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Bailey Putman March 30, 2017

Looking Through the Lens:

Jewish Self-Portrayal on Television in Five Pivotal Series:

The Goldbergs (1949-1956), *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973), *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2011), and *Transparent* (2014-Present)

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Media Studies

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Abstract

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The original top three broadcast networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC, were all started and run by Jewish executives who, based on the Jewishness depicted in the only two shows with Jewish lead characters between 1949 and 1971, where hesitant to and concealed Jewishness on Television. The Jewishness within *the Goldbergs* (1949-1956) and *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973) appears as a simply stated premise within the diegesis of the story, often as cartoonish stereotypes or as a tangential reality left unexamined. While there is no evidence to demonstrate whether or not any overtly Jewish show would have survived this era, the networks felt their attempt and failure of *Bridget Loves Bernie* was enough to re-evaluate the exposure of Jewishness into the late 70s and 80s. From the cancellation of *Rhoda* in 1978 to the premiere of *Thirtysomething* on ABC in 1987, there was not a single leading Jewish character on prime time television. These network executives left such a legacy on broadcast television that even the creators of *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), which aired long after these executives left their desks, were not allowed to depict more than one Jewish character or too many Jewish themes. It was not until other distribution platforms emerged, like premium channels and digital platforms, that a more complex and multi-dimensional representation of Jewish identity was shown, one that was allowed to be questioned, challenged and changed. While Larry David played a major role in the writing of both *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2011), *Curb* emerged with nowhere near the same lightness upon which *Seinfeld* thrives. Three Years after the last episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Transparent* premiered on Amazon Video as a television show that embraces its Otherness as a narrative device with which to develop and explore topics more taboo than Jewishness on the small screen. This study will demonstrate that it was not until the creation of new and diverse television distribution platforms that Jewish identity began to emerge as a multi-dimensional piece of character and narrative development, despite the fact that Jews have always been leaders of the television industry.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Amy Aidman, for her constant support at every step along the way of this project. Her passion toward the history of television inspired me to explore the history of Jewish television including the representations from 1949 to 1978. I would also like to thank Matthew Lewis, my professor from a class my Junior year who encouraged me to turn a final project into this thesis. The exploration of how my identity fit into American popular culture led me to consider *Transparent* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* as cultural texts with greater implications. In addition, I would like the thank the other two members of my committee, Matthew Bernstein and Eric Goldstein. Thank you both for your in-depth knowledge in these subjects and for your constructive feedback. I also could not have accomplished this year-long project without the help of my friends and family. Thank you all for your endless support and encouragement.

Table of Contents

Introduction:

Thesis Statement

To understand how HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and Amazon's *Transparent* came to be critically acclaimed, despite the fact that both programs overtly feature characters who reflect on and question their Jewish identities, one must consider the content and historical context of three formative Jewish programs on broadcast television: *The Goldbergs* (1949-1950) originally on CBS, *Bridget Loves Bernie* (1972-1973) on CBS, and *Seinfeld* (1989-1998) on NBC. Because Jewish signifiers often appear within their episodic narratives, all three shows, each in their own way, should be considered examples of historical and ostensibly Jewish television. This project considers the tendency and subsequent legacy of the founding Jewish network executives of NBC, ABC and CBS to conceal Jewishness on television as well as the restrictions of the standards and practices of broadcast television. It is because of these factors that Jewish identity often appeared as a simply stated premise within the diegesis of the story, as cartoonish stereotypes, or as a tangential reality left unexamined. In contrast, the characters of *Transparent* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, shows that remain unburdened by the restraints of broadcast television, have more complex relationships with Jewishness and as such, discuss, confront, and question their Jewish identities with other Jews and non-Jews alike.

…

Television developed in the great wake of the radio industry, with powerful radio networks expanding into television networks. As discussed in the report "Television's Changing Image of American Jews" by Jewish television experts Joyce Antler, Neal Gabler, Frank Rich, the leaders of the transition to television, David Sarnoff (NBC), William Paley (CBS), and Leonard Goldenson (ABC) were all Jewish, thus prompting half a century of a peculiar

relationship between Jewishness and television (4). Not only were the gatekeepers Jewish, but so were the majority of those who worked at the networks, including producers, writers, and editors. However, in a post-World War II, anti-Semitic climate, Jews were cautious about exposing the power they held within the entertainment industry. This hesitation is demonstrated from the beginning of Jewish programming, first by limiting the images of Jews on television and later by continuing to restrict the amount of Jewish content.

Todd Gitlin, political and sociological writer, states in his book *Inside Prime Time*, which was published in 1983: "Given the large number of Jews who hold top positions in the networks and production companies, it seems surprising that Jewish characters are scarce on screen" (184). The number of Jews involved in the creation of programs since the birth of television in the late 1940's greatly outweighs the number of Jewish characters, themes, and narratives depicted on television. Despite more favorable attitudes toward Jews in the 1950's and 60's, particularly in populated urban spaces, network executives followed a set of informal rules that, for the most part, kept Jews off the small screen. Gitlin continues, "In the end, the networks fall back on their marketplace predilections compounded perhaps by self-protectiveness against any real or conceivable anti-Semitic charge that Jews are too powerful in the media" (184). The tendency of Jewish leaders in the television industry to suppress the amount of Jewish identity portrayed on broadcast television is visible from the first Jewish television show *The Goldbergs* (1949-50) to *Seinfeld* (1989-1998) and beyond.

In chronological order, I will examine five of what I have deemed the most historically significant shows starring Jewish characters across broadcast television, premium television, and digital platforms. By analyzing both the cultural influences on the network executives and television creators, as well as how these programs influenced culture, I will investigate why

Jewish identity could not be expressed with full dimensionality until non-broadcast platforms emerged. In addition, I will analyze the materialization of a different kind of Jewish identity on premium channels and digital platforms. Most of the representation of Jews on television was created by Jews themselves; thus, spawned a unique socio-cultural relationship, one that only belongs to Jews, between the creation of television and the representation of their own identity.

Lynn Spigel in her essay "Television" for the *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual* History discusses the birth of racially and ethnically controversial television shows at the advent of television programming. She attributes the success of racially insensitive programs of the early 1950s, such as *Amos n Andy*, *Belulah*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Life with Luigi*, to the comedy of their "un-American" mistakes in trying to be "American." For *the Goldbergs* and *Life with Luigi*, the characters' Eastern European behaviors gave rise to plot lines that amplified the ways in which they tried to assimilate and failed. However, in this narrative structure they both "romanticized the close-knit family structures of first-generation immigrants" while they also "suggested that people should assimilate into the melting pot and adopt postwar consumer values" (Spigel). She also suggests that these shows were not just products of actual racist attitudes toward non-Whites and non-Christians, but also a result of the "structure of commercial broadcasting itself" (Spigel). As access to broadcast television expanded with enhanced technology and rise in the percentage of American's who owned televisions, the networks increasingly relied on calculated business strategies to sell their programs as products. They sought to appeal to the "white with buying power" and in doing so, consciously neglected the ethnic Other, any minority in the U.S., in terms of appropriate and desirable representation (Spigel). The Other and their associated Otherness denotes those excluded from the assumed

norm. On broadcast television particularly the Other is rarely represented, and if they are, their identity lacks in dimensionality and complexity.

Although there are remarkable Jewish themes, language, and moments in *The Goldbergs*, the show was conclusively about American family values. Within the narrative of an immigrant family living in the tenement housing in post-World War II America, lies intermittent pieces of Jewish identity portrayed by each character. In an attempt to appeal to the mass American audience, which was majority white and Christian, *The Goldbergs* maintained the façade that above all else they were just like every other American (Antler 32). When *The Goldbergs* first aired on network television in 1949, after 17 years of radio broadcast, it was the first Jewish show, meaning it was the first program starring Jewish characters. Nonetheless, the show's creators were fixed on representing Jewishness through material possessions such as menorahs and kippahs, Yiddish language and accents, and the family's residence in the Bronx tenements. However, when *The Goldbergs* moved from the tenement houses into a fictional all-American suburb called Haverville, in the 1955 season, the creators rid the show of its Jewishness: the show's title was changed to *Molly*, the characters rarely spoke in Yiddish following the move, and they ate highly Americanized food. Whether the show was cancelled because *The Goldbergs* still did not appeal to the white-suburban audience of the 1950's or because the move to Haverville erased what made the show unique, will remain unknown. Nevertheless, as the first Jewish program on the small screen, *The Goldbergs* established a precedent for a half a century of Jewish representation on television.

In the following years, American television was heavily weighted toward programs starring White, Christian families. As Joyce Antler states in *Television's Changing Image of American Jews*: "In the monolithic, increasingly domesticated, television America of the 1950s,

even *The Goldbergs* could not retain their distinctive ethnic character" (34). The consequence of cancelling *The Goldbergs* cannot be measured exactly; however, as David Zurawik, American journalist and author argues in his book *The Jews of Prime Time*, the utter lack of leading Jewish characters on broadcast television from 1956 to 1971 and then again from 1978 to 1987 signals a significant hesitation on the part of the network executives to represent themselves on television (9).

When Jewish identity is expressed on broadcast television, it is often represented as a caricature comprised of stereotypically Jewish attributes present only as a cultural statement or as comic-relief, as in *Bridget Loves Bernie*. Airing after an 18-year hiatus in which there were no leading Jewish characters on prime-time television, *Bridget Loves Bernie* in 1972 became the second Jewish broadcast television show (Zurawik 48). At a time when progressive shows that confronted issues in American society were becoming more commonplace, *Bridget Loves Bernie* could have been a bold expression of Jewish identity. However, the creators of the show fell back on tired stereotypes and tools to signify identity such as food, language, and idiosyncrasies. Bernie was a lower-class, Jewish taxi cab driver who met Bridget, an upper-class Catholic woman, one day while driving his cab. While Bernie is rarely represented as a Jewish caricature, his family, who lives above their Jewish deli, is depicted as loud, abrasive, and stubborn, among other demeaning and stereotypical Jewish attributes. The show only aired for one season because of the protests against the representation of intermarriage, but the ramifications of this Jewish representation lasted for decades. David Zurawik reports on the controversy of *Bridget Loves Bernie*, explaining, "To add insult to injury, most of the 'humor' in this series is based on the supposedly ethnic shortcomings of the low-class Jewish and the high-class Catholic families" (88). However, unlike the solely religious treatment of Catholicism, Judaism transcends religious

boundaries into cultural and sociological ones, leaving Bernie's family to defend all realms of their identity.

Although as the 20th century progressed there were visibly more representations of Jews on television (which might be attributed to the transition of networks from Jewish executives to non-Jewish multi-media conglomerates, prior to the 1990's) the characters and narratives continued to lack a depth in their treatment of Jewishness (Zurawik 206). In most cases, shows with Jewish characters touched on Jewish topics like traditions, food, and language sporadically at best. While it may seem as though they approached Jewishness without hesitation, these gestures often served as a reminder to the audience of a character's Jewishness. Many would consider *Seinfeld* to be a breakthrough in the representation and popularity of Jewish characters on television, but as a show about "nothing" is *Seinfeld* really about Jewish identity?

When *Seinfeld* was first pitched to the president of NBC, Brandon Tartikoff, who was also Jewish, he dismissed the show as "too Jewish" (Zurawik 7). Despite a lack of evidence to prove that overtly Jewish television shows were less acceptable to the American viewer, the co-creators, Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, came back the next year with the same concept, but this time there was less explicitly Jewish content and only Seinfeld was clearly defined as Jewish (Antler 39). Tartikoff reluctantly agreed to order the show giving *Seinfeld* "the smallest order in TV history—four shows" (Zurawik 204).

Not only was *Seinfeld* almost not picked up because of its Jewishness, but once it aired it had difficulty defining its own relationship *to* Jewishness. George Contanza's ethnicity and religion are widely debated among viewers because of his distinctly Jewish attributes despite his non-Jewish last name. Many also consider Elaine to be written as Jewish but masked as a Gentile (Antler 43). Even Jerry, who is clearly defined as Jewish, often identifies as more of a New

Yorker than a Jew. Zurawik notes that "much of the talk [about *Seinfeld*], especially among Jews, involved the purposefully murky ethnic and religious identity of the supporting characters, as well as the decided lack of connection to things Jewish by the leading character" (201). Although *Seinfeld* may be considered a show about Jewish identity in the 1990's, upon close examination, one finds that there remains a hesitation toward both overtly Jewish characters on prime-time television and Jewish subject matter that goes further than just a laugh.

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This study examines not only the ambivalence toward Jewish identity on broadcast television, despite both Jewish involvement in the early days of network television and increased acceptance of Jewish people in American culture, but also how non-broadcast contemporary television is able to evade the parameters set forth by the original Jewish network executives. Non-broadcast television, including cable and online streaming services, follows a distinct business model which is a great deal different from that of broadcast television. Premium cable networks like HBO and digital platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon do not have to abide by the prime-time system. The online streaming shows do not have to fit into a time-slot with a broad demographic and win it in order to survive. Instead the programs remain available any time for the viewer. In addition, both cable and digital platforms are subscription based; therefore, the audience is specifically choosing to pay for the content based on preference. These qualities, in turn, have opened non-broadcast television to an array of possible narratives, characters, and subject matter that include identities outside the norm of broadcast television. Thus, Jewish identity has had an ability to express itself in more direct and specific ways in the world of non-broadcast television.

Because both *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* were created by Larry David, one can easily conjure the direct differences in the expression of Jewish identity on broadcast television versus on a premium channel. The similarities in humor and style in *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* are prominent; both rely on a self-deprecating, cynical, and ironic comedy. Nonetheless, the differences between the shows are substantial. *Curb* punctures a surface not even visible on broadcast television. Larry David, on *Curb*, deconstructs every realm of identity and social norm only to reconstruct them in his postmodern understanding; an understanding that sheds light on the the history of Jewish representation on television and reconsiders this definition. He offers a sense of realism not available in *Seinfeld*, one that directly addresses what it means to question Jewish identity. David Gillota, Professor of Film and Ethnic Studies, in his article in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* entitled "Negotiating Jewishness: *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and the Schlemiel Tradition" argues that "the series critiques reductive attitudes toward race, religion, and other forms of difference and reflects an uneasiness that many contemporary American Jews feel about their own ethnic identity." While Curb is distinctly a comedic show, it is not without a serious commentary on being ethnic in America. Larry David's approach to this conversation is done through a self-reflexive humor, one that makes the audience laugh but also prompts an open dialogue.

Whereas *Curb Your Enthusiasm* opened the door for discourse on Jewish identity, Amazon Studio's *Transparent* completely revolutionized the way in which Jewish identity as well as the Other was depicted on television. The show, created by Jill Soloway, not only approaches themes of Jewishness, transgender identity, and sexuality, but displays an unusual and uninhibited relationship *with* them. Jewishness is not a tool, but a significant facet of who the characters are as human beings. It is because the Pfefferman family is Jewish, a part of the non-

normative group in American culture, that these other typically taboo topics are able to be expressed and questioned brazenly. Every single character on the show deals with a problematic and unsteady relationship with their identity. Not unlike real life, the characters' problems are not simple and cannot be resolved in one episode. Instead, these are issues that reflect a lifetime of contemplation, reservation, and introspection.

The characters on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* on HBO and *Transparent* on Amazon, in contrast to those of *The Goldbergs*, *Bridget Loves Bernie*, and *Seinfeld*, constitute a new kind of television Jew, one that does not rely on Gefilte fish and Yiddishisms as the signifier of Jewish identity. These representations are not cartoonish, symbolic, or only present for comedic relief. What follows is a close examination of the most pivotal Jewish characters on U.S. television series, as well as an enumeration of some of the cultural and economic factors that produced such a history of Jewish identity on television. In addition, this study will demonstrate that it was not until the creation of new and diverse television distribution platforms that Jewish identity began to emerge as a fully dimensional piece of character and narrative development, despite the fact that Jews have always been leaders of the television industry.

Chapter 1:

The Case of *the Goldbergs*

The Goldbergs, which aired from 1949 to 1956, was the first successful sitcom as well as the first show to star a Jewish family. Adapted from the radio show *the Rise of the Goldbergs*, *The Goldbergs* brought a committed audience and reliable narrative structure to the small screen. Created and written by Gertrude Berg, the program follows a Jewish family in the Bronx as they navigate their way through American-immigrant life. The show stars the mother of the family, Molly Goldberg (Gertude Berg), who is the lovable, welcoming, and kind image of the Jewish-American mother. Molly is married to Jake (Phillip Loeb), an adoring husband and dress cutter in the garment industry. Together, they have a son, Sammy (Tom Taylor), and a daughter, Rosie (Arlene McQuade), who live with them and their Uncle David (Eli Mintz) in a Bronx tenement apartment. As a distinct representation of the immigrant experience, *The Goldbergs* embodies not particularly Jewish-American struggles, but those of the average American in the 1950's. While the show is advertised as depicting the plight of the Jewish immigrant family, upon closer analysis, the viewer realizes that the Jewish element of the show was at best a tool to be used when it aided in narrative enhancement. No greater evidence exists for this characterization of the Jewish family as a plot tool than when the Goldbergs are moved to white, suburban Haverville in the 1950s and stripped of their Jewish element all together. As the fictional family's Jewishness is used merely as a device to assert their Americanness over their Otherness when given the opportunity, the show is reveled to be an image for the ideal American immigrant family, setting the stage for American families on television.

Before the Goldbergs move to the suburbs in 1955, Molly begins each episode by opening her apartment window and "Yoohoo-ing" to the American audience. She warmly invites the viewer into her home, diffusing any potential discomfort regarding her Otherness with her charm and benevolence. Even though *The Goldbergs* still represented the Other in American culture, they also embodied a family with which viewers could identify. Above all it was because they maintained their traditions. They represented a moral capacity that was very American as they not only offered humorous solutions to minor family issues, but also served as role models of upward mobility. Molly, often at odds with the American way, must find a resolution that will help her to assimilate. *The Goldbergs* was a show about family values above all else, and Gertrude Berg made a commitment to be as universally inclusive as possible. In his book *Acting Jewish: Negotiating Ethnicity on the American Stage and Screen* Henry Bial, Professor of Theatre at the University of Kansas, describes Berg's desire to create content for the non-Jewish, American audience, while, more discretely, appealing to the Jewish viewers as well:

> The self-conscious 'repacking' of Jewishness for consumption by non-Jewish audiences was central to…television series such as *The Goldbergs* (1949-55). The emphasis was on creating performances that were not "too Jewish"—that is, they would not alienate non-Jewish audiences. These performances depended on the ability of Jewish audiences to recognize culturally specific aural and visual performance codes as indicators of Jewishness and then "fill in the blanks" with their own experience of the Jewish-specific cultural and religious practices that are not depicted in the performance. (Bial 27)

While the Goldbergs are ostensively Jewish, as is apparent in their name, language, speech patterns, celebration of holidays, location, food, and other symbols, they were committed to maintaining the notion that first and foremost they are an American family, especially to non-

Jews. The exception to this rule were Jewish signifiers only apparent to other Jewish Americans. Instead of using the platform to educate the greater American population about Jewishness, *The Goldbergs* relied on these stereotypical symbols and performances when they were useful in amplifying the narrative.

Because *The Goldbergs* was the first American Jewish show on television, there was little historical data to suggest what would succeed or fail in this new media landscape, aside from what was known from its time on the radio. As evident in the characters' modifications in the closeness to their Jewish identity, there was much experimentation. While in a few rare episodes like "A Sad Day" (October 5, 1954), in which the Goldbergs celebrate Yom Kippur, most episodes only touched on Judaism. Despite the lack of concrete evidence to indicate that the exposure of Jewishness on television would fail, the creators of the show and network executives intentionally avoided anything "too Jewish" (Antler 32). They instead relied on universal themes to drive the dialogue and included symbols of Jewishness when they enhanced the ethnic-working class identity of the family. The decision to remain mainstream by reducing the characters' Jewishness to sporadic and subtle signifiers, derives from the desire by Jewish network executives to create a more generic product for broadcast television that will sell to the greater American population (Antler 32). Be it from a long history of proving their worth in America or the still present anti-Semitism of the late 1940s, Jewish television creators, particularly those in power, felt the need to limit the exposure of their own people and religion.

Before Molly Goldberg charmed American viewers with her "Yoo-hooing" and her yiddishisms on screen, *The Rise of the Goldbergs* entertained American audiences on the radio. The program ran as a 15-minute comedy show on the radio from 1929 to 1946 (Antler 31) Although Gertrude Berg's *the Rise of the Goldbergs* was successful on radio, it needed to be

altered to work with both the visual format and length of television comedies (Bial 41). Henry Bial describes the radio show as a "dialect comedy," citing that most of the humor derived from Molly and Jake's difficulty speaking English and their use of Yiddish: "Molly and Jake's greenhorn malapropisms were its stock in trade" (Bial 41). As a television show, though, the Goldberg's humor had to rely less on audible blunders and more on visually engaging plots. In the television program, Molly and Jake speak English with much more fluency than on the radio. In addition, Jewish symbols, such as food, holiday items, and cultural objects, appear more frequently due to both the medium and the amplifying of narrative complexity. However, the increase of Jewish symbols for television is not to say the radio show lacked in explicitly Jewish content and dialogue. A series of broadcasts of *The Rise of the Goldbergs*, in fact, "covered the Kirstallnacht in Nazi Germany in which Jews had been massacred and Jewish shops and synagogues stoned or burned to the ground by rampaging mobs" as well as a broadcast that featured a stone thrown through the window during a Passover seder (Brook 54). In contrast, on television, the Goldberg family spoke less of the plight of Jews abroad and more of Jewish cultural objects and traditions. These instances of Jewishness came in the form of traditionally Jewish food, menorahs, apartment location, Jake Goldberg's occupation, and the celebration of holidays. Both the unknown territory of television and the hesitation by Jews to expose Jewish identity transformed a radio show about an American Jewish family into a television show about an American family with a vague essence of Jewishness.

Despite the success of the Goldberg family on the radio, Berg faced opposition by the networks when she pitched her radio show as televisual program, David Zurawik, American journalist and author states in *The Jews of Primetime,* "What CBS and NBC were not interested in was Berg's Jewish ethnicity" (19). Both CBS and NBC were hesitant toward creating a

televisual pilot after the popular radio broadcast. Zurawik cites president of CBS, William Paley's resistance toward Jewishness for this reason: "Paley, who once turned down a chance to back *Fiddler on the Roof* by explaining that it was 'too Jewish,' was more comfortable putting a series with African American characters on his network than he was a Jewish sitcom" (19). However, at this time, sponsors held the programming power, and searched for programs that would best sell their products, without much bias toward content. *The Goldbergs* was picked up by General Foods, a non-Jewish sponsor, who saw the Goldbergs ethnicity as an advantage in selling to the diverse American population, that did not just consist of White Americans (Bial 42). It was the network that resisted; Jewish executives did not want to air such a program because of their personal ambivalence toward overtly Jewish content, especially in the wake of World War II. Meanwhile, other ethnic-working class sitcoms that were sought out as early as the 1950s helped develop television into a medium with a substantial amount of minority representation. Zurawik states that "CBS resisted putting *The Goldbergs* on the air despite the fact the it fit the very model for the kind of ethnic sitcoms with a history of radio success that his network was looking to add" (20). Such examples of the successful ethnic-working class sitcom include *Amos n Andy* (1951-1953) on CBS, *Life with Luigi* (1948-1953) on CBS, *Mama* (1949-1957) on CBS, and *Belulah* (1950-1953) on ABC. At a time when television was relatively new, and ethnic comedies had been successful on radio, these programs offered humorous and relatable situations that came with being ethnic in America. Yet, given its Jewishness there was a hesitation toward programming *The Goldbergs* that these other ethnic sitcoms did not face.

General Foods used this programming power to their advantage by not only putting *The Goldbergs* on air, but by securing a product placement segment at the beginning of each episode. General Foods saw the opportunity to use the ethnicity of the Goldbergs to promote American

consumerism as the line between distinct ethnic identities and American identities began to blur on screen. Molly Goldberg opens her tenement window and breaks the fourth wall by speaking directly to the audience. She speaks in an inviting and melodic tone, convincing the viewer that she is a well-intentioned, family-oriented American. While product placement in a scene was nothing new, these product placements emphasized how this program was first and foremost about American identity. In the first seasons, she speaks highly of Sanka, a decaffeinated coffee drink produced by General Foods. Molly encourages the viewers to buy this product and use it in their homes, often citing times when she would love to sit down with a cup. In later seasons, she praises the vitamin supplement, Rybutol (Bial 41). Vincent Brook, Author and Professor at UCLA argues in his article, "The Americanization of Molly: How Mid-Fifties TV Homogenized 'The Goldbergs' (And Got 'Berg-Iarized' in the Process)" that this "integrated commercial" works to make the viewer associate this product with the warm-heartedness of the Goldberg family (48). The product placement helps to amplify the theme of the all-American family, leaving their Jewishness as a silent characteristic and their Americanness as their prominent identity. General Foods, as Brook argues, strategically targeted ethnic-working class families to advertise their products because they embodied the 1950's consumer America: "the ethnic working-class family, as a link between modern and traditional values, provided an ideal vehicle for the transmission of the consumer ethos" (48). General Foods used the conspicuous Otherness of *The Goldbergs* as a marketing strategy, and they saw a profitable place in a Jewish, ethnic-working class sitcom, whereas CBS attempted to dismiss this ethnicity entirely. On the contrary, for example, the Sanka can remains on the outside of the Goldbergs' home, deliberately separate from the pronounced Jewishness in the home, as Brook argues, giving the brand "a mainstream American stamp of approval" (49).

Even Gertrude Berg, herself, hesitated to include Jewishness on her show that she feared may alienate or upset non-Jews. There is no doubt that the Goldbergs are Jewish. It is how the Jewishness is represented through symbols and, at times, not mentioned at all, that substantiates the claim that Jews were complicit in concealing their own identities on television. As a Jew, Berg expressed feelings of hesitation toward sharing a fully dimensional representation of Jewish identity on television as well as discussing issues of Jewish identity beyond the surface. In 1954, Berg told a reporter that she avoided:

> anything that will bother people…unions, politics, fund-raising, Zionism, socialism, intergroup relations. I don't stress them. After all, aren't such things second to daily living? The Goldbergs are not defensive about their Jewishness, or especially aware of it. I keep things average. I don't want to lose friends. (qtd. in Antler 32)

Gertrude Berg wrote about the Goldberg characters' Jewishness at times throughout the show when it benefitted the narrative, character development, and humor, but she did not pass the invisible line drawn by Jewish television executives and creators which did not allow for substantial Jewish content. As Henry Bial describes Molly's hesitation, "Berg self-consciously sought to reach a universal audience and certainly felt the pressure of openly acting Jewish for audiences all across America" (44). Molly, Jake, and Uncle David all have audible Eastern European Jewish accents and speech patterns and frequently use Yiddish when speaking. This language helps to identify the characters as Jewish, but is careful not to alienate the Gentile viewers by remaining clear to English speaking America. Still, they rarely, if ever, discuss issues of anti-Semitism and assimilation that were at the forefront of American Jewish thinking in the 1950's.

The Goldbergs, also, are distinctly 1950's Eastern European Jews, though the prevalence of the expression of this identity is sporadic. The episode, "A Sad Day" is very significant because it is one of the show's most overtly and religiously Jewish episodes. Typically, Jewish holidays were discussed but not shown in the explicit and detailed way in which Yom Kippur is represented in "A Sad Day." As an outlier episode, "A Sad Day" depicts the Goldberg family and neighbors getting ready to go to temple on Yom Kippur as well as a scene in the Orthodox temple. This is one of the only instances where ritual is performed on the show. Within the temple, as Brook describes, "the torah is displayed and a cantor chants the Kol Nidre as a pious congregation, including the Goldbergs, participates in the ritual" (54). During the episode, Molly tells two different neighbors, "If I did something or said something through the year, I wanted to say I'm sorry." To Jews, these exchanges are obvious, Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, so Molly is atoning for her mistakes and slights throughout the year. Non-Jews are not excluded, however, because when Rosalie is concerned about her Uncle David's melancholy behavior, Molly explains to both Rosalie and the non-Jewish audience, "He looks worried, well this is the kind of a holiday a person has to ponder, it's a holy day where people ask for forgiveness, my darling."

In airing this distinctly Jewish episode, Berg addresses both Jews and non-Jews and reinforces the show's commitment to family, faith, and values. Nonetheless, one must consider how this episode stands alone among the series. Rarely in other episodes does the Goldberg family show Jewishness so vividly, and never had they prior or since shown an Orthodox temple. In fact, at one point when discussing upcoming holidays, Molly does not mention a single Jewish holiday, instead "she walked through Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and Easter without so much as a mention of Hanukkah or Passover," greatly downplaying her

Jewishness (Gabler 15). In creating a show about a Jewish family, it appears as though Gertrude Berg finds herself in a balancing act of maintaining ethnicity for the narrative and appealing to the network executives and the Gentile American audience.

While the show aired off and on until its cancellation in 1956, it was not without controversy and instability behind the scenes. First, Philip Loeb, who played Jake Goldberg, was blacklisted as a communist sympathizer (Brook 53). Philip Loeb was not only on *The Goldbergs* for the first two years but also on the radio broadcast since the 1930s (Brook 53). However, after Loeb was named, pressure from CBS and General Foods mounted for Gertrude Berg to find a new Jake Goldberg. Despite Loeb's commitment to the show, both CBS and General Foods wanted to remain out of the controversy. General Foods cited "1,197 letters they received" in protest of his role on the show (Brook 53). General Foods and CBS, because of Berg's refusal to cooperate, dropped *The Goldbergs* from their network. The show was later picked up by competing network NBC, but on the condition that Loeb would be fired. Berg was forced to let Loeb go, despite her protest of the allegations, and brought Harold J. Stone on to play Jake. In 1955, Loeb committed suicide because of the damage the allegations did to his career and his reputation (Brook 53). Meanwhile, Brook describes, "Two Jewish network founders, Paley and Sarnoff, …accepted and enforced the blacklist in the broadcasting industry" (53). In addition to fearing the questioning of their legitimacy as Jews leading the industry, Paley and Sarnoff also feared the anti-communist blacklists.

In 1955, *The Goldbergs*, now sold by Guild films to local networks, moved out of the Bronx tenements and into a fictional suburb called Haverville, the name bluntly representing their move up in class (Zurawik 44.) A few different factors led to the beginning of the transition of *the Goldbergs* to appear as a more Americanized sitcom: an end of the FCC freeze on

licensing new stations in 1952, an increase in television ownership, and the trend of white-washing television in the 1950s (Brook 54-55). The end of the FCC freeze on new stations allowed for networks to reach a larger audience, including the newly suburbanized cities. The networks decided that this broad audience would be more inclined to watch shows that feature families like their own, instead of the ethnic-working class sitcoms of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Brook, discussing this trend, stresses that, "Networks and sponsors, hoping to tap the burgeoning mass audience, adopted a marketing strategy aimed at the largest consuming group, the middle-class family" (54). What this "marketing strategy" meant, though, was that the ethnicity of *The Goldbergs* was no longer thought of as profitable, not even by the sponsors. The show was forced to conform to the white, middle-class, suburban narrative or else it would not survive the great eradication of ethnic shows by the network. Therefore, the 1955-56 season saw immense changes in the foundation of the narrative and the identity of the characters: "Robbed of its singular bond to Molly Goldberg as a narrator/audience-confidante and of its Bronx working-class environment, *The Goldbergs*, in its 1955-56 season, was for all intents and purposes a new show" (Brook 56). The show transformed into a reflection of its white, suburban prime-time competition, most notably, *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960). The show's title even changed to *Molly*, for the majority of episodes in the 1955-56 season, dropping one of the most recognizable symbols of their Jewishness (Brook 56). The name was just one of many changes made to the show when the family moved to the suburb of Haverville, as Bial noted:

> Molly brought her "values of family and education" with her, but by now they had come completely unmoored from their roots in either Jewish religious practice or Ashkenazic Jewish culture. The Goldbergs speak no Yiddish in their home. They do not observe a Saturday Sabbath or keep a kosher kitchen. In most episodes, in fact, the words *Jew* and

> *Jewish* are never mentioned. Even in situations in which the Goldbergs' religion or ethnicity would seem to have a direct bearing on the plot, the subject is never broached (44-45)

The show lost seemingly all elements that made it a distinct Jewish, working-class sitcom. Instead, of cancelling the show and creating an entirely new one that followed the formula of *Father Knows Best*, Guild Films and Berg simply altered *The Goldbergs*. However, in doing so, they stripped the Goldbergs of everything that made them Jewish and made an enduring statement about Jewish shows on television. The effects of this change are visible in the complete lack of a television shows starring Jewish characters until *Bridget Loves Bernie* in 1972 (Brook 62).

In order to examine this transition in The Goldbergs shift from being an ethnic, sitcom to an Americanized, middle-class, suburban family show, one must look at two episodes: "Moving Day" (November 22, 1955) and "Rosie's Nose" (October 27, 1955). "Moving Day" begins with Molly talking to her neighbor, Mrs. Herman, and boasting about her new house in the suburbs. She calls her new house, not a "mansion" but a "castle." After she shows her house to everyone in the family and a few neighbors, she is quickly disappointed as her husband, Jake, returns from Haverville and says that they do not yet have enough money to move into the house. Molly devises a plan to sell all of her furniture, including family heirlooms, and her prized possession, the piano. What's left after she sells everything are two paintings, one of George Washington and one of Abraham Lincoln. These are subtle gestures toward her assimilation to American culture, by both selling everything from her Bronx apartment that connected her to the past and by only keeping items that connect her to America (Brook 50). The move to Haverville marks a new era for the Goldberg family; an era in which they fully assimilate to American cultural

norms, literally sell all remnants of their Eastern European past, and finally achieve their immigrant dreams of upward mobility. This forces one to question: were the writers, creators, executives, and the network saying that the end goal of the immigrant experience and the ethnically and religiously Other is to be successful enough to conform to Whit\ American middle class standards? The Jewish television creators thereby suggest that one must strive for American suburban normality through assimilation and conformity as well as upward class movement.

In the episode "Rosie's Nose," which aired after the Goldbergs settle into Haverville, the writers evade mentioning how Rosie's desire to get plastic surgery on her nose has to do with a historical stereotype of Jewish noses needing to be augmented in order to look like traditional white, American noses. In this episode, Rosie is saving up money, secretly, for her appointment with a plastic surgeon. When Sammy reveals why Rosie wants to babysit, rather than hang out with her friends, Molly, Jake, and Uncle David are devastated. They attempt to shower her with compliments in the hopes of raising her self-esteem. However, Rosie is adamant about changing the appearance of her nose, convinced that she will finally be beautiful. Although at the end of the episode she is talked out of the surgery, she still whole-heartedly believes that she would be considered more attractive if she had a different nose. The entire narrative of the episode unfolds without any mention of the ethnic and religious connotations associated with a Jewish nose. Rather than taking the storyline in a direction to introduce and address issues of ethnic prejudice and American conformity, the show demurs and entirely neglects the opportunity.

The Goldbergs only survived one season on air in Haverville. Whether the cancellation was the result of the Goldbergs losing what made them entertaining in the suburbanization of the show or that they were still not American enough to comprise what the networks saw as profitable in the 1950's remains unclear. While *The Goldbergs* began as a distinctly Jewish radio

broadcast and transitioned into a Jewish ethnic-working class sitcom that depicted symbols of Jewish life, the show developed into something entirely unrecognizable by 1956. *The Goldbergs* proved it could not withstand the controversy over the *Red Channels* blacklist, the Jewish executives' tendency to shy away from self-conscious representation, and the suburbanization of television in the 1950s. Brook explains, "Indeed, *The Goldbergs'* essential narrative conflict is between newness and tradition, Jewish and mainstream American ways, with a willingness to compromise and an abiding faith in familial love providing the ultimate solution" (47). Perhaps, with achieving "newness" and modernity, the Goldbergs had played out their "essential conflict," leaving nothing to be resolved. Nonetheless, the case of *The Goldbergs* gave the networks reason, although somewhat unsubstantiated, to be cautious and refrain from making Jewish identity more visible on television. They used the failure of *The Goldbergs* to justify a lack of leading Jewish characters on television until 1972 with *Bridget Loves Bernie*, with a subsequent gap, following the cancellation of *Rhoda* in 1978, until the premiere of *Thirtysomething* in 1987 (Zurawik 9). *The Goldbergs* was the first Jewish television show and arguably *the* pivotal series that paved the way for a peculiar history of the expression of Jewish identity on the small screen.

Chapter Two:

Bridget Loves Bernie, but America Does Not

Following the 1956 cancellation of the Goldbergs, the first show that depicted a Jewish family, television networks failed to program another show starring a Jewish character until *Bridget Loves Bernie* in 1972 (Brook 62). It was not until the 1972 season of broadcast television that networks began to include Jewish representation alongside the other progressive shows inspired by the counter culture movement of the 1960s. As Lynn Spigel, scholar of Screen Cultures asserts in her article "Television" in *the Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, shows like the *Defenders* (1961-1965) and *East Side/West Side* (1963-1964) reflected the Civil Rights, Women's Rights and other social movements of the Vietnam era. While the 1950s was still marked by shows that celebrated the suburban family, the characters in these shows were more outspoken on taboo topics. They did not possess the same passiveness of the 50s suburban characters on social issues as networks began to address society with a greater sense of reality. In addition, the first African American lead in a show since *Amos n Andy* aired on CBS in 1965, *I Spy*, starring Bill Cosby. Nonetheless, it was seven years before another Jewish television show would air on the small screen (Spigel, "Television").

By the second half of the 1960s, network heads were en route to redesign their domesticated sitcoms and introduce boundary pushing, socially relevant content. Due to slacking ratings at CBS, Chairman of the Board and Founder William S. Paley hired Robert D. Wood, who planned to completely remodel CBS' programming (Zurawik 83; Spigel, "Television"). To assist him in doing so, Wood hired Fred Silverman as head of programming. Together, Wood and Silverman cancelled shows they deemed old and outdated, such as *The Ed Sullivan Show*

(1948-1971), *Green Acres* (1965-1971), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971), and introduced, to name a few, *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), *All in the Family* (1971-1979), and *Bridget Loves Bernie*. Paley, who formerly held much of the regulatory power and used it to control the amount of Jewish programming on air, relinquished control to Wood and Silverman, and *Bridget Loves Bernie*, a distinctly Jewish television show was scheduled for prime time (Zurawik 82). While one might assume that a show airing in this progressive era of television, in between *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *All in The Family*, would also attempt to push the television norms of safe and appropriate content followed so strictly in the 1950s and 1960s, *Bridget Loves Bernie* failed to replace harmful religious and racial stereotypes. Instead, the creators of *Bridget Loves Bernie* used the same tools employed by the creators of *The Goldbergs* to represent Jewishness only symbolically.

Bridget Loves Bernie aired between *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and Norman Lear's *All in the Family* to complete CBS' highly successful Saturday night line-up. This placement was strategic as *All in the Family* and *the Mary Tyler Moore Show* both generated enormous audiences, relatively more accustomed to controversial subject matter. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* starred a single, working woman living on her own, for the first time on network television (Zurawik 58). While the show was a great advancement for the representations of independent women, Mary's journey onto the small screen was not without challenges and alterations. In a conversation between author of *The Jews of Prime Time*, David Zurawik, and Allan Burns, the co-creator of *the Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Burns describes the obstacles he faced while pitching the show:

> The people from CBS wrung their hands, and said, "You cannot do this, you cannot do divorce." …Finally, they just turned to this guy from research and he just reeled off this

> litany, saying CBS had research that showed there were four things American viewers simply would not tolerate. One was divorced people. The others were people from New York, men with mustaches, and Jews…I looked around the room and what you had mostly were divorced Jewish guys from New York. (qtd. in Zurawik 58)

The Mary Tyler Moore Show was one of the most successful and critically acclaimed network television shows, yet its production was almost halted because of data suggesting its content would not succeed in the American media marketplace. By this logic, the show's content had to be changed slightly so that it would succeed on prime time. Mary, on the show, had to be single, not divorced, yet this was still a revolutionary show on prime time. Mary Tyler Moore was not the only contested character; her best friend Rhoda was a lively, over the top Jewish woman. Nonetheless, CBS gave it a chance because of the progressive women's movement of the 70s on television.

All in the Family, on the other hand, was a working class family sitcom but it looked almost nothing like its *Father Knows Best* style, 1950's counterparts. Instead, the family's patriarch, Archie Bunker (Carroll O'Connor), embodied all of the taboo, off-limits behavior that the 1950's sitcoms consciously ignored. Archie broached subjects of anti-Semitism, women's rights, and civil rights. In a *New York Times* article from 1972, writer and author Arnold Hano states, "Archie is a middle-aged, middle-class bigot. He is anti-Black, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-Puerto Rican…He doesn't like hippies, short skirts, students, welfare, liberals" ("Can Archie Bunker Give Bigotry A Bad Name?"). While Archie was not a single, working woman making strides for feminism in American culture, the show did bring to the surface issues of acceptance and education regarding cultures different from one's own (in a 1950's, naively racist sort of way).

In a period of time ripe with more complex, challenging representations, one might expect a Jewish television show to follow suit. Placed right in between *All in the Family* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was *Bridget Loves Bernie*; a show that, at its core, strived to be about love and acceptance across cultural, religious, and class boundaries, a modern day Romeo and Juliet story. However, the show ended up employing tired stereotypes and surface level symbolism to characterize race and religion. The show follows a taxi-driver, Bernie, played by David Birney, and Catholic, Upper-Eastsider, Bridget, played by Meredith Baxter as they fall in love. In addition to coming from a lower socioeconomic class, Bernie is also Jewish. This is the central conflict of the show: the unlikely love between Jewish Bernie and Catholic Bridget; it is a show that reimagines the Romeo and Juliet trope with class and religion as the central tension.

The pilot follows Bridget and Bernie from the first moment they meet to them falling and love and introducing each other to their parents. Bridget meets Bernie's delicatessen dwelling, matzo-ball eating, Jewish family and Bernie meets Bridget's Upper East side, Irish, exceedingly buttoned up, tea drinking, Catholic family. As one critic wrote in a television review in *Variety* on September 20th, 1972, "It's hard to suppress the suspicion that it's all been said in the pilot and that the one-note joke that was worked to death in those 30 minutes will be asked to sustain for a full season" (Les. 30). Much of the show's humor comes from the apparent class and religious differences of the couple and their families. The pilot plays out the narrative's essential conflict, one that must remain entertaining and humorous for the show's success. One can assume that the two vastly incompatible families will continue to bicker at every milestone of Bridget and Bernie's relationship. Zurawik describes the shallow humor as more than just an easy laugh but as a poke at the suggested connection between race and economic status, "To add insult to injury, most of the 'humor' in this series is based on the supposedly ethnic shortcomings

of the low-class Jewish and the high-class Catholic families" (88). The difference, however, is that Bernie and his family's Jewishness extends past his religion to make sense of their economic status, cultural Otherness, and "humorous" blunders. *Bridget Loves Bernie* utilizes stereotypically Jewish economic status, cultural norms, and behaviors that are essentially the show's comedic drive. *Bridget Loves Bernie* remains unparalleled with its use of stereotypical Jewish images as a fundamental source of its narrative, yet never offers a serious consideration of about the root of this humor about Jewish identity.

The pilot episode, aired on September 16th, 1972, which is emblematic of the entire series, demonstrates the extent to which stereotypically Jewish behavior, and arguably stereotypical Catholic prejudice, propels the comedic narrative. The episode starts with Bernie picking up Bridget in his cab. They make eye-contact and the viewer is made aware, through the uplifting music and pause on their gaze, that they have fallen in love at first sight. The next few minutes depict a montage of the two young New Yorkers falling in love. They run through Central Park, kiss each other in the back of his cab, and finally the first dialogue is spoken. The first words that Bridget utters are, "I don't even know your full name." Bernie replies, "Bernie Steinberg" and Bridget responds with her name, "Bridget Teresa Mary Colleen Fitzgerald." They both reply in unison, "I think we have a problem."

Without elaboration or explicit description, the essential conflict emerges. While neither Bridget nor Bernie has a problem with the other's religious or ethnic background, Bridget's priest brother (Robert Sampson) knows the parents will. Bridget's brother, despite being a priest, does not find their relationship problematic and even encourages it. This is important to note because he is the first religious person they consult and he maintains a far different opinion than both sets of parents. The couple first goes to Bernie's parents' apartment, conspicuously placed

above a Jewish deli, that we later find out is the Steinberg's Deli. The dinner starts out with the Steinberg family questioning Bridget's name, increasingly becoming a key indicator in the show of religious background. The family speaks with dramatized Eastern European accents, using an overt amount of Yiddish. They even saying the words "Gefilte fish" within the first few minutes of the meal. Bernie's mother, Sophie Steinberg (Bibi Osterwald), explains that she made Gefilte fish because, she states to Bridget, "I know your people eat a lot of fish." As Bridget spits out the too flavorful horseradish into her napkin, Uncle Moe (Ned Glass) interjects, "So, you're Catholic." Bridget replies, "Yes" and Uncle Moe follows with, "Full blooded?" He elaborates, "Both sides of the family?" Sophie interrupts, and says, redundantly, "We're Jewish," and Bridget responds quickly, "I know," followed by an uproar from the laugh track.

In this scene, the Steinbergs are portrayed as caricatures of a Jewish family and Bridget as all-American girl. Bernie even calls his family out by saying, "I don't believe this. I've lived with you people all my life now. Why all of a sudden is everyone being so Jewish?" If Bernie's statement is true, though, and the Steinberg's are acting more Jewish than they normally are, the viewer does not see this subdued version. Therefore, once Bridget is involved they permanently assume these stereotypically Jewish identities. The Steinberg dinner ends with Bridget sick in the bathroom and Bernie's mother hysterical over the future of her Jewish family. She describes a vision she has of three of the couple's five children as nuns. Sophie's tantrum is depicted as loud, exaggerated, and nonsensical, an image very prevalent among representations of Jewish mothers. If that was not enough to drive her character's stereotype home, she begins to cry about how Bridget hates her cooking and exclaims, "Why couldn't that wonderful girl throwing up in the bathroom be Jewish?" There is nothing subtle in this scene. The implication is clear: Bernie's family is Jewish, very Jewish, and they do not like Catholic Bridget.

In the next scene, Bernie and Bridget visit Bridget's Catholic parent's Upper East Side apartment. The creators of the show juxtaposed the dinner scene at the Steinberg's with the dinner at the Fitzegeralds in order to simply and definitively develop this contrast. When the couple arrives at Bridget's parent's apartment, Bernie immediately notices how wealthy Bridget is based on where she lives. The viewer is given idea that the Fitzgerald's are the utter antithesis of the Steinberg's. The Fitzgerald's racism is established before Bernie walks in the front door. Bridget's father, Walter Fitzgerald (David Doyle), mistakes Bernie for Bernie's African American friend, Otis, while looking outside his living room window. Walter exclaims, "He's colored!" Bridget's mother, Amy (Audrey Lindley), gasps, "Oh dear…how colored?" Walter is slightly less startled to see Bernie walk through the front door. He runs to get Amy, who is crying in the bathroom, to tell her that it is not as bad as they originally thought; he's Jewish. Walter, in an attempt to calm Amy, who is still clearly upset says, "Put the fact that he's Jewish out of your mind." They all gather in the living room for some tea and appear relatively cordial. Amy tries to serve Bernie coffee and remarks, "Bernie, do you take one or two lumps in your Jew." Still fixated on Bernie's Jewishness, Amy makes a wildly inappropriate error.

This dinner scene is worlds different from that of the Steinberg's. First, they are a nuclear family with no extended relatives living in their home. Their dining room is an entirely separate room, their china is pristine, and they have a butler serving the meal. Their wealth is anything but concealed. Amy suggests they should skip saying grace because of Bernie's presence; still they serve shrimp and ham, characteristically non-kosher cuisine. To compensate for her unbefitting racist slip earlier, Mary remarks at the dinner table that some of her best friends are Jewish. Walter states bluntly, "Name five." Of course, Mary cannot. The meal ends with Bernie sick from the non-Kosher meal, just as Bridget was sick from the Jewish meal in the previous scene.

The 28-minute episode continues with Bridget and Bernie eloping, the Steinbergs and the Fitzgeralds protesting, and ends with the entire cast in the couple's bedroom. After finding Bridget and Bernie in bed together, the two families continue to disagree and each separately mourn their child's loss of religious commitment and lack of ethnic segregation.

As an indication of the themes, tone, and characters that will carry the show throughout the season, the pilot episode displays, with incredible clarity, just how far the creators of the show are willing to go to establish the conflict between the Jewish Steinbergs and Catholic Fitzgeralds. Yet, despite going to such lengths to solidify this conflict, the actual basis of the problem is rarely discussed. Both families share their distaste for the couple, but neither states explicitly why they believe a Jew and a Catholic should not marry. The humor at the expense of these characters is made clear by the laugh track, but not by the characters themselves. No one is laughing when Bridget falls in love with Bernie, but no one is trying to access the root of this dispute either. The humor relies on stereotypical characterizations and an unreflective, even exploitive, understanding of American racism and classism.

In a case study of the exposure of Jewish identity on broadcast television, *Bridget Loves Bernie* must be examined because of both its overt representation of Jewishness and the backlash it received from the Jewish community. *Bridget Loves Bernie* garnered a large audience, yet it was cancelled after just one season, making it "the highest-rated series in the history of network television to have ever been cancelled" (Zurawik 78). The show received so much backlash against the intermarriage of Jewish Bernie and Catholic Bridget that CBS was forced to remove it from its profitable Saturday night slot. A significant majority of this backlash came from the Jewish community, specifically because of the representation of the intermarriage. This was the first intermarriage between a Jew and a non-Jew on broadcast television and the last one for

fifteen years, despite the not uncommon occurrence of Jewish and non-Jewish intermarriage in America (Zurawik 100). Jewish critics believed this marriage to be both an oversimplification of the difficulties surrounding intermarriage and a threat to the survival of Jewish people in future generations. They saw television as so influential that it would impact young Jews' decisions on who they should marry. The Executive Vice-President of the Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman told the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* in 1972 that the show is "an insult to some of the most sacred values of both the Jewish and Catholic religions" ("Jewish Groups Score New Tv Show for Intermarriage Theme"). Rabbi Kelman describes how the Steinbergs are "crude and mainly occupied with food" among other stereotypical attributes (*Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, "Jewish Groups Score New Tv Show for Intermarriage Theme"). As noted in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the network was even picketed by the Jewish Defense League because of the show.

Aside from the intermarriage controversy, Jewish groups also viewed the Steinberg characters as problematic representations. The Rabbinical Council of Washington stated to the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* that "while depicting an ethnic religious problem in a humorous vein may attract a large television audience, it insidiously undermines and destroys the commitment and respect that the respective faiths seek to instill in their adherents" ("Jewish Groups Score New Tv Show for Intermarriage Theme"). Although Jewish comedic characters, especially self-deprecating ones, can captivate audiences, the way in which it is done in *Bridget Loves Bernie*, the Rabbis felt, is demeaning and damaging.

Moreover, the Steinbergs, like the Goldbergs, express their identity through objects often associated with the religion and culture. While the presence of Jewish objects is crucial to

establishing their identity, they do not demonstrate a multi-dimensional American Jew. Zurawik describes this protest by Jewish groups against the stereotypical and inglorious content as:

> Critics too have commented on differences in social status, as in this analysis of the series in connection with what one writer calls the "validated Jewish male" on television: "on what may be television's most anti-Semitic program…As their in-laws spew bigoted venom…the couple argues incessantly. Bernie invariably yields to his wife's wishes, always the lowly Jew groveling for the approval and attention of his angelic wife. (Zurawik 88)

The backlash against *Bridget Loves Bernie* went far beyond the Jewish television executives' collective fear of the exposure of Jewish identity extending into a universal feeling that the show was damaging to the reputation of Jewish American. It is unclear whether or not Jewish groups would have approved of any Jewish programs in this era because of the lack of Jews on television to begin with. However, neither *The Goldbergs* nor future shows surrounding Jewish identity faced this much criticism.

In a critical analysis, it is clear that assumptions were made about Jewish identity in *Bridget Loves Bernie*, including socio-economic status, occupation, and characteristics, that were not necessarily beneficial for the Jewish community. These assumptions, though, were made by the Jews who created and wrote the show. The show makes it very obvious that the Steinberg's Jewishness is inherently tied to their economic status, as is the Fitzgerald's Irish Catholicism. In this instance Jewishness is equated with working class, New Yorker. The characters are caricatures of the Jewish family members they attempt to portray. Bernie's mother is a hysterical, nonsensical, overbearing woman who needs constant affirmation. Bernie's Uncle is Yiddish speaking, blunt, and bound in his old-world, Eastern European ways. And Bridget is Bernie's

saving grace, his Catholic "angel" who will help to separate him from association with his Jewish family. These stereotypical representations, while not beneficial to the Jewish community, may have reflected a continued feeling of anti-Semitism and lack of acceptance of the Other.

CBS' attempt to include Jews in their progressive programs of the 70s was not entirely protested. Rhoda, from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* was not as controversial a character as those on *Bridget Loves Bernie*. She was even given a starring role in a spin-off show, in 1974. Aside from Rhoda's stereotypically Jewish characteristics and her overbearing Jewish mother, the show "consciously avoided dealing with Rhoda's Jewishness" (qtd. in Zurawik 100). If Jews in charge of creating television were not already hesitant in the era of *the Goldbergs* and the period before *Bridget Loves Bernie* to depict Jewish identity on television, they were especially wary following the protests against *Bridget Loves Bernie*. Even though the character Rhoda was developed in *the Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the creators of the show probably learned from the failure of *Bridget Loves Bernie* to limit the show's Jewishness. While there is no evidence to demonstrate whether or not any overtly Jewish show would have survived this era, the networks felt their attempt and failure of *Bridget Loves Bernie* was enough to re-evaluate the exposure of Jewishness into the late 70s and 80s. From the cancellation of *Rhoda* in 1978 to the premiere of *Thirtysomething* on ABC in 1987, there was not a single leading Jewish character on prime time television (Zurawik 9).

Chapter Three:

Seinfeld and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

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A Still Present History: The Television Environment into the 90s

The 1980s ushered in a significant change in the ownership of the three great television networks. The Jewish gatekeepers of CBS, NBC, an ABC all relinquished control of their positions to large multi-media conglomerates. For the first time since the inception of television, the networks changed hands to non-Jewish, but similarly profit conscious corporations: Loew's Inc. took over CBS, the General Electric Company acquired NBC (and RCA), and Capital Cities Communications now ran ABC (Allen and Thompson "Television in the United States"). In addition, cable television began to gain momentum in the American marketplace. Although cable television, via co-axial cables, had been around since the beginning of television, the launch of Home Box Office (HBO) in the 1970s changed the television landscape (Allen and Thompson, "Television in the United States").

With *The Dukes of Hazzard* in the rear view mirror and the Fresh Prince moving into Bel Air, came a new wave of television. As the 1990s approached, there was more diversity than ever before depicted on prime-time television across all networks. However, problems with the white-washing of television remained. Joyce Antler notes that, according to Professor George Gerbner in a study of the representation of minorities on television in 1998 representations, "Asian-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, low-income citizens, the disabled, senior citizens, and women as a general category were seriously underrepresented on prime-time television" (26). There was one notable change in the presence of diverse characters on television with an exponential rise in the representation of Jews for the first time on the small

screen. Going from one Jewish show every other decade to multiple Jewish programs in the same night of prime-time, the 90's gave way to what appeared as a distinctly diverse media landscape. While some of this change can be attributed to positive progress over time (a decrease in visible anti-Semitism and television catching up to the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s), one must consider the correlation between the relinquishing of control by the Jewish network executives to multi-media conglomerates and the significant increase in Jewish characters on television. Jewish network executives were so adamant about restricting Jewish representation that it was not until they handed over control that a significant number of Jewish characters populated the small screen: among them were Jerry Seinfeld, Ross Geller, Grace Adler, Fran Fine, Paul Buchman and Michael Steadman. The Jewish executives had often found even subtle Jewish content to be "too Jewish" for American audiences. David Zurawik explains the expression as:

> "Too Jewish" is an expression that echoes all too loudly across the history of Jewish characters on network television in its use—most often by Jewish programmers and network executives—as a tool to distort, disguise, or altogether eliminate depictions of Jewish identity from American prime-time television. (5-6)

The combination of those controlling the content no longer being Jewish and the historical shifts of the previous decades allowed for this change. As the networks transferred power away from Jewish executives, Jewish characters simultaneously became more prevalent and the notion of "too Jewish" began to fade. Yet, the founding network executives established a legacy such that the resistance to presenting Jewish characters did not disappear as they left their desks. Their original conceptualization of what constitutes acceptable Jewish television, albeit in a subtler form, remained long after they left their desks. Zurawik writes, "Even though the networks were

sold and Jewish characters were at least allowed to exist, vestiges of the culture that the founders helped create remained" (Zurawik 10). The notion that the greater American population must be comforted with whiteness and conformity, was so ingrained in television programmers, writers, and creators that the thumb print of these ideas can still be seen in the 1990s through the present. Despite powerful Jewish executives relinquishing their control, Jewishness in a substantive setting, remained taboo.

Regardless of the shift in new, out-of-the-box narratives, the expectations for the type of program allowed during prime time television were still quite rigid. The television system in which these rules were established was roughly the same in the 90's as it was during the production of *The Goldbergs*; it was still a platform that based profits on the number of views per a program. What did not change was the mechanism undergirding the entire creative endeavor; primarily, the economic reality that defined what takes shape inside the narrative of a broadcast television show. A show had to appeal to the broadest audience in order to survive on broadcast television. However, this concept significantly restricted the creativity of program creators. In direct contrast, premium channels, like HBO, and non-broadcast channels, which were the first step toward digital platforms, like Netflix and Amazon, were not restricted by the same profit incentives or restrictions first imposed by Jewish executives. Because viewers pay to watch these channels and platforms, and as a result have more of a choice in their content, the same rules of broadcast television do not apply. Viewers know that they are signing up for content that may not be appropriate or suitable for all audiences. The stories on HBO and Amazon video have the freedom to contain raw and jarring elements that broadcast channels do not.

Because the broadcast content airs at a specific time for whomever chooses to tune in, and it is fighting for views against other primetime channels, these channels must show content that appeals to the vast majority. The sharp delineation between broadcast and non-broadcast television was also reflected in the handling of Jewish identity. "While Jewish characters appear on network TV much more regularly than in the past," argues Michael Lerner from *Tikkun* in Joyce Antler's *Television's Changing Image of American Jews*, "they never depict the fullness of Jewish Life. To the extent that Jewishness itself becomes topical, it reveals an 'empty culture'" (42). A more nuanced, multi-dimensional and complex version of Jewish identity emerged on digital platforms and premium channels as not just symbolic and stereotypical. When new distribution platforms emerged, so did a self-aware handling of Jewish identity on television, especially in situation comedies. Because of the tendency of Jewish gatekeepers to limit the exposure of Jewish identity as well as the restrictions of the medium of television itself, broadcast television to this day lacks complete freedom in expression that premium channels and digital platforms possess.

While one can see the restrictions placed on and because of broadcast television in shows like *The Goldbergs* and *Bridget Loves Bernie*, especially with the handling of Jewish identity, they lacked comparative non-broadcast counterparts. The differences between these programs and those of premium channels and digital platforms cannot be seen directly. However, one instance directly compares the two different distribution platforms of television: Larry David's co-creation of both *Seinfeld* (1989-1998) for NBC and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2011) for HBO. When directly comparing the two shows, it becomes clear that while diversity on broadcast television increased, it was not until a similar show, with the same writer, aired on HBO that a new license was granted to content involving Jewish representation.

Seinfeld and the "Crypto-Jew"

From a bird's eye view, *Seinfeld* appears to overtly address the question of Jewish identity and seems to refute the preconceived wisdom that, by definition, a show about Jews cannot be successful and enduring. Zurawik writes, "*Seinfeld* was the first series in the history of the medium with a clearly identified leading Jewish character to become number one in the Nielsen ratings" (202). Not only was *Seinfeld* immensely popular in its time, but also it has become one of the most profitable syndicated shows as well (Coburn, *The Washington Post*). Zurawik goes on to describe the delineation in supposed market predictions by the networks, "If nothing else, that massive popularity exposed the lie told by all the network executives over the years who argued that Jewish identity had to be masked for economic reasons" (202). However, when compared to co-creator Larry David's HBO show *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Seinfeld*, the self-proclaimed show about nothing, actually did not exemplify and fully address Jewish identity on broadcast television. In fact, by creating a show about Jewish life (again set in New York City) that never really addresses the very Jewishness it proclaimed to be about, the result is a one-size-fits-all show about nothing.

Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, two Jewish New Yorker stand-up comedians, created *Seinfeld* while sitting at a Korean deli late one night joking about an assortment of items. They realized that there was something comical about the mundane, minute interactions of stand-up comedians in their daily lives that could be transformed into a fuller narrative for broadcast television (Levine 30-31). *Seinfeld* follows title character, Jerry Seinfeld, as he navigates his way as a stand-up comedian in New York City. The show revolves around Jerry and his three single friends – Elaine, George, and Kramer, who congregate in Jerry's apartment. Jerry and troop

move from relationship to relationship, always returning to each other for stability. They are blunt, candid, and unabashed about their narcissism while always relying on one another to ford the chaos of adult life. However, no matter how serious or confrontational the show's content became, it always ended with a laugh.

The show was an unconventional concept, one that broadcast television had never seen before, and for that matter, because of changes required before filming, would never *actually* see. The network executives to whom Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld pitched the show were fascinated by the idea but hesitant to deviate from the traditional sitcom format. As Josh Levine describes in his book, *Pretty, Pretty, Pretty Good, Larry David and the Making of Seinfeld and Curb Your Enthusiasm*, "The sitcom form is a genre as old as television itself. Its origins go back even farther, to the pre-television radio shows whose approach to humor was in turn adapted from vaudeville theater (where many of the comedians were Jewish)" (28). Although the concept was original, Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld were obligated to make the show appear more traditional or else lose the opportunity entirely. Broadcast television was not ready for this kind of innovation of style and form; their sitcom had to emulate every previous successful sitcom and appear as an episodic format and not a serial one: "No matter how vicious the sarcasm, how loud the screaming, in the end the characters learn something about life, kiss, and make up" (Levine 28). For the most part, the episodes had to be neatly tied up at the end because this was the format of a sitcom: one could turn on the television and watch one episode, laugh, turn it off and continue about their day. Much like the networks were not willing to allow innovation in form, they were also not inclined to allow too much Jewishness.

In an attempt to make *Seinfeld* appear more conventional, Larry and Jerry, by network executive's orders, changed both the format of the show and its explicit depiction of Jewish

identity. Originally, Larry David wanted the show to look like a documentary-style production, with one camera on set and some improvisations. This concept was much like what his later show *Curb Your Enthusiasm* would look like on HBO. However, the network decided that the show would have the traditional three cameras on set and a formal script (Levine 31). In addition, the show had to reduce the amount of Jewishness present, including limiting the overtly Jewish characters to just one, Jerry Seinfeld. NBC programmer, Brandon Tartikoff, was the main opponent of too many Jewish elements within *Seinfeld*; Zurawik explains, "It almost failed to see the light of day because NBC programming czar Brandon Tartikoff thought it 'too Jewish'" (201). It was Rick Ludwin, head of late-night programming at NBC, who convinced Tartikoff that the show was not too Jewish and would be a worthwhile addition to their schedule (Zurawik 205). It took a non-Jewish executive with a fresh vision for NBC, who did not carry the same hesitations toward Jewishness, to realize that Jewish programming can be suitable for American television. The echoes of history call out as it took an outsider to take this leap:

> Tartikoff's reaction is also important because it shows how, even though the founders had left the scene and the networks were no longer Jewish-owned in 1990, the culture they inherited from the Hollywood film moguls and nurtured for four decades was still maintained by some executives whom they had groomed and who remained in power. A reminder that cultures and policies like the ones founded by Paley, Sarnoff, and Goldenson do not die overnight. (Zurawik 206)

The *Seinfeld* that millions of viewers fell in love with was far different from the original concept. Nonetheless, the creators, in particular Larry David, were not opposed to discreetly returning to the show's original concept at times.

Larry David began to experiment with multiple story plotlines and season long story arcs

that rarely were seen on broadcast sitcoms (Levine 35-36). While *Seinfeld* employed the basic sitcom format (permanent main characters, one main plot and a couple subplots, 22-minute in length episodes, a laugh-track, etc.), the creators of the show subtly tried to move past its simplicity. As Levine describes, "Indeed, [Seinfeld] is where Larry learned how to write a season-long story, a skill he would take with him to all but the first of the *Curb* seasons" (Levine 36). The show had a deeper level of humor than other sitcom predecessors that often advantaged those in-the-know-viewers. However, it still sought to not alienate anyone. *Seinfeld*, for all intents and purposes, was for the broadest group of people imaginable. Although there were subtle attempts to create a broadcast show that was innovative, smart, and highly original, there were limitations to these desires.

Because the network executives forced Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld to make the show appear less Jewish, characters that were originally meant to be Jewish were slightly altered to be Gentiles. Joyce Antler uses the term "crypto-Jews" to refer to these characters, a term which originated from historian Jeffrey Shandler (45). While disguising Jews as Gentiles on television is not a new phenomenon, it is particularly visible in the characters on *Seinfeld*. Both George and Elaine are supposedly Jews in disguise: written as Jews but with subdued signifiers and Gentile last names, they are considered non-Jews (Antler 44). While Elaine often embodies the *shiksa*, a non-Jewish woman, she also appears to have characteristically Jewish attributes. Her tone and speech is that of a stereotypical Jewish woman, partially due to the fact that she is played by a Jewish actress, Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Although Elaine was raised Catholic and celebrates Christmas, there is a blurry line between her New York attributes and stereotypically Jewish ones. Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld toyed with this problematic stereotype by once again equating Jewish and New York, a stereotype repeated since *The Goldbergs*.

As for George Costanza, played by Jason Alexander, his character is indisputably Jewish in disguise. In an interview for the Archive of American Television, Alexander discusses how he had the famous Jewish director Woody Allen in "the back of his mind" as he first began playing George Costanza because of the similarity in attributes and idiosyncrasies ("Jason Alexander Interview Part 2"). Alexander realized after the first few episodes, that he was in fact based on Larry David and his real life events: "there still had to be a Larry on the show and for that reason George Costanza was created. Despite his Mediterranean name (a disguise really), George was imagined as another thoroughly Jewish New Yorker" (Levine 33). George embodies the stereotypical male Jewish character with his humor, his emphatics, his neuroses and dramatization. Furthermore, he is stingy, a historically negative Jewish stereotype. In the episode "The Invitations" (May 16th, 1996) George accidentally kills his fiancé because he chooses the cheapest invitations for his wedding. After licking the toxic adhesive on the envelopes, his fiancé suddenly falls dead. Throughout the entire series Costanza plays a character who often sounds Jewish and embodies the stereotypical Jewish persona. While he may not be ethnically Jewish, he can be described as a "crypto-Jew" because he is modeled after Larry David and possesses these stereotypical attributes. There is a difference here, though, between acting Jewish and being Jewish. In this instance, it is clear that the creators wanted these characters to be New York Jews and wrote them as such, then changed their religious and ethnic background to make the show seem less Jewish and presumably more palatable to executives and viewers.

Despite the presence of "Crypto-Jews," *Seinfeld* remains largely a show about a group of struggling New Yorkers, instead of a show about Jewish identity. Any social statement made by the creators of *Seinfeld* is erased with the lightheartedness of the show. Despite opportunities for

Jerry to explore or confront his Jewishness, his identity as a comedian, New Yorker, and single man overpowers.

No episode illustrates this point more than "The Yada Yada" (April 24th, 1997), one of the most Jewish episodes of the series. The subplot of this episode follows Jerry to his dentist appointment. The dentist, Dr. Whatley (Bryan Cranston), in an attempt to bond with Jerry, remarks on how he has recently converted to Judaism from Catholicism. Within minutes the dentist is telling Jewish jokes, particularly ones that are exclusive to those who identify as Jews because of their demeaning nature. Jerry questions to his friends Dr. Whatley's right to this humor after converting. When Jerry returns to get his cavity filled, Dr. Whatley promptly recites another Jewish joke. Jerry confronts him, "Do you think you should be making these jokes?" The dentist confidently replies, "It's our sense of humor that sustained us as a people for 3,000 years," Jerry corrects, "5,000."

Jerry, with even more affirmation after his most recent encounter, is convinced that Dr. Whatley only converted so he could make jokes. He implies that Dr. Whatley saw the rich arsenal of jokes that could only be uttered from Jewish mouths and went through the arduous process of converting to solely gain rights to them. Dr. Whatley also makes Catholic jokes, as he explains, because he used to be Catholic. Jerry describes this as Dr. Whatley's quest for "total joke immunity." Dr. Whatley, supposedly, must embody multiple identities in order to gain access to "total joke immunity," but Jerry, without explicitly stating this, decides that one cannot embody both of these identities at once.

In order to confront this problem with a person of religious authority, Jerry confronts a priest, who he can only access through confessional. In an attempt to expose Dr. Whatley for holding a stake in multiple identities, ironically, Jerry does the same. He confides to the priest

that he fears Dr. Whatley converted to Judaism just for the jokes. The priest questions Jerry's intentions, asking "and this offends you as a Jewish person?" Jerry replies, "No, it offends me as a comedian." He continues, "And it'll interest you to know that he is also telling Catholic jokes."

This episode alludes to a serious conversation on identity without directly acknowledging it. Although they are joking, Jerry and Dr. Whatley approach an argument about inclusive vs. exclusive humor. If *Seinfeld* could be summed up in one question and answer, it would be in this moment between Jerry and the Priest. Despite Jerry's relentless objection to Dr. Whatley's appropriation of Jewish identity, in the end he does not *really* care about having a cultural conversation. He strives for the laugh, at times in very serious territory, but is careful to not make anything too heavy. Eventually, Dr. Whatley hears that Jerry told a dentist joke to the priest and becomes upset. Dr. Whatley asserts that Jerry is not a dentist and therefore cannot make jokes at the expense of dentists. The episode ends with Kramer calling Jerry an anti-dentite, a play on anti-Semite.

Seinfeld is only overtly Jewish in moments, especially when Jewishness supports the humor. "The Yada Yada" is one of the most Jewish episodes in a show that rarely discusses Jewishness or Judaism at all. While Jerry may embody a Jewish identity, he seldom addresses or questions it. Professor and Author of American Studies, Ethnic Studies and Film, David Gillota wrote in *the Journal of Popular Film and Television* in his article *Negotiating Jewishness: Curb Your Enthusiasm and the Schlemiel Tradition,* "Even *Seinfeld*, the apparent flagship of Jewish television, has an uneasy relationship with Jewishness as such…typically treated as an annoying burden rather than an important aspect of Jerry's identity" (153). Gillota argues that despite Seinfeld being the most overtly Jewish sitcom of the 1990's and 2000's, Jewishness is still not a real and explored realm of Jerry's identity. He goes on to assert, "Without religion *or* ethnicity,

Seinfeld's Jewish features become superficial, limited to Jerry's last name, his home in New York City, and his stereotypically overbearing Jewish family" (153). Like Jewish characters previously seen on television, Jerry is only Jewish through symbols and stereotypical characteristics, and not through any real, substantial meaning of the word. Thus, his Jewishness manifests merely as a prop that aids in enhancing the narrative conflict, similar to *The Goldbergs* and *Bridget Loves Bernie*.

While a show with a Jewish lead character does not necessarily have to do anything with Jewish identity, the writers and creators of *Seinfeld* employ Jewishness when they see fit and forgo it when they do not. Jerry puts more emphasis on his New Yorker, single lifestyle than he does his Jewish identity. Josh Levine explains, "The show [has] a tart, witty, edgy, New York feel. And a vaguely Jewish feel as well, although that would rarely be made obvious" (32). Explicit Jewishness was only apparent when a joke could be made, even though much of Larry David's real life, from which many of the episodes are based, included Jewish influences (Levine 46).

In the episode entitled "The Bris" (October 14th, 1993), Jerry and Elaine are asked to be the godparents of their friend's new baby. As a part of their role, they must find a Mohel to perform their godchild's circumcision. A series of events unfolds as Jerry and Elaine attempt to embody the Jewish godparent, a role for which neither of them is suited. The Mohel that arrives at the circumcision is a Jewish character that could have come from the Steinberg family on *Bridget Loves Bernie*, as he is exaggerated and cartoonish in his Jewish mannerisms and features. During the ceremony, the combination of his shaking hands and Jerry's nervousness holding the child, causes the Mohel to cut Jerry's finger by accident. Much like the episode "The Yada Yada," Jerry's Jewishness is utilized for its humor specifically. While the Mohel scene is

comedic, the writers use stereotypical Jewish attributes to create comedy without reflecting on why it is comical. Similarly, the episode entitled "The Hamptons" (May 12th, 1994) exploits Jewish themes to add comedy to the plot. On a trip to the Hamptons, Jerry's girlfriend, Rachel (Melanie Smith), accidentally sees George naked. When she tells George's girlfriend about the incident, his girlfriend abruptly leaves. As revenge, George hides lobster in Rachel's eggs. Rachel, who is kosher, has made a point of informing the group that she will not eat shellfish. As she begins to eat the eggs, George holds up a lobster bib and says, "You know, you might want to try eating it with one of these." Rachel exclaims, "There's lobster in these eggs?" The laugh track erupts as she runs out of the shot. In the episodes of *Seinfeld* with the most Jewish content, the Jewishness appears only as a comedic element. Never is Jewishness considered as a serious part of the show's plot. Although *Seinfeld* is a situation comedy, and often does not pursue serious themes, it is a smart comedy that does seek to make socio-cultural statements. It would be easy to dismiss *Seinfeld* as a comedy, and therefore incapable of addressing Jewish identity with anything but surface level humor. However, Larry David's later show, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, serves as evidence that a comedic program can address Jewish identity with complexity.

Not only does Jerry Seinfeld's character not explore and question his Jewish identity, but also one cannot forget the fact that only his character was allowed to be Jewish. In an industry that was created and run almost entirely by Jews, one would expect the representations to be less inconspicuous and handled with greater reality. However, it appears that broadcast television remains fastened to the notion that Jewish identity on television does not appeal to the majority. Additionally, when it is allowed to be more visible, situations are conspicuously muddled to preclude any sort of real conversation on the matter.

Humor with a Punch

Larry David's Creative Freedom on HBO

Curb Your Enthusiasm is the lightly masked biographical account of Larry David's life post-*Seinfeld*. Larry David stars as himself joined by a fictional wife, Cheryl (Cheryl Hines), and agent, Jeff Garlin. The show follows Larry, with a one camera, documentary-style production, as he makes countless, painful-to-watch social errors. Larry struggles with his identity as a wealthy Los Angeles Jew who also is severely lacking in social etiquette. Larry means well but, at the same time, speaks his mind without a filter. His character is transparent, especially in his questioning of social norms. The show is the quintessential Jewish television show in this postmodern platform and period. *Curb* thrives on the history of Jewish television shows that lack a level of depth and substantial criticism of society and deconstructs the definition of Jewish identity on television. While writing a comedy, Larry David makes an implied comment in *Curb* about how cautious creators of shows on broadcast television have been, particularly with their handling of Jewish characters. There was an assumed and unquestioned definition of what Jewish identity looked like on television. More specifically, it did not cross any invisible boundaries or dare to assert itself in a manner that might threaten American conformity. It was not until writers for premium channels and digital platforms decided to address Jewish identity that it was finally allowed to be seen, explored, and unwound from decades of stale, uninspired, stereotypical representation.

Larry David handles his Jewish identity on *Curb* by showing every dimension of it. He questions who he is and what about his Jewishness makes him fit and not fit in society. He

challenges Jewish customs and his commitment to the faith. He employs irony and humor to illuminate these drawn out stereotypes of American Jews. In doing so, he makes a statement not only about Jewish identity in America, but also Jewish writers and executives making Jewish television. During season 5, Larry spends his time trying to find a kidney for his sick friend, Richard Lewis, because he does not want to sacrifice his own. In the episode "The Ski Lift" (November 20th, 2005), Larry pretends to be an Orthodox Jew in order to befriend the man who heads the kidney donor list, Ben Heineman. He feigns knowledge of Yiddish by ridiculously spewing words that mimic Yiddish. He invites Ben and his daughter to a ski lodge for the weekend where he plans to bring up Richard Lewis's kidney failure. The whole weekend he pretends to be an Orthodox Jew, albeit without knowledge of kosher customs and rules of unmarried Orthodox women. He makes his manager's wife, Susie, pretend to be his own wife because his wife Cheryl looks too Gentile. The episode ends with Larry and Rachel Heineman stuck on a ski lift after dark, a forbidden interaction among unmarried Orthodox women and men. Larry refuses to jump off the ski lift in order to respect Rachel's religion, so she jumps. The indifference with which Larry handles serious issues such as assuming a false religious identity is not simply flippant and funny, it also initiates a conversation about belief systems, customs, and tradition. While it may appear as though Larry is behaving with immense disrespect, because he treats all matters with the same tactlessness, the situation his character creates also unwraps decades of forbidden and concealed subjects on television.

In another ongoing plot in season 5, Larry hires a private investigator to uncover whether or not he is adopted. Episode 10 of season 5 titled "The End" (December 4th, 2005) explores just how much Larry's Jewish identity plays a role in who he is as a character. In this episode Larry's private investigator calls him into the office to tell him that he is in fact adopted, and his parents

are awaiting him in Arizona. Larry is shocked but then he is thrilled at the prospect. He soon arrives in Bisbee, Arizona at the quaint home of his alleged birth parents.

His birth parents describe the man they gave Larry up to as "fidgeting and nervous" and the woman as "loud." While these are the classic stereotypes of Jewish men and women on television, Larry is making fun of these oversimplified characterizations in this scene. Larry is looking for a signifier of their Jewishness, an affirmation that this is a correct match. Thus, the utilization of these stereotypes is ironic because they could belong to any Jewish parents as typically seen on television. Larry's birth parents tell him that they are from the Midwest and have ancestors from England and Scotland. Suddenly it hits him, but just to be sure he asked them how they spell their last name. Together they spell, "C-O-N-E." The soundtrack erupts in Catholic Oratoriem, the painting of Jesus bounces off the wall, and Larry whispers with utter amazement, "Oh my God, I'm Gentile."

The next scene opens with Larry getting out of the car in a straw hat, a shirt that reads "T.G.I.F.," a fanny pack, khaki shorts, and a big, authentic smile. His parents proceed to introduce him to the local townspeople. Larry even comments that he "may stick around." This is not the typical sarcastic, selfish, argumentative Larry David. No, this man is cheerful, optimistic, and welcoming to strangers. He comes across a man selling the same model Prius he had just sold to his agent, Jeff, for a significantly lower price. This man also claims to be selling the car for the *Kelley Blue Book* value. Larry realizes he has been cheated by his friend and expresses his frustration to his mother who replies, "I know it hurts son but you must practice love and forgiveness. Give him the benefit of the doubt. That's what Jesus would do." Larry backs down, respectfully. A montage of Larry and his father doing stereotypically Midwestern activities ensues. Larry fishes, hunts, rides a horse, repairs a car and a roof, chugs a pint of beer, all with

great success that he would not have encountered as the old Jewish Larry. At dinner, he learns how to say grace and cross himself. He attends church and listens to a sermon on friendship, and suddenly he must go home to give Richard Lewis his kidney. A changed Larry realizes that as a good Catholic man, he must give his kidney if he wants to uphold his friendship.

Larry returns to his wife Cheryl and shows affection never demonstrated by him before. He tells her he loves her and that he wants to have children. He says, "I know why God saved me from drowning a few months ago," he continues, "He wanted me to give Lewis my kidney and I am going to." His newfound appreciation of God and destiny has led him to become a selfless, forgiving person. As if by a flip of a switch, turning off his Jewishness and turning on his Catholicism, Larry is a changed man, and for the better. He does not possess the same lack of awareness of or rather carelessness for the society around him. He is not quick to judge or take the easy way out when it suits him. As Levine describes, "[Larry] becomes liberated from the burden of his Jewishness" (85). This is the most self-reflexive, postmodern moment in a show filled with them, as Larry realizes that the one thing holding him back from being a better person was, all along, his Jewishness.

However, on his way to give his kidney to Richard Lewis, in true *Curb* fashion, his private investigator runs in to tell him the Cones are not his parents. Larry, no longer the good Catholic man he thought he was, panics and tries to escape his commitment to his friend. They take his kidney anyway, and upon waking up Larry is told he is dying. Not only is he on his deathbed, but also he has returned to his old Jewish self. His first comment is to Jeff about how he cheated him when buying his Prius. The Rabbi asks if there is anyone he would like to apologize to for his wrongdoings. Another montage ensues, this time it is of Larry's most

condemnable moments. In these moments he is disrespectful, ill-behaved, racist, thoughtless, insensitive, presumptuous and combative. Yet, Larry replies confidently to the Rabbi, "Nah."

Curb not only questions American Jewishness but also Christianity. In the episode "The Christ Nail" (October 9th, 2005), Larry steals the nail from his father-in-law's necklace to hang his mezuzah before his own father arrives at his house. The father-in-law's nail necklace was a real nail used in the Mel Gibson film *Passion of the Christ* on Jesus's cross. The irony is palpable as Larry uses a nail that killed Christ (in the film) to hang his mezuzah, a Jewish symbol placed on the doorpost to signify a Jewish household.

In the episode "The Bare Midriff" (October 25th, 2009) Larry urinates wildly, leaving a drop on a painting of Jesus hanging above the toilet. His assistant and her mother see the painting and mistake the drops for Jesus's tears. They pray as they believe they have just witnessed a miracle. Both of these episodes portray Larry's flippant attitude toward religion. He does not consider any subject to be too significant or sacred to make a comical, yet candid statement about it. Larry not only touches on, but completely eviscerates, rarely talked about subject matters on television. Larry flirts heavily with questions of identity and identity formation and dives gleefully into controversial issues like conversion, faith, life after death, Orthodox Judaism and sexuality, anti-Semitism, the Israeli Palestinian conflict, racism, sexism, and racial/religious tension.

Without close examination, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* may appear to be one of the most offensive television shows. However, it is only through Larry David's abrupt, outrageous humor that these ironic explorations can be achieved. *Curb* tears apart every religion, identity, and ethnicity in order to reconstruct them within this postmodern narrative. The writers of *Curb* assume identities for the purpose of using humor to reveal their dimensions. The show gives an

understanding of Jewish identity that is achieved by looking at it through the lens of the stereotypical and assumed Jewish identity on television and then by deconstructing it in exchange after exchange

Curb Your Enthusiasm serves to reveal precisely what *Seinfeld* did not. That is, if Larry David had not ventured on to make *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, viewers would not know what *Seinfeld* had neglected in terms of how television might handle Jewishness. The difference truly lies in the platform on which these two shows aired. While the idea behind *Seinfeld* originally was to follow a few Jewish New Yorkers with a documentary style production and improvisational elements, the actual product fell within the network "rules" for Jewish identity on television (Levine 31). *Seinfeld* raised issues of identity but never offered any commentary about them. In contrast, Larry David's *Curb*, materialized as a concept that mirrored the original idea behind *Seinfeld*. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*'s primary objective was to make weighty statements about society, specifically the modern Jew's place within it, using irony and humor. While Larry David played a major role in the writing of both shows, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* emerged with nowhere near the same lightness upon which *Seinfeld* thrives. *Curb,* on the other hand, confronts Jewish identity in America unaccompanied by the hesitation seen during the previous 50 years of broadcast television.

Chapter Four:

Transparent: Making the Other Apparent

Sixty-five years since *The Goldbergs* first aired on CBS, Amazon Studio's *Transparent*, an immeasurably different kind of Jewish program, confirms the progress made for the representation of Jewish identity on television. While the 1990s and 2000s gave way to an exponential increase in the number of Jewish characters on television in shows like *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *Will and Grace* to name a few, it was not until shows on HBO and digital platforms like Amazon and Netflix introduced Jewish characters that a new incarnation of Jews on television appeared. While some of them were imagined with the same archaic stereotypes seen as early as *The Goldbergs* on the small screen, there has also surfaced a fresh vision and dimension of what a Jewish identity signified. In the best of cases, Jewishness is no longer solely a short hand form of character development meant only to amplify the main point of the series or to access self-deprecating humor. Nor is it used as just a signifier of an unwanted sense of Otherness combined with an incessant desire to conform to American normality. Without the constraints of broadcast television, established in order to reach the widest audience, Jewishness has become more than a tool utilized by writers and creators. Instead, it is a fundamental piece of identity that is allowed to be questioned, challenged, and changed. Premium channels and digital platforms have given way to a postmodern idea of Jewish identity on television, both due to changing cultural prejudice and the room for creative innovation that broadcast televisions lacks. In this space Jewish and non-Jewish creators of Jewish shows are no longer controlled by a set of rules put in place by Jewish network executives who feared their own visibility in society and the questioning of their legitimacy. The most significant piece of evidence to gauge the ways in which Jewish identity has been concealed and not handled with full dimensionality on broadcast

television is to contrast that with a current, digital platform program; a show where Jewishness is the foundation and the language with which any taboo topic can be examined.

On the surface, *Transparent* is a story about a transgender person, Maura (Jeffrey Tambor), who has lived against her own feelings as a man for her 70 years. She has an ex-wife, Shelly (Judith Light), and three children, Sarah (Amy Landecker), Josh (Jay Duplass), and Ali (Gaby Hoffman). They are an upper-middle-class, Jewish family from Los Angeles with a lot of transforming to do. Each character possesses an out-sized ego and an unrelenting selfishness that destroys almost every romantic relationship. Although Maura is the one in transition, every member of the family feels the need to perform a transition of their own. *Transparent* leaves no stone unturned as the creator, Jill Soloway, tackles identity in every realm. From the questioning of sexuality to gender identity and religious identity, the Pfefferman family is as complicated as any ever depicted on television. The show travels from Jewish ceremony to sexual encounter to relationship conflict and back. Flashbacks are also common from both the Pfefferman children's youth and, beginning in season 2, Jews in 1930's Berlin. Unlike the typical sitcom on broadcast television, the ending of each episode of *Transparent*, while technically a dramedy, does not offer a solution. Instead, *Transparent* opens a door, raises a question, and makes one reflect. The characters' Jewishness comprises the foundation for these dense and complicated social questions to be raised without explicit answer. Their Jewishness parallels these complex personal obstacles, most of the time being the only constant in the Pfeffermans' lives, but at times not even playing that role.

Jill Soloway not only dives into the complicated world of gender, religious, and identity questioning, but also considers how Jewish history lends itself fluidly to these topics. The history of the Jewish people as well as Jewish television was not forgotten when Soloway created a

show about a family in transition. Soloway herself is Jewish and her father came out as transgender in 2011. She extracts her own experience as a Jewish woman with a transgender father to create the narrative. In addition, as noted in *The New York Times Magazine* article titled *Can Jill Soloway Do Justice to the Trans Movement* by Taffy Brodesser-Akner, Soloway consults with transgender people for research. She even created a program, which she refers to as "transformative action," placing a great emphasis on hiring transgender people to work on the show. Soloway, unapologetic in her approach, sought to create a series that looked and felt real. By choosing Amazon Studios, she was able to be daring in exploring her characters' identity formation and in her narrative content. Josh Lambert, a writer for the Jewish publication *Tablet Magazine*, interviewed Soloway, who affirmed that she would not follow the network rules for Jewish television creators:

> The old adage is 'Write Jewish, cast British.' You're supposed to write the Jewish anxieties, but then take out any references to Tu B'Shevat and make sure that the actors look WASP-y. So I think I'm gonna subvert that and write Jewish, cast Jewish, act Jewish, fall apart Jewish, make mistakes Jewish, cry Jewish

Soloway committed to making the show as Jewish as she saw fit, leaving behind the legacy of disguising Jewishness on television all together. This was the only way, she saw, to create a show that dealt with the vulnerability of Otherness candidly. Starting with openness surrounding Jewishness and building from that, Soloway created a product that television has never seen before.

The pilot of *Transparent* features a very different dinner scene than the two featured in the pilot episode of *Bridget Loves Bernie*. The Pfefferman kids, who are actually grown adults, sit down with their father, who still identifies as Mort at this point in the series. He claims he has

big news to tell them, but cannot make the announcement among their incessant dialogue. Before the meal, the kids discuss what the news is going to be, guessing an engagement or cancer. They sit around the table eating barbeque with their hands, getting the sauce on their faces and shirts. Josh claims, "You guys never did teach us how to eat, you realize that, right?" Mort explains, "Because we come from shtetl people. Your grandma Rose actually ate lettuce with her bare hands." They continue to argue about the messiness of the barbecue sauce. Mort stops them, still attempting to tell them the news. They continue to ask if he has cancer and interrupt with stories of people they know who have cancer. He cannot handle their selfishness, "You kids want me to have cancer?" He tells them he is selling the house, instead of what he originally intended to say. The kids react poorly to this news and argue until the night is over. The scene cuts to Mort giving Ali a check, a seemingly common activity between the two. Once they leave, Mort calls someone on the phone and claims, "I couldn't do it." This episode foreshadows just how complicated each character's relationship with love is. Not one member is immune from the egotistical blood that runs through their veins.

Their Jewishness is never downplayed, yet it's never at the forefront of the conversation. Jonathan Freedman, Professor of English, American, and Jewish Studies at the University of Michigan, published *"Transparent": A Guide for the Perplexed* in Los Angeles Review of Books. He argues that the Pfefferman's Jewishness allows for a medium in which these complicated issues of identity can be expressed: "the show itself, which attempts in its engagement with Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness to find a language to think about weighty issues that rarely make their way onto the screen, large, medium, or small." It is because they are Jewish, and identify as such, that these other expressions and challenging of identity can make their way onto the screen. As Jewishness is already the Other, the foundation for the expression

of Otherness has been established. Soloway specifically chose the Pfeffermans to be Jewish because it represents just one of the many ill-represented identities on television. For somewhat different reasons, Jewishness, transgender identity, and non-heterosexuality have not been addressed with full dimensionality on broadcast television. While some exploration of these topics has been attempted, all three are dealt with fearlessly in *Transparent*.

Although the majority of viewers do not identify as trans, Soloway was not concerned with creating a show with which everyone could directly identify. Though *Transparent* reveals to most of the audience a struggle different than their own, Soloway makes it relatable on an authentic human level. *Transparent* is incredibly smart and a new kind of television that looks nothing like its broadcast counterparts. It is not a show to watch to forget about life's hardships; it is one to watch to understand that we are all linked by this desire to belong and connect on a meaningful level. It proves an inspirational model of freedom and openness of communication for all of us. It is a complex text that is to be enjoyed but not without interpretation and contemplation.

Each season employs a different Jewish tradition that frames that narrative for everything that follows. In season one, the most important Jewish ceremony, that actually never happens, is Ali's Bat Mitzvah (Freedman, "'Transparent': A Guide for the Perplexed"). Ali, the youngest of the Pfefferman children, begins to question why she was never forced to have a Bat Mitzvah, a Jewish woman's right of passage. In a flashback, in episode 7 of season 1 titled "The Symbolic Exemplar," Ali argues with her father Mort about following through with her Bat Mitzvah (September 26, 2014). She claims she hates her dress and questions her belief in God. She asks her father, "Do you actually believe in God?" He says, "That has nothing to do with your Bat Mitzvah…I sometimes have conflict…sometimes I wonder if there is…you know with the pain

and the suffering, I struggle with it." She argues, "So, if there's no God. I mean, like honestly, everything we do….no one sees it?" He looks at her without explanation or defense.

Mort and his wife, Shelly, fight over the cancellation of Ali's Bat Mitzvah. Shelly is furious because it is too late to cancel and they will lose all their money. She exclaims, "I want you to be a man and save the goddamn day," as Mort stares, once again defenseless, into the distance, these words clearly sting. Knowing that there is a cross-dressing camp the same weekend, Mort not only lets Ali cancel her Bat Mitzvah, he arguably encourages her to. At an immensely important moment in Ali's life, one which symbolizes her growth from a young girl into a mature woman in the Jewish community, she is abandoned. Not only does her father leave her to follow his own dreams of becoming a woman, but all the other members of her family desert her. They give up to indulge in their own self-absorbed desires. For Mort, this meant going to the cross-dressing retreat, a coveted escape from his family and his male body. For Shelly, this meant disappearing with her friend and drinking, abandoning her children as well. For Sarah, this meant chasing her socially conscious friends to a rally for the weekend. And, finally, for Josh, this meant running off with an older woman, who was also his nanny. At a defining moment for Ali, one that establishes a foundation for her future not only as a Jew and a woman, she is left alone to suffer the defeat of her impulsive decision. The fact that this decision was reinforced by her family's unanimous and instantaneous redirection helped guarantee for Ali a lifetime of instability, beginning with her identity as a Jewish woman. Ali, later in the series, is inspired by these early events to explore her Jewish ancestry and what it means to be the Other while at the same time being Jewish.

In season two, the Jewish ritual at the forefront of the narrative is Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. As Jonathan Freedman theorizes, the characters must atone for their

wrongdoing from Season 1. This occurs through a greater understanding of their history as Jill Soloway explores the Jewish history of acceptance of and research in the field of transgender and sexuality studies dating back to World War II. While every member of the Pfefferman clan questions their identity, be it their sexuality or gender identity, Jewish identity or role in a relationship, Ali is the most unsteady of the kids. In Season 2, Ali decides she wants to go to grad school for gender studies. As a part of her research she begins to look into the history of Jews and sexuality studies, which eventually develops into a flashback and narrative plot of its own. These flashbacks form an understanding from Ali's perspective of her ancestors' transgender history and their involvement in Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. Peter Drucker, writing in the journal *New Politics*, discusses the founder for the Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin, "In the mostly forgotten history of early twentieth-century movements for sexual freedom, Magnus Hirschfeld's name is one of the most familiar-and one of the most contested" (124). Magnus Hirschfeld and his institute are depicted throughout Season 2 as a space for sexual freedom in an increasingly fascist Berlin. These flashbacks depict the Pfefferman family's Grandmother, Rose, and her trans sister, Tante Gittel, at Hirschfeld's Institute. As Hitler rose to power and the Weimer period came to an end, Hirschfeld's research was no longer accepted, and he had to flee Berlin, alongside the Jews.

Television critic for *The Washington Post* Hank Stuever explains the importance of these flashbacks, "[A]ttentive viewers of the show now understand 'Transparent' as a broader, epic story about the American Jewish experience—particularly as it is lived by a family with an on-again, off-again dependence on faith" ("Better-than-ever 'Transparent' transitions into a study of American Jewish-ness"). The connection between Judaism and acceptance, as it relates to sexuality and identity, is not limited to the Pfefferman family. Even with their wavering

commitment to their faith they embrace their history and ancestry as Eastern European Jews. Moreover, their identity as Jews exploring their sexuality in the 21st century is substantiated by a history of Jewish involvement in sexuality studies from before World War II. A history lost among the ruins of Nazi rule is resurrected in *Transparent* as a remarkable movement led by Jews. Thus, *Transparent* emerges as more than just a story about a Jewish family with a transgender father. It tells a forgotten history only made possible by Jewish leaders.

No episode lays the relationship between the Pfefferman's lives and the flashbacks to 1930s Berlin more definitively than season 2, episode 9, "Man on the Land" (December 11, 2015). In this episode, Ali, Sarah, and Maura attend an all-women's festival in Idyllwild. The festival was designed to be a safe space for women where they can explore their sexuality without fear of male predation. Maura soon discovers, though, that she, as a trans woman, is not welcome at the festival. This realization saddens and torments her as she was finally feeling like she belonged. She fears she will be ostracized for not being born a woman even though she fully identifies as one. While waiting in line to use the restroom, the women around Maura begin to chant, "Man on the land! Man on the land!" Startled, Maura takes off to find Ali and Sarah.

Maura finds Ali at a bonfire with some of the festival veterans. An argument begins about the festival's women-born-women policy, making Maura feel more excluded than ever. While she identifies as a woman, Maura is attacked by the founders of the festival. They argue that they want a safe space where they can feel comfortable, and not one where they have to make others, outsiders, feel comfortable. They speak of the privileged male space that Maura has inhabited the majority of her life and how, despite identifying as a woman now, she will never fully understand growing up inferior. Ali attempts to defend her father but arrives at the conclusion that Maura has lived a life of privilege that she, herself, is failing to recognize in spite of her

current suffering. Maura flees the bonfire surrounded by women-born-women, in search of a safe space.

Meanwhile, unaware of her father's agony, Sarah explores her newfound draw to sadomasochism. Concurrently, Ali leaves the bonfire in search of her father. In a hallucination, she discovers she is wearing shoes with bells on them, historically forced upon Jewish women in an attempt to control them (Saraiya, "This is what the female gaze looks like: 'Transparent' returns for a thrilling second season"). Ali sees her great-grandmother, Yetta, walk past her in a hurry. The scene cuts to the ancestors in Berlin in the 1930s at the Institute for Sexual Science. Young Nazi men storm through the doors, disrupting the peace, tormenting the visitors, and finally burning all of their books. In one fell swoop, they destroy everything that Magnus Hirschfeld has created. The images of the Nazis burning these books is juxtaposed with Maura tearing down her tent in frustration. Soloway cuts back and forth between the scene in Berlin and the Pfefferman women at the camp, until Ali walks up to the fire in Berlin and for the first time the two narratives become one. She watches as the books burn and the members of the institute fight against the Nazi soldiers for their freedom. She watches alongside her grandmother, Rose, as Gittel struggles in the Nazi's arms. More is lost in this scene than the burned books of the institute. An era of sexual freedom and unprecedented research is destroyed, and human life is threatened. Maura is shown walking away from the camp as her uncle is carried away by Nazis in 1933 Berlin.

While Maura and Gittel live in vastly different times, they are both expelled from safe spaces and denied freedom of their identity. They wish to belong but are ostracized for being the Other. Because they were both born biologically male and not the gender with which they identify, they are expelled from belonging to the normative, "in-group." Both Maura and Gittel

are left by their families; while Gittel is left to the Nazis and Maura to the streets outside Idyllwild, they both feel rejected because of the gender by which they identify.

In these juxtaposed scenes, one song melds the two together, Alice Boman's "Waiting." Her song is slow and dramatic, but gains in tempo as the scene's conflict erupts. The lyrics are simple; the question, "Are you coming back?" and the response, "I'm waiting," repeat throughout the song. Gittel and Maura feel isolated in this their mirrored scenes. They have no one to turn to, not even their family members, who put their own freedom and comfort above Gittel and Maura, who are just waiting to feel that they belong. Gittel wants her family, especially her mother Yetta, to understand that identifying as a male again to flee Germany lets the Nazis win, thus, undermining all of the progress made at the institute. Maura, similarly, wants her family to understand the suffering she endured while waiting 70 years to transition, but instead they abandon her at this all women's festival to explore their own sexuality.

In the next episode, "Grey Green Brown & Copper" (December 11, 2015), the ancestors are seen crossing the ocean, escaping Germany without Gittel. Nonetheless, her legacy lives on in not just Maura but the entire Pfefferman clan. Her desire to be who she is, despite the severe consequences is exactly what the Pfefferman's are trying to attain albeit in selfish, misguided ways. Underlying in this narrative arc is the Jewishess that unites them all. The displacement, prosecution, and prejudice that Jews have faced for centuries mirrors that of the trans community. Maura and Gittel share more than being transgender, they are both Jews who carry this history with them at all times. They know suffering, in more ways than one.

Season three opens with the words "thoughts on Passover…" spoken by Rabbi Raquel as she prepares for her Passover speech at the temple (September 23, 2016). She tells the story of hope for freedom from a slave past, the story of escaping persecution and imprisonment. This

story applies to Jews throughout history, not just those who escaped Egypt, but Jews running from persecution for their entire existence. As the first episode of the season, following the story of Gittel's death in Nazi Germany and Maura's continued suffering as a trans woman, this story is incredibly emblematic of the Pfefferman family's experience. They are constantly trying to escape themselves in search of a new identity, or sexuality, that will give them the freedom they so desire. However, their pursuits rarely earn them freedom or safety. They are habitually alone and suffering; despite being surrounding by family. The last line of the first episode of Season 3, also read by Rabbi Raquel, says, "What if the miracle is you? What if you have to be your own messiah?" Her words echo in the distance, as if a solution is finally being offered to the Pfefferman problem.

The escape metaphor continues in Season 3, Episode 2 during Ali's lecture to her class about the connection between Jews and sexuality studies (September 23, 2016). She asserts, "Berlin, between the two world wars, was a much freer place than America is today." She continues, "How many of you have had the ominous feeling that your very essence is taboo to those around you? Maybe, you felt the need to escape. So the Jewish people have this escape legacy, but you don't have to be Jewish to feel like you're running from something." The link between Jewishness and the Other is asserted more definitively here than in any other moment of the series. Ali joins the history of Jewish people to a need to escape and then to feeling taboo in society. She is directly addressing the flashbacks of the previous season and solidifying the argument for why it is essential that the Pfefferman characters be Jewish. Jonathan Freedman asserts the connection between Jews and escapism in his article about Jewish themes in *Transparent*:

> As a wandering people, Jews have of course had to change as they moved from country to country, ghetto to citizenship, religious to assimilated, ghetto Jew to *sabra*, *frum* to modern, which raises and practically identifies the Jew with the perpetual questioning of identity that is a hallmark of modernity (*'Transparent': A Guide for the Perplexed*)

Without this core piece of their identity the show would not possess the historical roots that make it so commanding. Their Jewishness is not just the foundation of their lives as sexually curious and identity seeking individuals, but the tie to a forgotten history. Their Jewishness allows this story to develop to its full capacity, without hesitation. Soloway created a text that is just as entertaining as it is informative and mind-opening. *Transparent* is the first Jewish show that embraces its Otherness as a narrative device with which to develop and explore topics more taboo than Jewishness on the small screen.

Conclusion

Final Thought

When Getrude Berg set out to bring her popular radio broadcast to the small screen, as the first show to star a Jewish family, her intention was to charm the American audience. As a daughter of Eastern European immigrants, she wrote from her own experience as a Jew in New York City. She sought to please the widest viewership imaginable with her agreeable narrative of a Jewish, immigrant family, but also a distinctively American one. As a result, she rose into the role as TV's mother. Respected by viewers across the country, Berg proved that Otherness, in this case Jewishness, can be accepted on the small screen. However, network executives resistances the representation of the Other on television, particularly their own ethnicity and religion: Judaism. They feared alienating the white, Christian audience that constituted the majority. They also feared the questioning of their legitimacy as leaders of this new industry. Thus, the Jewish network executives and television creators aimed to create programs free of anything remotely controversial and Jewish.

David Zurawik in his book *The Jews of Prime Time* describes this phenomenon as "surplus visibility" or "the feeling among minority members and others that whatever members of that group say or do, is too much, and moreover, they are being too conspicuous about it" (6). Jewish executives maintained the notion that they must prohibit images and narratives of their own religion and traditions on television. Although there was an apparent Anti-Semitism in America at the time *The Goldbergs* aired, it was also a deeply internalized feeling that the Jewish creators of television must limit television's Jewishness. Despite theories that more minority representation within a medium of entertainment will champion greater representation of that

minority, the amount of Jewish contributors in the television industry did not produce more Jewish characters (Zurawik 6). Instead, it fostered decades of minimal and lackluster representations of Jewishness on the small screen.

Beginning with *the Goldbergs* and lasting, arguably, until present day on broadcast television a set of rules established by the Jewish founding executives promoted the idea that Jewish content, especially with complexity, could not be successful on television. Validated by both failed future attempts at programs cast heavily with Jewish characters, as in *Bridget Loves Bernie*, as well as the continued resistance by Jewish television creators, as in the conception of *Seinfeld*, Jewishness was for the most part only depicted as a narrative tool or a comical stereotype. As the first show to star a Jewish character since the cancellation of *the Goldbergs*, *Bridget Loves Bernie* was only the second attempt at portraying a Jewish family on television. Instead of taking the opportunity to depict a Lower East Side Jewish family with authenticity, the creators of the show fell back on tired stereotypes and predictable signifiers. Not only was the cartoonish characterization problematic, but Jewishness as the Other was utilized as the primary source of comedic and narrative conflict. Bernie Steinberg and his Lower East Side family served as the Other to White, wealthy Bridget Fitzgerald. Nonetheless, it was not the solely representation of the Steinbergs that drew negative attention and protest from American viewers, but the depiction of intermarriage as well. Network executives understood this backlash, however, as evidence against writing leading Jewish characters on television. Despite the prevalence and power of Jewish television executives, creators, and writers, Jewishness continued to lack in representation and complexity into the 1970s and 1980s.

Even by the time the Jewish gatekeepers of the top three networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS, relinquished control to non-Jewish executives in the 1990s, the legacy of their content

restrictions remained. As exemplified by the restriction of the number of Jewish characters and the amount of Jewish content on Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld's pilot of *Seinfeld*, Jewishness continued to be monitored and toned down on television. Though providing opportunities for the show's writers to confront and question stereotypical Jewish characterizations, *Seinfeld* remains a comedic show about New Yorkers, and above all a show about nothing.

Both the deficiencies in the image of Jews projected nationally until the 1990s and the continued use of stereotyped and unoriginal characters presents a problem for the national identity of Jewish people. Moreover, what is most peculiar about the representation of Jews, as opposed to other minorities on television, is that those images were created, for the most part, by Jews themselves. One cannot place blame, though, for the lack of Jewish images *because* of the internalized oppression faced by the Jews who started the industry. One can study these images and this history from *The Goldbergs* to *Seinfeld* as a living proof of the real discrimination and prejudice felt by Jews in the United States; an oppression so strong that stories of the Jewish experience rarely graced the small screen. The "empty culture" of Jewish characters portrayed to the American public is widely indicative of their own fears of acceptance (Antler 42). Not until new distribution platforms emerged, was Jewishness finally handled with a complexity and a multi-dimensionality experienced in real life. These platforms, consisting of premium channels and digital streaming services, were not bound by the same restrictions of broadcast television, which offered a new opportunity for originality. Thus, not only was Jewishness presented without the same restrictions but creativity flourished and confines were finally broken.

HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm* offered a new lens with which to view Jewishness and religion in general with its premiere in 2000. While Larry David eviscerated social etiquette surrounding religion and culture through his inappropriate humor, he also created a space for

open discourse. *Curb*, in its own, twisted way, turned a muddled history of Jewish characters on television into a comedy about a Jewish television creator. By commenting on stereotype and the use of Jewishness as a tool, Larry David developed a postmodern Jewish television show. With a knowledge of the history of Jewish representation on broadcast television in addition to actually being a Jewish television creator, Larry David turns *Curb* into a commentary on the representation of Jewish identity. As a reaction to the Jewish content restrictions for his broadcast show *Seinfeld*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* sought to eradicate such restricting network rules.

Three Years after the last episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm, Transparent* premiered on Amazon Video. Fundamentally a narrative about a Trans woman, the concept of *Transparent* did not appear to be a transformative Jewish television show. However, Jill Soloway, the creator of the show, intentionally and purposefully made the Pfefferman family Jewish. Their Jewishness serves as the foundation of the family's life teeming with unstable relationships and questions of sexuality and gender. As more than just a signifier of their religion, the Pfefferman's Jewishness connects them to a rich, forgotten history of the Jewish connection to sexuality studies during the Weimer Period in Berlin. *Transparent* is not the only Jewish television show available on non-broadcast platforms, but it is a pivotal program for Jewish and Other representation and an indication of the direction in which television is heading.

Demonstrated by merely the introductory sequence, *Transparent* is clearly a show that serves as more than entertainment; it is a social commentary and a smart, thorough historical statement. Unlike any other show in this study, but much like many new, innovative non-broadcast counterparts, the title sequence of *Transparent* matters. The sequence starts with a montage of wedding and Bar Mitzvah footage, supposedly from the Pfeffermans' past, and

midway through cuts to images of a drag show. Then, it switches back to the bar mitzvah videos and ends time-stamped "Jan. 1 1994," a date later revealed as the beginning of Maura's transition. The drag show footage is from the documentary *the Queen*, a 1968 expose on the New York Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant (Stephen Vider, *Why is an Obscure 1968 Documentary in the Opening Credits of Transparent?*). The montage of clips appears as an eerie, dreamlike sequence, fluttering from images of families dancing to a blurry sparkling dress to children lighting candles. These seemingly unrelated moments are strung together flawlessly. Soloway, always subtle but intentional, chose these seemingly unrelated moments as a summation of the show's themes. The Pfeffermans, despite their unpredictability, have strong ties to tradition. Their weddings and Bar/Bat Mitzvahs are rooted in Jewish tradition. Moreover, the act of becoming a man or a woman at ones Bar/Bat Mitzvah becomes a significant theme in the show. Thus, a title sequence depicting the moment of becoming a man juxtaposed with the images of a famous drag show, featuring men dressed in traditionally female clothing, highlights Soloway's ability to question tradition while maintaining a foundation within it. She recognizes the Pfefferman's place in this normative society, while also pushing aggressively against it. By rooting her story in a conventional setting she is able to uncoil the typically taboo world of the Other. Soloway makes a statement from the beginning to the end of each episode, not even the title sequence evades her clever intentionality.

Soloway's innovative conception of Jewishness and Otherness was only made possible through an unconventional platform. Similar postmodern, non-broadcast shows like *Girls*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Master of None*, *Broad City* and *Atlanta* follow suit as programs that reflect the dichotomy between traditional television and the new age of television. These shows do not follow the "rules" established by the founding fathers of television. Instead, they

reimagine the medium and revolutionize its content. These shows are often critical analyses, social commentaries, and pieces of art. Television has completely changed on the digital platform, which is made obvious by examining the history of Jewish images throughout time. While the content on digital platforms and premium channels is constantly changing, what is evident is a revolution in innovation; a new medium has emerged in which to project narrative storytelling and possibly, optimistically speaking, aid as a platform for social change.

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