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March 23, 2024

“But Not Too Jewish”

An Evaluation of Jewish Holidays in Television Comedies from 2000-2023

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An abstract of  
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## Abstract

### “But Not Too Jewish”

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Holidays are central to the Jewish faith, as they emphasize religious observance, community, and tradition. This thesis explores the portrayal of Jewish holidays in 30 episodes of American television shows, aiming to fill a gap in Jewish studies and Film and Media Studies by examining how these holidays are depicted within comedic contexts. Specifically focusing on Hanukkah, Passover, Shabbat, and Yom Kippur, this study analyzes 30 episodes between the four holidays, coding for six common themes. These themes include: is the holiday the main theme of the episode, is this the only “Jewish” episode in the series, is the episode educational, is the holiday used for comedic purposes, is the Jewish humor clear and explainable, and is there a depiction of an interfaith relationship or character. This thesis concludes that Jewish holidays are often depicted for comedic purposes by using Jewish customs or Jewish stereotypes. This thesis also finds that there is typically a portrayal of an interfaith couple or character in the holiday episode. This thesis also determines that the majority of the episodes are not the only “Jewish” episode in the series. Many of the episodes also use Jewish humor, which may not be universally understood by all audiences. Finally, this thesis claims that there will be less Jewish sitcoms in the coming years with the end of famous Jewish television shows, including *The Goldbergs*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

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I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my dear friend, Orli Sheffey (2002-2022). Your death destroyed us, and all we could do was watch television to escape the pain. Thank you for being a spiritual force during this process. I love you forever and always.

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### **A Note: Written in December 2023**

I am a television connoisseur: it is my escapism. I am the friend who recommends the next show on the watchlist, and I am well-versed in pop culture. Whenever the teacher asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would say, “an E News anchor.” I love the glitz and glamor of Hollywood, and I love how television can transport us into new realities.

Television has also united my entire family, giving us something to talk about at the dinner table, unrelated to politics. Moreover, television has played a significant role in my life, guiding me through some of the darkest times. Senior year of high school, two months before the COVID-19 outbreak, I was sick with the flu and mono, so I resorted to watching all six seasons of *Sex and the City*. When a close friend passed away sophomore year of college, I would escape to the world of television.

When I chose to write about television comedies, I was excited to explore how Judaism (my religion) was portrayed. I love seeing representation of Jews, especially when focusing on Jewish customs and traditions. Part of the reason I chose this topic is because it is fun and lighthearted. There is a lack of positivity in the world, and this topic felt like a release. Whenever I tuned into television, I observed a significant Jewish presence, something with which I could easily identify. I remember discussing *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* at the Shabbat table and wondering how non-Jewish audiences enjoy this inherently “Jewish” television show. As I watched all 10 seasons of *Friends*, I thought about the role of Ross and Monica Geller, as well as the Jewish stereotypes present in Rachel Green’s character arc. *Friends* is one of the most successful television shows of all time, and there were two openly Jewish characters. Thus, this topic felt natural and important to me.

Then October 7th happened: the most brutal violation of Jews and Jewish bodies since the Holocaust. The strong start to my thesis was halted, and I could not do anything other than stare at the screen and listen to the news. I had no desire to continue my research. As I



scrolled on Instagram, I saw a few peers praise the actions of Hamas, claiming the paragliders were “iconic.” I was and am beyond devastated.

As the war continued, I became even more distant from my thesis topic. I felt a sense of dread, forcing myself to spend time on these fun and lighthearted characters when the American Jews were and are experiencing a deep chasm. It felt insensitive to discuss the escapism and joy we get from sitcoms. I also feared the brutality of this upcoming war: how far would Israel go? How many more innocent civilians would die? How can we prevent death, especially when the Palestinians have no army of their own?

I feel lonely, and I am dreading my return to campus for the second semester. My peers post “educational” infographics with black-and-white opinions on their social media, unwilling to learn. I am the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, and for the first time, I am scared. While I deleted Instagram, I still see the police cars in front of my synagogue. There is truly no escaping the news.

I am exhausted and angry. I am embarrassed to explain my thesis topic. Whenever people ask what I am writing about, I feel uncomfortable telling them, since being Jewish has become synonymous with the Israeli identity. I feel lost and overwhelmed with all the media. People who I adore on my campus have disappointed me. I considered changing my thesis topic, but that is an unproductive tactic. I was once excited and passionate about this topic, but now I am just sad, lonely, and overwhelmed. Every day I play games in my head in which I contradict my contradictions about the war: “rape is never justified, and this retaliation is not justified. But what about x and what about y?” This is my only focus.

I understand the pressure and anxiety of the time, and I know that this topic explores American Jews of this pre-war period, in which antisemitism was subtle and audiences loved these inherently Jewish characters. These characters have allowed the American public to understand our community and for Jewish individuals to feel seen on television. However, I

fear that American Jewry before October 7th is different. Much has changed regarding what it means to be Jewish in America in 2024. While I am not a fortune teller, I know that these characters will continue to mean something to Jewish audiences, even as American Jewry experiences a divide. By looking at these characters, I am reminded about the strength of the Jewish people, and I have found the positive in this topic through their influence. Thus, this thesis sheds light on the value of Jewish characters and their pivotal role on the American television screen. Even when facing a dark moment, these characters demonstrate that there is joy in being Jewish.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

**“‘Too Jewish,’ a pejorative apocryphally attributed to Harry Cohn in the 1920s to justify de-Judaizing actors’ names and appearances, in the 1930s led the hyper defensive moguls to extend the practice to Jewish characters and subject matter as well (Desser and Friedman 1).” – Vincent Brooks, “Still an Empire of Their Own: How Jews Remain atop a Reinvented Hollywood.”**

When I was a kid, I loved the Nickelodeon television show *Victorious* (2010-2013) which follows a group of friends at a performing arts high school in Hollywood. The friend group of six each have distinct personalities, spending every episode engaging in trouble. Robbie Shapiro, the ventriloquist of the group, is the stereotypical Jewish character: pale, scrawny, and large nosed. Robbie cannot eat gluten or dairy, playing into the stereotype that Jews are physically weak. The characters often reference Robbie’s “jew-fro,” otherwise known as his curly hair. Robbie is unapologetically Jewish, which was exciting for a ten-year-old who had never seen a Jewish character on television. However, only recently did I realize Robbie’s identity is used in a comedic manner. Robbie is the archetype of the weak Jewish male, and the characters make fun of the traits that are stereotypically Jewish as opposed to celebrating them. It is a paradox: while I love the Jewish representation on children’s shows, his identity is mainly used for humor. Can Jewish characters exist on television without their stereotypes?

As illustrated in the television show *Victorious*, there is always that stereotypically “Jewish” character on television, especially on sitcoms. Whether it is a children’s show on the Disney Channel or a sitcom on CBS, there is often the classic Jewish archetype.<sup>1</sup> If the Jewish character is female, she has curly brown hair, brown eyes, and she is extremely

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<sup>1</sup> Typically, the character has Ashkenazi Jewish traits. These are Jews whose ancestors came from Central and Eastern Europe.

“spoiled” think Fran Fine from the CBS sitcom *The Nanny* [1993-1999]).<sup>2</sup> The male character is a bit nerdy, also having brown hair and brown eyes (think Ross Gellar from the NBC sitcom *Friends* [1994-2004]).<sup>3</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, but the overwhelming number of Jewish characters follow these archetypes. While certain television programs prominently feature Jewish characters, such as *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023), and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2024), these instances represent the exception rather than the norm. Often, Jewish characters are portrayed in supporting roles, where they become beloved figures among audiences. Examples include Winston Schmidt from *New Girl* (2011-2018), Annie Edelson from *Community* (2009-2015), and Willow Rosenberg from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

Despite the relatively small percentage of the American population that identifies as Jewish—approximately 2.4%, according to the *Pew Research Center*—the prevalence of Jewish characters and themes in television is astounding. This raises questions about the appeal and success of such shows, particularly considering their often niche cultural humor. For instance, the enduring popularity of *Seinfeld*, a series deeply ingrained in American-Jewish culture, prompts inquiries into its broad audience appeal and the resonance of its humor beyond the Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> One potential explanation for the prevalence of Jewish representation on television lies in the demographics of the entertainment industry itself. A significant number of producers, writers, and creators in Hollywood are Jewish, so they draw upon their own cultural backgrounds when creating narratives and characters. David Crane, the co-creator of *Friends*, admitted that he did not seek to create Jewish

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<sup>2</sup> Antler, Joyce. *Television's Changing Image of American Jews*. New York, American Jewish Committee, 2000. p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce Antler also comes to a similar conclusion about Fran Fine and Ross Gellar.

<sup>4</sup> In *Variety*'s “100 Greatest TV Shows of all Time,” they rank *Seinfeld* as number 8 and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* as 36. Both created by Larry David, these shows explore American Jewish identities. *Variety* also lists shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, *Friends*, and *Sex and the City*. Each of these shows have Jewish creators, while also exploring the New York Jewish identity.

characters, but “in the writers’ room, which was about half Jewish, people told stories from their lives, which is how Ross’s Jewish background came about” (Kaplan). Since the writers had strong Jewish backgrounds, they created a character that reflected their own experiences. This familiarity with Jewish themes often contributes to a form of authenticity seen on screen. However, this does not fully account for the widespread popularity and acclaim enjoyed by audiences of these deeply “Jewish” shows. These shows are successful even though many viewers may not fully understand the humor and references to Jewish culture.

The enduring appeal of such programs suggests a broader resonance that transcends cultural boundaries. Despite being steeped in specific cultural contexts, these shows often explore universal themes such as family dynamics, relationships, and societal issues, resonating with audiences of various backgrounds. The complexity of audience reception to Jewish characters and themes in shows like *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is underscored by personal anecdotes, such as when my friend who was raised Hindu expressed admiration for Larry David without necessarily connecting with the show’s Jewish humor. This friend loved David’s awkward responses to social settings without even realizing that many of the characters were Jewish. He completely separated David’s humor from his Jewish identity. Now that he is immersed in Jewish culture at Emory and in a Jewish fraternity, he has a better understanding of Larry David’s Jewish identity. The appeal of characters like David transcends cultural boundaries, drawing viewers in with their universal comedic appeal rather than solely relying on specific cultural references.

While it's tempting to seek definitive answers about audience perceptions, the reality is far more nuanced and challenging. Even discussions with friends from diverse backgrounds, such as those at Emory University, provides only a glimpse into the complex nature of audience reception. In an era characterized by greater cultural exchange and appreciation for diverse perspectives, audiences are increasingly drawn to narratives that

offer insights into different experiences. Jewish-themed shows, with their distinct humor and perspective, offer viewers an opportunity to engage with and understand the Jewish culture. Viewers may not seek out these shows because of their Jewish themes, but through watching these shows, they gain a better understanding of Judaism and Jewish traditions.

Either way, there are many Jewish characters on television, and many Americans have stated that this is because “Jews control Hollywood.” According to a 2016 article in the *Times of Israel* by Pinny Aaron, he asks the question “[a]re there a disproportionate number of Jews in Hollywood?... Without precise data, it would be easy to guess that 20% of studio executives, managers, and talent agents in Hollywood are Jewish. It’s possible that that number is significantly higher, but even at 20%, that would be ten times the national percentage,” (*Times of Israel*). It is challenging to find an exact estimate of Jews in Hollywood since there is a lack of data on Hollywood demographics.

There are a lot of Jews in Hollywood: this is simply a fact, and this has always been widely believed by the American people. According to polling research gathered in 1964, 50% of Americans believed Jewish people controlled Hollywood (*Anti-Defamation League*). In 2008, the number decreased to around 22% (*Anti-Defamation League*). Some of the most prominent names in Hollywood are Jewish: Bob Iger, the CEO of the Walt Disney Corporation, David Geffen, founder of DreamWorks Pictures, and Rebecca Blumenstein, the President - Editorial of NBC News, and, of course, the infamous Harvey Weinstein, founder of Miramax (*LA Times*). Other prominent examples of Jewish influence in Hollywood include Fran Drescher, who is the president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Steven Spielberg, three-time Academy Award winning director, and Matthew Weiner, the creator of the show *Mad Men* (2007-2015). The list could continue, but the point had been made.

Joel Stein, a journalist for the *LA Times*, claims that “[t]he Jews are so dominant [in Hollywood], I had to scour the trades to come up with six Gentiles in high positions at

entertainment companies...As a proud Jew, I want America to know about our accomplishment. Yes, we control Hollywood” (*LA Times*). Stein's perspective reflects a desire to give credit to the Jewish community for its significant contributions to Hollywood’s success. He hopes to convince the American public to acknowledge the integral role played by Jews in building and shaping the entertainment industry, as opposed to criticizing their role. The contributions of Jewish individuals to the development of Hollywood, transforming it into the globally recognized institution it is today, should be celebrated.

On the other hand, Dave Chappelle, a renowned American comedian, underscores the sensitivity and consequences associated with antisemitic rhetoric through his own experiences and observations. In Chappelle's 2022 *Saturday Night Live* (1975-Present) monologue, he begins by discussing the famous rapper Kanye West’s Tweet, in which he states, “I’m a bit sleepy tonight but when I wake up I’m going death con 3 On JEWISH PEOPLE.” Kanye’s remarks prompted Twitter to ban him, while Adidas, the shoe company with whom he held a substantial deal, severed ties. In response to Kanye’s rant, Chappelle admits that he “been in this business for 35 years, and [he] learned there are two words in the English language that you should never say together in sequence, and those words are ‘the’ and ‘Jews’” (Dave Chappelle Monologue). With this statement, Chappelle underscores the alleged gravity of Kanye’s offense, suggesting that such derogatory language against the Jewish community effectively excommunicates one from the industry.

Ironically, when Chappelle claims you cannot say ‘the’ and ‘Jews’ in the same sentence, he uses them in the same sentence, doing the very thing he tells people not to say. Here, Chappelle purposely uses his inflammatory remarks to demonstrate the sensitivity of Jewish audiences. This episode faced intense criticism, prompting *SNL* to remove the monologue from their YouTube channel (although the episode remains accessible on NBC's streaming app, Peacock). Jonathan Greenblatt, the head of the *Anti-Defamation League*

(ADL), took to Twitter, expressing concern.<sup>5</sup> The controversy stirred widespread anger towards Dave Chappelle, yet he has continued to host comedy specials on Netflix and perform on tour. He remains a successful comedian, and his career has not suffered. West also just released a highly successful album *Vultures 1* in 2024.

Furthermore, many celebrities have spoken out against Israel during the 2023-2024 Israel-Hamas War, leading to immediate backlash. In 2023, the Academy Award winning actress Susan Sarandon claimed that with the rise of antisemitism due to the 2023 Israel-Hamas War, Jews are “getting a taste of what it is like to be Muslim in this country, so often subjected to violence” (*Vanity Fair*). Sarandon was dropped from her talent agency, the United Talent Agency, and she has since issued an apology. Similarly, Melissa Barrera, an actress in the *Scream* franchise, stated on Instagram “I have been actively looking for videos and information about the Palestinian side for the last 2 weeks or so... Why? Because western media only shows the other side. Why they do that, I will let you deduce for yourself,” (*Fox News*). Barrera implies that Jews control the media, including the news media, causing a lack of information about the Palestinian side. Her remarks were swiftly met with condemnation, leading the Spyglass Media Group to drop her from an upcoming project. Despite Barrera's assertion that her comments were not rooted in antisemitism, Spyglass Media Group deemed her statement intolerable.

The juxtaposition of Joel Stein's assertion of Jewish dominance in Hollywood and the reaction to Chappelle's commentary on the repercussions of antisemitic remarks provides an exploration into the dynamics surrounding Jewish representation in the entertainment industry. The tension has been heightened during the 2023-2024 Israel-Hamas war, as demonstrated by Sarandon and Barrera's comments. These perspectives contribute to the

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<sup>5</sup> “[W]e shouldn't expect @DaveChappelle to serve as society's moral compass, but disturbing to see @nbcsnl not just normalize but popularize #antisemitism. Why are Jewish sensitivities denied or diminished at almost every turn? Why does our trauma trigger applause?” (Jonathan Greenblatt, Twitter)



ongoing dialogue surrounding Jewish identity and influence in popular culture, shedding light on the complex nature of this discourse.

These instances of sensitivity towards attacks on Jewish Americans and Israelis reinforce the belief that Jews run Hollywood, even by those who work in Hollywood. Peers of mine have claimed that these instances also demonstrate the double standard in which individuals face repercussions for saying anything about Jews, but not for any other form of hateful rhetoric. A peer had once told me that it is unfair that racism, homophobia, and Islamophobia do not lead to the same consequences. If anything is stated about Jewish people, there is an automatic attack on this person (such as Kyrie Irving, who was suspended from the NBA for posting a link to a movie that promoted Holocaust denial). He claimed that Hollywood is overly sensitive when an individual says anything regarding Jewish people.

However, there are instances where racism is met with strong condemnation and repercussions. In 2018, the sitcom *Roseanne* (1988-1997) planned to return to air for its tenth season. After the success of the first season, Roseanne Barr, the star of the sitcom, made horrific racist and Islamophobic tweets about Valerie Jarrett, a senior advisor to President Obama. She claimed that if the “muslim brotherhood & planet of the apes had a baby=vj” (*The New York Times*). This disgusting tweet led ABC to cancel the eleventh season of the show, despite successful ratings. ABC then greenlit a new show called *The Connors* (2018-present), which was a spin-off of *Roseanne*. ABC fired Roseanne Barr, killing off her character in *The Connors*. This incident shows that this double standard is not entirely the truth. Yes, when someone states something antisemitic, there are repercussions. However, do these repercussions further demonstrate Jews control Hollywood? Does Chapelle’s *Saturday Night Live* monologue speak to the inherent and hidden truth about the overrepresentation of Jews in Hollywood?

Ironically, some of the most vigorous suppression of on-screen Jewish presence in television history came from the Jewish media heads. Jews truly played a role in creating Hollywood; yet Jewish characters were only more recently introduced as protagonists of shows. In response to their desire to be “fully” American, Jewish studio heads promoted assimilation tactics, hiding Jewish characters on television. Prior to the 1990s, Jewish characters on television were sidekicks, such as Buddy on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961-1966), Rhoda in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), and Abe Vigoda on *Barney Miller* (1975-1982). There is one exception, though: *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973), which followed an intermarried Jewish and Catholic couple. However, this show was canceled after one season on the air. There was strong backlash from the Jewish community, but CBS did not cite this as the reason for its cancellation. In fact, Jewish groups started a campaign to remove *Bridget Loves Bernie* from television. This originated “with Conservative and Orthodox rabbis in the New York metropolitan area, but... gained the support of Reform rabbis... on the West Coast,” (*The New York Times*). Thus, the show was removed from air by CBS.

However, it is important to note that beginning in the late 1950s, there were representations of Jews in the media, including Lenny Bruce in stand-up comedy, and in films, with Mel Brooks, Woody Allen, and Sidney Lumet. Specifically, these filmmakers created films about being Jewish in America. In regard to television, studios headed by Jews prevented television shows from being “too Jewish.” Yet when *Seinfeld* (1989-1998) came on air, the tide changed. Jewish characters were the stars of television shows, as opposed to side characters. Unlike its predecessors, *Seinfeld* embraced Jewish culture and traditions, making Jewish holidays a central aspect of its storyline. From Festivus, the secular response to Christmas with various Hanukkah themes, to a Yom Kippur episode, the show integrated Jewish rituals and customs, offering audiences a humorous portrayal of Jewish life. This

marked a departure from the assimilationist tendencies of the past and brought in an era of celebration in Jewish identity on television.

Post-*Seinfeld*, television embraced a more celebratory approach to Jewish representation, with holidays serving as a catalyst for cultural exploration and storytelling. Emmy winning shows like *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023) and *Transparent* (2014-2019) not only featured Jewish characters prominently but also showed Jewish holidays. Between Passover seders, Hanukkah celebrations, and Yom Kippur services, these shows provided audiences with a deeper glimpse into the world of Jewish culture.

The inclusion of Jewish holidays in television programming has had an impact on both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. For Jewish viewers, seeing their traditions reflected on screen can validate their experiences and foster a sense of pride in their heritage. For non-Jewish audiences, exposure to Jewish holidays through television can help demystify and humanize Jewish culture, promoting understanding across different cultures. Thus, the celebration of Jewish holidays in Hollywood can serve as a tool for promoting cultural appreciation in the entertainment industry and beyond. Television serves as an important medium for exposing audiences to Jewish culture and traditions.

### **Why Holidays:**

Holidays are central to the Jewish faith, emphasizing religious observance, communal gatherings, and tradition. Jewish holidays serve as opportunities for the community to come together in celebration and prayer. Whether it's attending synagogue services, sharing meals with family and friends, or participating in rituals, Jewish holidays create a shared sense of belonging among Jewish people.

Since holidays are a central aspect of Judaism, there is a long history of their depiction in Hollywood. The first major depiction of a Jewish person in Hollywood was in Al

Jolson's vehicle *The Jazz Singer* (1927), which actually shows a Yom Kippur service. This 1927 Warner Brothers film tells the story of Jacob "Jakie" Rabinowitz who hopes to pursue his dream of becoming a jazz singer. His father, however, a cantor at the synagogue, wants his son to follow his path by also becoming a cantor. When Jakie's father learns that he has been singing at the local beer garden, his father punishes him, leading Jakie to run away. At the synagogue, Cantor Rabinowitz sings the Kol Nidre, the Hebrew and Aramaic prayer that is sung during sundown of Yom Kippur, devastated that his son is not at synagogue on the holiest day.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the film, Jakie leaves his Broadway show and returns to the synagogue to chant Kol Nidre, as his father becomes ill. This film perfectly portrays the desire to assimilate into American culture while maintaining the traditions of the old country.

*The Jazz Singer* marked the end of the silent-film era, becoming a revolutionary film as the first "part-talkie." The film was also extremely successful, landing Warner Brothers an honorary Academy Award. I find it interesting that Warner Brothers, which was headed by the Ashkenazi Jewish brothers, chose a film with a focus on a Jewish holiday as one of their first talking films. This was especially significant in the 1920s, since the US felt wary of immigrants, passing the Immigration Act of 1924.<sup>7</sup> The film was a hit Broadway play, so the potential profits gave Warner Brothers an incentive to make this film. While *The Jazz Singer* seemed to mark a turning point for Jewish portrayal in Hollywood, "[t]he Great Depression, the Nazi takeover in Germany, and burgeoning fascism at home refueled a Judeo phobia that spread beyond the confines of Hollywood but again saw in the movie capital a made-to-order target" (Brook 6). *The Jazz Singer* was a pivotal moment in both film and Jewish representation in the media, but the Great Depression and Nazi Germany led Hollywood to

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<sup>6</sup> Kol Nidre - Al Jolson, *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

<sup>7</sup> The Immigration Act of 1924 restricted the number of immigrants allowed in the US. Jews, in particular, were restricted from entering the US.

revert back to its assimilationist practices.<sup>8</sup> While my focus is on television, I wanted to highlight *The Jazz Singer* as it was not only one of the first times Jews were seen in Hollywood, but it was also the first time a holiday was portrayed.

Evidently, Jewish holidays are important to Jews and have left a significant mark not only on religious practices but also on cultural representations in Hollywood. *The Jazz Singer* stands as a pioneering example, intertwining its narrative with Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Since its release, a myriad of films, such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), *Yentl* (1983), and *Keeping the Faith* (2000) have continued to explore and celebrate Jewish holidays, strengthening cinematic portrayals of Jewish culture. Yet perhaps even more striking is the prevalence of Jewish holiday episodes in television shows, particularly within the realm of comedy. In this context, Jewish traditions take on a distinct and often humorous portrayal. As Neal Gabler observes, “You were allowed to be ethnic in comedy because you were an object of humor; you were making fun of yourself” (Gabler 10). Gabler's insight underscores the complex relationship between comedy and ethnicity, particularly within the Jewish comedic tradition. Jews were able to be “Jewish” only if they used their identity in a comedic manner. The first time a menorah (the candle holder used on Hanukkah) was lit on national television was on the sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (Zaltzman). On the December 10, 1977, episode of the third season of *SNL*, Radner lights the menorah and says the prayer over the candles in both Hebrew and English. This moment was so impactful for American Jewry, and Radner herself, that Radner sheds a tear. Immediately after this heartfelt moment, the sketch continues. This scene demonstrates that comedies are an important medium for the portrayal of Jewish holidays on television.

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<sup>8</sup> It is imperative to note that the racial politics and impact of *The Jazz Singer* is complicated, as the film uses blackface.

In this thesis, I aim to delve deeper into the portrayal of Jewish holidays on television, with a specific focus on comedy. By analyzing a selection of comedic television shows that feature Jewish holidays, I seek to uncover the dynamics of cultural representation, humor, and identity construction within the context of television. These portrayals offer audiences a unique lens through which to explore Jewish rituals, often infused with wit, irony, and irreverence. Jewish holidays often have serious undertones; but, in television they are used to make the audience laugh. Through this exploration, I hope to shed light on the diverse ways in which Jewish traditions are embraced, reinterpreted, and celebrated within television comedy.

### **Literature Review:**

Previous scholarship has mainly focused on Jewish influence in Hollywood as a whole. Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own* serves as a central text in understanding the interplay between Jewish identity and the rise of the studio system in Hollywood. Gabler's analysis delves into the origins of Hollywood as a way for Jewish entrepreneurs to find work and refuge from the antisemitism of the early 20th century. Figures such as Louis B. Mayer, co-founder of MGM, Jack Warner of Warner Brothers, and Harry Cohn, co-founder of Columbia Pictures, emerged as the leading figures within the industry, shaping the landscape of American cinema. Echoing Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own*, Vincent Brook writes that "[w]ithout antisemitism, of the European and American variety, Jews never would have 'invented Hollywood' in the first place" (Brook 4). When many Eastern European Jewish families immigrated to America, they felt a strong desire to assimilate. Yet these immigrants were unwelcome in the US, limiting their job opportunities and facing widespread discrimination. Hence, these Jewish moguls decided to create their own empire.

With their desire to be seen as “American,” many Jewish men saw opportunity in a new industry: Hollywood. Hollywood was only beginning, allowing these men to pave the way for the industry, and “[t]here were no social barriers in a business as new and faintly disreputable as the movies were in the early years of this century. There were none of the impediments imposed by loftier professions and more firmly entrenched businesses to keep Jews and other undesirables out” (Gabler 5). Gabler describes how these Jewish moguls, driven by a desire for acceptance and success, navigated the complexities of identity and assimilation while simultaneously using their culture to carve out a space of prominence within the entertainment industry. The PBS documentary *The American Jews* (2008) claims that the Hollywood moguls created an imaginary world in which Jews did not exist. These moguls had such a strong desire to assimilate that they were willing to leave their entire culture behind. Hollywood emerged as a symbolic battleground where Jewish immigrants and their descendants sought not only economic prosperity but also cultural legitimacy and recognition. Thus, Gabler emphasizes how Hollywood was truly the only place for Jewish moguls to find success.

In a similar fashion, Jewish moguls also founded the three major television networks: David Sarnoff (RCA/NBC), William Paley (CBS), and Leonard Goldenson (ABC) (Gabler 4). While the Hollywood moguls had to earn their place in Hollywood, these men were of a later generation. Vincent Brook’s book *Something Ain’t Kosher Here* explores the rise of the Jewish sitcom. He describes how even though Jewish men headed the television studios, there was little to no portrayal of Jews on television until *Seinfeld* premiered in 1989. Prior to 1989, there were two overtly Jewish sitcoms: *The Goldbergs* (1949-1957) and *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973), which was canceled after one season. Once *Seinfeld* proved a success, the Jewish sitcom was off and running. Brook classifies three phases of the Jewish sitcom: sitcoms that premiered during the onset of *Seinfeld* (1989-1992), sitcoms that emerged under

the influence of *Seinfeld* (1992-1998), and sitcoms that emerged under the influence of *The Nanny* (1998-2002).<sup>9</sup> Brook does discuss specific episodes where Jewish holidays are portrayed, but his main thesis is to discuss the rise of the Jewish sitcom within these three phases.

Regarding Jewish comedians and Jewish humor, Brandeis professor Stephen Whitfield classifies Jewish humor into three categories: internal humor to Judaic belief (i.e., using the bible to make jokes), poking fun at gentiles, and bragging about intellectual abilities and their influence in high culture. He emphasizes the point made by critic Albert Goldman who states that modern American Jewish humor was ““the plaint of people who were highly successful in countless ways, yet who still felt inferior, tainted, outcast,”” (Whitfield 245). Jewish humor has an element of “you know it when you see it” and Jewish humor is hard to pin-point exactly (Whitfield 245).

Scholarship has also dedicated significant attention to the assimilation experienced by American Jewry within the realm of Hollywood, particularly examining the portrayal of intermarriage on television. It is widely recognized that many of the leading figures in Hollywood, including the founders of major studios, were of Jewish heritage. However, driven by the desire to seamlessly integrate into American society, they often concealed their Jewish identity. In his article “Stars, Light, and Finding the Way Home: Jewish Characters in Contemporary Film and Television,” Terry Barr illuminates how these executives, predominantly immigrants from Eastern Europe, sought to downplay their Jewishness both in their personal lives and in the films they produced. Engaging in intermarriage and embracing a lifestyle that mirrored the mannerisms of the Eastern aristocracy, they hoped to assimilate into the dominant culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Brook, Vincent. *Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the 'Jewish' Sitcom*. Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 6.



As Terry Barr points out, Leonard Quart, a cinema critic, advances the notion that by the 1980s, intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles had become common, signifying a gradual and relatively un-self-conscious process of assimilation. Quart also asserts that Hollywood has grown increasingly comfortable with Jewishness, allowing Jewish filmmakers to subtly infuse their works with ethnic consciousness without overtly asserting a separate religious or cultural identity. This newfound ease within the industry has enabled Jewish filmmakers to navigate the complexities of identity with greater nuance and authenticity.

Moreover, historian Jeffrey Shandler sheds light on the phenomenon of “crypto-Jews” in television narratives. These characters, while identified with other ethnicities or religions, are often perceived as representing Jewishness in disguise. Shandler's analysis underscores the complexities of identity negotiation within the entertainment landscape, where cultural and religious markers are often subtly encoded into narratives. These crypto-Jews include Rachel Green from *Friends* and George Costanza from *Seinfeld*. In the case of Rachel Green, her last name is a stereotypically sounding Jewish last name, she constantly references her nose job, and she is from Long Island, New York. Her father is even played by the Jewish actor Ron Leibman. In *Seinfeld*, George Costanza is played by the Jewish actor Jason Alexander, and his parents are played by the Jewish actors Jerry Stiller and Estelle Harris. Even though “Costanza” is an Italian sounding last name, there are many instances that portray George as Jewish. Hence, Crypto-Jews have classic Jewish characteristics, but they are not overtly Jewish.

The scholarly exploration of assimilation and Jewish identity within Hollywood films, television shows, and the community reveal the experiences, challenges, and negotiations of Jewish characters. It underscores the evolving dynamics of cultural representation and the enduring quest for authenticity within popular culture. These scholarly works contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between Jewish identity, assimilation, and cultural

representation in Hollywood, television, and comedy. They also shed light on the historical and cultural dimensions of Jewish influence in the entertainment industry. However, scholars have not focused specifically on the role of Jewish holidays in television. They have alluded to the importance of Jewish holidays, but none of the scholarly works explore the depiction of Jewish holidays in specific television shows and specific episodes.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the portrayal of Jewish holidays in American television comedies/sitcoms. With the increasing representation of Jewish characters on television, this study seeks to gain insight into how these holidays are portrayed within comedic contexts. A noticeable gap exists in Jewish studies, the study of religion, and film and media studies regarding the depiction of Jewish holidays in comedic narratives. Many Jewish people are a part of Hollywood, working as writers, producers, executives, etc, and I would like to better understand how they portray Jewish holidays on their television shows. Specifically, this research will focus on four prominent Jewish holidays: Hanukkah, Passover, Shabbat, and Yom Kippur. By analyzing a variety of comedies featuring these holidays, I aim to identify and analyze six common themes among these episodes.

### **Methodology:**

For this thesis, I will be looking at any show that is considered a comedy as well as looking at television between 2000-2023 shows that are considered “Jewish,” even if the show is not explicitly so. I determined the genre of the television show by using IMDb (Internet Movie Database), which has information about television shows, actors, celebrities etc. IMDb provides information about the genre of the television show, as well as ratings, reviews, and other relevant data. By narrowing the scope to scripted episodic comedies, I aim to provide a focused examination of comedic storytelling, character development, and

thematic exploration within the context of the television series. This approach allows for a more in-depth exploration of the trends within contemporary comedic television programming. I will then analyze different comedies that focus on four Jewish holidays: Hanukkah, Passover, Shabbat, and Yom Kippur. I then plan to code for the six themes discussed below.

### **Coding Process:**

I separated my work into 3 overarching sections: Hanukkah, Passover, and Shabbat/Yom Kippur. I chose to put Shabbat and Yom Kippur these holidays together since they are two of the most important holidays for Jewish people. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible or Torah, Yom Kippur is referred to as “Shabbat Shabbaton,” meaning the Sabbath of Sabbaths. I wanted to analyze how television portrays these holy days. I then compiled television episodes that portray each of these holidays. I watched each of these episodes, taking notes on my observations of the episodes. My observations are located in the appendix. I then coded for themes in each category. The coded themes are:

1. Is the Jewish holiday the central theme of the episode?
  - a. Sometimes Jewish holidays are the backdrop of the episode. For instance, Hanukkah episodes are often a side plot to a Christmas episode.
2. Is this the only “Jewish” centered episode in the whole series?
  - a. This code explores if the show only talks about Judaism in this one episode.
3. Is the episode educational?
  - a. When discussing Jewish holidays, sometimes the characters use the holiday as a moment to educate viewers about the holiday. I consider the episode as educational if the episode goes beyond the basic meaning of the holiday.
4. Is the holiday used for comedic purposes?

- a. Jewish holidays may only be incorporated into the episode for comedic relief.  
This theme explores if the holiday is used to further the comedy of the episode.
5. Will audiences understand the humor related to Judaism? Is the Jewish humor clear and explainable (i.e. helping to explicate the meaning or practices of holiday)?
    - a. In various Jewish television shows, the humor can only be understood by a Jewish audience (i.e., Yiddish words, certain customs and traditions practiced by Jews).
  6. Is there a depiction of an interfaith relationship?
    - a. As mentioned above, there has been a long history of depicting intermarried couples on television. In 2020, approximately 42% of American Jews who are married are married to a non-Jew (Pew Research Center).

### **Important Clarifications and Terminology:**

There are many ways these themes can be understood by the viewer. However, here are the definitions and explanations of the terminology.

1. “Jewish” Television: I am following Vincent Brook’s definition of Jewish television. He states that a show is considered “Jewish” “if their protagonists are ethnically marked through a stereotypically Jewish surname... through explicit narrative references to association with Jewishness, or... through their having been conceived as Jewish by the show’s creators although they may not be perceived as such by the show’s viewers,” (Brook 1).
2. Education and educating the audience: shows that go beyond the surface level of the holiday (i.e., discussing the Maccabees when discussing Hanukkah).

3. Holidays as comic material: While I analyze comedies, this determines that the episode uses the holiday for laughs. Incidents where Holidays appear to be used as the punch line of a joke.
4. “Jewish” humor: I will be using Stephen Whitfield’s definition of Jewish humor: internal humor to Judaic belief (i.e., using the bible to make jokes), poking fun at gentiles, and bragging about intellectual abilities and their influence in high culture.
5. Understanding “Jewish” humor: I am not making a definitive claim; I am merely speculating that “Jewish” humor, especially humor that is specific to Jewish beliefs, may not be understood by all audiences.
6. Yiddish humor: I will also be classifying the use of Yiddish as “Jewish” humor. Professor Rebecca Margolis explores the question of whether Yiddish is inherently funny in her article “‘Oy with the Poodles Already!’: Yiddishisms and Non-Jewish Characters on American Sitcoms.” In recent television, Yiddish has increasingly been used by non-Jewish characters. She also notes Julia Schultz’s article in which she determines there are 300 Yiddish borrowings in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Schultz). However, I am claiming that these colloquialisms may not be understood by all audiences, as they ultimately stem from Yiddish.

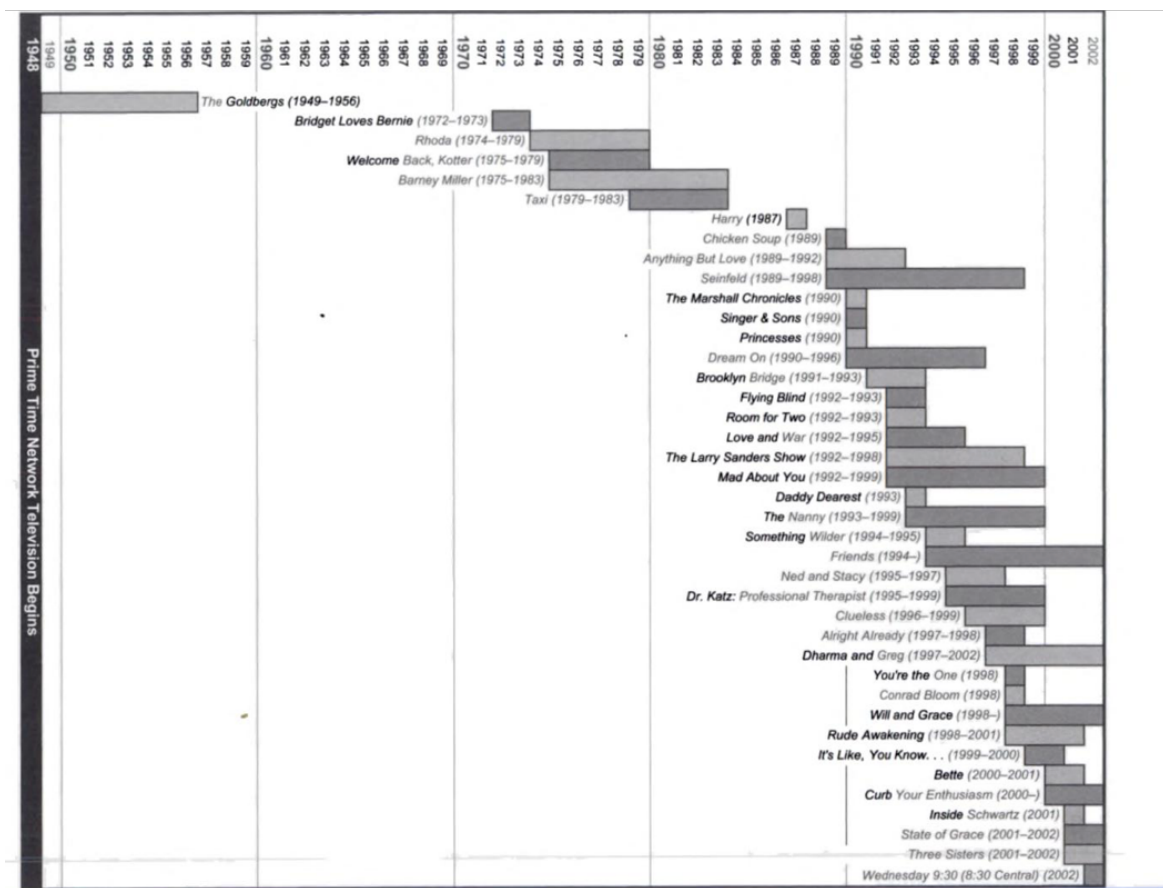
### **What Comes Next:**

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the rise of American Jews in Hollywood and the Jewish sitcom. Chapter 2 will help place my research into the context of previous television episodes and the influence of Jews in Hollywood. In Chapter 3, I will look at Hanukkah in different American comedies. In Chapter 4, I will explore how Passover is depicted in comedies. Chapter 5 will look at Yom Kippur and Shabbat, and Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis by discussing overall conclusions and final takeaways.

## Chapter 2: The Jewish Sitcom

“Jewish actors are often left with an impossible choice: abandon their Jewishness, or play into stereotypes. Even if they choose the second option, they could still be beat out for a role by a non-Jewish actor.” – Chelsea Levinson, *Hey Alma* website

Figure 1: Timeline of “Jewish” Sitcoms (1948-2002)<sup>10</sup>



### History of Jews in Comedy and the Jewish Sitcom

“Hollywood Jews... were a relatively homogenous group. All of them were of Eastern European origin... All of them were born into dire poverty. All of them had a desire to succeed and realized that the avenue to success would be an avid pursuit of assimilation...

The Television Jews... were a generation younger, which may have made them less sensitive

<sup>10</sup> Brook, Vincent. *Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the 'Jewish' Sitcom*. Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 4.

to the scourge of antisemitism than the Hollywood Jews... they were less avid for assimilation because they were born into assimilation” (Gabler 4).

Television was founded by three Jewish men: David Sarnoff (RCA/NBC), William Paley (CBS), and Leonard Goldenson (ABC). As stated by Gabler, these men were not attempting to assimilate; they already had assimilated into American society. With the raging antisemitism throughout the country, the very fact that three Jewish men headed television studios could be considered “proof” of Jewish control of Hollywood. Hence, the studio heads were sensitive to Jewish characters, and adapted the “too Jewish” rule put forth by Harry Cohn.<sup>11</sup>

The studio executives were careful to ration to one Jewish character per year (Elkin 25). When Jewish writer Carl Reiner wrote his popular television show, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961-1966), he initially wanted to make the show about his life, following a Jewish protagonist. However, studio executives used the “too Jewish” excuse and “Reiner was persuaded not merely to de-Semitise (tone down its Jewishness) but to de-Judaize it (‘convert’ its Jews to non-Jews)” (Brook 45). Dick Van Dyke, the stereotypical Midwestern American, became the protagonist of the show, completely changing its plot to focus on a non-Jewish family. There was still a Jewish character, Buddy Sorrell, but Carl Reiner’s entire premise was altered to fit the Jewish quota.

The first successful American sitcom was *The Goldbergs* (1949-1957), which followed the immigrant Jewish family in New York City. The show began in 1929 on a radio broadcast medium and eventually transitioned to television in 1949 and ran until 1957. Molly Goldberg, the family matriarch, was the loving Jewish mother, who possessed a heavy

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<sup>11</sup>Desser, David, and Lester D. Friedman. *American-Jewish Filmmakers: Traditions and Trends*. Univ. of Illinois, 1993, p.1

accent, and viewers adored Molly “because of her ethnicity” (Antler 32). Molly Goldberg became an important figure in the country, as she was portrayed as this mother figure. However, *The Goldbergs* officially left its Jewish identity behind when, in 1955, the family moved to suburbia. The show erased most of its inherently Jewish qualities. There were once routine episodes that featured Passover and Yom Kippur, but during their time in the suburbs, the family was no longer devoted to their culture. *The Goldbergs* was the first and last Jewish sitcom for nine years. However, Hollywood became more comfortable with Jewish characters by the late 1960s. As Vincent Brook admits, “[t]hrough the “too Jewish” syndrome continued to dominate episodic TV into the 1990s, it began to loosen its grip on Hollywood movies in the late-1960s: partly due to radical changes in American society, partly to the contrasting balance sheets of the two industries.” Television, however, was still cautious of Jewish characters, which brings us to our next Jewish-ish show.

*Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973), which premiered in 1972 and was canceled a year later, followed a Jewish man who marries a Catholic woman. Many Jewish groups were strongly opposed to intermarriage, and they found the entire show offensive. Many rabbis saw *Bridget Loves Bernie* as advocating for intermarriage, leading them to meet with CBS officials and demand the show be taken off the air. The show’s producers even received bomb threats (Brook 50). According to Vincent Brook, “*Bridget Loves Bernie* was a major success... however, at the height of the Jewish protest and the show’s popularity, CBS announced *Bridget Loves Bernie* would not be renewed for the next season (Brook 51). However, the CBS president claimed that the show’s cancellation was unrelated to Jewish protests and criticisms. In response to the depictions of intermarried Jewish couples, writer John O’Connor notes that there is a lack of interracial marriage on television, but “network policy apparently requires Jewish male characters to date and marry exclusively non-Jewish



women” (*The New York Times*). This double standard was somewhat debunked with our next sitcom: *Rhoda*.

*Rhoda* (1974-1979) was a spinoff of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), where Rhoda was once Mary Tyler Moore’s sidekick. *Rhoda* follows the Jewish character Rhoda (Valerie Harper) as she embarks on her quest to find love, and eventually marrying an Italian man, not a Jewish man. Ironically, the actor who plays her Italian husband, David Groh, was Jewish (IMDb). Unlike *Bridget Loves Bernie*, the advocacy groups did not protest and boycott the episode. In fact, viewers applauded their wedding in an episode which earned record-breaking ratings (Brook 54). *Rhoda* remained on television for five seasons.

In 1978, the miniseries *Holocaust* premiered, changing the trajectory for Jewish characters on television. *Holocaust* gave American audiences a glance into the atrocity of the war. After the premiere of the miniseries, many films and television series discussing the Holocaust and antisemitism, including *Playing for Time* (1980), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1980), *Skokie* (1981), *Ellis Island* (1984), and *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), became popular (Brook 67). Viewers became interested in stories pertaining to the Holocaust, but there was still a lack of sitcoms with Jewish characters.

Up until the premiere of *Seinfeld* in 1989, there were only nine Jewish television shows, as shown in Figure 1. The lack of Jewish characters on television was not a coincidence:

As late as 1983, NBC Entertainment President Brandon Tartikoff insisted that a show about a specifically Jewish family, a la *The Goldbergs* of 1949-54, ‘would not work today.’ It worked when television was new, television sets expensive, and the owners were disproportionately Jewish.’ Tartikoff added that while ‘suppliers...[are]... probably self-

censoring...I wouldn't put it past a network executive to say 'We don't want this because it's too Jewish' (Gitlin 184).<sup>12</sup>

In fact, between 1984 to 1987, there was not a single character identifying as Jewish in Nielsen's top twenty shows (Antler, 38).

Ironically *Seinfeld*, which is arguably one of the most important sitcoms of all time, was almost vetoed by Tartikoff for being "too Jewish." Yet *Seinfeld* was such a turning point for Jewish sitcoms and Jewish characters. The protagonist Jerry is the quintessential Jewish character: a New Yorker who is an aspiring stand-up comedian. *Seinfeld*'s success proves that Jews had a place on television, and "[b]y 1999, no less than twelve 1990s Jewish sitcoms, counting reruns, were airing on network and cable stations... All in all, by my count, thirty-three sitcoms with Jewish protagonists made their way onto America's television screens from 1989 to 2001" (Brook 3). This is a major shift from the prior decades, and Jewish characters finally had a place on television.

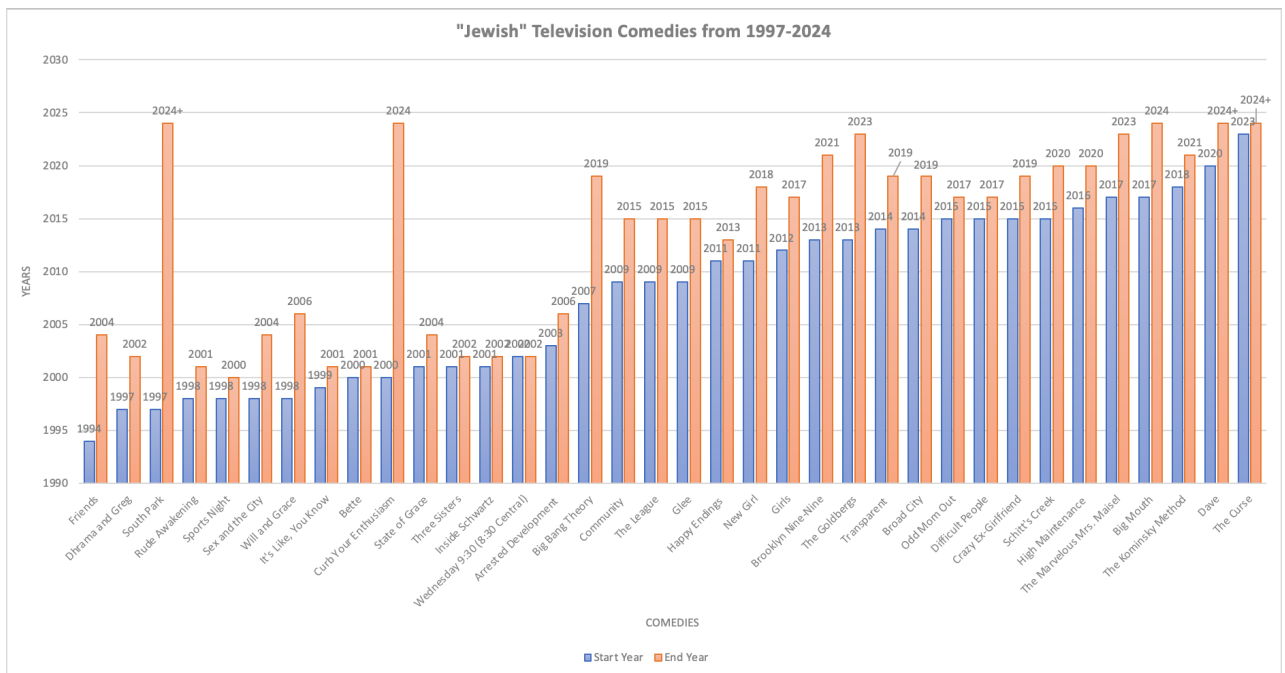
In Figure 1, we see a timeline of Jewish television shows from 1948 up until 2002. This figure is used in Vincent Brook's book *Something Ain't Kosher Here*. As we can see, there were very few Jewish sitcoms prior to the premiere of *Seinfeld*. After *Seinfeld*, we see a surge in Jewish sitcoms, demonstrating *Seinfeld*'s influence for both television and Jewish representation. However, according to Professor David Gillota, *Seinfeld* only has subtle nods to Judaism. He claims that the most Jewish thing about the television show is Jerry's last name, "and his stereotypically overbearing Jewish family" (Gillota 153). Yet *Seinfeld* demonstrates that Jewish people are welcome on television. Even though *Seinfeld* does not solely focus on Judaism, *Seinfeld* showed that Jewish television shows could be successful. The "too Jewish" theory was finally put to rest.

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<sup>12</sup> Barr, Terry. "Stars, Light, and Finding the Way Home: Jewish Characters in Contemporary Film and Television." *Studies in Popular Culture* 15, no. 2 (1993): 94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23413963>.

Another important turning point in Jewish sitcoms was Fran Drescher’s sitcom *The Nanny*, which ran from 1993-1999. Fran Drescher plays the classic “JAP” (Jewish American Princess) who ends up nannying for a wealthy New York WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) family. She is a loud, frizzy haired, unapologetically Jewish woman. Fran Drescher created the space for Jewish women to shine, giving them a voice on television. While Fran can be materialistic, her love and adoration for the children shows the strength of the Jewish woman. This period also saw *Friends* (1994-2004), which had two openly Jewish characters, Ross and Monica Gellar, and the crypto-Jew Rachel Green, whose Judaism is hinted at throughout the entire series. In addition, the groundbreaking sitcom *Will & Grace* (1998-2006) featured two roommates – Will, a gay man, shared an apartment with Grace, a Jewish woman, challenging societal norms and advocating for LGBT+ representation.

Figure 2: “Jewish” Television Comedies from 1997-2024



Mirroring Brook's graph in Figure 1, Figure 2 shows the Jewish television shows from 1997-2024, and on this graph, there are 36 shows represented.<sup>13</sup> While the thesis explores the television shows from 2000-2023, I included television shows that ended and continued into the 2000s, even if they began in the 1990s. As Joyce Antler states, "The fact that Jewish characters have been written into more than forty prime-time shows— many of them the highest rated on the air – suggests that despite possible fears of losing audiences with 'too Jewish' identifications, the trend toward marking Jewish characters on screen was well under way in the 1990s" (Antler 41).

In the 21st century, Jewish characters and themes are welcome on television, as the "too Jewish" rule was proved to be a moot concern. One of the most popular television shows, Larry David's other brainchild *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2024), proudly embraces its Jewish identity. In fact, "entire episodes revolve around Jewish holidays or rituals" (Gillota 153). This is a huge shift from the era of *The Goldbergs*, where the characters become more assimilated as the show continues. Series pilots focus on Judaism, such as the Amazon Prime television show *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023) which begins with the main characters preparing for Yom Kippur. The season premiere of the Hulu original *Difficult People* (2015-2017) focuses on Passover. Thus, Jewish customs and holidays are celebrated on television through comedies and sitcoms.

Currently, there are many Jewish sitcoms on both streaming services and network television, as shown in Figure 2. However, there are still various issues regarding Jewish characters. For one, many of the Jewish roles are given to non-Jewish actors. The popular television show *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* follows the Joan Rivers-esque Jewish comedian. The lead actress, Rachel Brosnahan, is not Jewish, and neither are the actors playing her

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<sup>13</sup> I would like to note that in this graph, I am using Vincent Brook's classification of a Jewish television show. If the show has a Jewish protagonist, I put it in the chart. I do not include children's shows in this graph.

parents, Tony Shalhoub and Marin Hinkle. This point leads to the second major issue: Jewish stereotypes. Jewish are either portrayed as extremely stereotypical, as a way of adding comedic relief to the episode. Even when there is a Jewish character, such as Larry David “there’s a Cheryl Hines, a non-Jewish spouse, friend — foil, if you will — to offset the Jewishness... When there is a Jewish actor playing a Jew, Hollywood effectively demands said actor to express at least slight moral disdain and psychological discomfort with one’s Jewishness” (Saval).

The landscape of television representation for Jewish characters has undergone significant evolution since the turn of the 21st century, and there has been a noticeable increase in the presence of Jewish characters on television. By my calculation, from 2002 onwards, 22 television shows have prominently featured Jewish characters, mirroring and even surpassing the trend observed from 1989 to 2001, which saw 19 such shows predominantly in the comedy genre. It's important to note that beyond the shows directly included in the graph, numerous drama series, such as *Gilmore Girls* (2017-2021), *The OC* (2003-2007), and *The West Wing* (1999-2006) have also contributed to the portrayal of Jewish characters. These shows not only broaden the representation of Jewish experiences but also showcase the versatility of Jewish narratives across various genres.

A significant catalyst in this evolution has been the growing influence of Israeli television on the global stage. The adaptation or direct import of Israeli shows into American television culture underscores the increasing appreciation for diverse storytelling. *Homeland* (2011-2020), adapted from the Israeli series *Hatufim* (2010-2012), and the HBO sensation *Euphoria* (2019-present), are prime examples of this phenomenon. These American adaptations almost completely erase the Israeli influence. While there are a few Jewish characters in the show, the show no longer has its Israeli roots. Additionally, mainstream Israeli shows like *The Baker and the Beauty* (2013-2021), *Fauda* (2015-2022), and *Shtisel*

(2013-2018) have garnered international acclaim, further enriching television narratives of Jewish characters. However, many of the era-defining Jewish television shows are coming to end. *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* ended in 2023, *Broad City* in 2019, *The Goldbergs* in 2023, and *Big Mouth* in 2024. Each of these shows centered on main characters with unapologetic Jewish identities. These television shows garnered attention from both audiences and critics, remaining on air for many seasons.

The most significant television finale will happen in late 2024. Much of this thesis will discuss Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which, after twelve seasons, ended its run on HBO. *Curb Your Enthusiasm* began as a stand-up special in 1999, then became a scripted television show in 2000, and the show has remained in the cultural zeitgeist for 25 years. Almost every episode explores David's Jewish identity in comedic and crude ways. However, with the end of *Curb*, we are marking the end of "the peak" era: the era of the prevalence of Jewish comedies/sitcoms. I would like to clarify that I am not foreseeing the end of television shows about the Holocaust. In fact, in 2024, two new Holocaust limited series are coming to streaming services: *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (2024) and *We Were the Lucky Ones* (2024), both based on historical fiction novels of the same name. The Holocaust remains "interesting" to the American public, and shows will continue to explore the atrocity, especially when Jewish characters die in the end (I do not mean to be cynical, but time and time again we have seen the portrayal of dead Jews, as referenced by Dara Horn).

Evidently, Jewish television has undergone various changes, from almost no representation before the 1990s, to dozens of shows with Jewish themes and characters post *Seinfeld*. These shows have not only entertained audiences but also contributed to a broader cultural conversation about Judaism on the small screen. While the end of this era may leave a void in the television landscape, the legacy of these shows will endure, continuing to inspire future generations.

### **Chapter 3: Hanukkah**

**“I'm a Jew A lonely Jew**

**I can't be merry**

**'Cause I'm Hebrew**

**On Christmas”**

**– Kyle Broflovski, *South Park* “Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo,” (Season 1, Episode 9, 1997)**

Hanukkah, the festival of lights, brings the joyful spirit to American Jews. While many places prepare for “the most wonderful time of the year,” Jews have their own holiday: Hanukkah. Hanukkah falls in the Hebrew month of Kislev and lasts eight days. Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabees, the Jewish fighters, defeating the Greek army when they invaded Jerusalem. The Maccabees reclaimed the Temple and decided to light the menorah; however, there was only enough oil to last for one day. The menorah remained lit for eight days, which was considered a miracle. Many Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah by giving presents to their children, eating oily food, and playing the game of dreidel. Jewish people also light the menorah, the candelabra, for eight nights.

Since Hanukkah usually falls during the Christmas season, the two holidays are typically paired together. On television, there is always a classic holiday episode. The December holidays are such an important and meaningful time for many, and television looks to capture this special period. However, many of these episodes focus on Jews feeling left out during Christmas. A pivotal moment on television occurred during the 1994 episode of *SNL*, in which Adam Sandler sings his iconic “Hanukkah Song.” In this song, he acknowledges the challenges and loneliness of being Jewish on Christmas, so he proceeds to list various Jewish actors and actresses. “The Hanukkah Song” was so influential that it was certified Gold by The Recording Industry Association of America, and Sandler has written three more versions

since.<sup>14</sup> Another iconic song was from the *South Park* (1997-Present) episode “Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo,” (Season 1, Episode 9, 1997) in which the only Jew of South Park, Colorado sings about feeling lonely on Christmas. He sings the line: “I would be merry but I’m Hebrew.” These songs both demonstrate how Hanukkah is often only portrayed on television and in popular culture in relation to Christmas.

For this section, I looked at eleven comedies that can be categorized as dark comedy, sitcoms, and dramedies. I determined that these episodes are considered “Hanukkah” episodes if they have some sort of discussion or portrayal of Hanukkah. This can range from the character saying they celebrate Hanukkah to showing the characters lighting the candles. Figure 3 lists all the eleven shows and their coded themes.

Figure 3: The shows referenced and the themes:

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<sup>14</sup>“Chanukah Song.” RIAA, [www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab\\_active=default-award&ar=Adam+Sandler&ti=Chanukah+Song&format=Single&type=#search\\_section](http://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&ar=Adam+Sandler&ti=Chanukah+Song&format=Single&type=#search_section).



| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year</b>  | Is<br>Christmas<br>a central<br>theme in<br>the<br>episode? | Is this<br>the only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode<br>in the<br>series? | Is the<br>episode<br>educational? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|--|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Big Mouth</i> ,<br>“A Very Big<br>Mouth<br>Christmas,”<br>Season 5,<br>2021               | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | No  | Yes   |
| <i>Friends</i> ,<br>“The One<br>with the<br>Holiday<br>Armadillo,”<br>Season 7,<br>2000      | Yes   | No  | Yes                               | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>New Girl</i> ,<br>“The 23rd,”<br>Season 1,<br>2011  | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Schitt’s<br/>Creek</i> ,<br>“Merry<br>Christmas,<br>Johnny<br>Rose,”<br>Season 4,<br>2018 | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Glee</i> , “Glee,<br>Actually”<br>Season 4,<br>2012                                       | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Community</i> ,<br>“Comparativ<br>e Religion,”<br>Season 1,<br>2009                       | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Crazy Ex-<br/>Girlfriend</i> ,<br>“My Mom,<br>Greg’s Mom                                  | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | No  | Yes   |

| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year</b>   | Is<br>Christmas<br>a central<br>theme in<br>the<br>episode? | Is this<br>the only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode<br>in the<br>series? | Is the<br>episode<br>educational? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| and Josh’s<br>Sweet Dance<br>Moves,”<br>Season 1,<br>2015                                 |   |   |                                   |   |   |   |
| <i>High<br/>Maintenance,</i><br>“Soup,”<br>Season 4,<br>2019                              | Yes   | No  | No                                | No  | No  | No  |
| <i>The<br/>Goldbergs,</i><br>“A Christmas<br>Story,”<br>season 3,<br>2015                 | Yes   | No  | Yes                               | Yes   | No  | No  |
| <i>The League,</i><br>“The 8<br>Defensive<br>Points of<br>Hanukkah,”<br>season 5,<br>2013 | Yes   | No  | No                                | Yes   | No  | Yes   |
| <i>Ginny and<br/>Georgia,</i><br>“Latkes are<br>Lit,” Season<br>2, 2023                   | Yes   | No  | No                                | No  | Yes   | Yes   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | 11  | 0   | 2                                 | 9   | 6   | 9   |

### **Is Christmas the main theme?**

Christmas has truly become an American holiday, so it is not surprising that Christmas is the main plot of all the eleven Hanukkah shows analyzed. For instance, the *Big Mouth* (2017-2024) Hanukkah episode is named “A Very Big Mouth Christmas” (Season 5, Episode 8, 2021). This episode tells the story of Hanukkah, as many of the characters are Jewish, while also depicting the story of Christmas. One of the characters, a stereotypical Jewish boy named Andrew Glouberman (John Mulaney), makes a Hanukkah wish to be Christian. He looks on Instagram and admires his best friend Nick’s (Nick Kroll) perfect Christmas with his family. In fact, Andrew admits that “there is no greater injustice than being a Jew on Christmas.” He then wakes up as a Christian, and his parents are stereotypically blonde and preppy. His last name changes to “Kent,” and his parents spoil him with presents, including a Range Rover. They then conclude Christmas with a Christmas movie and matching pajamas. This episode plays on the classic trope of the lonely Jew on Christmas, as discussed in Adam Sandler’s song and the television show *South Park*.

Another example is the *Schitt’s Creek*’s (2015-2020) episode “Merry Christmas, Johnny Rose” (Season 4, Episode 13, 2018). *Schitt’s Creek* follows the once wealthy Rose family who lose their entire fortune and are forced to move to the small town of Schitt’s Creek. In this episode, Johnny Rose (Eugene Levy), the father, hopes to host a Christmas party and bring the spirit of Christmas back to his family. Ironically, Johnny Rose is Jewish, and his wife is Christian; yet he pushes his family to celebrate Christmas. Johnny Rose rarely mentions his Jewish identity, and his children even question why he wants to celebrate Christmas.

Moreover, while some of the episodes have “Christmas” in the name, some use “Hanukkah” as a way to make a punchy episode title, even if the episodes center around Christmas. For instance, the Netflix comedy *Ginny and Georgia*’s (2021-Present) holiday

episode is called “Latkes are Lit” (Season 2, Episode 5, 2023). *Ginny and Georgia* centers on the mother daughter duo who move to Massachusetts for a fresh start. Ginny (Antonia Gentry) explores life as a high school student, meeting a group of friends and beginning new relationships. In the Hanukkah episode, which ironically focuses more on Christmas, Ginny and Georgia (Brianna Howey) go to a Hanukkah party where they make latkes. In fact, Georgia asks, “what is a latke?” The episode does not go beyond the surface level of Hanukkah traditions, and they never really explain what a latke is. This scene is the only discussion of Hanukkah in the entire episode. Likewise, the show *The League*’s (2009-2015) holiday episode is called “The 8 Defensive Points of Hanukkah” (Season 5, Episode 13, 2013). However, the majority of the episode centers around Christmas traditions.

Even in a show such as *The Goldbergs* (2013-2023), which centers on a Jewish family in Philadelphia, there is a mention of Christmas. The mother Beverly (Wendi McLendon-Covey) wants her family to have a meaningful holiday, and she realizes this is only possible through Christmas traditions. In the episode “A Christmas Story” (Season 3, Episode 10, 2015), she turns Hanukkah into “Super Hanukkah”, decorating the house with lights and a Hanukkah bush. Beverly envies her Christian neighbors and their Christmas traditions, leading her to forget her roots as a Jewish woman. The narrator, who is the adult Adam Goldberg, admits that “mom got the Hanukkah she wanted: Christmas.” Eventually, Beverly realizes the importance of tradition. Thus, whenever Hanukkah is seen on television comedies/sitcoms, Hanukkah is the backdrop to Christmas. Even when a television show focuses on a Jewish family, such as *The Goldbergs*, Christmas is still the main theme.

### **Is this the only “Jewish” episode in the series?**

Since each of these television shows has at least one Jewish character, Hanukkah fits perfectly into the plot line. For all eleven television shows, this is not a stand-alone episode about Judaism. There are Jewish characters, so they often have episodes with Jewish

traditions and culture or discussions about a Jewish identity. For instance, in *Friends* (1994-2004), Monica (Courteney Cox) and Ross Gellar (David Schwimmer) are half Jewish, as conceived by the creator David Crane (Brook 272). In the episode “The One With the Girl From Poughkeepsie” (Season 4, Episode 10, 1997), one of the friends, Phoebe (Lisa Kudrow), sings a holiday song for her friends, singing, “Monica, Monica, have a happy Hanukkah.” Rachel, on the other hand, “might be Jewish, though that’s not an aspect [they’ve] done much with” (Brook 272).

In *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (2015-2019), the main character, Rebecca Bunch (Rachel Bloom), is the epitome of a Jewish American woman. She is loud, witty, and opinionated. The creator and star of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Rachel Bloom, is a proud Jew. Rebecca grapples with her Jewish identity and her relationship with her mother throughout the show, emphasizing the Jewish mother stereotype. There is even an episode called “Will Scarsdale Like Josh's Shayna Punim?” (Season 2, Episode 10, 2017), where Rebecca and her non-Jewish boyfriend attend a Bar Mitzvah.

In *Ginny and Georgia* (2021-Present), three of the characters, Abby (Katie Douglas), Norah (Chelsea Clark), and Maxine (Sara Waisglass) are Jewish. The characters explicitly mention their Jewishness once or twice throughout the show, and Maxine even hosts a latke making party, in the aforementioned holiday episode “Latkes are Lit.” The creator of the show Sarah Lampert admits that she “felt [that it] was important to highlight, without delving too deeply into religion... her own Jewish faith” (*Jewish Insider*). Thus, there are various mentions to Jewish characters throughout *Ginny and Georgia*.

In *Community* (2009-2015), a television show about a group of students at a community college, there is representation of many different cultures and religions. Annie Edison (Alison Brie) has a Jewish mother and Episcopalian father, but her character mainly focuses on her Jewish identity. Throughout the show, the other characters make references to

Annie's Jewish identity. In the episode "The Art of Discourse" (Season 1, Episode 22, 2010), Annie calls out one of the characters, Pierce (Chevy Chase), for saying she has a "crafty Jew-brain." Later in the episode Annie reprimands Shirley (Yvette Nicole Brown), admitting "When you found out I was Jewish, you invited me to a 'pool party' that turned out to be a Baptism." Annie's Jewish identity is mentioned throughout the show, which does not make "Comparative Religion" the only Jewish episode.

However, for the television show, *Glee* (2009-2015), which follows a high school glee club, the Jewish themes are a bit more complicated. There are Jewish characters, but their identity is not discussed beyond the occasional joke. Rachel Berry (Lea Michele) is the lead vocalist of the glee club. She is stereotypically Jewish, which is mentioned throughout the show. Another character, the bad boy Noah Puckerman (Mark Salling), is also Jewish. In the "Glee, Actually" episode, a play on the Christmas movie, *Love, Actually*, two of the Jewish characters sing "Hanukkah o Hanukkah." This is the first time any character on *Glee* sang a Jewish song, which is surprising for a show that focuses on music. While the representation of Jewish identity may not be as prominent or deeply explored as other aspects of the show, such as LGBTQ+ issues or racial diversity, its occasional inclusion demonstrates that there are Jewish episodes within the show.

Thus, the representation of Jewish identity in television shows varies in depth and prominence across different series. While some shows like *Friends* and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* feature Jewish characters who grapple with their cultural heritage and traditions, others such as *Glee* incorporate Jewish elements more sporadically.

### **Is the episode educational?**

Often, when episodes discuss Jewish holidays, they do so without educating the audience, almost assuming the audience knows about the Jewish holiday. As stated above, Jewish people only make up 2% of the American population (*Pew Research Center*). If only

a small minority of Americans celebrate Jewish holidays, many viewers may not understand the meaning behind the Jewish holidays, unable to fully understand the episode. Out of the eleven episodes presented, only two episodes are educational, going beyond the surface level meaning of the holiday.

In the *Friends* episode “The Holiday Armadillo” (Season 7, Episode 10, 2000), Ross, one of the members of the friend group of six, attempts to teach his child about Hanukkah. His son Ben (Cole Sprouse) has a Christian mother, and he typically only celebrates Christmas. Since Ross has Ben for the holiday, he uses this opportunity to teach Ben about Hanukkah, but Ben is not interested. Every time he brings up Hanukkah, Ben asks if Santa is mad at him since he is not celebrating Christmas. Ben does not realize that he can celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas. Ross then decides to dress up as Santa for Ben. However, the costume store does not have a Santa costume, so Ross dresses up as the made-up character, the “holiday armadillo.” Eventually, Ross decides to try again with Ben and tell him about the Festival of Lights and the Maccabees. While Ross does not go into depth about the miracle of Hanukkah, Ross still educates the audience by referring to Hanukkah as “the festival of lights,” as well as showing that the menorah is placed next to a windowsill.

Professor David Gillota, however, believes that “the episode sidesteps a genuine exploration of Jewish heritage, for Ross dresses as a giant armadillo to make the story more exciting, and he is repeatedly interrupted by his gentile friends” (Gillota 153). Yet even the mention of Hanukkah as “The Festival Lights” and the discussion of the Maccabees is more educational than other television episodes. *Friends* goes a bit beyond the surface level of the holiday. Thus, for viewers with little to no knowledge about Hanukkah, this episode serves as a great starting point.

In *The Goldbergs* episode “A Christmas Story,” the overbearing Jewish mother Beverly forces the family to eat Eastern European foods for all eight nights of Hanukkah. The

children also receive presents for all eight nights of Hanukkah, but the presents are small and useless. The Goldberg children dread Hanukkah. A key educational moment occurs when Bev decorates a Hanukkah bush for her family. Her neighbor comes over and says, “I never knew there were so many similarities between our holidays.” Beverly then proceeds to tell the story of the Maccabees, using the story to justify her Hanukkah bush. While this moment unfolds in relation to Christmas traditions, the show tells the story of Hanukkah. The viewers learn the story of the Maccabees with the ironic backdrop of the Hanukkah bush. The viewers also understand the differences between Hanukkah and Christmas. Since the entire episode is meant to be ironic, demonstrating how much Beverly Goldberg wants to celebrate Christmas, the audience better understands what is and is not a Hanukkah tradition.

*Friends* and *The Goldbergs* both educate the audience by describing Hanukkah and Hanukkah traditions. While neither show goes into great depth about the holiday, they discuss Hanukkah beyond the surface level as a December holiday.

### **Does the episode use humor to discuss Hanukkah?**

While each of the television shows are considered comedies, sometimes holidays can be discussed in a more serious manner. Other times, the holiday is used for comedic purposes, garnering laughs from the audience. In nine of the eleven episodes analyzed, Hanukkah and Hanukkah traditions are used for comedic purposes.

In the *New Girl* (2011-2018) episode “The 23rd” (season 1, episode 9, 2011), a show about three male roommates living with one female, Schmidt (Max Greenfield), the Jewish roommate, talks about his Jewish identity in relation to Hanukkah. However, Schmidt talks about Hanukkah in a comedic way, admitting that he hates Christmas because it means Hanukkah is over. This contrast in holiday perspectives serves as a source of audience amusement, emphasizing Schmidt's cultural differences. There is also a scene where the four roommates are driving to a holiday party, and they see a menorah outside a house. They point



the menorah out to Schmidt, and he says “Judaism, son,” a now iconic line. This line becomes a recurring motif throughout the series, with Schmidt using it to represent his Jewish traditions. Thus, *New Girl* utilizes Hanukkah as a comedic device to playfully mock Schmidt's Jewish identity, adding humor to the show's narrative.

Moreover, in the television show *Community*, the episode “Comparative Religion” follows each of the characters' relationship to Christmas. Annie, the Jewish character, says that she plans to wear a Hanukkah sweater to the group's holiday party. Shirley, the devout Christian, scolds Annie, stating, “Annie, I didn't know you weren't ummm Christian.” Annie then responds, “some may even say I'm Jewish.” This scene pokes fun at Shirley for being such a devout Christian, unaccepting of her Jewish friend. Later, when the rest of the group arrives at the holiday party, Annie brings her menorah, and Shirley asks if it is her “Hanukkah holder.” Annie then puts it in the Christmas tree and hides the menorah. Shirley then refers to Annie as a “Jew” in a derogatory term. This scene is meant to be comedic, playing on the trope that Jews are “non-believers” and are going to Hell. This portrayal of Shirley as an unaccepting Christian who uses stereotypes to mock Annie's Jewish identity adds to the comedic tone of the scene. However, it also serves as a commentary on the harmful effects of religious ignorance.

While the majority of analyzed television episodes use Hanukkah as a comedic device, there are exceptions where its portrayal diverges from humorous contexts. In two of the eleven shows, Hanukkah is not used as a comedic backdrop. In the episode “Soup” (season 4, episode 9, 2020) of the television show *High Maintenance* (2016-2020), which follows the life of a Jewish weed dealer in Brooklyn, the main character, known as “The Guy” (Ben Sinclair), is snowed in with his niece Ilana (Rachel Kaly). Once they return to his apartment in Brooklyn, he has a very honest and raw conversation with his niece. While they do use humor when discussing Jewish organizations such as Birthright and the youth group

NFTY, they discuss Ilana's mental health. Thus, *High Maintenance* portrays Hanukkah as a time for family and connection rather than a mere comedic backdrop.

Likewise, in *Ginny and Georgia*, Hanukkah is used as a backdrop for the name of the episode, as well as one scene in the episode. As noted above, the only mention of Hanukkah was when the mothers and daughters make latkes. The scene does not discuss what the latkes or the significance of Hanukkah, and the conversations during the latke party are about previous events from the show. Hanukkah is only used to further reiterate the identity of the characters, so Hanukkah is not used for comedic purposes.

Thus, in the analysis of various television shows' treatment of Hanukkah, it becomes evident that the holiday is predominantly used for comedic purposes, serving as a backdrop for humor and cultural commentary. In shows like *New Girl* and *Community*, Hanukkah is portrayed through comedic interactions and stereotypes, generating laughs from the audience while also highlighting cultural differences and religious ignorance.

However, there are exceptions where Hanukkah is depicted in a more serious light. In episodes of *High Maintenance* and *Ginny and Georgia*, the focus shifts towards themes of family, connection, and personal struggles. Overall, while Hanukkah is often utilized for humor and satire in television episodes, its portrayal can vary, offering opportunities for both comedic exploration and deeper thematic exploration.

### **Will the audience understand the “Jewish” humor?**

In many of these episodes, “Jewish” humor can be used, including discussions of Jewish traditions, the use of the Yiddish language, or reiterating Jewish stereotypes. However, the specific usage of “Jewish” humor may be unfamiliar to non-Jewish audiences. In five of the eleven episodes, Jewish humor is employed.

*Big Mouth*'s “A Very Big Mouth Christmas” depicts the story of Christmas using the characters. *Big Mouth* follows a group of middle schoolers who begin to experience puberty

and hormonal shifts. Each of these characters has a “hormone monster” who guides them through their puberty process. When Jessie, a central character, plays Mary in the episode’s reimagined story of Christmas, she makes many references to Mary’s Jewish identity (which is also Jessi’s identity). Consequently, when Jesus is born, the group exclaims “Mazel Tov,” recognizing Mary’s Jewish heritage. Matthew, another central character in the show, plays Joseph, and he owns a furniture store that says “Custom Furniture” in Hebrew letters. He then yells that his furniture is two shekels off. Many of the audience members may not know what a shekel is or how a shekel relates to Jesus and Mary. Since Jesus was born in Ancient Israel, the writers decided to use shekels as the currency, since shekels are the current currency of the state of Israel. Thus, these subtle, anachronistic nods to ancient Israel may be universally understood by all audience members.

Moreover, the show *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* follows the Jewish protagonist Rebecca Bunch as she uproots her New York life to move to West Covina, California. She was unhappy as a lawyer in New York, so she followed her ex-boyfriend to California. In the episode “My Mom, Greg’s Mom and Josh’s Sweet Dance Moves” Rebecca pretends to be her ancestor on the boat to the US. Her mother (Tovah Feldshuh) also pretends to be her ancestor, nagging Rebecca about her life choices. The two women are speaking Yiddish and fighting, with subtitles for the audience to follow. A popular Jewish trope is that Jewish mothers are intense and overbearing. Rachel Bloom, the creator and star of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, portrays the challenging relationship between a Jewish mother and daughter, stemming all the way back to Europe. Without being Jewish, audiences may not understand this complex dynamic between a Jewish mother and daughter. Another aspect of this episode is when Rebecca’s mother visits her in West Covina, California. Rebecca lies and tells her mother she works at a Jewish law firm to appease her and make the mother feel less upset about her move. She further lies and tells her mother that she cannot bring her to the office because her colleagues

are spending Hanukkah in Israel. Non-Jewish audiences may not understand that many Jewish people go to Israel during the Jewish holidays.

Moreover, in *High Maintenance*, when The Guy talks with his niece Ilana, he asks if she was ever in NFTY, a Jewish youth group based in the Reform movement. Not all audience members may understand what NFTY is, especially since the characters do not explain NFTY. She says yes, and he asks if it was a hookup venue. It is commonly known that Jewish youth groups have a strong “hook-up” culture. If one is not Jewish, they may not understand or know this fact about Jewish youth groups. Similarly, The Guy questions Ilana about her experience with Birthright, another reference that may not be universally understood. Birthright trips, often taken by Jewish college students, can also develop a reputation as hookup opportunities. For viewers unfamiliar with these aspects of Jewish culture, the humor derived from these interactions may be lost. Thus, while these episodes employ Jewish traditions and themes for comedic effect, the intended humor might not resonate with all audiences.

While shows like *Big Mouth*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, and *High Maintenance* leverage Jewish humor and traditions for comedic effect, not all audience members may fully grasp the nuances and references inherent in these portrayals. Whether it is subtle nods to Jewish heritage, Yiddish language usage, or references to specific Jewish cultural phenomena like NFTY and Birthright, these elements may elude viewers who are not familiar with Jewish culture. However, this doesn't diminish the value or enjoyment of the shows for non-Jewish viewers. For those unfamiliar with Judaism, these shows can serve as an introduction to understanding Jewish humor and traditions.

### **Does the episode have a depiction of an interfaith couple or character?**

When looking at Jewish portrayal on television, many shows have intermarried Jewish characters. While this is acceptable on television, many Jewish communities are

firmly against intermarriage. To modernize the family, television shows depict interfaith households, especially giving the writers an opportunity to focus on both Hanukkah and Christmas and adding a more diverse plotline.

Out of the eleven television shows analyzed, nine of the shows depict interfaith relationships or characters. The only shows that do not depict interfaith relationships or characters were *High Maintenance* and *The Goldbergs*. As mentioned above, the Hanukkah episode of *High Maintenance* shows the relationship between an uncle and niece. They both appear to be fully Jewish, and they only mention relationships when discussing NFTY conventions and Birthright, and since those are both Jewish organizations, they promote relationships with other Jews.

In *The Goldbergs*, both the parents discuss their connection to Hanukkah. While the show depicts the family eating non-Kosher foods such as shrimp, they still celebrate Hanukkah. This episode depicts the struggle for Jews during Hanukkah, especially when their neighbors have lights and trees. Beverly's response to Hanukkah and her father's reaction demonstrates the complexities of an American identity versus a Jewish identity. Not only does *The Goldbergs* depict a Jewish family, but they also further portray the complexities of being an American Jewish family.

However, nearly all of the analyzed episodes portray themes of intermarriage and an interfaith identity. In the already described *Friends* episode, "The Holiday Armadillo," Ross wants to educate his son about Hanukkah since Ben usually only celebrates Christmas. Additionally, another interfaith relationship is depicted through the characters Chandler and Monica, who are engaged. Monica, Ross's sister, identifies as Jewish, while Chandler, her fiancé, does not share the same faith background.

In *Schitt's Creek* "Merry Christmas, Johnny Rose" (season 4, episode 13, 2018), the father of the Rose family daydreams about his extravagant Christmas parties before he lost all

his money. However, Johnny Rose is Jewish, and his wife, Moira (Catherine O'Hara), is Christian. Johnny Rose wakes his children up by claiming that "this year, we will be celebrating the holidays," since they had not done so prior to losing their money. Johnny Rose wants to throw a party, just like the old times. When Moira states that "he is seemingly possessed by the Christmas spirit," he replies, "that reminds me: someone needs to find the menorah." Ironically, the Jewish member of the family is pushing his family to celebrate Christmas. He does acknowledge the menorah, but his true priority is Christmas. Later, when his son David discusses the Christmas party, one of the characters admits, "I thought you were Jewish," to which David replies "I'm a delightful half-half situation." Interestingly enough, this is the real identity of the actor, Daniel Levy, who is the real-life son of Johnny Rose (Eugene Levy). His mother is Christian, while his father, who plays Johnny Rose, is Jewish.

In the *Glee* episode "Glee Actually" (Season 4, Episode 10, 2012), one of the characters is half-black and half-Jewish. As he is walking down the high school hallway, one of the students asks: "Are you going more African or more Hebrew for the holidays?" He asks if he's celebrating "Kwanaka." Jake Puckerman, the character, beats his peer up, as he is offended by this comment. Jake struggles with this identity in private, and he is horrified that his peer made such a comment. Depictions of interfaith characters are not always simple, and the celebration of both holidays can be complicated.

Thus, across these Hanukkah episodes, interfaith relationships are depicted with nuance. From Ross's efforts to teach his son about Hanukkah. to Johnny Rose's strong desire to celebrate Christmas, these narratives highlight the challenges and joys of navigating multiple cultural backgrounds within a family unit. Moreover, instances like Jake Puckerman's struggle with his mixed heritage shed light on the complexities faced by individuals with interfaith identities. These depictions serve as a reminder that the

intersection of different cultures and religions can be a source of both pride and conflict for many people.

**Conclusion:**

As demonstrated, Hanukkah episodes are almost always used in conjunction with Christmas, and Hanukkah adds diversity to the episode by embracing more Americans in the process. American television has grouped the winter holidays together, referring to them as “the holidays.” In all of eleven episodes with Hanukkah themes, Christmas is always a main theme. Hanukkah episodes also depict interfaith relationships or characters. Out of the eleven episodes viewed, nine had depictions of interfaith relationships or characters. As discussed above, Jews have often been portrayed in interfaith relationships, so this observation is not shocking. Finally, Hanukkah is used in a comedic manner, aligning with the comedic nature of the shows themselves. While the holidays are often approached humorously, only two out of the eleven episodes aim to educate the audience about Hanukkah, indicating an emphasis on entertainment over educational content.

## **Chapter 4: Passover**

**“Doesn’t it seem like every Jewish holiday has to do with them escaping stuff?” –**

***Family Guy*, “Family Goy” (season 8, episode 2, 2009)**

Figure 4: The shows referenced and the themes:



| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year</b>                                    | Is<br>Passover<br>the theme<br>of the<br>episode?<br>Yes or no | Is this the<br>only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode<br>in the<br>series? | Is the<br>episode<br>education<br>al? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the<br>Jewish<br>humor<br>clear and<br>explaina<br>ble? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or character? |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <i>Curb Your<br/>Enthusiasm,</i><br>“The Seder,”<br>Season 5,<br>2005              | Yes  | No  | No                                    | Yes   | No   | Yes  |
| <i>Big Mouth,</i><br>“Florida,”<br>Season 3,<br>2019                               | Yes  | No  | Yes                                   | Yes   | No   | No   |
| <i>Family Guy,</i><br>“Family<br>Goy,”<br>Season 8,<br>2009                        | No   | No  | Yes                                   | Yes   | No   | Yes  |
| <i>Sports Night,</i><br>“April is the<br>Cruellest<br>Month,”<br>Season 2,<br>2000 | Yes  | No  | Yes                                   | Yes   | No   | Yes  |
| <i>Difficult<br/>People,</i><br>“Passover<br>Bump,”<br>Season 3,<br>2017           | Yes  | No  | No                                    | Yes   | Yes  | No   |
| <i>South Park,</i><br>“Jewpacabra<br>,” Season 16,<br>2012                         | No   | No  | Yes                                   | Yes   | Yes  | No   |
| <i>Transparent,</i><br>“Exciting<br>and New,”<br>Season 3,<br>2016                 | No   | No  | No                                    | No  | No   | No   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | 4  | 0   | 4                                     | 6   | 2  | 3  |

## **Introduction:**

Like Hanukkah, Passover is an important time to celebrate Jewish history with family and friends. The Passover Seder is one of the most important family gatherings for Jewish people. Passover commemorates the story of Exodus, where the Jews escaped slavery in Egypt. Jewish people celebrate Passover by having a Seder for the first two nights of Passover, where they tell the story of the Exodus. Passover falls during the springtime, typically during late March or April. According to the *Pew Research Center's* 2020 report, 62% of all American Jews said they hosted or attended a Passover Seder in the last year (*Pew Research Center*). Passover unites the Jewish people across various backgrounds, making Passover one of the most celebrated Jewish holidays.

For Passover television comedies, I analyzed seven shows, ranging from comedy-dramas, straight comedies, to cartoons. Each episode depicts Passover very differently. Some of the episodes depict a Passover Seder, while others just discuss the very fact that it is Passover. Prior to watching these episodes, I was expecting there to be more references to Easter, similar to how Hanukkah and Christmas are grouped. Yet this was not the case, and only two shows discussed Easter: *South Park* (1997-Present) “Jewpacabra” (season 16, episode 4, 2012) and *Family Guy* (1999-Present) “Family Goy” (season 8, episode 2, 2009).

### **Is Passover the main theme of the episode?**

In four of the seven episodes, the episode is centered around Passover. In the infamous *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2024) episode “The Seder” (season 5, episode 7, 2005), Larry David hosts a Passover Seder for his friends and family. However, one of Larry’s neighbors warns him about a sex offender in the neighborhood. Larry and his wife Cheryl are horrified, but Larry eventually befriends the sex offender and invites him to the Seder. The episode centers around the preparation of the Seder, the aftermath of inviting the

sex offender, and the Seder itself. If the name of this episode “The Seder,” does not demonstrate its theme, then the episode itself does the job.

Similar to Larry David’s crude humor in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Nick Kroll’s *Big Mouth* (2017-2024) episode “Florida” (season 3, episode 5, 2019) pokes fun at the Seder. The episode centers on the Globerman family’s trip to Florida for Passover. Andrew brings his non-Jewish best friend Nick along to Florida, explaining its significance and Andrew’s customs throughout the episode. The episode tells the story of the Exodus, as well as depicts the actual Seder. While there is a side plot, the main theme of the episode is the Seder and the Globerman family’s trip to Florida.

Moreover, the episode “Passover Bump” (season 3, episode 1, 2017) of the Hulu show *Difficult People* (2015-2017) centers on the main character Julie (Julie Klausner) and her anxiety for the upcoming Seder. Her mother is a stereotypical Jewish mother: extremely hard on her daughter and opinionated. Whenever Julie is with her mother, the mother judges and nags Julie. Julie spends most of the episode trying to get anxiety medication for the upcoming Seder. She does not want to be with her family, and she thinks drugs will help the Seder become more tolerable. This episode crudely explores the anxiety of family gatherings for Jewish individuals, especially between mothers and daughters. The second half of the episode shows the Seder, portraying the tension between Julie’s family.

In contrast to *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Big Mouth*, and *Difficult People*, the *Sports Night* (1998-2000) Passover episode “April is the Cruellest Month” (season 2, episode 19, 2000) has a much more lighthearted approach to Passover. The episode focuses on two Jewish members of the news show “Sports Night” planning to host a Seder in between commercial breaks. The episode depicts the characters going through the story of Exodus, with each character playing the role of someone from the story. At the end of the episode, after the evening broadcast, the entire team at “Sports Night” comes together for a Seder.

Each of these episodes focus on Passover in their own comedic way. *Big Mouth*, *Difficult People*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* depict the lead-up to a Seder, with all the anxiety and preparation. *Sports Night*, on the other hand, shows how the Seder brings people together, even when there is conflict. However, three of the seven episodes are not centered around Passover, and Passover is a mere subplot of the episode. These episodes include *South Park* “Jewpacabra” (season 16, episode 4, 2012), *Family Guy* “Family Goy” (season 8, episode 2, 2009), and *Transparent* (2014-2019) “Exciting and New” (season 3, episode 10, 2016). While Passover is a theme of the episode, the holiday is not the main plot.

*South Park*’s “Jewpacabra” begins with one of the characters, Cartman (Trey Parker), a notorious antisemite, asking his Jewish friend Kyle’s mom about Passover. Kyle (Matt Stone) overhears his mom explaining the story of Passover and tells Cartman to leave. Kyle knows Cartman is not asking about Passover for educational purposes; he is up to something. Immediately after this scene, it cuts to many members of the South Park community participating in an Easter egg hop. At the event, Cartman tells his friends that he hopes the “Jewpacabra” does not come out to suck their blood. He admits that since Passover falls on the same week as Easter, the Jewpacabra is extra thirsty for young boys. The rest of the episode centers on the Jewpacabra and the town’s response to the threat. Later in the episode, Cartman hallucinates and imagines he is a part of the story of Exodus as Pharoah’s first-born son, who is killed during the Ten Plagues. He eventually feels guilty for starting the rumor about the Jewpacabra and says he would convert to Judaism. The episode then concludes with the Easter Egg hunt. While Passover is an important part of the episode, the hunting of the Jewpacabra is the main theme of the episode.

Like *South Park*, *Family Guy*’s “Family Goy” (season 8, episode 2, 2009) spends the episode poking fun at Judaism. The episode begins with the wife Lois (Alex Borstein) believing she has breast cancer, so the family heads to the hospital. The doctors look at her

family's medical history, and Lois discovers her mother is a Holocaust survivor and she was Jewish. She immediately makes a joke about her father concealing her mother's identity so they could get into country clubs. Lois and her husband Peter (Seth Green) spend the episode contemplating their Jewish identity and their observance level. Peter, in particular, forces the family to pursue this new identity and celebrate the Jewish holidays. The family goes to temple, and the kids go to Hebrew school. Eventually, Peter becomes hesitant about embracing their newfound Jewish identity since he does not want to go to Hell. His wife Lois, however, wants to have a Passover Seder and ignore Easter. The episode shows the family sitting around the table with wine and a Seder plate, attempting to connect with Judaism. However, Peter interrupts the Seder dressed as the Easter bunny, hoping to return to his Christian roots. Until the end of the episode, there is no depiction of Passover, and the episode only focuses on the family's new Jewish identity. The main theme of the episode centers around Judaism rather than Passover.

*Transparent* tells the story of Mort Pfefferman (Jeffrey Tambor) who comes out as a transgender woman, Maura, and the dysfunctional Pfefferman family must grapple with their father's transition. In "Exciting and New" (season 3, episode 10, 2016), the Pfefferman family spends their spring vacation on a cruise. While the family is Jewish, they no longer celebrate Passover. They discuss their failed Seders, in which Maura and Shelley's (his ex-wife and the matriarch of the family) sister fought. The episode shows each member of the family separately enjoying the cruise, until the daughter, Ali (Gaby Hoffmann), realizes it is Passover. She plans to hold a Seder that will bring the family together. Ali and her sister Sarah (Amy Landecker) run around the cruise looking for makeshift items for the Seder plate. However, the Seder leads to more fighting between the family. While the episode depicts a Seder, the main theme of the episode is their vacation and the familial strife.

While Passover serves as a central theme in four out of the seven episodes discussed, its portrayal varies significantly across each show. In *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Big Mouth*, *Difficult People*, and *Sports Night*, Passover is a major part of the storyline, showcasing the anxiety, preparation, and ultimately, the significance of the Seder meal. However, in *South Park*, *Family Guy*, and *Transparent*, Passover is a subplot or background element, with the main focus on other plotlines and story arcs.

### **Is this the only “Jewish” episode in the series?**

When a television show features a Jewish holiday episode, it is often used as a narrative device to further develop the plot for one or more characters. Usually, the series has other episodes that discuss Judaism in the series. Hence, it is not surprising that in all seven of the television episodes analyzed, there are additional episodes within the series that delve into Jewish themes and identity.

Larry David, the creator and writer of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, is staunchly Jewish, often labeled as the epitome of a New York Jew (IMDb). David’s identity is discussed in many episodes of the twelve seasons of the show, and David frequently uses Yiddish humor. He also depicts Jewish holidays such as Passover and Yom Kippur. David’s episode “The Seder” is one of many “Jewish” episodes throughout the show.

Moreover, many of the characters within *Big Mouth* are Jewish, prompting various episodes that explore Jewish themes. These episodes include “I survived Jessi’s Bat Mitzvah” (Season 1, Episode 9, 2017), which shows the chaos and family drama that unfolds during Jessi Glaser’s Bat Mitzvah, and “The Funeral” (Season 4, Episode 8, 2020) where Andrew’s Zayde dies, and his friends attend the service at his synagogue.

Moreover, *South Park* centers around four 3rd-grade schoolboys in South Park, Colorado. One of the boys, Kyle Broflovski, is the only Jew in the town. His identity is explored throughout the show, including the iconic 1997 song “The Lonely Jew on

Christmas” in the episode “Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo” (Season 1, Episode 9, 1997). In this song, Kyle sings about feeling excluded from Christmas because he is Jewish. This song truly explores how difficult Christmas can be for those who do not celebrate. In addition to this famous episode of *South Park*, the 1998 episode “Ike’s Wee Wee” (Season 2, Episode 3, 1998) depicts Kyle’s brother Ike’s circumcision, which is a Jewish ritual for baby boys eight days after they are born. While there are various other episodes that explore the Broflovski’s Jewish identity, the point has been made that “Jewpacabra” is not the only Jewish episode of *South Park*.

Likewise, this is not the only episode of *Family Guy* with a focus on Judaism. There is an called “When You Wish Upon a Weinstein” (Season 3, Episode 22, 2003) which shows Peter, the dad, becoming fixated on the fact that Jews are mathematical and legal geniuses (IMDb). He then has his son convert to Judaism at a Las Vegas Bar Mitzvah to ensure that he becomes smart, like the Jewish people. Thus, in addition to “The Family Goy,” *Family Guy* has other episodes that focus on Judaism.

While “April is the Cruellest Month” (Season 2, Episode 19, 2000) is the only episode of *Sports Night* that depicts a Jewish holiday, there are other episodes that explore the character’s Jewish identities. Two of the characters, Dan Rydell (Josh Charles) and Jeremy Goodwin (Josh Malina) identify as Jewish in the show and in real life (Wikipedia). In addition to the Passover episode, the episode “Sally” (Season 1, Episode 16, 1999) shows Jeremy’s fear about spending the weekend at his Catholic girlfriend’s house since he is Jewish (Wiki). Thus, *Sports Night* has other Jewish episodes and discussions of Judaism throughout the show.

Finally, the Amazon Prime original show *Transparent* was created by Joey Soloway, a Jewish writer (Wikipedia). The show openly explores the struggles endured by members of the LGBT community, while also exploring the connection to Judaism. The Pfefferman

family, whom the show is centered around, is openly Jewish. As discussed in Chapter 5: Yom Kippur and Shabbat, “Exciting and New” is not the only episode of *Transparent* that explores Judaism. “The Book of Life” (Season 2, Episode 7, 2015) explores how the family spends Yom Kippur. Thus, all seven television shows with Passover episodes have other episodes with Jewish themes.

### **Is the episode educational about Passover?**

Many viewers possess limited knowledge about the details of Jewish holidays, such as Passover. Television, with its broad reach and ability to engage diverse audiences, can serve as a valuable educational tool, even when approaching subjects with comedic elements. By incorporating Jewish holidays like Passover into television narratives, creators have the opportunity to inform viewers about cultural traditions and customs in an accessible manner. Despite the comedic tone often employed in these portrayals, television episodes centered around Passover can offer valuable insights into the significance of the holiday.

Four of the seven episodes analyzed educate the audience about Passover. In the *Big Mouth* episode “Florida” (Season 3, Episode 5, 2019), the episode begins with the non-Jewish friend Nick asking about the Seder. Marty Globerman, the father of Andrew Globerman (the Jewish friend), responds that the Seder is when they tell the story of Passover. Then, they depict the story of Passover with the main characters pretending to be slaves in Egypt (like the episode “A Very Big Mouth Christmas” (season 5, episode 8, 2021). They explain the story of Moses and the burning bush, the Ten Plagues, the reason why Jews eat matzah, and the parting of the Red Sea. However, since *Big Mouth* is a comedy that focuses on sex and adolescence, they made the story of Passover sexual. For instance, instead of the killing of the first-born son, they claim it is the “first born penis.” While this sexual reference feels extremely uncomfortable, the writers want to make the show entertaining as they educate the audience. Nick then asks, “when did they go to Israel,” and Andrew explains that the Jews



spent 40 years in the desert. This scene gives the main story of Passover even though it is made to be sexual.

Like *Big Mouth*, the *South Park* episode “Jewpacabra” (Season 16, Episode 4, 2012) tells the story of Passover by depicting the characters of *South Park* as slaves in Egypt. In fact, Cartman acts as Pharaoh’s first-born son. By placing the show’s characters in Egypt, the writers make the story relatable, and the viewers better visualize the ancient stories.

Moreover, “Jewpacabra” also begins with a short description of Passover. Kyle’s mom, the classic prototype of an overbearing Jewish mother, explains to Cartman that Passover is about Exodus and Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt. The Jewish people celebrate the Seder and eat matzah. She also says that Passover is seven days, and the name originates from the Angel of Death passing over Jewish houses. While this scene is intended to set up Cartman’s antisemitic rant, viewers still learn about the meaning of Passover. Many audience members may not have even known the significance of Passover, and through this comedic and somewhat offensive episode, viewers have a better understanding of the holiday.

*Family Guy* also educates about Passover and the Seder. When Lois Griffin declares that her family will celebrate Passover instead of Easter, the husband objects. Lois proceeds to lead the Seder and tells her family the story of Passover. Eventually, Peter storms into the Seder dressed as the Easter bunny, claiming he wants Easter and “can’t be with someone who doesn’t believe in Jesus.” Jesus then shows up and explains that he was actually a Jew, and the Last Supper was a Passover Seder. He also tells the family that Judaism and Christianity are very similar. Many people are not taught that Jesus was a Jew or that the Last Supper was a Seder. While this episode pokes fun at Jewish traditions and Passover, they still educate the viewers about Passover.

While these episodes use comedy to introduce viewers to the traditions and significance of Passover, three out of the seven episodes fail to provide educational content

about the holiday. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*'s Passover episode "The Seder" (Season 5, Episode 7, 2005) depicts Passover traditions without explaining their significance. One scene shows the children searching for the afikomen, with Larry promising them a dollar if they find the matzah. However, many viewers may not understand the significance of the afikomen or why the children are searching for it. Additionally, characters frequently use the expression "good yontif," a Yiddish phrase meaning "have a good holiday," without any explanation provided within the episode. When a doctor at Larry's Seder leaves because he is called to the hospital, he also says "good yontif," potentially leaving viewers confused or unaware of the meaning behind the phrase. While comedy can serve as a vehicle for cultural education, these instances highlight missed opportunities for providing viewers with a deeper understanding of Passover traditions.

In *Transparent*, the Pfefferman family decides to celebrate Passover as a last-minute endeavor. There is a beautiful scene in which Maura and her daughter Ali look out at the ocean, and Maura throws her spandex into the ocean. Maura reveals she is unable to get her surgery to transition into a woman. She feels as though she is "nothing," as she must go off hormones and cannot completely transition into a woman. Ali leads Maura in a prayer in which they throw the "tight, terrible spanx" into the ocean. She uses the phrase "deliver us," to which Maura responds "dayenu." She then ends the prayer by stating "set us free." The entire meaning behind Passover centers around freedom from slavery. By accepting her body as is, Maura is freeing herself from the pain of being unable to transition. On the surface, this scene does not directly discuss Passover. However, for the audience members who celebrate Passover or know about its traditions, the significance of using "dayenu" is not lost at this moment. Only those with a comprehensive understanding of Passover can fully process this scene.

## Is Passover used for comedic purposes?

Many comedic shows solely use Jewish holidays to further their comedy and build a plot for the “ethnic” character. Jewish holidays, even though they are typically serious, can be used for comedic relief. In six of the seven episodes, Passover is used for comedic purposes. Whether the characters make fun of the Seder or Passover, these television shows use Passover for comedic reasons. We will begin by discussing the outlier, *Transparent*, where Passover is not viewed or used in a comedic way.

In the *Transparent* episode “Exciting and New” (season 3, episode 10, 2016) the Pfefferman family struggles on their vacation. The two daughters, Ali and Sarah, plan the Seder to bring the family closer together since the family has become distant. While it is the last day of Passover and Seders are the first two nights, she decides a makeshift Seder will bring the family together. At the Seder, the mother reveals she feels ignored by her family, claiming “you ridicule me. You roll your eyes at me.” This scene is extremely painful and brutally honest, depicting the challenges of any family, especially the Pfeffermans. The episode ends with Shelley, the mother, performing a one-woman-show on the cruise ship, singing Alanis Morissette’s “One Hand in My Pocket.” The family sobs in a beautiful moment where Shelley finally feels seen. While this episode is extremely powerful and, at times, true to its comedic genre, the episode explores the loneliness each member of the Pfefferman family experiences.

*Transparent* depicts one version of a Passover story which is emotional and painful. The six other episodes observed, however, use the holiday of Passover to build on the comedy. As discussed, the *Sports Night* episode “April is the Cruellest Month” (Season 2, Episode 19, 2000) focuses on Jeremy and Dan’s Seder. Since the goal of Passover is to tell the story of Exodus, Jeremy assigns his co-workers different parts to play. Jeremy tells his co-workers that everyone is invited to the Seder, and his ex-girlfriend responds, “I am not

Jewish.” He then proceeds to assign her to the role of Pharaoh, since she is his ex-girlfriend and Pharaoh is the villain. The episode also shows Jeremy treating the story like a television show he is producing by saying “I need Joseph, I need Jacob, I need Pharaoh,” and “find my Moses.” Thus, the story of Passover is used in a comedic manner and in tangent to the plot of the show.

In *South Park*, the story of Passover is used in opposition to Easter. The white supremacist character Cartman spends the episode creating a lie about a Jewish monster who sucks the blood of children, which is essentially blood libel. Specifically, whenever Passover and Easter fall on the same day, the Jewpacabra emerges. As mentioned previously, this episode depicts the story of Passover with the characters in ancient Egypt. Thus, Passover is used in a crude way furthering Cartman's arch as the antisemite.

Moreover, *Big Mouth* plays on the stereotype that Jewish grandparents live in Florida. Throughout the episode, Andrew teaches his non-Jewish friend Nick about Passover and his family. In fact, since the show explores the sexual awakenings of middle schoolers, the story of Passover is made to be inappropriate and dirty. Instead of the first-born son being killed, it is the hormone monster's first-born penis. This is an extremely raunchy scene, but it is nothing out of the ordinary for *Big Mouth*. The episode also depicts the family Seder. In keeping with the raunchy nature of the episode, Andrew and his first cousin flirt the entire night. This first cousin sings the “Four Questions,” which is traditionally sung by the youngest child, in a seductive manner. The creators are taking the Passover tradition, making it dirty, and, in a way, comical.

The last example is from *Family Guy* where the Seder is viewed as a burden. The Griffin family discovers their ties to Judaism. Initially, Peter is very invested in the family becoming Jewish. Later, however, he claims he is a good Catholic, and he does not want to go to Hell. Horrified by her husband's behavior, Lois decides that they will no longer

celebrate Easter. The family is extremely disappointed by this news, as Easter is seen as a fun holiday whereas Passover is long and boring. Lois leads the Seder, taking note of the fact that this is her first time. When Lois explains how Passover is about the Jews leaving Egypt, her son admits, “doesn’t it seem like every Jewish holiday has to do with them escaping stuff?” Then it shows the dog asking, “when do we get to the wine drinking?” The family is evidently impatient and ready to be done with the Seder. Peter then emerges as the Easter bunny, stating “get this Jew food off the table.” This episode makes fun of Passover in a crude manner for comedic relief. The family did not have Jewish ties prior to the episode, so the writers incorporated this episode for comedy and diversity.

### **Will the audience understand the Jewish humor?**

Episodes centered on Jewish traditions and holidays often incorporate humor that directly relates to these traditions, enriching the plot of the episode. However, this specific brand of humor, rooted in Jewish cultural references and traditions, may not be universally understood by all audiences. In five out of the seven episodes analyzed, the Jewish humor employed may not resonate with viewers who are unfamiliar with Jewish customs and Jewish culture.

In *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, the entire episode uses Jewish themes and traditions for comedic effect, which may lead to misunderstandings among non-Jewish audiences. For example, in the beginning of the episode, Larry’s non-Jewish wife Cheryl mentions she is making “charoses.” The correct term is “charoset,” a traditional Passover dish, but Larry does not correct her, adding to the humor. However, this joke may go unnoticed by many viewers who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Passover Seder.

Another example of language-based humor is found in the *Big Mouth* episode “Florida” (season 3, episode 5, 2019). Many characters use Yiddish expressions, adding authenticity to the portrayal of Jewish culture. However, one such expression, “shtup,” which

means to have sex in Yiddish, is used in the Passover episode without explanation. While viewers may infer its meaning from the context of the scene, the joke may not fully resonate with those unfamiliar with Yiddish.

Similarly to *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Big Mouth*, *Transparent* employs humor through the use of Yiddish language. However, this use of Yiddish may confuse audience members who are not familiar with the language, as the words are often not explained within the context of the show. For instance, Maura uses the word “tuchus,” which means butt in Yiddish, during a scene where she throws her spandex into the ocean and points to her butt pads. While viewers may infer the meaning of the word from the context of the scene, its translation is not provided, potentially leaving some audience members puzzled.

Later in the episode, when Ali decides the family should have a Seder, her sister Sarah expresses her reluctance by saying, “I am a bad Jew. I’m over the hineni shit.” “Hineni” is a Hebrew word that holds significance within Jewish culture, as it emphasizes a person's readiness or preparedness, often regarding their relationship with God. However, the meaning of this term may not be apparent to viewers who lack familiarity with Jewish customs.

By incorporating this phrase into the dialogue, *Transparent* adds depth to its portrayal of Jewish identity. However, the lack of explanation within the episode may leave some audience members unaware of the word's significance, highlighting another instance where cultural context may be lost on viewers.

### **Is there a depiction of an interfaith relationship or character?**

In many television shows, Jewish characters are often portrayed as either married to non-Jewish individuals or being of mixed faith backgrounds. This trend extends to Passover episodes, where characters frequently navigate their interfaith relationships within the context

of the holiday. Among the seven Passover-themed episodes analyzed, three episodes feature interfaith relationships.

Larry David's wife Cheryl is non-Jewish in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. In the episode "The Seder" (Season 5, Episode 7, 2005), Larry and Cheryl host a Seder for their friends and family. The episode begins with Jeff, Larry's manager and best friend, acting shocked that Cheryl is doing a Seder, and Larry says the Seder is meant for his father. Jeff then asks, "does she know what she's doing?" meaning does Cheryl know how to host a Seder.

In the next scene, Cheryl stands in the kitchen preparing for the Seder, and Larry says, "oh boy, look at the Jew girl," to which she responds, "I am so Jewish right now." Cheryl then states that what she is cooking "is charoses." Ironically, the dish is called charoset, not charoses. Cheryl then admits that her mother "would flip if she knew [she] was doing this." Cheryl then proceeds to refer to Jews as "you people," to which Larry states he does not enjoy. This episode demonstrates the struggle for a non-Jewish partner to better understand Jewish traditions. Since Cheryl is the woman, it is her role to cook for the Seder, even though she is not Jewish.

In the *Family Guy* episode "The Family Goy" (Season 8, Episode 2, 2009), the non-Jewish Griffin family discover that the mom has Jewish ancestry. The family spends the episode navigating their newfound identity and attempting to incorporate Judaism into their life. The episode demonstrates how foreign and uncomfortable Judaism can feel for non-Jews, especially during the spring holidays.

In the *Sport's Night* episode "April is the Cruellest Month" (Season 2, Episode 19, 2000) Jeremy admits that teaching gentiles about Passover is almost as good as teaching children the story. As he tells his co-workers of the upcoming Seder, his ex-girlfriend Natalie says, "but I am not Jewish." He responds, "I know, I dated you for a year and a half." Jeremy

acknowledges that his ex was not Jewish, and he deliberately has her play Pharaoh, both because they have bad blood and because she is not Jewish.

**Conclusion:**

This examination of Passover's portrayal in American television comedy reveals its significance as a recurring theme within comedic narratives. Passover episodes often serve as educational platforms, offering insights into Jewish traditions and customs surrounding the holiday. Through humor, these episodes engage audiences about the significance of Passover within Jewish culture. Passover is frequently employed as a comedic device, showcasing its versatility as a source of humor. Whether through exaggerated portrayals of family gatherings, mishaps during traditional rituals, or humorous anecdotes about the holiday's significance, Passover episodes generate laughter while celebrating the Jewish identities.

Thus, Passover episodes on television serve as both a celebration of Jewish tradition and a reflection of the enduring relevance of religious holidays in popular culture. Through humor and storytelling, these episodes contribute to a deeper appreciation of Passover for all audience members.



## **Chapter 5: Shabbat and Yom Kippur:**

**“We’re happy but we’re starving. It’s New Year’s, but we’re guilty” – *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel***

**“More than the Jewish People have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.” – Ahad Ha’am**

Figure 4: Shabbat and Yom Kippurs episodes and their codes:

| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year,<br/>Holiday</b>   | Is Shabbat/<br>Yom<br>Kippur<br>the<br>central<br>theme of<br>the<br>episode? | Is this the<br>only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode in<br>the series? | Is the<br>episode<br>education<br>al? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Sex and the City</i> , “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little,”<br>Season 6,<br>2003<br><b>Shabbat</b>           | No  | No   | Yes                                   | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Curb Your Enthusiasm</i> ,<br>“The Larry David Sandwich,”<br>Season 5,<br>2005<br><b>Yom Kippur</b>     | Yes (one of the plots of the episode; there are two)                          | No   | No                                    | Yes   | No  | Yes   |
| <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> ,<br>“Pilot,”<br>Season 1,<br>2017<br><b>Yom Kippur</b>                   | No; it just happens to be Yom Kippur  | No   | No                                    | Yes   | No  | Yes – sister-in-law converted to Judaism  |
| <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> , “Ya Shivu v Bolshom Dome Na Kholme,”<br>Season 1,<br>2017<br><b>Yom</b> | No  | No   | No                                    | Yes   | No  | Yes   |

| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year,<br/>Holiday</b>  | Is Shabbat/<br>Yom<br>Kippur<br>the<br>central<br>theme of<br>the<br>episode? | Is this the<br>only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode in<br>the series?  | Is the<br>episode<br>education<br>al? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Kippur</b>   |   |   |                                       |   |   |   |
| <i>Difficult People</i> ,<br>“The<br>Courage of<br>a Soldier,”<br>Season 1,<br>2015<br><b>Yom<br/>Kippur</b>                  | Yes   | No  | No                                    | Yes   | No  | Yes   |
| <i>The<br/>Marvelous<br/>Mrs.<br/>Maisel</i> ,<br>“Look, She<br>Made a<br>Hat,”<br>Season 2,<br>2018<br><b>Yom<br/>Kippur</b> | No  | No  | Yes                                   | Yes   | No  | Yes   |
| <i>Fresh off<br/>the Boat</i> ,<br>“Philip<br>Goldstein,”<br>Season 1,<br>2015<br><b>Shabbat</b>                              | No  | Yes   | Yes                                   | No  | Yes – There<br>is none                              | No  |
| <i>Ramy</i> , “A<br>Black Spot<br>on the<br>Heart,”<br>Season 1,<br>2019<br><b>Shabbat</b>                                    | No  | Yes/No–<br>talk a lot<br>about Jews<br>because the<br>show<br>focuses on<br>Islam, but<br>this is the | Yes                                   | Yes   | Yes – There<br>is none                              | Yes   |

| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year,<br/>Holiday</b>   | Is Shabbat/<br>Yom<br>Kippur<br>the<br>central<br>theme of<br>the<br>episode? | Is this the<br>only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode in<br>the series? | Is the<br>episode<br>education<br>al? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
|  |   | first time<br>they depict<br>Shabbat                         |                                       |   |   |   |
| <i>Odd Mom<br/>Out,</i><br>“Fasting<br>and the<br>Furious,”<br>Season 2,<br>2016<br><b>Yom<br/>Kippur</b>      | Yes   | No   | No                                    | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   |
| <i>Entourage,</i><br>“Return of<br>the King,”<br>Season 3,<br>2007<br><b>Yom<br/>Kippur</b>                    | Yes   | No   | Yes                                   | Yes   | No  | No  |
| <i>Big Mouth,</i><br>“Andrew’s<br>Gonna<br>Touch a<br>Boob<br>Tonight,”<br>Season 6,<br>2022<br><b>Shabbat</b> | No  | No   | No                                    | Yes   | No  | No  |
| <i>Transparent</i><br>, “The Book<br>of Life,”<br>Season 2,<br>2015<br><b>Yom<br/>Kippur</b>                   | Yes   | No   | Yes                                   | Yes   | No  | No  |

| <b>SHOWS:<br/>Episode,<br/>Season,<br/>Year,<br/>Holiday</b> | Is Shabbat/<br>Yom<br>Kippur<br>the<br>central<br>theme of<br>the<br>episode? | Is this the<br>only<br>“Jewish”<br>episode in<br>the series? | Is the<br>episode<br>education<br>al? | Is the<br>holiday<br>used for<br>comedic<br>purposes? | Is the Jewish<br>humor clear<br>and<br>explainable? | Is there a<br>depiction of<br>an interfaith<br>relationship<br>or<br>character? |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | 5   | 2  | 6                                     | 11  | 4   | 8   |

**Introduction:**

This section will focus on Yom Kippur and Shabbat. I chose to put these holidays together since they are two of the most important holidays for Jewish people. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible or Torah, Yom Kippur is referred to as “Shabbat Shabbaton,” meaning the Sabbath of Sabbaths. Yom Kippur marks the Jewish new year where Jewish people fast and atone for their sins. While Yom Kippur is considered the holiest of days, according to *Pew Research Center’s* 2020 report, only 46% of US Jews fast on Yom Kippur.

However, the *Pew Research Center’s* report breaks Jewish people into two categories: Jews by religion and Jews of no religion. Jews by religion consider themselves Jewish and had a Jewish upbringing. Jews of no religion are categorized “if they answer a question about their present religion by saying they are atheist, agnostic or have no religion in particular; and they say they had a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish; and they consider themselves Jewish in some way aside from religion, such as ethnically, culturally or because of their family background.” (*Pew Research Center*). Thus, 56% of Jews by religion fasted, while 20% of Jews of no religion fast for Yom Kippur. I would like to emphasize that fasting is not the only way in which people mark Yom Kippur. Many individuals cannot fast for medical reasons or because of their age. Thus, this data may not reflect the percentage of Jews who mark Yom Kippur.

Shabbat, on the other hand, is the weekly Sabbath in which Jewish people rest and attend synagogue. Shabbat starts on Friday night at sunset and concludes on Saturday night at sunset. While many secular Jews may not recognize Shabbat, Shabbat has been a central holiday for the Jewish people for thousands of years. The famous 19th century Russian cultural Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am once stated that "more than the Jewish People have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews" (Israel Democracy Institute). According to the *Pew Research Center*, four in ten Jews mark Shabbat in a meaningful way. Jews by religion were more likely to mark Shabbat than Jews of no religion, and "it also is more common among in-married Jews (marriages between people of the same religion) than among those who are married to non-Jewish spouses."

For this section, I analyzed twelve television shows, four that depict Shabbat and eight that depict Yom Kippur. Each of these episodes emphasize the familial values surrounding both holidays all while adding humor. Typically, Shabbat is depicted at the Friday night dinner table, while Yom Kippur episodes show the characters at synagogue.

### **Is the main theme of the episode Shabbat or Yom Kippur?**

Jewish holidays can serve as either the central focus or a subplot within television episodes. The holiday can be a central part of an episode, or the holiday can play a minor role, mentioned briefly in passing. Among the twelve shows analyzed, Shabbat or Yom Kippur emerged as the central theme of the episode in five instances.

In the *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2024) episode "The Larry David Sandwich" (Season 5, Episode 1, 2005), Larry experiences a life-threatening moment where he is pushed under a wave. Once he emerges from the water, which he refers to as a miracle, Larry decides to attend Yom Kippur services. However, he soon learns that one cannot just show up to high holiday services: you must buy a ticket. Jeff, his best friend, tells him that he will attempt to find him a ticket, but the odds are slim. Larry will need to try for a scalper ticket. This is a

particularly comedic remark since he must scalp a ticket for synagogue on the holiest of days. Once he comes to the temple, he scalps a ticket, entering the service. While there is a subplot to this episode, the main theme is Larry David's experience with Yom Kippur.

In the *Difficult People* (2015-2017) episode "The Courage of a Soldier" (season 1, episode 4, 2015), the main characters Julie and Billy spend Yom Kippur with their families. Julie has a challenging relationship with her mother, who constantly nags and critiques her daughter's choices. Julie dreads Yom Kippur since she does not want to spend time with her family. She would love it if Billy came with her, but Billy plans to spend Yom Kippur with his observant brother. The entire episode centers on the main characters complaining about going to break fast then eventually going to break fast. The episode does not show the characters at synagogue, and Julie chooses to not fast because she is too hungry.

In the Bravo series *Odd Mom Out* (2015-2017), Jill, the mother and main character, decides to celebrate Yom Kippur, which she refers to as "Yom Kips." Since Jill's husband is Episcopalian, it is implied that the family does not typically observe Yom Kippur. She spends the episode complaining about being hungry, while her non-Jewish husband handles the fast with grace. The family then attends synagogue, where there is a cantor and rabbi who is singing actual Yom Kippur prayers. The episode concludes with a break fast at Jill's apartment with her parents and her in-laws. Thus, the entire episode centers on the Yom Kippur service and the eventual break fast.

In the episode "Return of the King" (Season 3, Episode 17, 2007) of the HBO series *Entourage* (2004-2011), the ruthless agent Ari Gold is supposedly taking the day off, along with the rest of the Hollywood agents, to observe Yom Kippur. His family heads to synagogue, where Ari's wife reminds him that he may not have his phone at the temple. He runs into another important Hollywood big shot, who's involved in a new film. They want Ari's ex-client, Vince, to star in the movie. Even though Vince is no longer Ari's client, **Ari**

wants Vince to get the role of his dream. Ari is supposed to be observing Yom Kippur with his family, but he spends the episode working to help Vince receive the role. The episode centers around Ari and the movie producer working to ensure a deal is closed before sunset. The episode plays on the stereotype that Jews rule Hollywood, while also grappling with the secular Jew's relationship to religion.

Finally, the *Transparent* (2014-2019) episode "The Book of Life" (season 2, episode 7, 2015) shows the Pfefferman family observing Yom Kippur in their own separate ways. Shelley and her son Josh head to the synagogue, where Josh dated the rabbi. Shelley believes her son still has a relationship with the rabbi, but we soon learn they broke up. The other child, Ali, is hosting a break fast with her girlfriend, and they plan to have the entire family over. Sarah, the other daughter, is a little lost, spending Yom Kippur high and having sex. Finally, we see Maura, the father of the family who came out as transgender, doing tashlich, a form of repentance where you throw bread in a stream and wash away your sins. The episode ends with the break fast. The entire episode follows each family member's own Yom Kippur, all in their dysfunctional ways.

It is important to note that almost every Yom Kippur episode shows the characters in the synagogue. I looked at eight episodes that depict Yom Kippur, and only *Difficult People* and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023) does not show the characters at synagogue. Synagogue is central to Yom Kippur, as many Jews who typically do not attend synagogue do so for the holiest day.

There were also no episodes that centered only on Shabbat. Shabbat was only shown for one scene, or Shabbat was only a sub-plot of the episode. It is important to note that there were no episodes that showed characters in the synagogue for Shabbat. If characters are in



synagogue for Shabbat, it is usually for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.<sup>15</sup> Many Jews attend synagogue for Yom Kippur, but only go to synagogue on Shabbat a few times, especially for Bar and Bat Mitzvah season.

### **Is this the only Jewish episode in the series?**

Often, there is a Jewish character in the television show, and the writers must incorporate a holiday to build onto the Jewish character's plot. However, there are some shows with very few Jewish characters if any at all. Hence, these episodes often use holidays to connect to Jewish characters. In total, only two of the twelve episodes discussed were the only Jewish episodes in the show, and they were both for Shabbat. However, as noted above, *Ramy* (2019-present) discusses Judaism very often, as his uncle has antisemitic beliefs and ideas. Since *Ramy* is about the Muslim American Ramy, they have many discussions about Jews and Muslims.

In the *Fresh Off the Boat* (2015-2020) episode "Philip Goldstein" (Season 1, Episode 8, 2015), a show that follows Chinese immigrants and their experience in America, the principal asks the middle son Eddie to show the new kid around school. Eddie realizes that he is supposed to show the new kid around because he is also Chinese, since Eddie is the only Chinese kid in the grade. He asks the new student, Philip Goldstein, where his family is from, and he says Jerusalem. Confused as to how this is possible, Philip then explains he was adopted by a Jewish family. Eventually, the Goldstein's invite the Huang family over for Shabbat dinner. At the dinner, the Huang family learns about Shabbat being a day of rest. This is a new experience for the Huang family, and they are happy Eddie has a Chinese friend. Since the show follows the life of the Huang family as they attempt to fit into American society, there are no other episodes that depict Judaism. The show has similar tones

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<sup>15</sup> Think *Big Mouth* "I survived Jessi's Bat Mitzvah," *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* "Will Scarsdale Like Josh's Shayna Punim?", *Curb Your Enthusiasm* "The Bat Mitzvah," and *New Girl* "Sister."

to the other ABC sitcom *The Goldbergs*, which depicts a Jewish family. This episode also compares the similarities between Jewish people and Chinese people, who both value academic success.

*Ramy*, on the other hand, explores Ramy's experience as a Muslim American with immigrant parents from Egypt. He is constantly caught between his Muslim identity, especially as an Egyptian, and his experience as an American. In "A Black Spot on the Heart" (episode 1, season 3, 2019), Ramy's uncle, an unapologetic antisemite who works in the diamond business, asks Ramy to meet with an Orthodox Jew, who technically cannot close a deal on Shabbat. However, the man will close the deal in a round-about way. Ramy heads to his apartment, and there are candles everywhere. The man is ultra-Orthodox, wearing a kippah and having long payos.<sup>16</sup> Ramy then meets the man's granddaughter Sarah, with whom he begins to flirt. After texting for most of the episode, Sarah invites Ramy to a post-Shabbat party. Ramy and his friends decide to attend the party, which is a bit chaotic, almost rave-like.

While the episode does not depict Shabbat traditions, Ramy has his first experience learning about Shabbat. The episode centers more on his relationship with Sarah, setting up for the next episodes where he dates a Jewish girl. While the show does discuss Judaism, this is the only episode where they discuss a Jewish holiday. Thus, this episode depicts a Jewish holiday, as this thesis is centered on holidays. In the later season, Ramy and his uncle travel to Israel and have a deep dialogue about the land. The episode titled "Egyptian Cigarettes" (Season 3, Episode 2, 2022) focuses on Ramy and his uncle in Israel and the West Bank.

In the other ten episodes I watched, there were other episodes in the series with Jewish themes and Jewish holidays. These include *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Entourage*, *Sex and the City*, *Big Mouth* etc. In fact, most of these shows have

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<sup>16</sup> Payos, or payot, are long curls (kind of like long sideburns) worn by Orthodox Jewish men

other episodes discussed in this thesis. Thus, the only two television shows that were not created by Jews had only one Jewish episode in the series.

### **Is the episode educational?**

As discussed above, Jews comprise just 2.4% of the American population (*Pew Research Center*). Television is a great way for people to learn about Judaism. Many episodes depicting Jewish holidays use humor to educate the audiences. Of the twelve episodes I watched that depict Shabbat and Yom Kippur, six episodes have educational elements.

In *Sex and the City* “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little” (Season 6, Episode 4, 2003), one of the main characters, Charlotte, hosts her first Shabbat dinner as a convert. Charlotte meets a Jewish man named Harry, who says he can only marry her if she converts to Judaism. Charlotte understands the importance of Shabbat, so she is excited to mark her first Shabbat as a Jew. Her friends do not quite understand the significance of Shabbat, and her friend Carrie joins her at the deli to buy food. She explains to Carrie that marking Shabbos with a traditional meal is an important step for her new identity. The episode then depicts Charlotte cooking brisket, matzah balls, and braiding the challah. Later in the episode, when Harry and Charlotte sit down for dinner, she says that it is time to do the prayer over the candles. Viewers can see a traditional Shabbat dinner and the work that goes into preparing for the meal. Viewers also see that the woman does the blessing over the candles.

In *Fresh Off the Boat*, the Huang family experiences their first Shabbat with the Goldsteins. At dinner, Mr. Huang asks about the significance of Shabbat. Mr. Goldstein responds that “Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest,” and they are prohibited from doing any form of work. They then explain that Philip, the son, is even more strict about the rules of Shabbat. He does not turn lights on, does not play his instrument, or use his phone on Shabbat. Many viewers may not realize that the Jewish sabbath involves completely shutting

off electricity since the Christian Sabbath, which happens on Sundays, emphasizes a rest from work. However, one is still allowed to use electricity, which differs from the Jewish Sabbath. This episode teaches viewers about this difference, allowing them to better understand the significance of Shabbat.

Switching gears to Yom Kippur, the HBO series *Entourage* gives viewers a glimpse into different Jewish traditions. While this episode plays into the stereotype of the Jewish agent, viewers still come out with a better understanding of the holiday. At the beginning of the episode, the Gold family walks into synagogue and the daughter complains about being hungry. She then asks why they must fast, and the mother explains they must atone for their sins. For a viewer who did know the significance of Yom Kippur, they now have a better understanding of the holiday.

### **Is the holiday used for comedic purposes?**

As we have discussed for Hanukkah and Passover, holidays are often used to add comedic undertones for episodes. Especially in sitcoms, Jewish holidays are viewed as something to poke fun at, even if the holiday has extremely serious undertones. In eleven of the twelve shows analyzed, the holiday is used for comedic purposes. It is important to note that Yom Kippur and Shabbat are extremely important for Jews, so making fun of these holidays has the potential to offend audiences.

I will begin by discussing the Yom Kippur episodes then exploring the Shabbat episodes. “The Larry David Sandwich” (season 5, episode 1, 2005) pokes fun at the Yom Kippur service. Since Larry did not get a ticket for the service, he buys a scalper at the door. The episode then shows the women wearing hats and the men in yarmulkes. When Larry sees Susie’s hat, he asks why she has an “Al Capone hat on.” Many women wear hats on the high holidays, and Larry pokes fun at Susie’s modesty. They then enter the sanctuary, and we see the cantor and rabbi singing a Jewish prayer called “Sim Shalom.” We also see Larry using

his yarmulke to wipe off his glasses, which is extremely disrespectful to the holy garment. Larry and his friends then start fighting during the service, causing the cantor and rabbi to stop singing. This episode turns the Yom Kippur service into a comedy. David is known for his provocative humor that is often offensive, rarely holding back. Even though Yom Kippur is the holiest day, David still makes fun of the holiday.

In *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* “Pilot” (Season 1, Episode 1, 2017) episode, Miriam “Midge” Maisel preps for Yom Kippur break fast since the rabbi is coming over. The episode depicts Midge as the perfect wife, with a beautiful Manhattan apartment and a loving family. However, on the night of Yom Kippur, her husband Joel leaves her. He packs up Midge’s suitcase and says he is unhappy in their marriage, to which Midge responds “nobody’s happy. It’s Yom Kippur.” Since Yom Kippur is about atonement and forgiveness, there is an added irony that Joel decides to leave his wife. Later, Midge stumbles into a comedy club drunk, on Yom Kippur, and tells her audience what happened. She admits “I’m gonna have to lie to the rabbi about why Joel is not there. Lying to the rabbi on Yom Kippur.” While they are not directly making fun of Yom Kippur as a holiday, they are poking fun at the fact that they are sinning on Yom Kippur by lying.

During the second season of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the family celebrates Yom Kippur together, attempting to make up for last year’s disaster. In the episode “Look She Made a Hat” (Season 2, Episode 7, 2018), the Maisel and Weissman family (Midge’s family) once again prepare for break fast since the rabbi said he plans to stop by. The families are excited to redeem themselves, but they first need to get through the actual day.

At the service, the Weissman and Maisel families sit together, complaining about their hunger. Midge tells the family to be quiet, saying “we’ve been without food for 24 hrs. Some people never have anything but bread soaked in water.” After, we watch as they say the final prayers, and all the members of the synagogue disperse to find food. This episode pokes fun

at the idea that Jewish people constantly complain. While Yom Kippur is supposed to be a day for atoning and connecting with the soul, they spend their time in synagogue complaining about their hunger and how they wish they could eat. This episode is reminiscent of the *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode “The Larry David Sandwich” (Season 5, Episode 1, 2005) as they both depict the Yom Kippur service in a comedic way.

While Yom Kippur services are the main comedic focus, Shabbat episodes poke fun at the associated traditions. In *Sex and the City* “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little” (Season 6, Episode 4, 2003), Charlotte prepares for her Shabbat dinner with the help of her friends. Carrie, her best friend, refers to Charlotte as “Martha Jewert,” shocked by her Shabbat dinner preparations. Carrie and their other friend Miranda help Charlotte braid the challah, and Carrie asks, “doesn’t shabbat mean day of rest, i.e. ordering in?” Charlotte then yells to her friends, and Carrie says, “you don’t need to challah!” Shabbat is material for Carrie’s witty sense of humor, as well as to develop the plotline concerning Charlotte’s new identity as a Jew.

In the *Big Mouth* episode “Andrew’s Gonna Touch a Boob Tonight” (season 6, episode 5, 2022), I know, a very silly name, we see the Globerman family host a big Shabbat dinner for the rabbi. However, Andrew’s parents have been fighting, and the father is angry that the rabbi is coming. Marty asks the wife, “Since when do you care about Shabbat? Last Friday, we ate moo Shu pork in front of an all-new *Madam Secretary*.” Marty cannot comprehend his wife willingly planning a Shabbat dinner.

The episode shows a tense Shabbat dinner, where Marty (the father) makes many snarky comments about Shabbat and the rabbi. The dinner table looks like a classic Shabbat table, with Challah, candles, and wine. After the rabbi does the prayer for wine (it is the real prayer), Marty says “cute song. Let’s eat.” The mother then responds, “the rabbi still has to bless the challah,” to which Marty says “God’s not listening to us. Probably making a new

COVID.” Afterward, Marty accuses the rabbi of having an affair with his wife, leading to a fight. What was supposed to be a lovely evening turned messy and uncomfortable. While the viewers see a Shabbat dinner, the scene is used to make fun of the stereotypical rabbi and push the narrative of an affair. Marty is evidently anti-religion and feels suspicious of this dinner. At first, the viewers laugh at Marty’s comments and the depiction of the rabbi; after, the viewers feel sorry for his wife.

### **Will the audience understand the Jewish humor?**

There are certain experiences that can only be understood by a Jewish audience. These can be jokes about the holiday itself, about Jewish traditions, or Yiddish humor. In eight of the twelve episodes, there is Jewish humor, which some audiences will be unable to understand. *Entourage* explores the differences between Jewish sects: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. Most Jews are a part of the Reform movement, and it is the most secular. The Orthodox movement is the least lenient; however, there are varying degrees of Orthodoxy within Judaism. In the episode “Return of the King” (Season 3, Episode 17, 2007), Ari and a movie producer Nicky must close a deal before sunset. Since they do not have their phones, they decide to walk to the Orthodox synagogue to meet with another Hollywood executive. Once they enter the sanctuary, we see that only men are seated on the main floor, and the women are seated upstairs. This is a contrast to the Reform synagogue that Ari and Nick came from, where they were seated with their families. The Orthodox executive says, “I don’t know what goes on at that half-church reform synagogue of yours, but here, we don’t talk business on Yom Kippur.” Without knowledge about the different Jewish sects, the viewer may not understand this joke. Many people in the Jewish community view the Reform movement as too lenient, and the Hollywood executive is playing into that trope.

Moreover, in many of the episodes about Yom Kippur, the characters use the Yiddish term “good yontif.” These shows include *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Marvelous Mrs.*

*Maisel*, and *Transparent*. For viewers unfamiliar with Jewish customs and traditions, encountering terms like “good yontif” might initially be puzzling. However, it also presents an opportunity for cultural exploration. This phrase may be unfamiliar to viewers, but it gives the viewers a glimpse into typical phrases used on Jewish holidays. This may not necessarily be used in a funny manner but is important to mark this Yiddish phrase on the television shows.

Among the Shabbat episodes, *Big Mouth* sticks out. Barbara (Andrew’s mom) and the rabbi are discussing the drama about the upcoming Purim cabaret at the Shabbat dinner table. Non-Jewish viewers might not be familiar with the tradition of Purim, let alone a Purim cabaret. Purim is a Jewish holiday commemorating the saving of the Jewish people from Haman, a Persian official who plotted to kill them, as recounted in the Book of Esther. During Purim, it's customary to celebrate with festive activities, including theatrical performances like cabarets, which retell the story of Esther in a lively and often humorous manner. Without prior knowledge of Purim customs, the mention of a Purim cabaret might seem obscure or confusing to non-Jewish viewers. The conversation between Barbara and the rabbi regarding the drama includes specific cultural references, such as references to Jewish community dynamics, synagogue politics, or the intricacies of organizing a communal event. These references may not resonate with non-Jewish viewers who are not familiar with Jewish communal life or the internal workings of Jewish institutions.

### **Is there a depiction of an interfaith relationship or character?**

As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, the depiction of an interfaith relationship or character has become a common practice in shows with Jewish themes. Out of the twelve shows discussed, eight episodes depict interfaith relationships or characters. For Yom Kippur and Shabbat, the non-Jew is typically more invested in the prayers and traditions. Here, I will focus on the intermarried couples, and, particularly, the women.



In the episode “Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little” (season 6, episode 4, 2003) of *Sex and the City*, Charlotte, whom they often refer to as the “Episcopalian princess” has converted to Judaism for her husband, Harry. Charlotte tells Harry how she wants to make this Shabbat special. However, the Mets are playing, and Harry turns on the television. Charlotte feels incredibly hurt, as she prepared a meal for Harry, and he is watching television. She then says, “I gave up Christ for you, and you can’t give up the Mets?” She goes into depth about her Shabbat preparations and how frustrated she is with Harry. Even though she converted to the religion, she is more connected to the Shabbat meal than Harry. He is unaware of how important this meal is for Charlotte, as he is accustomed to Shabbat meals. Here, the convert is more dedicated to the Shabbat meal than the Jewish born individual.

Like *Sex and the City*, in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the convert is extremely invested in the Yom Kippur service. In the episode “Look she Made a Hat” (Season 2, Episode 7, 2018), we see the Weisman and Maisel family at services. During the atonement prayer in which Jewish people make a fist and lightly tap their heart, Astrid, the convert, hits herself hard. Mrs. Weisman remarks “that’s Catholic, Astrid.” Ironically, Astrid is the only member of the family truly immersing herself in prayer. Astrid is yelling, crying, and singing along with the rabbis. When the rabbis sing the final note of the prayer, she is the only member of the congregation who sings with him. They end up harmonizing, leading the entire congregation to stare at her. Even though Astrid is one of the only people praying, she is still gawked at since she is clearly a convert.

In contrast to Charlotte and Astrid, Larry David’s non-Jewish wife Cheryl, who is not a convert, does not have a deep connection to Judaism. She goes to synagogue with Larry, but she is not particularly encouraging or looking forward to the high holiday. When Larry and Cheryl are being kicked out of the synagogue for having scalper tickets, Larry yells you are “setting a bad example for my gentile wife. It’s her first time in a temple.” In this

instance, Cheryl is clearly more embarrassed than disappointed to be leaving the service. Cheryl's portrayal highlights the distinction between cultural observance and personal belief. While she may participate in Jewish cultural practices alongside her husband, her involvement appears more obligatory, reflecting a pragmatic acceptance of Larry's Jewish identity rather than a personal or spiritual connection to Judaism.

**Conclusion:**

Shabbat and Yom Kippur serve as central themes in several episodes, highlighting their importance within Jewish tradition. These episodes often provide educational insights into Jewish customs and practices surrounding these holidays, offering audiences a glimpse into the richness of Jewish culture. Shabbat and Yom Kippur are frequently utilized as comedic devices, showcasing their versatility as sources of humor. Whether through exaggerated portrayals of rituals, mishaps during observance, or humorous anecdotes about the challenges of fasting, these episodes generate laughter while celebrating the complexities of Jewish identity and familial dynamics.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Figure 5: The final count of the coded themes in all 30 episodes

| Is (Christmas, Passover, Shabbat/Yom Kippur) the central theme of the episode? | Is this the only “Jewish” episode in the series? | Is the episode educational? | Is the holiday used for comedic purposes? | Is the Jewish humor clear and explainable? | Is there a depiction of an interfaith relationship or character? |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| 20   | 2  | 12                          | 26  | 12   | 20   |

In delving into the portrayal of Jewish holidays across American comedy television from 2000 to 2023, this thesis has illuminated the dynamics between cultural representation, Jewish identity, and comedy. By building upon prior research concerning Jewish television comedies, this study delved deeper into the significance of Jewish holidays within the realm of American comedies, particularly in their role as comedic devices. Through an examination of American television comedies spanning over two decades, this thesis looked at six recurring themes that engage with Jewish holidays, analyzing shows with Hanukkah, Passover, and Shabbat/Yom Kippur episodes. In total, I analyzed 30 television episodes.

Out of the six coded themes, the most prominent one seen in all three sections was the holiday being used for comedic purposes, which is seen in 26 of the 30 episodes. While this thesis explores comedies, it is interesting that the holidays are used as comedic devices. But they are comedies. Whether the episode pokes fun at Jewish customs or Jewish stereotypes, the holiday is used to elicit laughs. Jewish holidays are not only embraced within the realm of American comedy but actively used as a ground for humor.

The next most coded theme was the depiction of interfaith couples or characters, which is seen in 20 of the 30 episodes. This representation underscores the multifaceted

nature of the Jewish identity within the comedic narrative, highlighting the complexities of interfaith relationships within the context of Jewish culture. As American Jews become more assimilated into society, this depiction is anything but surprising. These depictions also continue the long line of portraying Jews in interfaith relationships, beginning in the 1970s with *Bridget Loves Bernie* and *Rhoda*.

Moreover, a recurrent motif across several comedies, including *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Odd Mom Out*, *Entourage*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, is characters engaging in activities typically deemed inappropriate during Yom Kippur, such as conversing in a synagogue. This narrative device serves to juxtapose religious observance with irreverent behavior, generating comedic tension.

Another notable theme identified was the portrayal of the converted Jew or non-Jew displaying a greater enthusiasm for holiday celebrations than the other Jewish characters, as evidenced in episodes of *Sex and the City*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and *Odd Mom Out*. These depictions are used as comedic devices, but also further confirm the assimilation of the American Jew.

However, amidst these trends, a notable outlier emerges in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. Unlike many other shows, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* centers on a Jewish heroine character who defies stereotypes. She is not relegated to a supporting role or defined solely by her Jewishness; rather, she takes center stage (literally and figuratively), embodying a multifaceted portrayal of a Jewish female. Set against the backdrop of 1950s New York, the show's central theme delves into the intricacies of Jewish life, departing from the conventional portrayals typically seen in comedic narratives.

This research underscores the diverse role of Jewish holidays within the American sitcom, illuminating their use as both comedic devices and vehicles for exploring complex themes of identity, assimilation, and cultural tradition. Through various portrayals and clever

narrative twists, these comedies enable the American public to better understand Jewish holidays and Jewish traditions.

Furthermore, this thesis can be used as a template for future scholarly articles. Other groups can use this thesis to explore portrayals of their own religions or ethnicities within American comedies, using similar themes and coding. Its comprehensive approach to analyzing the portrayal of Jewish holidays in American comedy television is a solid framework that can be adapted by scholars studying other religious groups. By employing similar themes and coding, researchers can explore how various religious traditions are depicted in comedic narratives, contributing to a deeper understanding of cultural representation in the media. This thesis not only sheds light on the dynamics of Jewish identity and comedy but also paves the way for broader investigations into religious portrayal across different comedic and even dramatic contexts. Further research can also look at the portrayal of holidays in drama series. Thus, as television continues to be a primary source of entertainment and cultural influence, the portrayal of Jewish holidays in popular media has contributed to their wider recognition and understanding among diverse audiences.

### **What happens next?**

As mentioned throughout the thesis, the 1990s marked a significant turning point for Jewish sitcoms, with the premiere of *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *The Nanny*, and *Will and Grace*. Jewish television defined this era and continued to play a significant role in comedies throughout the 21st century. Yet we see a transition where there are no Jewish sitcoms coming out in 2024. Jewish television comedies are ending or have just recently ended, leaving us at a turning point. Jewish television comedies will always have a role in American television, but I do not foresee another *Seinfeld* era. Jewish holidays and Jewish themes will be present, especially through the Yiddish language, but Jewish characters will not hold the same place in television moving into the future. There will continue to be Jewish television

shows; however, the golden era that started in the 1990s is coming to an end. The “too Jewish” rule may once again become the norm for television creators.

### **Limitations:**

A major limitation to this study is the subjective nature of identifying and interpreting themes. Many individuals perceive and interpret themes differently based on their own cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and biases. This subjectivity could introduce limitations in the analysis, as perspectives and interpretations may influence the analysis of themes. Additionally, the comedic nature of the narratives adds another layer of complexity, as humor can be highly subjective and open to interpretation. As a result, there may be variations in how themes are identified and analyzed, potentially affecting the reliability and validity of the findings.

Another limitation of this study is that it may not account for the perspectives and experiences of all Jewish communities, as comedic portrayals may vary based on cultural, religious, or regional differences within the Jewish diaspora. For example, the experiences and traditions of Ashkenazi Jews may differ from those of Sephardic Jews or other Jewish communities. There are also differences in Jewish sects such as orthodox, conservative, conservadox, reform, reconstructionist etc. beliefs. This study does not account for these communities.

Finally, there may be sampling bias in the selection of comedies to analyze, which could limit the generalizability of the findings. For instance, personal preferences, availability of media, or accessibility to certain comedies may influence the selection process. This bias could result in an unrepresentative sample of comedies, potentially overlooking important trends or variations in comedic portrayals of Jewish holidays.

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"The 23rd." *New Girl*, created by Elizabeth Meriwether, season 1, episode 9, 20th Century  
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"Andrew's Gonna Touch a Boob Tonight." *Big Mouth*, created by Nick Kroll, Andrew  
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"April is the Cruellest Month." *Sports Night*, created by Aaron Sorkin, season 2, episode 16,  
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"A Black Spot on the Heart." *Ramy*, created by Ramy Youssef, season 1, episode 3, Hulu,  
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"The Book of Life." *Transparent*, created by Jill Soloway, season 2, episode 7, Amazon  
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“Look, She Made a Hat.” *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, season 2, episode 7, Amazon Studios, 2018.

“Merry Christmas, Johnny Rose.” *Schitt's Creek*, created by Eugene Levy and Daniel Levy,

season 4, episode 1, Not a Real Company Productions, 2018.

“Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo.” *South Park*, created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, season 1, episode 9, Comedy Central, 17 Dec. 1997.

“My Mom, Greg’s Mom and Josh’s Sweet Dance Moves.” *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, created by Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna, season 1, episode 8, CBS Television Studios, 2015.

“The One With the Holiday Armadillo.” *Friends*, created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, season 7, episode 10, Warner Bros. Television, 2000.

“Passover Bump.” *Difficult People*, created by Julie Klausner, season 3, episode 8, Universal Cable Productions, 2017.

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“Pilot.” *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, season 1, episode 1, Amazon Studios, 2017.

“Return of the King.” *Entourage*, created by Doug Ellin, season 3, episode 17, HBO, 2007.

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## Appendix:

### Episode Observations:

#### *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

“The Seder” (season 5, episode 7, 2005)

- Learn there is a sex offender in the neighborhood
- Larry admits that Cheryl is doing a Seder for Larry's father (Cheryl isn't Jewish) --> Jeff is surprised.
- Jeff asks to bring more people to the Seder, including his Republican relative
- Larry "Oh boy look at the Jew girl" -- to Cheryl--> this is a "charoses" (he does not correct Cheryl)
- Cheryl refers to Jews as "you People" then you Jews because Larry was offended
- Larry brings up Christmas gifts.
- Also explains that inviting people to Seder is what you are supposed to do the holiday
- Sex offender asks Larry his Passover plans, then says he is free
  - Looking for an invite
  - Invites him to Passover
- Sex offender says he'll bring latkes (which is silly because this is for Chanukah)
- Larry tells Cheryl Rick (sex offender) is coming; Cheryl is overwhelmed about the amount of people, but feels bad about people being alone
- “You invited a sex offender over for seder” – Cheryl
  - “CHERYL he's a Jew”
- Playing klezmer music in the background
- Now we are at the Seder: some people have kippahs on, some not; all holding wine
- In the background – “did you call my mother” → very stereotypical of a Jewish character
- All wearing suits and ties
- Larry confronts someone about stealing his newspaper
- Conservative person at the Seder (showing different family strife at seder); many people offended by his presence
- Some children, more adults (mainly couples without kids)
- Susie about the sex offender: “he should not be in our presence on a holy day”
- Mainly older individuals wearing kippahs and the conservative
- Doctor at Seder, woman faints when she sees the sex offender
- Then we move to the PRAYERS – Larry's father does them; traditional Haggadah
  - Does the afikomen
  - Gives kids a dollar if they find it
  - Kids search the whole house for it
- Wine and candles on table, eating food and drinking wine, more like a dinner party
- Mention eating gefilte fish
- Kids table, kids wearing kippah
- Doctor being paged (because doctor is Jewish or because of plot)
- “Gut yontif” when the doctor leaves
- Kid finds the afikomen
- Sex offender refers to the Seder as a party
- Sex offender tells Larry that the conservative guy spoiled where the afikomen is for his kid
- Big debate at the table about the afikomen, everyone yells at Larry for being friends with a sex offender

- Kid starts choking, ends with sex offender saying he knows mouth to mouth
- Last scene shows the doctor wasn't lying about needing to go to the hospital, doctor leaves to perform surgery
- Seder is used for comedic purposes to bring the plot of the sex offender.

“The Larry David Sandwich” (season 5, episode 1, 2005)

- Season 5 premiere episode
- Starts with Larry in the ocean and a massive wave hits him; shows him almost drowning
- Intense classical music while he's under water and being pushed by wave
- Emerges from water and is lying on sand
- “Says god help me,” even though he's not religious at all and then he was saved
- Next is shows Larry telling his friend about what happened; claiming it was divine intervention
- Susie thinks this happened for a reason so he will be more respectful
- L'Chaim, they toast
- Then Larry asks Jeff if he's going to temple for high holidays, Jeff says yes of course
- Larry wants to go to temple because of what happened, but Jeff says he needs to get his ticket six months in advance
- Tough ticket, Larry shocked you need tickets and Larry wants to figure out how to get one
- Jeff says he'll make calls and help Larry get a ticket
- Leo's Delicatessen → sandwich called the Larry David
- Then shows Larry and Cheryl having sex
- Larry gets a phone call during sex, and Cheryl says don't answer it, Larry says it might be Jeff calling about temple tickets
- Larry says this is important
- And then Larry picks up, no go on tickets; “Try for a scalper”
- Then shows Larry eating at Leos and he's mad about his sandwich because it has gross ingredients
- Leo gives Larry a hug and his dad
- Larry says he doesn't love the sandwich because he doesn't like white fish, and Leo is mad at Larry for correcting the sandwich
- Leo then says, “I'll see you at temple”
- His dad then has a mild stroke, and Larry steals mints and Leo watches him (as his dad is being taken to the hospital)
- Doctor tells him he's a big fan of Seinfeld, and then says he'll do the dad's surgery
- Larry thinks sandwich was responsible
- Larry heard he was adopted when dad was half asleep and on drugs
- Larry then goes to see Ted Danson to change sandwiches
- Ted Danson is willing to switch
- Then shows Larry at synagogue talking to a scalper, 600 for 2 tickets, then 300 for the 2 tickets; guy in a kippah is the scalper
- Larry David not in a kippah; Shows women in hats, some men in kippahs; Holding talis bags
- All dressed very conservatively, fairly appropriate for temple
- Shows Jeff and Susie talking to people
- Larry then asks Susie why she has an “Al Capone hat on”
- Then shows a real service, Torah ark
- Many people in white kippahs (for YK)
- Larry not in a talis, but wearing a kippah
- Singing Sim Shalom
- Shows a real cantor and Rabbi
- Larry uses kippah to wipe glasses, very disrespectful
- Women wearing head coverings too
- Then his friend is talking to him during the service
- The rabbi and cantor stop because they are talking
- Whole congregation is staring

- Security guard looks at his ticket
- Little kid rats him out for scalping; gets kicked out of temple
- “Setting bad example for my gentile wife, it’s her first time in a temple”
- Klezmer music playing as he’s getting escorted out

### *Family Guy*

Family Guy (season 8, episode 2, 2009)

- Episode starts with nothing to do about Judaism
  - Quite dirty; talking about porn
- Go to hospital because wife thinks she breast cancer, but she doesn’t
- Look at family medical history; determine Lois’s mother was a Holocaust survivor
  - Doesn’t realize her mother is Jewish
- Discovers in the episode and jokes that the father made her conceal it so they could get into country clubs
  - “Right thing to do”
- “Hebrewberg money grabber”
- Invite friend Max over “actual Jewish person”; has a kippah
- Lois: I don’t know what to do with my life because I spent the majority as a Christian
- “Being Jewish doesn’t have to change your life”
- Husband becomes Jewish, wears Talis, Jewish star, kippah “Shalom Jews”
  - Chest hair came with my star necklace
- Ch ch ch – Hebrew name
- Being Jewish isn’t overnight → Max
- “Leave it to a Jew to take fun out of being a Jew”
- Go to temple →for Sabbath
- Approach Passover; rabbi seems stereotypical; old and male
- Peter makes tons of Jewish jokes in shul
- Is sodomy illegal if you are Jewish?
- Excellent Jewish schools
  - Shows Hannukah explained at day school
- What are you going to do when Jesus comes back?
- Mount Sinai Preschool
  - Make fun of Jews not being athletic
- Peter has a dream that dad comes back to him and says he’s going to Hell (play on Fiddler on roof?)
- Throws bagel at wife → I’m a good Catholic
  - Jews are gross → has ew in it
  - Puts wife on Crucifix because he misses Christianity
- “I’m Jewish and proud and we are having seder” → Lois says → but it’s Easter!! (Peter)
- Has seder; wine; first time doing Seder; Seder plate
  - Every Jewish holiday has to do with escaping → son admits
- When do we get to wine → dog
- Blessing over candles in a perfect accent (Stewie)
- Daughter: can’t we just eat!
- Then peter dresses up as Easter bunny and crashes the Seder (he is drunk)
- Comes back and messes up Seder → Peter claims it is Jew food
- It’s Me or your religion → Peter says
- Jesus comes and tells Peter he’s Jewish
- Catholicism and Judaism are similar; islam in same family
- Jesus explains that we must treat people the same; owes his wife an apology
- Which religion should we be? All complete crap (that’s the resolution)

### *Big Mouth:*

“Florida” (season 3, episode 5, 2019)

- Begins with Nick and the Globerman family on the way to Florida

- What is this Seder thing again? (Nick asks Andrew)
  - “Nicola, you don’t know?” (says Andrew)
    - Long, boring dinner with relatives
- Andrew’s dad: Andrew, Seder is when we tell the story of Passover → finally our people did the screwing
- Depicts Passover story; shows the main characters from the show acting as slaves in Egypt
- Depicts Moses and the bush
  - Burning bush and made it sexual
  - Other characters pop up throughout the telling of the story
- Shows Pharaoh, and shows the Ten plagues
- Last plague is the killing of the “First born penis”
  - Dies because he didn’t paint the lamb’s blood (they explain this concept)
- Pharaoh finally allows the Jews to leave
- Shows main characters trying to leave Egypt and food became matzah
- Parting of red sea; my “leather sandals ruined”
- After this story, Nick asks “Then when do they go to Israel?”
  - 40 years in desert
- Story finished, dad saying they need to get gas because it’s cheap. Portray Jewish dad as cheap and intense
- Then shows the non-Jewish parents as warm and kind; non-Jewish dad is a doctor
- Community in Lakeland Florida: Fontana del Vecchio estates
- Older people; some old people wearing Kippahs
- Grandpa is a veteran, annoyed at son for being late → father like son connection
- Zaid: how’s your hip; All a bit scared of grandpa
- Talk about how much they hate Florida (then starts hailing)
- Wife to husband: “promise me you and Skip won’t fight over afikomen at the seder this year”
  - Then shows creepy brother-in-law flirting with sister-in-law
- Then cousins flirt → cherry and Andrew
  - Says her name is Cherry because it is better than Cheryl
- Then we see the hormone monster dressed up as Borat
- Andrew has a crush on the cousin
- Cousins look at old pictures together; Cherry flirting with him too
- Go to an abandoned marina
  - Meet Vicky, a hillbilly from Florida
- Cherry vapes and makes Jewish star smoke
- Andrew asks: “Why is it so frowned upon to hook up with cousin”
- “Shtup” used
- Seder: Israeli flags,
  - Don’t worry, you won’t be eating for 4 hours
  - Slab of cold gefilte fish mentioned
- Happy Passover; you are dry like matzo meal (one of the characters says)
- Then we have Ma Nishtana – but cousin is seductive
- Want to wander the desert with me? (cousin says)
- Old people wearing kippahs; Wine on table; Basket of matzo
- Explain the afikomen → Zayde says that they get his condo when he dies if you find it
- Cousins kiss and dads walk in when searching for afikomen
- Brothers start fighting each other
- Leave the seder early because the family is awful
- Andrew’s mom: LET your cousin go; ground starts breaking in Florida like the sea is splitting
- Compare leaving Florida to leaving Egypt
- Ocean becomes a tidal wave and mom parts the sea
- Like the bible, it’s a metaphor (for Florida)

A very Big Mouth Christmas (season 5, episode 8, 2021):

- Episode named the Christmas episode (interested to see how Hanukkah comes in)

- Starts with the hormone monsters talking about Christmas, and they are puppets in a Christmas cabin
- Inappropriate joke about Santa and sex
- Part 1: Jessi's first Christmas; Jessi is Jewish and dad marries a non-Jew
  - I think you forgot we are Jewish → dad: we are but Caitlyn isn't
- Jessi's dad has a tree and sweater, but Jessi doesn't want to celebrate Christmas especially because she doesn't like her step mom
- Hormone monster tries to convince her it isn't so bad
- Cut to her telling the story of Christmas
- Talk about Mary being Jewish → same as Jessi (Jessi is Mary in this story)
- "Mazel tov Mary" → has a baby from god
- Go to a store that says Custom Furniture by Joseph in English but Hebrew font
- Then says 2 shekels off
- Characters are all actually from the show; pretend to be from ancient Israel
- ALL the Hanukkah narratives until the 4th storyline
- 4TH STORYLINE: 14:50
- Andrew looks on Instagram and admires Nick's Christmas
- Dad to Andrew: "we are celebrating an olive oil based miracle"
- "Oy gevalt. It's still Hanukkah?" → upset about this
- Open your terrible present notebook from Walgreens. Fox News babies
- Then he gets diet m and ms
- "There is no greater injustice than being a Jewish boy on Christmas"
- Hormone monster → you really are missing out
- Andrew: wants one perfect noel, so he makes a wish to be Christian
- Wakes up the next morning, puts glasses on and he can't see
- Thinks he's spider man
- Nice fridge, nice kitchen, parents are blonde and wearing fancy clothes
- Goes by Andy + the family spoil him with presents
- "Martin Kent" is the dad now
- Becomes a Christian → thinks their families are nicer and warmer
- Santa movie, pjs, cross
- Then: Andrew tries to masturbate and is immediately sent to Hell
- Wakes up and realizes he was dreaming → confirms he is still Jewish
- To all of you at home: Happy Hanukkah
- UNTIL 19:20
- Go to school and everyone talks about Christmas

"Andrew is Gonna Touch a boob Tonight" (season 6, episode 5, 2022):

- "Andrew's friend from Vermont is joining us for Shabbat dinner tonight" says the mom
- The dad: "Shabbat! No thank you"
- "Marty, 'I've told you a million times. Rabbi Paulblart is coming.'"
- "That putz in my home? What," did we lose a raffle?" → clearly angry about this
- Parents fighting, "lucky to get the rabbi" (Barbra says)
- "Who does this guy think he is? Debra Messing? Queen of the Jews?"
- Bernie at Andrew's house for Shabbat dinner, he's excited to make out with her
- Episode continues with other plots
- Shows the rabbi doing the prayer over the wine (real prayer)
- "Cute song. Let's eat" → Andrew's dad
- "Rabbi still has to bless the holiday" (Barbara says)
- "God's not listening to us. Probably making a new COVID" (Marty)
- Candles on the table, all wearing kippahs, the mother looks nice
- Immediately after wine, they say prayer for the challah. They skip washing
- Barbara made brisket; it's kosher
- Marty gets angry about how kosher meat is expensive
- Also makes kugel → Bernie says the kugel is yummy



- “Barbara’s got Jew wild for the rabbi tonight” (Marty)
- “Marty, it’s for Shabbat” (Barbara)
  - Talking about how this kind of dinner is rare for the family
- “Since when do you care about Shabbat? Last Friday, we ate moo shu pork in front of an all-new Madam Secretary” - Marty
- Andrew afraid that the mood is ruined for him and his girlfriend
- Then skips to a new scene
- Then back to Shabbat dinner, Barbara confiding in Rabbi about the Purim Cabaret
- Rabbi says he’ll mediate
- Rabbi tells Marty he should have pride in his wife’s devotion to Shabbat
- Then they fight about how Marty does not appreciate his wife
- “No tears Barbara, this was a lovely Shabbat” (Rabbi)
- Marty mad because he thinks the rabbi is having sex with Barbara (shtupping used)
- Mood is awkward, skips to next scene (2 scenes before we return)
- Barbara said she would never sleep with the rabbi
- “Why are you spending so much time at the synagogue?” (Marty)
- Menorah in the background
- Synagogue gives Barbara purpose → Marty does not believe her
- Barbara decides to leave and drive away, tells Marty she is leaving him
- “Shabbat Shalom Rabbi” as she leaves
- Shabbat dinner was over

#### *Community:*

“Comparative Religion” (season 1, episode 12, 2009)

- Starts with Christmas decoration on the lawn of the college
- Happy Holidays throughout Greendale → blue and gold
- Non-denominational Mr. Winter
- Shirley (super Christian) claims dean is being PC → jamming it down her throat
- WWBJB → what would baby Jesus do → real meaning of season is Christmas (Shirley claims)
- Gives this bracelet to everyone, and everyone is reluctant to put bracelet on
- MERRY HAPPY → dean (gives presents and has a beard)
- Shirley hosting Christmas party
  - Annie is the first character to speak up; “I guess I could wear one of my Hanukkah sweaters”
  - “Annie, I didn’t know you weren’t um Christian”
  - Annie: yep, one might even say I’m Jewish” → awkwardly
  - “I respect all religions
- All the other members of the study group say their religions; Jehovah’s witness, Muslim, Atheist
- Educating one another about religions, but Shirley is not very accepting
- Later, Annie comes to the Christmas party and brings a menorah
  - “Is this your Hannukah holder” Shirley asks
- Puts it in the tree and hides it
- Shirley then calls her a Jew rudely
- Annie then points at baby Jesus and says we know you were one of us
- Annie brings latkes “hash browns and applesauce that’s nice” (Shirley says)
- Shirley’s party is not very welcoming to all
- Pierce calls Annie a Jew → says they know about guilt. Calls her a Jewie
- “Gonna let religion divide us?” Britta says
- Episode ends with Jeff fighting bullies, no longer tension for the gang

#### *Entourage:*

“Return of the King” (season 3, episode 17, 2007):

- The entourage is out to brunch, one guy says let’s do shots because it’s a holiday

- What holiday is it? Yom Kippur → says Yom wrong
  - I forgot. No wonder there was no traffic (one of them says)
- Then shows Ari and his wife and kid walking to synagogue.
  - Kid: I hate this I'm starving
  - Ari: Now you understand how mommy feels every day to make a hot body for daddy
- Dad wearing kippah, mom wearing a hat
- Explain why they fast → "but daddy ate a breath mint" daughter says
  - dad says: "now you will have to atone for telling mommy"
- All the congregants wearing hats and kippahs (white kippahs)
  - Nice dresses for the women
- Talking about business at synagogue
- Run into "little Nicky Rubenstein and Sheila"
- One character says: "do not curse at temple,"
- Later, Ari jokes "No business today, it's Yom Kippur" but then demos he has his phone
- Want Vince for a famous movie, so Ari leaves the sanctuary with Nick Rubenstein to do work
- Discussing with Vince's current agent, who is not Jewish (Amanda)
- "Ironic that on my people's holiday I am working and she's not" (Ari says)
- Deal has to be done by sunset
- Ari calls Amanda, she says "got a lot of begging for God's forgiveness to get back to"
- Deal at six, but Amanda is mad. Because they can't make deal in writing for her to give to Vince
- Ari's daughter comes out, and he tells the daughter to lie and say he's sick. She is upset that she has to lie on Yom Kippur
- Ari says: "That is the beauty of Yom Kippur – as long as you'll be back by sundown it doesn't matter what you do"
- In order to make the deal, they need another executive's help
- Since phones were taken, they have to walk to Orthodox shul 2 miles away to make a deal
- They also have no money because it's Yom Kippur
- "Like our desert dwelling ancestors, we walk"
- They show up Orthodox temple: The cantor is intensely doing the prayers, and men and women are separate
- Go up to the executive while he is praying and say: "Good yuntif"
- The executive says: "Disgusting you guys came here to discuss money on this day"
- "God will understand" Ari says
- "I don't know what goes on at that half-church reform synagogue of yours, but here, we don't talk business on Yom Kippur" the executive remarks
- Later, they return to the synagogue. The women see the men on phones, and they are livid
- "I am sorry, and I'll fast the whole week" (Ari says)
- Wife makes Ari give her the phone, and the back phone
- Shows reform synagogue with rabbi giving sermon about giving forgiveness
- Then Ari's phone rings, rabbi makes a face (Ari takes the call)
- Rabbi wearing white, mixed seating
- Later shows break fast with bagels
- Then shows Ari on his phone, he gets 4 minutes until the sun is down
- Do not end up getting the deal; everyone can eat now, but Ari says he lost his appetite
- Wearing a tallis at the break fast

### *Schitt's Creek*

"Merry Christmas, Johnny Rose" (season 4, episode 13, 2018):

- We know the dad Johnny Rose is Jewish, mentioned throughout the show
- Episode starts with Johnny daydreaming about his old Christmas parties before he lost his money
- Johnny tells his family they are celebrating Christmas this year
- Also tells his family "Somebody needs to find the menorah"
- Main focus of episode is Christmas

- Later, Stevie tells David: “I thought you were Jewish.” David: “I’m a delightful half-half situation”
  - Claims his Dad has no authority over Christmas
- This is the only mention of Hanukkah; all about Christmas

### *New Girl*

“The 23rd” (season 1, episode 9, 2011)

- Schmidt, the Jewish roommate: “I hate Christmas because it means Hanukkah is over; also hate when you all go home”
- Later, see a menorah outside s house and they point it out for Schmidt
  - Schmidt says: Judaism, son (famous line)
- Schmidt had a relationship with an Indian model (interfaith couple)
- Schmidt also dresses up as Santa for his office holiday party
- “Schmidt, Santa voice this isn’t temple” → his boss says this to him
- Only small mentions of Hanukkah, mainly focuses on Christmas

### *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

“My Mom, Greg’s Mom and Josh’s Sweet Dance Moves” (season 1, episode 8, 2015):

- Starts by showing a ship from Europe, and Rebecca and her mom pretending to be their ancestors
- Speaking Yiddish and complaining, relationship between mother daughter that’s challenging (even for ancestors)
- Then shows West Covina playing We Wish you A Merry Christmas
- Then Rebecca throws the Christmas stuff out and replaces it with Hanukkah, Hanukkah o Hanukkah comes on
- Multiple Happy Hanukkah signs with different spellings
- “Happy Holidays, Chag Sameach” → Rebecca’s her co-worker says → tight with Gilad the krav maga instructor
- Office decorated for Christmas, not Hanukkah
- Mean Jewish mother coming into town → co worker claims she is a mom pleaser
- When mom comes, very European music; mother sings
- Classic Jewish mom singing and complaining, telling her daughter that she’s fat, has eczema, “do you get a maid here,” “are you sure you aren’t gay,” talks about antisemitism, greasy goyish food
- Then cuts to Greg Christmas shopping
- Then Rebecca takes her mom to her office, and she is mad there isn’t a menorah at work
- Lies to her mother that she does not work there
- Tells her mom she works at a Jewish firm and its closed for Hanukkah; all of them are in Israel right now
- Rebecca gets her friend to pretend to be Jewish, and they go out with the mother
- Friend does a British accent when meeting the mom; claims she’s a British Jew (tea and matzo)
- Then shows other character’s Christmas
- Cuts to a nice Christian mother who hugs her son; Christmas drinks, Christmas dinner
- Back to Rebecca and the mother; the mother is being nice to her because of her Jewish friend
- Rebecca thinks he mother will finally give her the family ring → seal of approval
- Rebecca got her mom a Hanukkah gift; mom claims she’ll keep it but she doesn’t like it
- Brings her a daughter a massive present → it’s only a vase, not the ring
- Cuts to the non-Jewish family decorating a gingerbread house
- Mom gives cookies and eggnog → portraying them as great parents
- Then cuts to Rebecca’s mom yelling at her for moving to California
- Rebecca tells her mother she was lying about her job and her friend. Rebecca says I know you are disappointed in me
  - We also learn that Rebecca is half Irish Catholic
- Her mother says she loves her so much and is consumed by her love

- Mother then says: you are coming home for Passover right?
- Ends with them at a Christmas festival
- Then Rebecca sings a song called “California Christmastime” (Song about loving California)

### *The League*

“The 8 Defensive Points of Hanukkah” (season 5, episode 13, 2013)

- Starts with the Jewish attorney losing a game
- Lost fantasy football to his rabbi
- Wife says she’s finally coming around to Judaism (she is not Jewish)
- House mainly has Christmas decoration
- “Of course you are coming around to religion, you ended up in the Shiva bowl”
- Nothing about Hannukah for the majority of the middle of the episode, mainly about fantasy football and talking about other characters
- Lawyer lives in a massive home, but there’s a Christmas tree and a lot of Christmas decorations (even though he is Jewish)
- Sister is Lizzy Caplan, a Jewish actress. Talks about the Hadassah group
- “None of you are funny. Jews aren’t funny” one of the characters says
- Raffi wants to date the sister, but she only dates Jewish men. He tells Raffi he must convert
- Episode is not really about Hanukkah
- Then flips to Raffi talking about a dreidel and a hanukkiah with the lawyer’s son
- The sister walks in on him talking about Hanukkah, calls the hanukkiah a candelabra and tells the son to practice his haftorah (she finds this attractive)
- Then says shalom to the sister; Raffi says he was telling the nephew how great it is to be Jewish
- Sister is excited he’s Jewish
- Then decide to have sex because it would annoy the brother
- Shows the sister with the guy making out
- The truck starts to go backwards
- “What I do to you isn’t kosher” Raffi says
- Then shows the Christmas story at church; Jewish character also at church
- Ends with the wife saying it is a Hanukkah miracle because she won the shiva bowl
- She’s loud in church, but she says she converted
- Ends with a church choir

### *High Maintenance*

“Soup” (season 4, episode 9, 2020):

- Starts with flights being delayed at an airport
- Santa at the airport, people dressed for Christmas
- Main characters flight delayed
- Now their flight is canceled
- The Guy then brings his niece to his apartment, “we can do a hanukkah thing, we make latkes, matzah ball soup,” talks about how he loves latkes
- Has a Jesus in his apartment
- Learn Ilana goes to Barnard (his niece)
- The Guy is a drug dealer, but he doesn’t let his niece know. She’s mad he’s breaking the law
- Then cuts to two women who are in a hostel for the night for Christmas
- Shows a Christmas dinner at the hostel
- Lots of flight attendants whose flights got canceled
- Then skips to the Guy and Ilana eating Chinese food on Christmas
  - Talking about therapy and how his niece is doing mentally
- The Guy he likes the soup, she seems uninterested
- Ilana admits that matzo ball is her favorite soup
- Then power goes out in restaurants
- Then he sings don’t let the light go out (classic Hanukkah song)
- Whole city loses power because of a storm

- Cuts to hostel, which has Catholics, Muslims (no Jews)
- Then it cuts back to the Guy and Ilana lighting the Hanukkah candles and doing the prayers → the menorah only had 3 candles
- Then they eat donuts
- Then he asks if she was in NFTY and if was a Jewish hook up venue
- Talks about how Birthright was a hookup venue
- He said he was supposed to go on birthright
- The Guy ends the episode by deciding to get on flight to Auckland
- Episode split between the Guy and Ilana, and the two women who are stuck at the hostel. The episode is about both Hanukkah and Christmas

### *Odd Mom Out*

“Fasting and the Furious” (season 2, episode 2, 2016):

- Begins with one of the moms complaining about another Jewish holiday and the school being closed again
- “When will it end” she says
- Main character (who is Jewish) says: “sorry, it’s all part of our conspiracy to take over the world”
- Jill (the main character) complaining about fasting, calling it Yom Kips
- Then she talks to her husband, saying she has been doing this since her bat mitzvah
- Yells at her kids to turn the tv off for the holiest day of the year
- “Today is about reflection and bad breath” Jill says
- “If you want Christmas, you are doing Yom Kippur” she says again
- Jill’s husband begs her to have coffee
- Then she yells at the kid to not wear crocs
- Talks about how she’s weak
- Husband says that even though he’s Episcopalian, he’ll fast in solidarity
- Klezmer music playing
- Shows a real service, and the family gossiping in synagogue
- Men in kippahs
- Jill then gets yelled at for talking by one of the other moms
  - The other mom says she converted for her husband because they were married for 10 years
- The convert is yelling the prayers loudly
- Then flips to another scene with another character (not relevant to Yom Kippur)
- “Damn it: my entire legal and accounting departments are out for Yom Kippur. SO annoying” → Jill’s sister and law says this
- Back to synagogue → Jill saying she’s starving, visioning Torah to be a turkey and rabbi as a pizza
- Silent worship, but they are talking, the convert friend shushes them
- Jill leaves and uses her phone on Yom Kippur; calls her best friend
- Mad at friend for eating, wants to gossip
- Friend says: “I’ll let you get back to atoning.”
- Mom finds Jill and is mad at her for going on phone
- Jill learns that her parents are not fasting this year; she’s upset she fasted
- Then cuts to break fast; Jill is hosting it for her family
- Shows bagels, tuna, lox, big break fast, and also klezmer music is the background
- Three minutes to sundown and Jill is starving
- The husband says he feels great
- Jill cannot wait the three minutes, and she dives for the food
- Jill is mad her in laws are coming because she says why would they celebrate Yom Kippur if they didn’t have to
- Non Jewish relatives call Yom Kippur the “Little holiday”
- Jill’s sister in law says: “Must’ve been hard for you, you aren’t used to fasting”
- Non Jewish relatives keep saying happy holidays and Happy Yom Kippur

- Non-Jews talk about how they atoned
- Jill offers her sister in law a bagel or kugel; she responds, “Jill I’m not an animal”
- Episode mainly focuses on Yom kippur. There are some side plots, but it is about Yom Kippur

### *Friends*

“The Holiday Armadillo” (season 7, episode 10, 2000)

- Christmas tree and Christmas decorations in the apartment even though Monica is Jewish
- Phoebe mentioning Christmas
- Ross says that he gets Ben for the holidays this year; Monica asks if he will dress up as Santa, he says no → wants to spend this year teaching him about Hanukkah
- Coffee shop has Christmas decorations, no Hanukkah decorations
- Friends all talking about what they got each other for Christmas
- Cuts to Ross with his son, has Hanukkah decorations in his apartment and a Christmas tree
- Two menorahs in the background, eating latkes with Ben
- Asking his son if he knows what holiday is coming up, and Ben says Christmas
- Ross then asks do you know what else is coming up, and Ben says “Christmas eve”
- Ross then says that Hanukkah is also coming up, so he tells Ben about Hanukkah and how he’s part Jewish
- Ben is more excited about Santa and does not care for Hanukkah
- Tries to teach Ben about what Hanukkah means, but Ben keeps bringing up Christmas
- Ross tries to sing “Dreidel Dreidel,” then Ben sings “Rudolph the red-nosed Reindeer”
- Ben very sad that there is no Santa, and he thinks Santa is mad at him
- Ross is a bit disappointed because he wanted to just do Hanukkah
- Ross goes to a costume store to buy a Santa outfit for Ben, but they are out of Santa costume
- Then he dresses up as “the holiday armadillo” for Ben
- Gives Ben Christmas presents
- Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah → Holiday Armadillo
- Ben says he’s part Jewish, which makes Ross excited
  - Then Ross says the armadillo is as well
  - “Because armadillos also wandered in the desert?” → Monica
- Holiday armadillo tells Ben about the festival of lights
- Ben listens and Monica and Ross explain Hanukkah
- Then Chandler walks in as Santa
  - Ross says: I am your part Jewish friend, the holiday armadillo
- Ross finally getting Ben excited about Hanukkah, so he asks chandler to leave
  - Really important to Ross
  - Chandler leaves
- Ben says bye to Santa, but he wants armadillo to leave
- Santa then says he wants to hear about Hanukkah, so Ross tells them the story of Hanukkah
- Then Joey walks in as superman
- Chandler jokes about superman flying the Jews out of Egypt
- Then they light the Hanukkah candles facing the window (the candles are next to the Christmas tree)
- One of the characters says: Looks like the Easter bunny’s funeral
- They all light the candles
- Episode ends with *The Fiddler on the Roof* song “Tradition”

### *The Goldbergs:*

“A Christmas Story” (season 3, episode 10, 2015)

- Starts by showing them watching the movie *A Christmas Story*
- Narrator: “We didn’t do Christmas, but we had Hanukkah”
  - Forced family time and Eastern European foods → they think it smells bad
- Explains that the 8 presents aren’t good and they get worse over time
- Tried the best to make the holiday fun

- Didn't think it was a joyous holiday, especially after visiting their friend's Christmas wonderland
- Envious of Christmas; don't enjoy the holidays together as a family
- Portray the Christian family as happy and lovely and perfect
- The Christian family asks the Jewish dad to dress up as Santa
- Mom wears a Hanukkah sweater
- This year the mom wants to spice up the holidays
- She proclaims Super Hanukkah; Hanukkah sizzling and popping
- Decorating house → using Hanukkah bush (very similar to Christmas)
- Save all presents for one-night, having a Super Hanukkah morning (again, like Christmas)
- Having Hanukkah Harry, not Santa
- As they decorate, they play Santa Claus is coming to town
- Narrator says that "Mom got the Hanukkah she wanted: Christmas"
- Super Hanukkah spirit!
- Was once the only house on block without lights, but now they have lights
- Really just recreating Christmas, holiday of mom's dreams
- Beverly's dad comes to the house and is mad about Super Hanukkah
- Playing Neil Diamond Christmas song → she claims that he is "the voice of our people"
- Pops (the grandpa) believes she traded in her family's traditions
- Non-Jewish neighbor says: I never knew there were so many similarities between our two holidays
- Neighbor then asks for the story behind the Hanukkah bush → then tells the story of the Maccabees
- Mom then builds a gingerbread house with daughter; it is Hanukkah themed
- Grandpa dresses up as Hanu-clause; trying to teach Beverly a lesson
- Pops guilts Beverly by telling family history and saying how hard they worked to keep their traditions
- Pops sings a song about "8 nights of Hanukkah my daughter gave to me, 5 backs of stabbing..."
- She counters with "Oh Hanukkah bush oh Hanukkah bush..."
- Pops is livid that they are turning Hanukkah into Christmas
- Then the Hanukkah tree is lit on fire by the menorah
- The family turns around and the non-Jewish neighbors stare at them
- Ends by talking about how family is everything
- Remember why holiday is important in the first place
  - Beverly talks about how Hanukkah is important to her mom
  - Have to know where you come from to be good at family
- Ends with a Neil Diamond song
- Realizes that no one is better at family than the Goldbergs
- They head to the Chinese restaurant on Christmas
- Our Christmas story: who you celebrate with

### *Sex and the City*

"Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-Little" (season 6, episode 4, 2003):

- Starts with the four girls going out with Carrie's new boyfriend
- Nothing related to Shabbat in this part; the girls are mainly talking about themselves and getting to know Carrie's new man
- Cuts to Charlotte at a deli with Carrie, talking about how much they love their men
- Charlotte says that tonight is her first official Shabbos, cooking big traditional dinner
- Excited to finally be a real Jew
- Shows her getting brisket
- Shows each of the other girl's plots
- Shows fight between Carrie and her man
- Cuts to Charlotte hanging up her Mezuzah, and one of her neighbors asks what the banging noise and she says that she's a Jew now

- Neighbor looks scared
- Then halfway through the episode it shows Charlotte cooking dinner with the help of Carrie and Miranda
  - Carrie refers to her as “Martha Jeweret”
- “Kugel, matzo ball, 3 hours til Shabbos I think we should start braiding the Challah” Charlotte says
- Carrie then says “doesn’t shabbos mean day of rest, i.e. ordering in”
- Charlotte showing Miranda how to braid Challah
- Looking at recipes, and Carrie sees Charlotte’s writing: Mrs. Harry York Goldenblatt
- Carrie says that Charlotte “Jewdeled”
- Charlotte says that she is planning her Jewish wedding at a synagogue
  - Carrie says: “you are counting Matzo balls before they rise”
  - Charlotte claims it is b’shert, meant to be (she explains that)
- Charlotte wouldn’t have converted if she didn’t know for sure they were getting married
- Then cuts to other plotlines of the episode
- With 8 minutes left of episode, shows Charlotte’s beautiful Shabbat dinner
- Wearing a conservative dress
- Charlotte says she wanted to make their first Shabbos special
- She says she needs to say the “Brucha” (really pronounces the ch)
- Then Harry turns the TV on, and she asks him to turn TV off because they are about to eat
- Then she does prayer for candles, and it’s all correct
- Harry says it smells amazing
- Then he looks at game while she does prayer
- They say good Shabbos and eat
- No prayer for challah or washing hands
- Then she tells him he’s a blessing
- However, he continues to watch the game
- She’s incredibly hurt the TV is on, “we are having Shabbos dinner”
- “I gave up Christ for you, and you can’t give up the Mets.” Charlotte says
- “Gonna be a long life if you keep that up” Harry says
- She discusses how hard she worked to prepare meal: went to Zabar’s every day, made 30 matzo balls to get four right
- Studied for months to become Jewish, then she yells “set the date”
- He tells her she’s acting crazy
- She responds: “Do you know how lucky you are to have me. Do you know how we look?”
- Harry: “I know what people are thinking, I just did not think you were one of them”
- Harry gets up from the table and leaves her. He admits he bought a ring.
- Charlotte lost everything that night
- Episode ends with Carrie saying: “Just what NY needs: Another single Jewish girl”

### *Glee*

“Glee, Actually” (season 4, episode 10, 2012):

- Name is literally based off of a Christmas movie
- Starts in Sue’s office, she is talking about the film *Love Actually*
- Sue has Christmas trees in her office
- *Glee* episode logo has Christmas lights
- Everyone in holiday outfits
- Background music is jingles
- Has a It’s a wonderful life plot where Artie walks; black and white
- The whole school is different and changed
- School is all decorated for Christmas
- Then we go to New York with Rachel and Kurt; their apartment is only decorated for Christmas even though Rachel is supposedly Jewish
- Kurt’s dad brings a tree, decorate everything for Christmas
- Then Blaine and Kurt sing White Christmas



- Then we go back to Lima and McKinley High School
- Jake Puckerman walking in the hallway
- One of the students says: “are you going more African or more Hebrew for the holidays,” (half black and Jewish) → Hanukkah or Kwanza, “Kwanaka”
- Then Jake beats them up and brother comes to break fight off
- Puck tells his brother to come to LA and do Hanukkah together
- Ride in a motorcycle, make it to the Paramount lot
- Walking through the set and Puck says, “If you are in Hollywood and you are a Jew or a gay, you basically got it made,”
- Pucks says: “Let them know what we are,” → proceed to sing “Hanukkah o Hanukkah”
- Cannot pronounce “tsevivon”
  - Neither actor is actually Jewish
- Everyone comes around and dances to them singing; all do the hora
- Then drive past a Christmas tree and put a Jewish star ornament on the tree
- Then shows them getting tattoos of Jewish stars
- Rest of episode is Christmas themed

### *Ginny and Georgia:*

“Latkes are Lit” (season 2, episode 5, 2023):

- Starts with Ginny running in the cold
- So far there is no holiday theme (around 5 minutes in)
- The high schoolers are talking about how they were all grounded for throwing a party
- Planning a Christmas charity carnival for the town
- Normal high school day, some mentions of Christmas
- Secret Santa being played for the cast of the musical
- Nothing until later in the episode, where the characters prepare for the latke making party
- Georgia is doing Ginny’s hair, then says: “Let’s go make latkes.” Then Georgia asks “what is a latke”
- Then cuts to the Hanukkah party, with Hanukkah plates, tablecloths, latkes, and the menorah is lit
- All making latkes and eating them
- One of the moms says: “these latkes are lit”
- All gossiping
- Then Ginny goes upstairs and hangs with her boyfriend
- This scene is the only Hanukkah scene in the episode
- Then episode continues by only discussing Christmas

### *South Park*

“Jewpacabra” (season 16, episode 4, 2012):

- Starts with Kyle’s mom talking to Cartman about Passover
- Explaining Passover is about Moses leading the Jews out of Egypt
- Celebrate with a Seder; can only eat matzah
- Passover lasts 7 days
- Cartman then asks: “Why is it called Passover?” Kyle’s mom says that the Angel of Death passed over houses with lamb’s blood on their door
- Kyle yells at Cartman to leave, and Kyle thinks Cartman is up to something
- Cartman leaves, ominously stating this will be the “most memorable Passover ever”
- Then it cuts to Cartman’s Passover holiday special with 2 Jewish stars
  - Starring the Jewpacabra
- It’s a beautiful day; people doing an Easter egg hunt
- Cartman says to his friends he hopes the Jewpacabra doesn’t come out
- Then he says a lot of people claim on Passover that the blood sucking Jewpacabra comes out and preys on children because Passover falls on the same week as Easter
- He then sees a dead bird and claims it’s the Jewpacabra
- Kyle yells at Cartman, saying there is no Jewpacabra

- Cartman compares the Jewpacabra to bigfoot
- Cuts to Butters being afraid at night
- Cartman sneaks into Butter's room, and asks if he wants to catch the Jewpacabra on camera
- Then cuts to a forest, claim Jewpacabra is there; drinks blood, no belief in Christ
- Cartman does the mating call: "no Christ"
- Town says they are not canceling easter egg hunt because of this myth; Cartman claims he has a video of the Jewpacabra
  - Clearly is a bird
- The town decide to help Cartman find the Jewpacabra
- Give Cartman what he needs, and he goes to Atlantis
- Kyle is extremely offended
- The grocery store who hosts the Easter egg hunt watches the video of the bird/dog and claim it's big food then claim it's a Jewpacabra
- The heads of the store genuinely believe in the Jewpacabra
  - Then Cartman says it really could just be a dog (he knows it is not real)
- Claim Cartman brave, and it's gonna come after him
- Shows Cartman in bed at night nervous; claims he has a case of the Hebrew-jeebies
- Cartman calls Kyle and asks if the Jewpacabra is real
- Then it shows cartman at church praying to Jesus to be saved
- They make Cartman dress up as an Easter bunny and have Jewpacabra come get him
- Then they hear a howl and they leave him there
- Then the grocery store leadership goes to Kyle's, claiming they are absolutely not an antisemitic company
- Shows a menorah in background of Kyle's den
- Then they say: "but if you people do have a monster creature that feeds on easter children..."
- Cuts to cartman crying in the park, begging Kyle to save him
- Cartman yells: "it's so cool I celebrate Passover even though I am Christian. Both holidays are awesome"
- Then he says: "I sympathize with the Jews in ancient Egypt"
- Then cartman dreams he is in Egypt and the plagues are upon them
- Egyptians yelling, it's raining frogs
- Kyle tells Cartman that God is angry, and He will kill all first born boys
- Then shows cartman going to Pharaoh (his dad)
- Pharaoh says "Jews are an economic political issue in Egypt" → can't let them leave
- Pharaoh doesn't think Cartman will die, and he believes in a just god
- Then shows the Jewish people killing a lamb and putting blood on door
- First borns die
- Then Cartman is back in the forest and is crying; Kyle brings cartman home and helps him
- Ends with Easter Egg hunt
- Cartman gives a speech and says the Jewpacabra passed him over, and he woke up safely in bed
- He then says he will deny Christ and accept Jehovah as the God
- Everyone mad he ruined Easter; tells Kyle he understands how he feels
- Cartman claims he really believes in Judaism → ends with Cartman saying "Happy Passover"
- Sun is a Jewish star

### *Fresh off the Boat*

"Philip Goldstein" (season 1, episode 8, 2015):

- Principal asks Eddie to show the new kid around
- Philip is Chinese, so the principal has Eddie show him around because he's also Chinese
- One of the students says "it looks like someone has a twin"
- Eddie asks where Philip's family is from
- Philip says he's family is from Jerusalem, and he was adopted by a Jewish family (his last name is Goldstein)
- Eddie says we both eat Chinese food on Christmas and our parents are super pushy

- Philip doesn't get the comment
- Philip says he can't watch tv on Fridays because of Shabbat → hanging with God
- Brings gefilte fish for lunch
- They do not like each other
- Has Philip work with Eddie, teacher says they should be together because they are both Asian
- Says he felt is was racist
- Principal creates a Pacific Rim Club for the boys
- Eddie and Philip stand together, and the mom is excited there is another Chinese boy
- Mom offers to drive Philip
- He talks about playing the cello and doing his homework; the mother is excited
- Jessica (the mother): "A Chinese boy with Jewish parents, the world is an amazing place,"
- Eddie then uses Philip as a way to go to Beastie Boys concert (the mom would let him go with Philip)
- The Huang family goes to the Goldstein's for dinner
- Shows Philip playing the cello for everyone at dinner; Jessica is crying
- Philip is wearing a kippah, Mr. Goldstein has a kippah
- Has them for Shabbat; Mrs. Goldstein has Jessica turn the stove off for her because it's Shabbat
- Randall asks about Shabbat
- Mr. Goldstein says: "Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest,"
- Prohibited from doing things from Friday – Saturday
- Philip strict about Shabbat
  - Wants to do Shabbat all the way
- Candles on the table
- Also shows a Mezuzah on their door
- Goes go bathroom in dark because of Shabbat
- Philip and Eddie conspire: Philip can't go to Les Mis because of Shabbat, so he wants Eddie to help him (he can't handle money because it's Shabbat)
- Philip promises to go to Beastie Boys with Eddie
- Later, Philip leaves Eddie at Les Mis; Jessica tells him Philip selfish and he's not a good Chinese boy
- Philip and Eddie no longer have a relationship
- The episode ends with Asian and Black student bonding about music by white Jewish rappers

### *Ramy*

"A Black Spot on the Heart" (episode 1, season 3, 2019):

- Starts with a Ramy's uncle saying there are only Muslims in this district, and that's why the Jews come to him to borrow; can't charge them interest
- Uncle tells Ramy it's Shabbat: holy day for the Jews, and the night they need us the most. Can't work after sundown
  - In Arabic: at least they believe in something
- Ramy has to bring something to a Jewish man who cannot close a deal because of Shabbat
- Man is ultra-Orthodox, wears a kippah, and has pais. He is in the diamond business
- Candles all over the house because no electricity
- Has to play along to give the man the watch (because it is Shabbat)
- Asks the man for the money; not getting his hints that he cannot touch money. Calls in granddaughter Sarah
- Ramy talks to the granddaughter, bonding and flirting
- "Don't feel guilty doing business on Shabbat" she says yeah sarcastically and asks if he does, and he says "I am actually the other Middle Eastern thing"
  - She says: "why you coming in with your Jew curls, you are confusing me"
- He says: "These are curls → belong to the whole region:"
- She says: "You get the land, we get the curl"
- He says: "The land and the curl belong to both people"
- Then he asks for her number "for business"

- Cuts to Ramy telling his friends that Sarah is amazing and they have been talking
- Go to a party at Sarah's with his friends
- Tells Ramy that the party is post Shabbat
- "Every Saturday we celebrate Shabbat being over"
- Then cuts to the party where he realizes there are a lot of similarities between them
- Cuts to the friend praying and there is an Israeli flag
- Ramy and Sarah really bonding and dancing; Then they kiss
- Smoking weed on the bed, while Sarah and Ramy are making out
- Sarah then takes a pill, and Ramy says he doesn't want it (ecstasy)
- He really doesn't want to do it, and she is trying to convince him
- Then she says we should take a shower together once it kicks in, but he can't take it
- She says she wishes she didn't take it and they can't do anything because she's on ecstasy
- Finds his friends and they leave
- He finds Sarah in a shower: "I feel so bad for Palestine" Ramy: "yeah, me too"
- Ramy took an edible (100 mg)
  - Extremely high
- Ramy ends up at his friend's house, very Catholic family
- Episode concludes

### *Difficult People*

"Passover Bump" (season 3, episode 1, 2017):

- It's the premiere of the season
- Billy and Julie got in trouble for storming a Broadway show, so they have to do community service
- Julie says she seeds her meds upped for Passover... "ahh yes the Passover bump"
- Then shows the stereotypically Jewish mother asking Julie what she plans to wear for the Seder, and Julie says she doesn't dress for the mom
- Then the mom gossips about the family and cousins coming at the Seder
- Julie hangs up on the mom
- Julie tries to get meds, but her therapist dies as she writes the prescription
- Julie takes the pad with the meds, claims "Everything bad always happen to me"
- Shows Billy and Julie at Quiznos, and she's seeing a doctor at Quiznos
- All making fun of Trump and healthcare
- Julie doesn't know how to get through Seder without drugs, and doesn't want to sit through the Seder
- Billy cannot go to the Seder
- Then shows them helping kids as part of community service
- They think the kid is dying
- Then cuts to the Seder: Julie decides she wants to meditate
- Menorah behind them
- Table has Haggadahs and candles
- Dad is lost on way back from getting fruit platter
- Julie's mom and her sister hate each other
- "Welcome to Seder everyone, Happy Passover."
- Men wearing kippahs
- One of the characters says: "Can we please start the seder so we can eat?"
- Mom and sister fighting; yelling at dinner table
- Julie then meditates in the bathroom
  - Afraid of becoming her mother
- Aunt Bonnie comes in bathroom and asks for a line
- Then Passover ends
- Episode was a bit crude and sarcastic; it felt like it was trying to be *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

“The Courage of a Soldier” (season 1, episode 4, 2015):

- Starts with Julie saying: “another Yom Kippur, do you think Bethany Frankel’s fasting today?”
- Billy: “Yeah but not because she knows what day it is”
- Julie says she is going to her mom’s break fast, and Billy is going to brother’s for Yom Kippur
- Billy says his agent called on Yom Kippur, and Julie thinks that’s a bad sign
- Billy says the agent is legit
- Cuts to Julie and her mom. Her mom is obsessed with another girl who looks like Julie
- The mom says to Julie: “Help me with the bagels.”
- The mom explains that Nicole is fasting, she am not because it’s uncomfortable and Julie can’t because she’s hungry
- Julie’s boyfriend (non-Jew) comes in and says: “Chag Sameach, Marilyn”
- Cuts to Billy at his brothers, huge menorah
- “Chag Sameach Billy”
- The brother tells Billy about “Bas Mitzvah” party themes
- The brother tells Billy he doesn’t see them enough
- Billy’s sister in law: “Come into the dining room, time for the blessings,”
- “Before I bless the bread, and the wine, and the forks, and the napkin holders...” (the brother says)
  - Wearing a kippah, Billy wearing a kippah
- The sister in law says to the daughter: “Can’t let out seams on your bat mitzvah dress, so stop eating”
- “I don’t understand when everything got so Jewish,” → Billy asks
- “We didn’t even fast as kids, I don’t care about blessings” (Billy)
- Then the episode concludes its section on Yom Kippur
- Episode ends with Billy and Julie claiming they need “two weeks to recover from family”
  - “Family is like religion: it’s only for dying and getting married”

*Transparent*

“Exciting and New” (season 3, episode 10, 2016)

- Starts with the family on a cruise ship
- Family all together, getting hand sanitizer from the cruise
- Theme song has a synagogue in it
- Pfefferman family; mother is Shelley
- She gets a room to herself, and she has a butler who caters to all her needs
- Shows the family eating and talking about how someone always gets sick on vacation
- Then talk about how one of the family members got sick at Aunt Bryna’s during the Seder
  - Conversation happening over dinner on the cruise
- “That was the Pesach that Maura and Bryna had that big fight,” (Shelley says)
- “Then we never had another Seder after that” – one of the daughters admits
- “Pesach and Seder: That was Aunt Bryna’s holiday,” someone else admits
- “That’s so stupid → Pesach doesn’t belong to one person”
- The mother then gets upset and tells the daughters they treat her horribly
  - Outlier because usually the mother is mean to the daughter
- Then cuts to Maura looking over the ocean, admits to Ali that she cannot get her surgery
- They both say a prayer looking at the ocean
- “Deliver us” dayenu → set us free (from being restricted in the ass)
- Throwing her spandex in the water (Maura’s)
- Then cuts to Ali telling Sarah, who is lying on a lawn chair, that she wants to do a Seder
- Sarah doesn’t want to → “I’m a bad Jew, I’m over the hineni shit”
- “We need it, and it’s the last night of Passover,” “one moment of being together” Ali says
- “I don’t have a Seder plate” (Sarah)
- Then shows them using saltines for matzo, getting Seder plate materials, parsley, charoset from the ship’s buffet

- Being creative with the meal and buffet on the ship
- Then the Seder begins: Ali says she is “grateful we are all gathered together, invited by the feminine space” → very reform, very untraditional
- They want to mark tradition of the Jewish people by eating traditional Seder foods before sun goes down
- Shows the entire family eating the foods – “I get the bitterness of being a slave on that one”
- Then they go around and say what you feel enslaved by, what you need to be freed from
- The son got up and left
- Maura says: the pain and size of her fear, her actual self is tied up with shame (while she looked out at the vastness of the ocean) then she begins to cry
- Ali then speaks, and the mother tells Ali to go quickly because she has to leave
- They object and say she needs to tell her story. She then admits she is not at home in this family
  - You ridicule me
  - You roll your eyes at me (as they do)
  - Finally feels taken care of by Trevor (the butler)
  - Gonna perform her one-woman show. She tells them to come if they want to hear her story
- Cuts to the son alone in his room
- Then cuts to Shell and Back (her one woman show)
- The mother sings Alanis Morissette’s “One Hand in My Pocket”
- Family is crying
- Shows son spraying ashes in the ocean
- All applauding, then ends with the real version of the song
- Very emotional episode; not lighthearted like the other comedies

“The Book of Life” (season 2, episode 7, 2015)

- Start with one of the daughters talking about how she did not feel a good relationship with her mother
- “Why are you here today?”
- “It’s Yom Kippur today” it’s like trick or treating for forgiveness and atoning; get forgiveness and absolve yourself
- “Don’t want your apology” “happy Yom Kippur”
  - A bit confused about what is occurring here; this is the second episode I have seen, and this moment is a bit unclear
- Supposed to ask 3 times, only got 2 in there
- Then cuts to Ali placing chairs around table for break fast
  - Is she with her girlfriend?
  - Fighting about another girl
- Girlfriend worried she’s into polyamory
  - “You’ve been queer for like 30 seconds”
- “Be open and brave,” Ali says
- Then cuts to Maura in bed
- Then shows Shelley in line at synagogue with her son
  - “I’m already starving”
  - Talking about food she wants
- All the men have kippahs, some have a talis (some white kippahs)
- Tickets reserved in the synagogue
- Mom is clearly flirting with one of the congregants
- She tells him that her “son is engaged to the rabbi”
- Son visits the rabbi (a woman) Katherine Hahn
- She’s in white, wearing a chamasa
- Has hebrew art in her office
- In the background, we hear praying
- They are no longer engaged, we come to find out

- Immediately cuts to Sarah smoking a bong with her lover (a doctor)
- Then they make out
- Then cuts to Ali placing bagels and tuna on the table
- She's hungry and complaining about being hungry
- Pickles, coleslaw; Big break fast
- Then cuts to Maura again
- Then shows the synagogue
- Cantor praying loudly in English and Hebrew
- The mom continues to flirt with the other congregant
- The son and rabbi are looking at each other crying
- Mixed seating at the synagogue
- All hitting their hearts during the prayer, the son is anxious
- Son leaves and gets air
- Do slach lanu
- Son looks up outside to sky as slach lanu continues
- He sits outside the synagogue
- Cuts Maura near a pond doing tashlich while the prayer continues
- Then cuts to Sarah having sex
- She then stops the sex because she's high
- She admits she's supposed to be fasting but she's too high
- Then she says it's Yom Kippur, and he asks if that's a Seder
- She then says it's the holiest day of the year
- Then shows break fast at Ali's
- Feldman family is doing break fast with the Pfeffermans (Feldman family is Ali's girlfriend's family)
- Warming up the blintzes
- Shelley brings the man from Shul to break fast
- Run into Maura in the elevator, and Shelley says she is with a man from the temple board
- All say good yontif
- Cuts to the break fast; all admiring the break fast
- The family is together with the Feldmans; Josh is there but the rabbi is not
- Sarah comes in; "You're too thin. Eat a bagel!" Shelley says
- Ali claims that they have no water in solidarity with drought → only wine
- Before they eat, they admits that they are waiting on rabbi to do the blessing
- But Josh says they can start without her
- All gather around the table; Sarah stuffs face before they eat
- Ali thanks everyone for coming and gives a speech
  - I was "Wondering about my Jewishness"
  - Explains Yom Kippur
  - "Epic yellow pages called the book of life, writes and seals, make apologies to get into book of life; then apologies to the family"
- "All apologies are accepted," to a great new year
- Ali leads the prayers: "Take a bagel, hold it aloft"
- "Does anybody know the blessing?" she admits
- Buzz knows it (Shelley's new man); they all say the prayer over bread, a little awkward
- Happy Yom Kippur; Buzz says you can't say that and it's gut yontif
- Maura asks if Josh wants a different bagel
- Someone asks: "Where's the rabbi?"
- "Raquel's not coming," and he announces that they broke up
- Shelley sobs and wails, Buzz calms her
- They all yell at her
- She's being selfish "it's not about you!"
- Also admits that Raquel is not pregnant; Shelley thinks she killed the baby
- Everyone uncomfortable
- Maura tells Josh it's ok to be sad

- “I don’t need your permission”
- Not the malcha hamavet Shelley → Buzz says this
- Then shows the food and the mess left over
- Ali and her girlfriend cleaning up
- Then shows Josh at grocery store
- He starts eating deli meat before he buys it, essentially steals stuff from store
- Eats bread, opens cheese
- Josh is clearly upset about breakup
- The episode concludes

### *Sports Night*

“April is the Cruellest Month” (season 2, episode 19, 2000)

- Starts with Dana (Felicity Huffman) yelling at one of the heads of the network
- Only woman in the room → tell her to watch her mouth
- Then cuts to one of the men asking the other if he is doing anything for Passover
- Jeremy says he’s doing a Seder – not a big deal, just matzah, say a prayer
- One of the men says he’s gonna do a rewrite of the haggadah
- Invite people because Passover is about telling a great story to those who have never heard it usually small children but gentiles will do (man in plaid, Jeremy)
- “No one will want to be there because I am there” → Dan says
- Then cuts to Jeremy stating: “Dan and I are making a seder between shows, and everyone's invited,
- Woman says “I am not jewish” Jeremy says “I know I dated you for a year and a half”
- Jeremy then assigns Passover roles, making ex girlfriend play Pharaoh
- All have parts and roles for the seder
- Other woman plays “Maggie” Pharaoh’s assistant (made up role)
- Cuts to a new scene, Dana tries to get Kasey to make up with dan
- Dan invites Kasey to the Seder → “Jeremy and I are having a passover seder, we’ve never had a Seder together”
- Kasey says he’s never been to a Seder
- “This one won’t start a stampede of conversions, might be nice if you wanna come”
- Kasey says no
- Between ad breaks for the show, they are reading the story of Abraham and Sarah
- Jeremy says: “Voice of God, Abraham, sheep, Sarah”
- Then cuts to Sports Night
- “I need joseph, i need jacob, I need pharaoh” Jeremy says again
- “Are people coming to this seder” – Kasey asks
- Cuts to jeremy writing notes, talking to Natalie
- “Page 9 and I haven’t introduced Moses yet” Jeremy says
- Then shows a conference room with white table cloths
- Then shows wine being poured, candles being lit, kiddush cups, Seder plates
- “Where’s pharaoh” – Jeremy says, “find my my moses – getting there, have another 5-600 years”
- Some of the men wearing kippahs
- Back to Seder, shows a haggadah
- Dan says a few words before they start; talks about his behavior and how he apologizes
- “We need each other” – Dan says
- Then shows Kasey knocking on the door
- Kasey and Dan make up; hug each other
- Dan says the gefilte fish is getting cold, come on in
- Walk in and they are reading the script about Pharaoh, Moses, and God, telling story of Exodus
- Actually having a seder
- Make it a bit sport- themed, say moses is “up”
- Jeremy does a blessing over the wine, doesn’t say adonai, says adoshem



- Ends with them at the seder
- Very sweet scene and very sweet episode

### *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*

“Pilot” (episode 1, season 1, 2017)

- Starts with a Jewish wedding, Midge giving a toast at her wedding
- Shows men wearing talit
- “Do the caterers have any idea what the Jews went through a few years ago?” (Midge says during her toast)
- New York Jewish, heavy accents
- Only one actor is Jewish so far
- Midge says during the toast: “And yes there is shrimp in the egg rolls”
- Her parents: “rabbi she’s kidding”
- Shows Abe fighting with someone about where it says you cannot eat shrimp, man tells him where in the bible
- Then cuts to a few years later; shows Midge going to the butcher’s shop telling the butcher “we got the rabbi” for break fast
- “This year on Yom Kippur Rabbi Krinsky will be breaking fast at our house” (Midge says)
- Butcher tells her she’ll need lamb “rabbi loves his lamb”
- Shows another woman who is mad because she's in the middle of an order
  - Midge is getting pork chops → so odd (not Kosher)
- Then she claims that the “Rabbi has been mad since the wedding” → yet clearly at nonkosher butcher
- Grabbed black and white cookies
- Midge screams “we got the rabbi”
- She’s in an amazing world, day is perfect, show she has a good life
- Husband calls and asks if she told everyone about the rabbi
- Husband complaining about his time for the comedy show tonight; Midge gets him a different time
- Then shows her high maintenance makeup routine
- Klezmer music as she gets ready
- She’s in a good mood, shows that her family is wealthy, have a maid
- Then it cuts to them at the comedy club with friends
- Eventually, Midge realizes Joel stole bob newhart’s act
- Later in the episode, he goes to the comedy club again and fails
- He comes home and starts packing his bags
- Midge is confused why he’s leaving her on Yom Kippur
- Joel claims he is not happy in their marriage
- “Nobody’s happy. It’s Yom Kippur” (Midge responds)
- “The rabbi is coming. Five years we’ve been trying to get the rabbi” (Midge)
- Mad that the rabbi got more laughs than he did with his joke about sodom and gomorrah
  - He was in Buchenwald → Midge admits, trying to get him to cut the rabbi some slack
- He’s unhappy, admits he’s having an affair with his secretary
- “Tomorrow is Yom Kippur. I have 30 people and a rabbi coming over for break fast, and this is the moment.” (Midge says)
- Goes to her parent’s apartment, and they assume she did something
- The mother starts crying and the dad starts slamming things
- The dad is made for sending Midge to the fancy “goysisha” college
- “Not a word to the rabbi” the mother says
- Miriam then gets very drunk and ends up at the comedy club
- She stumbles on stage and does a stand-up act
- “I’m gonna have to lie to the rabbi about why Joel is not there. Lying to the rabbi on Yom Kippur” (Midge says)
- Then tells the audience he left her for the secretary
- “Shit they say about Jewish girls in the bedroom? All true”

- Then Midge gets arrested on Yom Kippur, very silly and engaging episode
- Very Jewish beginning of the show

“Ya Shivu v Bolshom Dome Na Kholme” (season 1, episode 2, 2017)

- Starts with Midge talking to Lenny Bruce who bailed her out of jail
- Playing Yiddish music (Klezmer)
- Then shows her at exercise class with her best friend
- Joel goes to father’s factory, and the dad is named Moishe
- Family bails on rabbi because of divorce, but they pretend everyone is sick
- Dad is intense and mean
- “Break fast is canceled” “so ill the holiest of holy days cannot happen” (Moishe admits to Joel)
  - Weisman family called the Maisels and said break fast cannot happen because everyone is sick
- “If it’s so holy why do you keep factory open” (Joel asks the father)
- “Half those people out there are gentiles. You go explain Yom Kippur to gentiles” (Moishe)
- “We’re happy but we’re starving. It’s New Year’s but we’re guilty” (Moishe)
- “Sounding like a non-believer, pop” (Joel)
- Moishe believes his success is because of God
- Trying to figure out why dinner is canceled; “Yom Kippur is a very big deal for your mother. There’s kugel, she sees the kids”
- Tells his dad they are splitting up, he assumes it’s a secretary
- Joel denies his dad’s accusations
- Shows the dad as a nasty boss
- Shows Abe walking into his job as a professor at Columbia, he is angry
- Mother visits a tea reader
- Shows everyone in the family spiraling about the break up
- The mother in law calls Midge’s parents devastated
- “I didn’t get to have my Yom Kippur dinner”
- Family decides to get together after the kids break up
- Midge overwhelmed by the in laws and seeing Joel interact with their kid
- “Do you have any matzah meal?” → Shirley asks
- All sit down for dinner, very awkward
- Mr. Maisel talks about how he brought 13 jews out of Germany; everyone seems irritated
- Annoyed that the seats they paid for were empty during Yom Kippur → Mr. Maisel says it, Abe also gets annoyed
- Moishe is mad that they have a housekeeper, “we don’t own slaves, and we were slaves”
- Abe and Moishe fighting
- The episode concludes with Midge focusing on her stand-up comedy

“Look, She Made a Hat” (season 2, episode 7, 2018)

- Episode begins with Midge on a date with a doctor (Both non-jews playing jews)
- They are at a gallery
- Then shows Joel sleeping with tons of women
- One of the women asks to see him on Sunday. His secretary says “it’s Yom kippur”
- Secretary asks Joel: “What are you doing for Yom Kippur? Welcome to break fast with me and my sister in Queens”
- He says he is going to the Weisman’s
- He says: “Yom Kippur, atone for your sins. I’m the fucking poster boy”
  - A year since he destroyed his marriage
- Shows midge and boyfriend (Benjamin Ettenberg) in a bar
- Uses the word “shmuk”
- Then cuts to Susie calling Midge and telling her she has to work
- Midge says she can’t work one night because it’s Yom Kippur
- Susie says who gives a shit

- “Susie. Yom Kippur. High holidays. Break fast. Temple. Family Guilt”
- “There are gentile bookers who are gonna wanna see you on Yom Kippur”
- “There are?” (Midge asks)
- Midge says put me on late
- Shows the mom at the butcher getting food; livers, lamb, brisket, chicken
- Then the mom says that Rabbi Krinsky is coming
- Midge and her mother yell “we got the rabbi”
- Lutzis meats and poultry
  - Main theme so far is not YK
- ¼ episode about YK
- Midge spends time with a painter
- 19 minutes left of episode and finally focusing all on YK
- Singing Neilah; all hitting their hearts
- All wearing white kippahs
- Shirley “I’m starving,”
  - Shirley and her husband seated while everyone stands
- Mrs. Weisman, “don’t think about it”
- Noah, “I’ve been thinking about it since yesterday”
- Women have hats; Every man in a tallis
- Men and women sitting together
- Midge: “we’ve been without food for 24 hrs. Some people never have anything but bread soaked in water,”
- This conversation occurs while they are in the service
- Astrid, the convert, is really feeling the prayer and singing with her whole heart
- Two-year-old stuffing himself with candy bars
- “Looks like Al Jolson” → black face reference
- “Be quiet, everyone can see we are talking”
- Mrs. Maisel says “yes because these seats are fabulous”
- Then she starts gossiping about people with worse seats
- Astrid is hitting herself hard, the mom says “that’s Catholic, Astrid”
- Why do you sit, Abe asks → I am an elder (Moishe says)
- Abe: We are the same age, why do you get to sit? Moishe: “good you get to be king of the Jews. How’d that work out for the last guy?”
- Astrid praying loudly, Moishe asking: “has anyone ever diagnosed her?”
- Noah: she’s the only one actually praying
- Moishe complaining about how everyday was Yom Kippur, claiming he used to have nothing
- Abe: “please Moishe I am atoning, for the things I’d like to do that to that man”
- The rabbis speaking in English now, wearing big white hats
- Astrid yelling and almost crying; chanting with the rabbis; almost speaking over them
- Singing “adoni who ha elohim,”
- Ends up doing a harmony with the rabbi, everyone staring, she holds the note
- Techica gedolah, blow shofar
- Moishe goes: “here we go”
- Shows everyone dispersing, scrimmaging for food
- All fighting for food
- Midge telling her dad she has to leave at 9:00; he is extremely disappointed
- “Cover for you? It’s Yom Kippur.”
- Devising a plan for her to leave
- “Tell them what you are doing. It’s time” Abe says
- He does not want to lie right after Yom Kippur: “You want me to blow a year's worth of sinning?”
- All the Jews running and looking for food
- Then shows the family gathering for break fast, making drinks
- Have help prepping the food; Zelda brings people
- Beautiful dinner table

- “You have a room full of unfed Jews in there. That’s a lot of desperation and rage in the air,” (Joel to Midge)
- “Right now they’d kill each other for a garnish”
- “Happy New Year” they say to each other
- Shows Moishe eating Ethan’s cereal
- “Can’t put dressing on Mrs. Weisman’s plate” Zelda says
- Dinner is ready, all running to eat
- Lots of snarky comments because they are so hungry
- Ethan isn’t hungry; Zelda is mad because she worked hard to make the food
- Challah on table
- “Yom kippur is scary,” Ethan says
- Candles, flowers, wine
- Midge stands up and says she has to tell everyone something
  - Holiday is about atoning
- Bring in lamb, potatoes
- “Can you hold off on the food, Zelda” (Midge says)
- “People are starving Miriam” → mother says
- Midge trying to tell them about being a comedian
- All eating kosher dill pickles
- A lot of interruptions
- Zelda bringing food, then not grabbing food
- Then Susie comes in; takes a seat
- Abe pretending he doesn’t know Susie
- Then Miriam tells them she is pursuing a career in stand-up comedy
- Abe pretends to be mad
- Then then rabbi comes in
- “Gut yontif rabbi” – Susie says
- Continues telling them about her stand-up comedy
- Rabbi looks uncomfortable
- All have such responses
- The rabbi is confused as they are all fighting
- Very uncomfortable, lots of fighting
- Now talking about her new boyfriend Benjamin in front of ex husband
- Rabbi is confused again, trying to follow
  - He says: “Maybe I should be going. I have another house to stop by”
  - No one says by to the rabbi
- Everyone is super confused
- Everyone fighting, Zelda bring the food in
- Astrid tells everyone she’s pregnant, very much the wrong moment
- Susie says congrats
- Then Susie and Midge leave
- Then it cuts to after Midge’s set
- Susie and Midge talking about the set
  - “All I did was re-enact break fast” (Midge says)
- Midge: “This is our anniversary, one year ago on Yom Kippur I gave my first performance “
- Ends with them drinking
- However but YK isn’t always on the same day (so it’s not a full anniversary)
- Episode did a nice job showing what synagogue is like on Yom Kippur