On the other end of the spectrum, there’s Andrew’s Jewish family, and their loud and cold aggression toward each other. Andrew’s dad identifies his own son as the “enemy,” constantly calling him a pervert and accusing him of crimes he would have had no possible way of committing. Most notably, Andrew’s father accuses him of being responsible for the decision to replace Charlie Sheen with Ashton Kutcher on the show *Two and a Half Men*. The contrast between these two families is shown through the lens of hyperbole to expose the often-stereotypical portrayal of Jewish families as dysfunctional messes. In Season 3 episode 5 of *Big Mouth*, the contrast can especially be seen as Nick spends spring break with the Gloubermans. After a day with Andrew’s family, Nick is miserable, and Andrew is pleased. Nick asks Andrew if he is enjoying their trip, and Andrew responds, “I am. I like it when things are as bad for you as they are for me. Imagine living like this” (Fetter et al., 2017- present). These two families may be opposites, but they are both so

insanely extreme that there is little chance of watching this show and coming to the conclusion that Jewish families are less than or somehow worse than Christian ones. The exaggeration technique of satire works to debunk stereotypical ways of thinking through dramatic differences.

Conversely, creating jokes about the differences between Jewish and Christian families can be unsuccessful if there is no acknowledgement of the context of which the joke was born. On *The Goldbergs*, the titular family is constantly screaming, fighting, and causing a scene wherever they go, with seemingly no discernment. The family that lives across the street, the Kremps, are a stark contrast, portraying a sweet and quiet Christian family who are always spending quality time together. The show creates tension by pitting these families against each other from time to time. The mothers in the two families become determined to prove that their family is better at being a family. There is no irony, hyperbole, parody, or antithesis. The Jewish family simply dreams of being as good and perfect as the Christian family, and the Christian family is afraid of the Jewish family. In Season 1 episode 8, Mr. Kremp tells Murray that the reason the two families never hang out is because Mrs. Kremp is afraid of Beverly, and it seems for no other reason than the fact she is an extremely stereotypical Jewish woman.

There was some effort to correct this mistake in the Season 3 episode 10. In this episode, the families fall into a holiday competition to discover which family is better at celebrating the holidays. In the end, they discover that no family is perfect, and no family is the best at being a family (Armstrong et al., 2013-present). This comedic moment is successful because it highlights the fact that Jewish families are not worse families because they are Jewish, but rather, every family, no matter their religion or how they express their love for each other, is a good family with sometimes not-so-good moments. *The Goldbergs* achieved satirizing the Jewish stereotype of being a dysfunctional family in this episode through using a conflict/resolution setup that produces

laughs that don't come at the expense of any group. They also manage to teach their audience, a young one, to not judge a family by the stereotypes surrounding their culture or reputation. However, it raises the question: Does one episode correct mistakes made in previous episodes? Dr. Raney is of the opinion that it all depends on the context of the show, how often a mistake was made, and how they try to remedy it. However, he also pointed out that it is important to remember that people could just tuning in and seeing a single episode as it airs, with no knowledge of previous storylines or episodes. This, to me, means that whether or not people think the correction is too little too late, it is both important and necessary. This way, the stereotype isn't being perpetuated to new viewers, and long-time viewers can see a different and more evolved side of characters.

It's 2021; why are some of these shows still relying heavily on Jewish stereotypes? A lot has to do with the short-form medium of television. This can be seen primarily in *The Goldbergs* where every character is defined by a specific Jewish stereotype. Without taking time out of the program to discuss the characters' relationship to Judaism, the show identifies the characters as Jewish through making them loud, cheap, and anxious. Through the "show don't tell" nature of *The Goldberg's* reliance on stereotypes, writers are allowed to make jokes about the family being Jewish without ever having to explain why they are applicable – the audience just knows. Later on in the show, there is more of an attempt to convey the characters as Jewish with episodes that get into the characters' relationship with their religion and culture. However, initially, the show relied solely on Jewish stereotypes, with the occasional use of Yiddish words and characters with loud, overbearing natures that conveyed the characters' Jewishness. This is problematic because it reinforces Jewish stereotypes in a way that validates them.

When asked about this, Jeffrey Richman replied, "It [stereotypes portrayed on television] goes on because the person at the helm of that show thinks it's funny." The control of a

showrunner and the jokes they approve for the show is a huge part of how stereotypes end up on television. If a showrunner is promoting the use of stereotypes in a show, those are the kinds of jokes that will get pitched to be included in an episode. And as was mentioned in an earlier chapter, if a show has a homogeneous writing staff, stereotypical representation can go unnoticed.

Another aspect of a show's decision to include stereotypical characters and jokes comes from the medium in which the show is being presented. Cable and broadcast television are very different arenas than streaming platforms. According to Central Casting,

The networks (also known as broadcast television) are ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, and The CW. Like radio, these networks are nationally transmitted through local affiliates or owned-and-operated stations and can be picked up through a TV antenna. Of course, now viewers can also access them digitally or through cable providers. Since the networks are nationally broadcast over public channels, they are subject to federal regulations and oversight from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). All content services profit through various means, but the broadcast networks primarily make revenue by selling advertising space (commercials) during their programming blocks. That's one of the reasons why ratings and demographics are so important to networks – they determine how much they can charge for an ad slot. Like broadcast TV, cable gets its name by how it's transmitted to you, which is through coaxial or fiber-optic cables. Unlike networks, cable channels, like AMC, USA, TNT, FX, Freeform, etc., are not tied to local affiliates and have control over their full 24 hours of programming. These channels also make money through ad revenue, so while they often still debut original programming during the Sunday-Friday primetime slots, they supplement with re-airings and acquired content (2020).

The different viewing platforms have different show requirements and standards that make the content production a different process in each. The different processes, however, are driven by the same thing: Shows are driven by viewership – if no one is watching, it's going to get canceled. Television shows put a lot of emphasis on making sure they give their audiences what they want to see so they keep watching. In my interview with Jeffrey Richman, he discussed how broadcast, network television tends to have a more stereotypical approach to characters because their audience is primarily white. As such, the jokes writers and show creators are going to put on TV

are going to reflect what white people think are funny. This is a large reason why there are so many stereotypically Jewish but ethnically Italian characters on television – Italian is more palatable to a WASP audience than Jewish.

Streaming platforms are different because they have a disparate audience. Their audience is younger and more diverse, and this is reflected in the content they provide. According to the article “Netflix, Disney+ and other streaming sites offer more diverse shows than cable, study finds,”

Americans want more diversity on TV, and they're increasingly finding more of it on streaming platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ than on cable, according to a new Nielsen study. In the ratings company's first-ever TV diversity and inclusion report, Nielsen examined the 2019 on-screen cast demographics for the 100 most popular, first-run shows in the United States on broadcast, cable and streaming platforms... The Nielsen study found that White, non-Hispanic actors make up 81.2% of all recurring characters on broadcast, cable and streaming programs combined... The inclusion report revealed that the widest assortment of shows starring people of color was found on streaming platforms. Streaming shows offered either the highest or the second highest rate of representation for recurring characters who are Black, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern or Native American (2021).

Streaming platforms allow for shows that market to niche audiences. Because they have higher rates of representation on the screen, a more diverse audience tunes in to watch shows that feature people who look and act like them. Conversely, network television caters to a largely white audience, therefore they portray less diversity on the screen. One of the reasons *Big Mouth* and *Schitt's Creek* have better portrayals of Jewish characters could be because *Big Mouth* was on a streaming service, and *Schitt's Creek* was on POP, a small cable station. These circumstances allowed the show creators to feel more freedom to show Jewish characters in a more truthful way. Jeffrey Richman discussed with me how while streaming television puts effort into getting laughs from their more nuanced audiences, network television gets easier laughs from a primarily white audience. Network audiences relate to the same, easily

recognizable jokes that play off of stereotypes because that is what a white audience finds funny because it's what they have grown accustomed to. However, on streaming services, there is a broader audience, meaning more attention can be given to telling niche, diverse stories.

Streaming services also bypass some of the heavy reliance on stereotypes through a deviation from the short-form nature of television. Streaming introduced the concept of binge watching, or watching multiple episodes of a television show in a row all in one sitting. Binge watching effectively made television shows season based as opposed to episode based. In one week, a person could watch a whole season rather than just one episode, giving show creators more freedom to develop characters over time as opposed to immediately. And, yes, characters on network television also develop over seasons; however, when someone is flipping on a station and watching an isolated episode, that viewer needs to understand what is going on and whom these characters are, or viewers are going to change the channel.

Each of the three shows analyzed for this thesis showed some degree of progress toward eliminating old Hollywood stereotypes of Jews. All three shows had at least one episode dedicated to a Jewish holiday where it explained details and the meaning of these unique Jewish holidays in a manner that was post educational and entertaining. The episode on *Big Mouth* about Passover, that was discussed previously in this thesis, is a prime example. These informative episodes work to normalize things like Jewish food, traditions, and the experiences of being the only Jewish kid in your neighborhood not celebrating Christmas. These holiday-driven episodes de-other the Jewish experience in a very effective and entertaining way, chipping away at dangerous Jewish stereotypes. However, *Big Mouth's* Passover episode is one of two television episodes that highlight a Jewish holiday other than Hanukkah. In 1995, *Rugrats* aired an episode where the *Rugrats* tell the story of Passover, and Neilson records report it is the

highest rated show in Nickelodeon's history (McCormick). So other than these episodes on Rugrats and Big Mouth, the rest of the Jewish holiday television episodes revolve around the Christian idea of what Judaism is. Hanukkah is not a major Jewish holiday; however, it does fall near a major Christian holiday. Because of the calendrical placement of the holiday, Hanukkah has been commercialized to compete with Christmas and normalize the celebration of Jewish holidays. Regardless of the reasons American Jews continue to play up the celebration of Hanukkah, television has the opportunity to normalize the celebration of major Jewish holidays, but show creators continue to miss this opportunity. Aside from Big Mouth, the rest of the shows analyzed had one or more episodes centered around Hanukkah. There were no episodes about Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, or any other major Jewish holidays. Especially in shows targeted towards young people, having episodes about major Jewish holidays could make young Jews feel seen and understood. All too often Jewish students are not given time off from school to celebrate important Jewish holidays, if they choose to, and instead are forced to choose between temple and keeping up with school. In the same way the "Jewish look" is primarily a non-Jewish idea, so is Jewish television holiday episodes.

The question: Do classic Hollywood stereotypes of Jews still exist in modern television? has a more complicated answer than I initially surmised. While there is no denying that they do still exist, it is also clear that some effort is being put into telling more nuanced Jewish stories on television. This matters and is incredibly important because as with all hate, anti-Semitism is based on ignorance, treating Jews like a monolith; they are all more loyal to Israel, they all have more allegiance to each other than other groups of people, they all are cheap and greedy, and the list goes on. ADL research done over the past 25 years has shown that these monolithic stereotypes are believed by the majority of Americans. "Our research finds that this uptick [in

anti-Semitic violence] is being caused not by a change in attitudes among most Americans,' said ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt in a statement. 'Rather, more of the millions of Americans holding anti-Semitic views are feeling emboldened to act on their hate'" (Sales). In 2019 there were 2,107 hate crimes against Jewish people nationwide. This is the highest count since 1979 (Walters). In 2020, Jews continued to be the targets of hate crimes, and already in the third month of the year, 2021 has seen 31 anti-Semitic hate crimes (ADL tracker of antisemitic incidents). Flyers were passed out in a town in Washington reading, "Hitler was right." Hasidic Jews were attacked on the streets of Brooklyn by a man welding a knife. Swastikas have been drawn everywhere from temples, to Jewish peoples' homes, to the street of a residential neighborhood, to art installations. One person this year even received a text message reading, "Kill Jew Scum" (ADL tracker of antisemitic incidents). All of these acts were committed within the first three months of this year.

The question this thesis aimed to answer is less about stereotypes and more about a philosophy of comedy. Stereotyping is being used less to tear Jews down and more to make cheap jokes to get laughs. Jokes shouldn't require an understanding of the history of comedy and the history of a group of people to be funny. Audiences shouldn't have to know about the context behind Woody Allen's standup, decades of Eugene Levy being typecast due to his Jewish look, or know the history of post-World War II sexism to understand a joke. Jokes should be character driven. Jokes should enhance characters. Comedy should never come at the expense of a character's development; it should enrich audience understanding of a character. Comedy can be used as a tool just like any rhetorical device. But when comedy takes the avenue to conveying messages through stereotypes that stunt character development, it becomes less about telling a story and more about getting laughs. It's lazy.

This is what can be surmised from analyzing these three shows: Successful comedies about Jews are all about nuance because there's not one thing that defines a Jew or Judaism. Judaism isn't about how someone looks, how many times they go to temple, what holidays they celebrate, or how they act. Jews deserve to have diverse and rich stories told about them that illustrate their religious identity in more ways than just their celebration of Hanukkah every year. In telling more nuanced stories about different kinds of Jews, these ignorant, homogenous stereotypes begin to fall apart. If people do not have real-life experiences with Jewish people that they can leverage against stereotypical representations of Jews that they see on television, then television needs to do a better job at creating this "reality" for viewers. Through my study for this thesis, I observed that we are seeing the emergence of this process of positive change in television shows. For certain, it's not perfect, but it's a start.

Imagining The Future of Jewish Representation

If television shows are still falling short on creating a representation of Jewish characters free of stereotypes, what changes should be made going forward to remedy this problem? There must be a series of adjustments to the current and well-established television show production process. These adjustments include the diversity of look, diversity of the writer's room, development of satirical jokes, and greater understanding of the impact of television and the power shows wield to influence the attitudes of their viewers.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis: What does a Jew look like?, I discussed how shows all too often rely on stereotypes to be the sole driver of a character. This is my first recommendation for change in the industry. There are other very effective ways to signify to an audience that a character is Jewish without making the character a stereotype. As Dr. Raney suggested in our interview, they could wear a Jewish star necklace or a yarmulke, or something else that obviously codes a character as Jewish. If shows took this route, they could make their Jewish characters any race or sect of Judaism they wanted – they wouldn't have to play into the “non-Jewish” idea of what a Jew looks like or acts like.

The second change that needs to be made in television is behind the camera. Diversity in the writing room, and in all areas of the production team, is a necessary step toward representation that does more good than harm. It is no secret that there are a lot of Jews who work in Hollywood. The article “Who Runs Hollywood, C'mon,” by Joel Stein, outlines,

How deeply Jewish is Hollywood? When the studio chiefs took out a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times a few weeks ago to demand that the Screen Actors Guild settle its contract, the open letter was signed by: News Corp. President Peter Chernin (Jewish), Paramount Pictures Chairman Brad Grey (Jewish), Walt Disney Co. Chief Executive Robert Iger (Jewish), Sony Pictures Chairman Michael Lynton (surprise, Dutch Jew), Warner Bros. Chairman Barry Meyer (Jewish), CBS Corp. Chief Executive Leslie Moonves (so Jewish his great uncle was the first prime minister of Israel), MGM

Chairman Harry Sloan (Jewish) and NBC Universal Chief Executive Jeff Zucker (mega-Jewish). If either of the Weinstein brothers had signed, this group would have not only the power to shut down all film production but to form a minyan with enough Fiji water on hand to fill a mikvah.

The person they were yelling at in that ad was SAG President Alan Rosenberg (take a guess). The scathing rebuttal to the ad was written by entertainment super-agent Ari Emanuel (Jew with Israeli parents) on the Huffington Post, which is owned by Arianna Huffington (not Jewish and has never worked in Hollywood.)

The Jews are so dominant, I had to scour the trades to come up with six Gentiles in high positions at entertainment companies. When I called them to talk about their incredible advancement, five of them refused to talk to me, apparently out of fear of insulting Jews. The sixth, AMC President Charlie Collier, turned out to be Jewish (Stein).

Having representation in high-level positions is certainly beneficial, but it is not enough to simply have a body in a seat at the table. This article illustrates how successful Jews have been in Hollywood but not how effective they have been at driving meaningful change in combating Hollywood stereotypes of Jews. It's no wonder, because this list of Jewish Hollywood Executives is comprised exclusively to all white men. This influences the "trickle down" effect of having Jewish representation at the top. Meaning, there are no Jewish women running studios, and there are no Jews of Color running studios. This has a significant impact on who those people hire, the people they will put their money behind, and the stories they want to tell. From executives to writers in the writers' room, to directors and producers, there needs to be a stronger push for diversity so female characters on TV, like Erica and Beverly on *The Goldbergs*, have a true female voice. I think we would see more female characters that more developed, more three-dimensional. I think we would see more stories like *Missy's*, on *Big Mouth*, that more accurately represent real life. This diverse female perspective is important. We can see the real impact this move would make through reading the article "So This Is What Authentic Black Jewish Representation Feels Like" by Jesi Taylor Cruz.

It's not a coincidence that certain narratives and types of characters dominate mass media and pop culture. It's also not a coincidence that there are so few examples of Black Jewish representation in mass media and pop culture. From discriminatory hiring practices in writers' rooms to popular misconceptions about who can be and what it means to be Jewish, there are countless factors that play into the stories that are told in the mainstream.

Thankfully, every so often, gems like Tiffany Haddish's *Black Mitzvah* come along because, as Rebecca Pierce once wrote, it's 'hard not to get emotional seeing pictures of a Black woman who embraces both her Jewish and African heritage widely circulated, like it was the most natural thing in the world.' Upon release of her Netflix special, and the images of her bat mitzvah that followed, I felt seen in a way I hadn't before. I felt joy. Pure joy. The limit for meme-making potential did not exist. I was thrilled. I knew that there was more to come when it came to wholesome representation for Black Jews (Cruz).

Diversity matters and it makes a difference. Having multi-racial, multi-religion characters like Missy on *Big Mouth* and having her written and voiced by a person with shared experiences allows Jews of Color to see themselves in the stories on popular television shows in a way they never have before. As with all groups of people, there is diversity among Jews, and in telling all of their nuanced stories, we can debunk the stereotypes widely believed that all Jews are rich, white, and more loyal to Israel than America.

I know first-hand how great it feels when you see your people – Jews – accurately represented in a show. I was so moved by this when it happened, I wrote an article for *Jewish Women's Archive* on Jewish representation in the Broadway show, *Falsettos*. In the article "L'dor Vador in Falsettoland," I wrote,

This play teaches its audience a lot about Judaism without being a show about Judaism. The show is about a dysfunctional family that just happens to be Jewish, allowing their religion to be something that guides and gives them courage in the story, rather than being the story. At its core, the show is about l'dor vador, making connections between generations. The characters show us that we learn a lot from the people we surround ourselves with, and that generational learning doesn't just have to be down the family tree. Jason teaches his parents a lot about love, acceptance, and the relationship between faith and family. Family isn't just the people you are related to or married to, but the people whom you love and who love you.

...I realized that I have never watched anything involving Judaism and felt prouder of the beauty in my religion afterwards. I also realized something I'd never thought of before: I am not proud of the way my religion is usually portrayed. It is upsetting to think that mainstream entertainment's portrayal of Jews shapes most non-Jew's ideas of what being a Jew is. The revival of Falsettos couldn't have come at a better time. Anti-Semitism is rising in America, and all throughout the world, and Falsettos reminds us all, Jews and non-Jews, why Judaism is important. Our religion and our culture bring us together and hold us together. Falsettos reminds me why I am proud to be Jewish, and to be a part of all the Jews in rooms everywhere bitching (Stein).

I wrote this in 2018, never knowing the relevance it would play just a few years later when I decided to write a thesis about the very same topic. Seeing Falsettos was the first time I had ever felt proud of my religion's representation in modern media. The characters' Judaism wasn't a punchline; it was a core part of their identity – something that made their lives beautiful, and that was a beautiful thing for a Jew to see. I think we are moving towards more Jewish representation like this, especially in streaming. As television moves more towards streaming services, and away from network TV, more nuanced stories are being told, allowing room for wholesome Jewish stories as well as humorous ones – but most importantly, accurate ones. The future of Jews on television should have more diversity not only in the kinds of Jews portrayed and what they look like but also in the manner in which the Jewish characters relate to their religion.

Another pitfall of the “sitcom” template of these shows is that satire is not something that always lands with audiences. As Dr. Raney pointed out in our interview, there were two loyal groups of people who watched *The Colbert Report*: liberal democrats and conservative republicans. People either understood that the show was a satire and loved it for that reason, or they loved it because the show reinforced what they already believed. This is an issue that shows can face when they try to indulge in the self-deprecating nature of Jewish comedy. If a viewer is not aware that it is satire, it can reinforce what they already believe about Jews. An example of this could be when a family is watching *The Goldbergs* and they see the Jewish mother acting

insanely and the Jewish father being extremely cheap and unfeeling. These characters are written this way to be funny, but if a viewer is unaware of the history of these stereotypes, they reinforce these negative ideas.

I found that *Big Mouth* did a great job undercutting their self-deprecating humor with acknowledgement of nuance. This can be seen in the Woody Allen jokes and in this example from the article “The 13 Best Jewish Jokes in Season 1 of Netflix’s *Big Mouth*” by Emily Burack. “Jessi and Jay are in front of ‘Temple Beth Amphetamine’ (yes) when Jessi is ranting about how annoyed she is with Cantor Dina (who her mom may be in love with). Jay suggests throwing a brick, and Jessi immediately shuts the idea down: ‘That’s a little hate crime-y.’ This is the perfect example of good Jewish jokes: self-deprecating but getting defense immediately when a non-Jew veers into anti-Semitism” (Burack). Obviously, I don’t think people would watch this show, hear this joke, and then immediately go out and throw a rock into the window of a Temple, but I think this example shows how you can tell an edgy joke and then point out that it is in fact just an edgy joke without being obvious or taking away from the comedic moment.

There must be an understanding of the medium the show is being created on and the specific issues inherent to that medium. If the show is on network television, work must go in to ensuring every character isn’t a walking one-dimensional stereotype for the sake of audience understanding. If the show is on a streaming service, take advantage of the creative freedoms that come with releasing a season one at a time by getting into the nitty gritty of identity and a character’s relationship to their identity. If the show relies on laughs from identity jokes, then put in the time to make sure audiences understand that character’s identity. Because if there is no context, there is nothing to satirize, and the joke upholds stereotypes.

The future of Jewish characters on television needs to be more diverse to reflect the reality of Jews. It needs to have characters who use self-deprecating humor and have meaningful relationships with their religion. It needs to show Jews as more than a stereotype not only on streaming sites but also on network television. Through this thesis I have shown it to be true that Jewish stereotypes are still being used to generate laughs, even though it's not funny. This negligence fuels anti-Semitism. However, as also shown in this thesis, three popular shows are taking important steps to rectify the age-old Hollywood stereotypes of Jews. As we move forward toward greater social awareness, the media we consume will be more reflective of the viewers who consume it.

Appendix A

Interview with Jeffery Richman

Minnah Stein (MS): What I wanted to talk to you about was the reinforcement of negative stereotypes through Jewish characters in TV not necessarily specific to any of the shows I watched for this thesis. I was wondering if you could speak to aspects of television and the characters we see on television seep into pop culture. How have you seen characters influence culture?

Jeffery Richman (JR): Well, you know, for the past ten years I've worked on *Modern Family*. I've been writing in television for over 40 years. But I've seen the two gay characters, more than any other show I've worked on, on *Modern Family*, actually permeate culture. They got to be married on that show at the same time that same sex marriage became legal in America. We never named the state that they lived in, but we really didn't want to do it unless everybody got to do it. So, when same sex marriage became legal in the middle of the run of the show, I thought, "Oh my gosh. An 11-year-old boy or girl is sitting at home knowing that they are going to grow up and if they want to, they're going to get married and have a family that's not going to look any different than anyone else's family. That was an enormous and moving moment. The gay characters were parents anyways, but the impact, that I got to write on episodes like the engagement and the wedding, was moving. I knew the show was popular. It was watched by so many different kinds of people—the Romney's and the Obama's both said it was their favorite show. So, the idea that this show was moving the needle in the eyes of viewers was monumental as a sitcom writer. That doesn't always happen.

MS: And just to tie that into the shows I watched, *Modern Family* definitely paved the way for *Schitt's Creek*. The gay characters get married on that show and there's nothing out of the ordinary about their engagement or marriage.

JR: Even five years before that. In the pilot they're bringing home their daughter from Vietnam. It's about revealing that information to their family. That episode was a huge deal then and they weren't even married. They couldn't get married, but they could adopt a baby in another country. I just love that Dan Levy (who was on our show!) got to do the same thing we did five or six years later, and it was commonplace.

MS: It goes to show how television can normalize things.

JR: And so quickly.

MS: The characters in *Modern Family* grow and develop- they adopt a baby, they get married, etc. Character development is something I have been thinking about a lot. It's so important in taking down stereotypes. In the shows I'm watching I've found that in *The Goldbergs*, the daughter character is a very stereotypical Jewish American Princess. The fact that her character never devolves over the course of the show reinforces the stereotype. In *Schitt's Creek*, there's a Jewish American Princess stereotyped character but she grows and evolves, making Jewish American Princess one part of her instead of her whole identity. Could you speak to why character development matters?

JR: I've been in a way very fortunate that I've gotten to work on some very long running shows. That gives you the time and the space to dig into characters and reveal things about them constantly. You get to invent as you go, because when you're on a show from the beginning you don't know what you're going to be able to reveal given the time. So, I think character development is very important. I haven't really worked on a show where ethnicity was the

central theme. I would say if you worked on Raymond you had Italian American tropes that could slightly move to Jews. A lot of ethnicities could see themselves in a show like that. In Modern Family, it was slightly diverse, but at the end of the day it was a show about white Christian people. Frasier was the epitome of that. Wings, again, no real stereotypes because they were homogenized. They were not trafficking in any stereotypical areas. For example, Seinfeld, a very Jewish show. But in the 90s, they changed the character George to be Italian so he wouldn't be too Jewish. They did the same thing on The Golden Girls. So, B Arthur's character is so Jewish, and her mother is completely Jewish. They just gave them an Italian last name. Somehow, being Italian and Catholic was more appealing to the TV audience. Even in pitching shows, there was an unspoken—and often spoken—rule about being too Jewish. Even in casting. “Write Yiddish, cast British.” That was the trope. So, write as the Jewish comedy writer you are, and then cast a complete WASP in that role. So, you write your good Jewish humor that you were hired for but then when it comes to casting, they'll give that part to a WASPy actor. Patricia Heaton on Raymond is a perfect example of that.

MS: Where character development can diminish stereotypes by adding dimension to characters?

JR: Yes, but I will say that is completely at the behest of the showrunner. So, if the showrunner of The Goldbergs wants that girl to stay that way because that's where the jokes are, he'll keep it that way. That's kind of a weird show though because that's a memory show for Adam Goldberg.

MS: Yes, I actually wanted to ask you about that. Erica is not based on a real person. So, they added her.

JR: Well, that makes perfect sense. The other thing you will find is women and girls are not remotely well written or represented especially in comedy. It's starting to change a little now.

But my own show, I regret to say, I woke up to the misogyny of the show. The writing staff and the development of the female characters. Those characters could be developed but there was not a big female voice behind them. If there was development, it was being written by men.

MS: You think that misogyny plays into the lack of female character development?

JR: 100%. There's a saying in comedy television: girls aren't funny. Can you even imagine? It's so much harder for women in comedy. It's getting a little bit better now. At the end of our show, it was embarrassing to photograph our writing staff. There were never more than three women, over 10 years. The first person to get fired every year was a woman. I'm going off on a tangent, but to your point, if there's a lack of development in female characters, particularly young girls, that is because they are written and developed by men. And the women who maybe say, "Hey, Erica has kind of been one note for over six years..." will not be listened to.

MS: I'll have to look into how many women were on the writing team of all of the shows because that's something I hadn't even thought about. Now I'm defiantly curious about it.

JR: Oh, I guarantee you *Schitt's Creek* has a better ratio of women to men. It's run by a gay man; he's not going to have the straight guy "girls aren't funny" attitude. There's also a fucking genius Catherine O'Hara who he has known his whole life. There NO WAY he thinks girls aren't funny. Gay men are just more open to hearing a female voice than straight guys who can be threatened.

MS: Yeah, that's really interesting. I was wondering why a show would choose to not develop a character really at all over an almost nine-year run.

JR: I'm only surmising. I don't know the innerworkings of that show. However, I did do a show with the company that executive produces *The Goldbergs*, and it was the only job I've ever taken where I didn't know anyone. It was very men vs. women.

MS: Schitt's Creek was a very niche show that existed in the shadows for a long time.

Meanwhile The Goldbergs is on ABC for a huge audience of families.

JR: Yes, but so was Modern Family. The Goldbergs was actually a leading for us. You can choose to dig into a character or not. Also, I think Wendy M is a genius. She is hilarious. I don't know if they've locker her character...

MS: I think she's amazing as an actress. But her character is underdeveloped. And that's an interesting one because obviously her character is based off of Adam Goldberg's real mother. This is maybe something you can speak to working for a long running show. Obviously, Frasier and Modern Family weren't based on anyone's families, but when does a character become its own entity separate from the real-life counterpart? How much creative liberty is taken in developing these characters based on real people?

JR: Don't forget. In a sitcom there's a writer's room. It's not just one person, each character is a collaboration. The showrunner is just filtering what of the suggestions he wants to incorporate. I could pitch things about my family that might fit really nicely into that show and it gets put in or, the showrunner could say no I want jokes that fit the paradigm I have given you. That was not true for the most part on Modern Family. We could give the characters personality traits we had not seen before and those would come from our own truths. You're not necessarily creating characters based on people you know it's more your experiences that you're putting on them. Or, what you want your experience to be. No matter the character, all of the writers are writing for that character. So, my relationship to those two gay characters is going to be different than a 35-year-old straight man's, than a 40 year old woman. I think it's a crime to not grow a character. Interestingly enough, Seinfeld was a show where it was determined from the beginning the

characters would not grow. That was the decision that was a comedically thought out thing. I mean, I don't think *The Goldbergs* is *Seinfeld*, but I think if what you're saying is that a particular character isn't moving it's not a decision, it's laziness.

MS: I've read so much about the impact of *Seinfeld* and Larry David and all of the choices that were made on that show that influenced Jewish comedy since then. There's so much that has been written about the character George in particular and if he is actually a Jewish character or not. Does saying George is Italian make him Italian, despite him playing into all the Jewish stereotypes and being based off of a Jewish person? Do you think that giving Jewish characteristics to characters who audiences are told are not Jewish debunk the Jewishness of the stereotype? Do they no longer become identified as Jewish stereotypes and just become characteristics of how people are?

JR: How ethnic people are. I think network television up to this point has white Christian people and then everyone else: Jews, Italians, Black people, Asians; everyone else. Of those ethnic, "nonwhite" Christian people, Italians are the most palatable to a Christian audience. Italians are loud, but there's no boogie man in there like "the Jews run the media." Black characters on television always have to be a certain way. The *Cosby Show* changed that some, and then today we have *Blackish* which is continuing to change Black representation. Asian people have the worst luck on television. But television creators took all of the white, ethnic, non-American people and folded them into "Italian." Somehow, that was more palatable. It was so cynical and so obvious. The actors they cast were Jewish, the writers were all Jewish, but you couldn't really present a Jewish family on television, I'm trying to think of one... *Schitt's Creek* does that, I guess. But that's a show that's five years old and it's on a niche platform.

MS: Do you think network television has anything to do with watered down representations of Jewish characters?

JR: Yeah, I guess *The Goldbergs* is the first show I can think of where they claimed it. But first of all, it takes place in the past, so it's not a current representation of a Jewish family. It relies on stereotypes, and I'm sure the selling point for the network was that it's a show about a guy's real family. It's a truthful representation. We're not disparaging Jews; everyone was really like that! Here are the tapes! There's a million ways to dodge and sidestep the fact that they are stereotyping Jews.

MS: Do you think being on networks like Pop and Netflix gives a show creator more freedom to stray from that? I haven't watched a lot of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, but that's another show that has mixed reviews on their representation of Jewish characters but it's on Amazon Prime.

JR: Also, a show that takes place in the past. It's very specifically New York Jews in the 50s.

MS: Do you think a show taking place in the past gives show creators more freedom to use stereotypes?

JR: 100% They can point to a period of time in history and say, "Tell us that they weren't like that." A better example of that is the movie *Dirty Dancing*. At its center is a Jewish family and a Jewish girl. Her growth is charted in that movie. It was made in the 80s depicting characters in the early 60s, and it's a great example of what you can really, truly do without relying on stereotypes and tropes.

MS: It really is such a great movie. Going off of this overarching theme of Jewish shows created by Jewish people, do you think it matters where the stereotype comes from or the motivation behind the stereotype? For example, in *Big Mouth*, one of the characters is basically a tiny Woody Allen. He is a middle school Woody Allen. He is constantly nervous, he has anxiety

induced vertigo, he plays the clarinet, and he just looks like Woody Allen. And as I was watching I thought to myself, well, I know why this is funny because I know who Woody Allen is. But if you are not me, are you going to understand the context behind the Woody Allen spoof?

JR: Well first of all it depends if you perceive Woody Allen as a negative stereotype. There's so much controversy and scandal around Woody Allen anyways, I don't know what the motivation would be to make him a young character in that show, but I don't know that show at all. It seems like an odd person to spoof. It seems like all bets are off when you have a young Woody Allen. But I will give you a couple of examples. Unless it's satire, unless it's to make a point, if you're leaning into stereotypes it is lazy. These are things that for decades a white straight audience thought was funny. These stereotypes are ideas pitched in a writer's room because up until very recently, white taste was the audience for broadcast television. If they [the white, straight, audience] thought it was funny, since they have the power, it was put on television. Up until about two years ago, we had a Korean American woman on our show [Modern Family] who was very funny, a great woman. Maybe three years ago, one of the show runners was pitching a character who spoke with a stereotypically Asian accent. They had to be forcibly talked out of including that accent. That show runner said, "Why not? They talk like that." And that is the rationale for keeping stereotypes alive. People say: they exist! So, why can't we trade in on that and make them funny? And that's why things don't grow. One of the things Modern Family did really well was blow up gay stereotypes. They were not fabulous; they were just everyday guys. They would have liked to have been fabulous, but they just weren't. They had bigger fish to fry like raising a child. So, in that way, we didn't give into a stereotype. We did however, with Sophia's character. We tried to expand her and give her some depth.

MS: Not that it doesn't matter what the motivation is, but unless the motivation is satire, the joke was unsuccessful?

JR: Unless you are calling attention to it, to the stereotype, and not to just get a laugh it's terrible. That is because the person at the helm of the show thinks it's funny. I'm telling you we had several occasions where people pitched stereotypical characters and had to be condemned by the writers.

MS: Because I have not spoken to anyone who writes for Big Mouth I don't know if the Woody Allen allusion was a conscious choice, but it is obvious enough they made jokes about it in the show. And this allusion made me think about how it seems they're making fun of Woody Allen through this character, but if you don't know this person, are you understanding the joke? So, I was just wondering what your take is on that idea.

JR: Again, I haven't seen the show. But I love John Mulaney, and I think Nick Kroll is very funny. It seems very inside baseball to make a character Woody Allen in a moment where Woody Allen is off putting to a lot of people. Although his autobiography is very great. What's your opinion of Woody Allen?

MS: I grew up watching a lot of Woody Allen films but I'm not his biggest fan.

JR: Yet you still love Big Mouth? The Woody Allen character isn't off putting to you?

MS: He is very off putting but he has a willingness to own up to his mistakes and learn which makes his character endearing. His character really got me thinking about people perpetuating their own stereotypes.

JR: In my experience, the reliance on stereotypical writing is laziness. It's the first thing that would come to your mind, so you write it instead of thinking about it. Speaking to *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the parents on that show are pretty stereotypical. I watched the first season of that show, and I appreciated what they were trying to do, but I did think, they're too "Jewy."

MS: In a bad way?

JR: Yes, in a bad way.

MS: My question then is, what do you think the impact is of having a show that is popular and critically acclaimed have negative stereotypical characters in it?

JR: Again, I think the fact that it's in the past and it has such a feminist thrust to it- this woman was a comic when there were no women comics. The actors are all really wonderful actors, and I'm sure they do everything they can to not lean into a stereotype. And, maybe it's improved. I only ever watched the first season.

MS: I think that goes back to what we were talking about before about character development diminishing a stereotype. Because that show focuses primarily on feminism and not Judaism, it lessens the impact of the stereotype because the characters are developing.

JR: Correct. And because Jews were so prominent in the standup world in that era, it makes sense that a woman starting then would be Jewish. Jews are just different now, 50 years later. The show *30 Somethings* had a couple that was interfaith, and nothing was made of that other than in a holiday episode they would celebrate Hanukkah and Christmas. It was one of the best examples of not stereotypes Jews and Christians that was ever on television. Mainly what I think about stereotypes is, as television, specifically comedy television, grew up, actual Jews were not

really on screen. They were fine in writers' rooms and as executives, just not on screen. And if you did put them on screen, you made them Italian.

MS: Do you think that has changed at all?

JR: Of course. But just remember the amount of self-loathing going on. Almost all of the television producers were Jewish. This goes back to the movies. They were afraid to call attention to themselves. They were afraid that if people saw too many Jews on TV, they would say: see, I told you Jews run the media! So, they stereotype the past or change the ethnicity because it's safe. A lot of it has to do with the people who run things. That's changing now with streaming. Two of the biggest shows during the pandemic have been Jewish: *Unorthodox* and *Stitzel*.

MS: Those were all of the things I specifically wanted to ask you about, if there is anything else you would like to add please feel free to.

JR: No. I think it's a really interesting topic, and something that for sure is changing. I think *The Goldbergs* is an older show. I think you will not be able to make fun of an ethnic group of people the way Broadcast situation comedy was allowed to for so long. Like you could never make a show like *The Jefferson's* today. That show, by the way, was my first sitcom writing show. There were no black writers. It was a show written by Jews about black people. Maybe by the end they had one black writer.

MS: Do you think writer's rooms are becoming more diverse?

JR: oh, absolutely. By edict. There were writers' rooms that had no women, or no ethnic groups represented. The first step of that was diverse casting. And now, you can't just have white people writing those characters. The writer's guild wants writer's rooms to be 50/50. Because women, and to a bigger extent minorities, were not welcome, they had to start at the bottom and work

their way up. Then a diverse hire would be thrown into a writer's room and of course they would fail because they hadn't had the same opportunity to learn. I think that's why it was so hard to get diverse writers.

Appendix B

Interview with Dr. Arthur Raney

Minnah Stein (MS): Specifically with overrepresentation, it can make show viewers think the people being overrepresented are more powerful simply because there are more of them in the show. Something that sparked in my mind was a question about the abundance of Jews in television and Hollywood. Do you think the overabundance in television is reinforcing the stereotype that Jews run the media?

Arthur Raney (AR): I would say the overwhelming majority of people in America don't know that for a fact there's an overwhelming majority of Jews in Hollywood. I think they probably don't know that. I think they have a perception that's the case, based on a historical base or the stereotype. Individuals may think that, but they don't know that. If they think that, it's merely a reflection of a stereotype. That makes it hard to say whether or not the truth reinforces the stereotype, because they have it in their minds already. So, I think for people who peddle that stereotype they utilize and rely upon that real world data to justify their arguments. But the fact that there may be a higher proportion of Jews working in television, in and of itself does not reinforce the stereotype. That fact is used to justify the stereotype.

MS: Yes. Obviously, I didn't think these people should go quit their jobs because their presence perpetuates the stereotype. That was not my line of thinking. I was just thinking about this recent study the ADL did about the most commonly believed stereotypes about Jews and one of them was that Jews run the media, they put themselves above everyone else. I wonder if people then see the Jews on TV and think: see, it's true! There they all are.

AR: Yeah, any kind of representation that seems to have some sort of power behind it can be used as a way to perpetuate power based stereotypes. It's exemplar accessibility. What's the example that comes to mind when you hear Jews control the media. If you can think, "oh there's this guy..." then it serves as a reinforce meant of the stereotype. When there are examples to reinforce that are quick to come to one's mind it's a way stereotypes get perpetuated.

MS: When talking about children watching television shows and reinforcing stereotypes at a young age, one of the shows I'm looking at, *The Goldbergs*, it's a family show targeted towards parents watching with their children. I was wondering what your thoughts are on the difference between the power of stereotypical representation in shows for children versus shows for adults.

AR: I don't know that the power is different. There's a long history of gender stereotypes in children's cartoons. It's directed at them and it's just as powerful in forming those associations. The difference though is the developmental issues that allow a kid to understand the themes of a kids show are different from the developmental issues required to understand a sitcom. I've only seen snippets of *The Goldbergs*, but if kids, for instance, don't understand sarcasm, satire, or the use of over the top representations that serve as a critique, kids completely miss it. Then it is incumbent upon parents to explain it to their children. Again, I don't know that show well enough, but kids take that information as much more on its face. They don't get subtext, they can't read between the lines, they don't know nuance. That's where it can get problematic unless they're watching with their parents.

MS: That parent/child dynamic is very interesting. The role parents play is key. I feel like parents are more likely to watch a show like *The Goldbergs* with their child than a cartoon so having parental influence makes the dissection of a show easier.

JR: There's a long line of research in what's called, "parent co-viewing" Research that looks specifically at these issues like how parents can help their children navigate waters that might otherwise drown them.

MS: Yes, because that show [The Goldbergs] is particularly tricky.

JR: If kids are watching a show by themselves and there's a lot of innuendo, or satire or sarcasm, likely they're not going to get it. Let me give you an example. There's a lot of evidence that, even kids show, will use teaching a moral lesson through showing a kid bullying a kid, followed by a message on why it's not good to bully. What we consistently find is that afterwards, particularly in kids 4-7, their takeaway from that is to bully. They don't get the lesson, the cognitive unraveling of "what we just showed you is the wrong thing." What we find is kids who watch that kind of program are much more likely to bully than to not. And that's for kid shows designed to teach a moral lesson. Their cognitive ability can't unravel that lesson.

MS: Going off of what you just said, I'll give you an example from The Goldbergs, just because it's the show that I've noticed the most stereotypical behavior in, every character is a stereotype and there is no development of the characters. The show starts, they make a mistake, they apologies, they learn their lesson, but in the next episode they do the exact same thing. So, in one episode there's the Goldbergs, the Jewish family, and the Kremps, the Christian family. The Kremps are lovely and respectful, and the Goldbergs are screaming and running around in the front yard without their clothes on. The Kremps are afraid of the Goldbergs, not as a commentary, they're just afraid of the Goldbergs. There are quite a few episodes that have that narrative of, the Christian family is better than the Jewish family. Later on the show, they recognize what they had done and so they have episodes that try to course correct and the

message is that really the Kremps are just as dysfunctional because no family is perfect. My question is, do you think those corrective episodes actually erasing the pervious messages?

AR: I really think it depends on the issue, and also how much the initial message has been reinforced by pother experiences. Most people don't learn about Judaism solely from The Goldbergs. Or, Maybe they do. But when real world experiences are impactful it's going to serve as a course correction just as much as the show. So, we have to acknowledge that for most audience members the show isn't their only source of information. Now in terms of the show in general, yeah, I think that the reverse course only works if you have the history of the initial course. If you're a long term viewer, then there may be some different understanding of the show. If you're new to the show, then it means less to you. I think there's a possibility that the show creators had this intention, and they knew it was coming, getting into this metta story. That's all well and good, but there needs to be an understanding that messages have effects.

MS: yeah, there definitely needs to be some kind of recognition of the intention the show creators had if that was the case.

AR: exactly, but we don't know what their intention was. Like, Quentin Tarantino doesn't necessarily come out and say, "well, here's why I'm making these movies incredibly violent. It's actually a critique of violence." So, yeah, we tend not to get it, and people aren't necessarily great at interpreting messages unless they're watching with a critical eye.

MS: As a follow up question, do you think if a show is trying to pull off a satirical story arch with no mention of what they're trying to do, does that reinforce the stereotype?

AR: Oh, it absolutely can. Colbert is a great example. There were a number of studies done in the media field when that show was on. He had two very loyal groups of viewers: liberal democrats, and conservative republicans. Both loved him. One because they thought he was a

master of satire, the other because they thought he was speaking the truth. So, yeah, you can watch something and not get it but still enjoy it. He was for sure reinforcing the beliefs of right-wing viewers by stating what they thought was true. And then I mean, this was way before your time, but there was a show called All in the Family.

MS: I'm a big fan.

AR: Ok, well studies were done on that show as well, and there were lots of viewers who thought Archie Bunker was right about his beliefs and Mike was a meathead. Then, the larger group of viewers saw it as a satire and thought Archie was a buffoon. So absolutely you can watch something and not get it, and it will reinforce the negative.

MS: I don't know if you're a Sacha Baron Cohen fan, but he has made speeches about his art where he says, people just don't get satire.

AR: Yeah, it's hard.

MS: Moving on to something a little more general. What do you think the motivation is for including stereotypes in television? I did another interview with someone who writes for television, and he was talking to me about how whatever gets laughs, that's what gets put in the show. I was wondering what, from your background, you think motivates including stereotypes in shows?

AR: I agree with the writer. At the end of the day, all media is about selling content. It's all about getting eyes on screens and clicks on websites. That's what gets monetized. The more eyes on screens dictates the price of advertising. So, I agree it's about the laugh. And it's also the fact short form narrative has to rely on stock characters. There has to be a quick way to communicate motivation, ideas, thoughts, and overall characteristics of a character so most viewers can understand immediately where that character is coming from. The need to rely upon

archetypal characters opens the door for stereotypical characters. We're relying on shortcuts for people to understand a character and one of the ways to do that is for them to have a certain skin color, for them to speak a certain way, for them to have a certain body type. But then what comes with that is the idea that everyone who looks that way has the same characteristics. It's a catch 22 that the writers are in: they have got to rely on stock characters, but they shouldn't do so in a way that solely places the same face with the same characteristics, specifically negative ones, over and over and over again. But they know if they put that face with that characteristic, people are going to get it immediately, they don't have to explain backstory or motivation, or any of that. People will just get it. And since people get it, they form alliances for those characters or against them, because that's what gets the laugh. It's a combination of those two things: you've got to rely on stock characters, and you've got to sell. It's the nature of the business. Viewers are a little more savvy than sometimes they're given credit for. I don't know if you've watched *Bridgerton* on Netflix.

MS: I have not; not yet.

AR: I just watched a few episodes, but it's set in England in the the 17/1800s. And in the role of the Queen, they cast a Black woman. They didn't say anything about it, they just put her in that roll, and it seemed perfectly normal. And there are other people of color who play dukes and gentlemen, and it doesn't seem odd that that's the case. They could have gone with the idea that this is England in the 1700s and everyone looks a certain way, but they didn't. And it was perfectly fine, and the audience didn't freak out about it. You don't have to rely on these stereotypical representations.

MS: Something I was talking about with the television writer was about how having shows that take place in the past allows you to rely more on stereotypes because you can't prove that the stereotypes aren't true.

AR: Right.

MS: So, going off of that, and what you were talking about in *Bridgerton*, do you think that the introduction of streaming is changing things? Because one of the shows was purely on streaming, one was on a niche channel, and the other was on ABC. The ABC show had very one dimensional character who were stereotypical. The streaming one had way more character development and less stereotypical characters. Do you think because of binge-watching, those show creators know viewers are watching a season at a time allows them to move away from short form narrative, stock characters?

AR: I don't think it's necessarily because of bingeing. It's more about the basic nature of the outlets themselves. Broadcast television stations in the United States play by different rules than all the others. They have different rules that cable and streaming, they have to operate in the public interest. So, one of the ways they do that is to appeal to the largest audience. They are trying to appeal to the largest audience to, again, drive up revenue. Cable and streaming have audiences that are more niche. Because of streaming algorithms giving recommendations, it's like having your own little cableverse in a single app. It's probably more reflective of the massive broad appeal of broadcast television than the niche streaming services have. It's also I think why broadcast television had better representation than cable and streaming because they're trying to appeal to a much broader audience.

MS: What does the kind of stereotypes we see on television say about where our media is at. If we're seeing an increase in Jewish stereotypes or women being stereotypes, what does that say about where we are culturally?

AR: It depends on the perspective you take on media's role in society. If you take that writer's perspective, and follow that out, it would be if there's an increase in stereotypes it's because people find them funny and that's what we're making money at. So, television, in that perspective, is more of a reflection of society than a driver. So that would be a way to say, if there's an increase in Jewish stereotypes or even diversity, that these things are a reflection of what the audience wants. This is the argument that most television writers use is that they're just giving audiences what they want. So that's one way to look at it: trends we see are a reflection of the audience. You could also flip that around and say it's not like people have the ability to choose from two similar shows one with Jewish stereotypes and one without while both doing a similar thing. It's not really fair to say we watch what we want to watch because really, we watch what they give us. So really if there's a reliance on stereotypes, it's coming from the producers thinking that's what people want and creating narrative worlds that are reflective of values and narratives people will buy. I think it's a reciprocal process between those two things. Wherever you stop the cycle, an argument can be made from either side. Either give us what we want, or we just watch what you give us.

MS: Less of a reflection of audiences and more of a reflection of what people think audiences want.

AR: Yes, exactly. And then what it ends up being is that audiences exist, and they want content so whatever is given to them is what they consume. It does them become what audiences want because it's a cyclical/symbiotic relationship.

MS: Going more towards the nature of stereotypes in general, how do you think stereotypes impact people's perceptions and actions. I know that people watch television and they think it's real even though they know it's not. Our brains just can't tell the difference. How does seeing stereotypes on television effect the way you view people?

AR: I think at the end of the day and answering your question as a social scientist with a background in psychology, my thought is that what each stereotype represents is the association between a type of person and a particular characteristic, and often times that characteristic is negative. So, the more those two concepts are presented to you, the stronger the relationship between those two things gets in the brain. And, if I enjoy a show that has a connection, I don't enjoy the show because of that connection, but if I enjoy a show that has it, I'm going to watch that show more, which means I'm going to have more chances to see that connection, which only further strengthens the connection in my brain. So, now at the same time, whatever type of person this is, I likely have this type of person in my life. The relationship I have with this person and the experiences I have with them are also going to be strengthening concepts about that kind of person. Many of which, I would assume, are contrary to what I see on TV. Or, maybe not. But the real world impacts the way someone thinks about and what is connected to this type of person. So then, why does it matter? When we meet a new person like this, we often are trying to assess them. And one of the things that happens when we get a first impression, is that we have expectations based on what somebody looks like. We'll use the blonde girls are dumb stereotype as an example, not because we hold it, but because we have heard about it. So, if I'm meeting a

blonde female, I have a lot of notions of blonde females in my head that this female isn't going to be very smart. The stronger that connection is between blonde females not being smart, the more it's going to inform my expectations of new people I meet. It will also serve as the way I interpret what they do. We talk about inferring attributions from someone. Why do people act the way they do? Well, they do it because either that's who they are or something in their environment made them that way. What we find is that because you're my friend, something in your environment made you do that. Because I know you, and you're a good person so it didn't come from within you. So, I make an external attribution- you did something wrong, but it came from outside you. We then find with people we don't know; we make internal attributions when they do something wrong. And in particular, with stereotypes, then it's going to help influence that assumption. You know, we could talk about January 6th. The way that those people looked, people had assumptions about why they were rioting- it was their environment. Black Lives Matter protests was because they were bad people. Where does this interpretative lens come from? Well, it comes from these connections we make in our heads about different characteristics. These are just two ways: meeting someone knew and interpreting their behavior where stereotyping can come into play. Often what we are talking about when we talk about stereotyping is the way we use information in the world to make judgements. Stereotyping allows us to make quick judgements about people, often that are unfair, because we are assuming. That's the way media can have a downstream effect on behavior.

MS: I think assumptions based off of how people look is so interesting. Even going off of the January 6th example, so many people were assuming those people were poor because they looked a certain way, but a lot of them were wealthy. Even in the Jewish studies I've been doing on the

“Jewish look.” People say, “oh well you don’t look Jewish.” But what does a Jew look like?

There are so many different kinds of Jews.

AR: Exactly! And, that is where stereotypes come in to play. One of the things we do as humans is we survey our environment for possible threats. Our old brains – our fright or flight – still operate the same way as our evolutionary ancestors. We are surveying our environment, and we are judging people on very obvious kind of characteristics – the way they look is one of the most obvious. So then the information that we have in our brains that are connected to people who look that way, that’s what is going to come most readily to mind when we see someone who looks like that. Stereotypes are those quick shortcuts, those characteristics that then lead to those interpretations.

MS: Right. I think that’s relied on a lot, at least from what I have seen, in television especially to be like I can tell you something about this character without having to say it based on stereotypes. I don’t know if you’ve seen New Girl? Schmidt in New Girl, they were like we’ll have him be a Jewish character, but we won’t say he’s Jewish, we’ll just cast someone who looks really Jewish and hope the audience gets it.

AR: Exactly, hopefully it will come up maybe at some point in an episode that reaffirms. Again, with short-form narrative, we have to do stuff like that, right? We have to try to communicate as quickly as possible to our audience. But again, there are ways that are better to communicate [Jewishness]. He could be wearing Star of David, that would be another way you could communicate that as opposed to a particular nose size, hair color or whatever. So, there’s other way to communicate what you want to, or maybe a little more nuisance, but it is a reality of the narrative form.

MS: That's really interesting. I hadn't thought about the short-form narrative and needing to make jumps quickly. Does this happen more in TV than in movies?

AR: Well, I think you get more character development in movies, mainly because you've got 90 to 150 minutes to communicate those things. These often have fewer, broadly speaking, fewer characters that are being introduced. Some are big ensemble casts, but it's often the focus on a few people, so you have more character development there. So necessarily the way that television works, it has more opportunity to rely on stereotypical stuff. I think comedic films surely rely on stereotypes just as much as television ever does. And films, ya know, in particular – I'm thinking from the 80s and 90s – portraying any individual of Middle Eastern descent as a terrorist, right? I'm not in any way letting films off the hook. But, action adventure films, you're not having lots of dialogue, so you're not really developing characters anyway. So, you're going to rely on stereotypical stuff. I hate to make statements and not have data to support them. I don't have a TV versus film study to point to, but my general sense is yes, there is likely more reliance on that kind of stereotyping on television than in film.

MS: Yes. I hadn't put a lot of thought into short form; I think because the way I viewed the shows is very different from how everyone else does. I'm sure *The Goldbergs* wasn't meant to be watched 31 hours straight! Like all eight seasons back to back! That's not how it was meant to be enjoyed. It's a very different experience for me that the average viewer, watching episode after episode, after episode. It kinda removes the short form from my mind – because I was like that's the longest show I've ever seen!

AR: 31 hours is not short form.

MS: No! I was like yeah, these are episodes that you normally see once a week.

AR: That's the whole notion of a situational comedy. It was a genre that was developed so you didn't have story lines building over time. You were given a situation, and they were funny, right? So, it allowed people to come in to those shows and build an audience without having to build this huge history of what's happened because it's just characters that are now in a situation, and you don't really have to know their history from four episodes ago; You can find it funny. And that the nature of that particular genre. They continue to rely, in short form, on those stereotypes because they hope new people are coming to watch new episodes all the time.

MS: This is my last question. It's based on the question I asked before about how stereotypes impact our actions. Obviously, stereotypes impact outsiders who are learning things about a group through messages they are being sent on TV, but how do those messages influence – do they influence? – the members within that group?

AR: Sure. They do, absolutely. I can't point to a specific study that lays out how, but it absolutely reinforces the thoughts and feelings people have about themselves and about other people outside their group. Whether it is turned in to oneself – that Jewish stereotype – wow, I really am kinda cheap. I do think my nose is too big. Whether it's turned on oneself or if it then becomes another lens to judge others inside the group, I think it's probably a little bit of both. It can shape the way that one then forms their self-presentation when in the presence of others. I know that you think Jewish people act this way; therefore, I am going to act a different way – not because I necessarily want to, but just because I don't want to fit the stereotype. Absolutely, it can influence individuals to kind of curve their own behavior to not appear to be reinforcing the stereotype. It can lead to self-analysis that way and group critique and all of these kind of things. There's absolutely self-influence as well. Just my own experience – I grew up in Alabama. You just grew up with a Southern accent. Mine wasn't super thick, but seeing the representations of

people with Southern accents and the shit they were given, made me not want to have one when I was around other people. My college roommate and best bud from high school, we went to undergrad together, but he went to graduate school in Virginia and said, 'I've got to change the way that I talk before I to.' He didn't want to be judged by people there negatively. That's the way a stereotype can influence individuals.

MS: No more questions. Thank you so much! I really appreciate it.

AR: You're welcome!

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