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Excessive, Spoiled, Forgotten or Erased: Addressing Stereotypical and One-Dimensional Representations of Jewish Women Characters in American Popular Culture

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Abstract

Jewish women are more prominent in American pop-culture than many realize, the list including such illustrious and well-loved characters as Beverly Goldberg in *The Goldbergs*, Willow Rosenberg in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and Paris Geller in *Gilmore Girls*. These ladies, among many others, are such ingrained and familiar presences in the American televisual landscape that they become the standard for what most people think of as the "Jewish woman." Unfortunately, their characterizations and character development owe more to stereotypical representations historically perpetuated by anti-semitism rather than drawing on the available historical and contemporary accounts and descriptions of Jewish women. Even with such problematic representations, some argue that for a minority to have any exposure at all is "good exposure"; after all, if the minority is "visible" then it is impossible for them to be ignored and erased. However, these stereotypical representations of Jewish women characters are often one-dimensional and injurious. Though prominent, strong, and proud Jewish women characters have existed and do exist within the realm of American popular culture, a female character's Judaism more often than not continues to be regulated to one of two scenarios: either her Judaism is obvious and largely contributes to the conception of said character, and is consequently hyperbolized for comedic effect; or, if her Judaism is not at the forefront of her character, it falls by the wayside, and said character is villainized and victimized. Several harmful archetypes emerged from this process, and whether a character embodies the overbearing Jewish Mother, the spoiled Jewish American Princess, the brainy Jewish adolescent, or the passing non-Jew, what she fails to embody is the Jewish women who exist in our everyday lives, thereby facilitating the dichotomic narrative forcing Jewish women into either comedy or demonization.

1. Introduction

The images and messages within television shows have the power to influence perceptions, perpetuate stereotypes, caricature widespread historical conceptions, and hyperbolize the adjacent misconceptions. According to the directors of the Jewish Televimages Resource Center in New York, Jonathan and Judith Pearl, in their book *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters*, television has gained "prominence and stature as a resource for the study of popular culture and as a primary historical source," reflecting patterns and themes present in societal structures and underlying assumptions about how the majority constructs images of minorities.[1] In such constructions of minority characters, those with the freedom to create rely heavily on agreed upon stereotypes. How these stereotypes are depicted, however, are purposeful, and it is worth recognizing how these characters perpetuate one-dimensional and superficial ideas about a specific minority group: Jewish women. While some Jewish women characters "have been Jewish in name or mannerism only—as opposed to any explicit identification and Judaic manifestation; [the

Pearls note that] others have indeed fallen into stereotypes."[2] These characters—both explicitly and implicitly Jewish––dwell in all genres of television shows, ranging from comic series to comedy sitcoms to dramas to musicals. *Though prominent, strong, and proud Jewish women characters have existed and do exist within the realm of American popular culture, a female character's Judaism more often than not continues to be regulated to one of two scenarios: either her Judaism is obvious and largely contributes to the conception of said character, and is consequently hyperbolized for comedic effect; or, if her Judaism is not at the forefront of her character, it falls by the wayside, and said character is villainized and victimized.*

Several sources I referenced which regard the representation of Jewish characters in television and popular culture also confront issues of visibility and autonomy. Nathan Abrams' *Hidden in Plain Sight*, Joyce Antler's *Talking Back*, and Jonathan and Judith Pearl's *The Chosen Image* tackle how representations of Jewish characters, specifically Jewish women, have been shaped and dominated by the images presented in television shows. As noted in their titles, these books not only delve into the historical conceptions of stereotypes, how they have been adapted and amended to fit the screen for many genres and settings, and the perpetuation of these images over time; they address the problematic and controversial one-dimensionality of such characters and the need to call for more nuanced representation and characterization of Jewish women. These Jewish women characters in American popular culture are either based on the image chosen by others or they are "hidden in plain sight"; these Jewish women must talk back, dispel the stereotypical images that are often chosen for them, and demand to be seen and heard.

In order to address this topic and analyze the representation of Jewish women characters in American television, one should be acquainted with the spectrum of typical and prevalent stereotypes about Jewish people as perpetuated within the American imagination. Jewish historian Joyce Antler found that images of Jewish women often come not from historical accounts, but from "compelling images that circulate in the mass media, in narrative and stories, and in other arenas of popular culture" in her novel, *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture*.[3] From fiction to creative nonfiction to television shows to feature-length motion pictures, literature and film studies scholar Terry Barr observes that the characterization of Jewish women has been largely based on the "cultural stereotype of the possessive and demanding Jewish woman," in "Stars, Light, and Finding the Way Home: Jewish Characters in Contemporary Film and Television."[4] From the Yiddishe Mama to the Jewish Mother to the Jewish American Princess (JAP), to the New York Jew to the Florida Jew, to the thriving but self-centered Jewish woman in her late twenties or early thirties to the elderly Jewish woman who is irritated and likes to complain, American popular culture has captured and perpetuated it all. Jewish women are often characterized as spoiled, selfish, and manipulative; controlling, overbearing, and nitpicky; unaware of social boundaries, able to get what they want, and no thing is too small to voice their opinion about. These women are loud, obnoxious, obsessive, nosey, and neurotic. On the other end of the spectrum, these younger Jewish women can also be quiet, studious, sheltered by those stereotypical Jewish Mothers, top-of-their-class, nerdy and awkward, nevertheless neurotic and anxious. It is important to note, however, that there is a distinction between being religiously Jewish and culturally Jewish; the Jewish women characters I will be looking at are largely culturally Jewish.[5] Though folklorist Alan Dundes argues that these images initially "entered the mainstream of American culture . . . through folklore and jokelore" in "The J.A.P. and the J.A.M. in American Folklore," the pervasiveness of television shows and the inclusion of such stereotypes for comedic effect have solidified the acceptance of one-dimensional, explicit and implicit anti-semitic representations of Jewish women.[6] With that being said, a transdisciplinary approach will be most useful in analyzing popular stereotypical depictions of Jewish women in American popular culture: critical theory converged with cultural and religious studies, as informed by historical contextualization.

2. The Jewish Mother

The maximization of these stereotypes can be seen in the conceptions of the Jewish Mother and the JAP in American popular culture. This Jewish Mother, however, is not the lovingly depicted, darling, "sentimental Yiddishe mama" that Antler describes in *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother*, keeping the faith of Judaism alive or demonstrating acceptable behavior for her children.[7] The Jewish Mother of American popular culture is most often the nagging, overly obsessive, sheltering, and controlling mother who tries too hard to keep her family together, which directly results in frayed and distant relationships with her children. According to literature scholar Martha Ravits' article "The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture," "[t]hrough humor and ridicule, the stereotype acts to silence ethnic women by warning against their zealous energy and hidden agendas."[8] Some television shows demonstrate this warning by hyperbolizing and giving volume to the ethnic voice of Jewish Mothers. Within the first few minutes of the pilot episode of the comedy-drama *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, the

audience is introduced to the nagging, ethnic voice of the Jewish Mother. The audience is not made aware of her name; the show begins with sixteen-year-old Rebecca Bunch getting back into her mother's car after a summer away at camp, greeted with, "Damn it, Rebecca, is that a hickey on your neck? Okay, look, keep in mind, anything happens, we go right to the abortionist. Nothing, *nothing*, is going to ruin your future and your career, you hear me, Rebecca? Are you listening to me? Your future is all that matters."[9] The scene transitions to now twenty six-year-old Rebecca, still hearing the drone of her Jewish Mother's ethnic accent over the phone say, "You want that promotion, don't you? It's very important. It's what we've been working so hard for. I've said that a million times. Eh, I guess you don't care what I think."[10] The audience is given only a voice, not a face, to accentuate the stereotypical nature of the Jewish Mother Ravits describes as excessive and overbearing, "[w]hether [she] is represented as protecting her children or demanding their loyalty, she is seen as exceeding prescribed boundaries."[11]

This voice is also loudly heard in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. Howard's mother, Mrs. Wolowitz, is known exclusively for her ethnic voice; the actress who played Mrs. Wolowitz is never seen by the audience, but she is recognized by her demanding yells, her overly mollycoddling comments directed at her son in his late twenties, her loud complaints and unwanted opinions. She still treated Howard like a child, for example, scolding him and threatening "if you don't settle down right now, I'm not gonna let you have any more sleepovers"[12]; diminishing her son's maturity and professional accomplishments by chaffing "excuse me, Mr. Fancy Pants, want me to get you a popsicle?"[13]; and although she constantly nags at him to answer the phone or get the door, she ultimately "can't say no to [her] little tushy-face."[14] In Ravits' scholarship, it is Jewish male creators Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady who "crafted an overbearing woman, who lived vicariously through the son she pushed toward material success, while she herself unwittingly undermined his progress by her ignorance."[15]

However, some sitcoms give the "overbearing Jewish matron" social historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg perceived in adolescent diaries of the 1920s and 1950s plenty of screentime.[16] When this happens, Ravits' Jewish Mother's "aggressive, parochial, ignorant, smothering, crass, selfish but also self-martyring" behaviors are at the root of the main characters' conflict, drama, denial, and self-doubt—even within the comedic genre.[17] Beverly Goldberg from *The Goldbergs* epitomizes this 'smother' of a Jewish Mother: crossing many boundaries multiple times in an episode, her children often getting caught in lies they initially told in order to prevent their mother from overreacting, confusing protecting her children with stifling their growth and independence, and manipulating those around her in order to preserve the sanctity of her family. In the pilot episode, the narrator introduces his "overbearing smother" as the woman who "began the day by dressing [her three children], feeding [them], and ignoring any sense of human boundaries."[18] In the first season, the middle son—Barry Goldberg—gets his license and thinks he is free from under his mother's control, but of course this comes with some caveats; after not hearing from her son that he arrived at his destination, Beverly Goldberg proceeds to call the emergency room, the police station, the roller rink, the batting cages, and the four ice cream shops in the dictated 'green zone,' all the while guilting her husband for blissfully enjoying his baseball game. After Beverly sends her husband out to find their son, Murray Goldberg admits to his son that "if [Beverly] finds out about [that I found you on the side of the road in a ditch], you're not gonna be allowed to leave the house until you're forty and then my life is ruined too."[19] As Beverly Goldberg illustrates, when the Jewish Mother receives more visibility and representation on screen, it is not necessarily for the better. Beverly rather embodies and emphasizes the most stereotypical quality of the Jewish Mother; according to Myrna Hant, a research scholar in the study of women, she is "too domineering, thus causing the poor father and children to submit to all of her demands."[20] This Jewish Mother also has the "possibilities to not only nurture but to destroy the child with her intense and insatiable mothering."[21] In the fifth season, the eldest daughter—Erica Goldberg—comes back from college because she's "never had to clean or cook or act like a human in the real world."[22] Her dorm room a mess and her clothes dirty, Erica has never had to do anything to help herself because her Jewish Mother did it all for her; Beverly has "manipulate[d] [her kids] into needing her week after week," however, at the age of eighteen, Erica comes to realize that "after all these years of tricking [her children] into staying close, all [their Jewish Mother has] done is drive [them] away."[23]

This self-imposing and nitpicky Jewish 'smother' can also be found in the sitcom *New Girl*; though Louise Schmidt is a visiting character, unlike Beverly Goldberg who is a regular character on *The Goldbergs*, she is introduced by other characters as "pushy, overbearing, controlling" and "a typical Jewish mom" from Long Island, New York.[24] In Season 4, Episode 19—her *first* appearance—the audience learns that Louise has been withholding her thirty-something-year-old son's bar mitzvah money in order to teach him a lesson; at the same time, she buys him a new sweater and forces him to put it over the sweater he was already wearing, anticipating she would not approve of the one he chose. Ultimately, the introduction of Schmidt's Jewish Mother introduces his own internal conflict, self-doubt, and "pent-up resentment towards [his] mom."[25]

Compared to Beverly Goldberg's portrayal of the Jewish Mother and the ways in which she manipulates her children in *The Goldbergs*, it is brought to Schmidt's attention that his mother is trying to control him and "treats [him] like a

little baby who can't do anything for himself."[26] In the same vein, the aforementioned Jewish Mother in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* is no better. Even though she receives better treatment and more representation than the voice of Mrs. Wolowitz—she is eventually given a name and a face in the series—she does not receive redemption from the stereotype. Naomi Bunch visits West Covina to see her daughter, Rebecca, for the Hanukkah season. The audience sees Rebecca replacing the Christmas decorations in her apartment with dreidels and menorahs, hears Rebecca attempting to pronounce Hanukkah correctly, and is privy to the conversation between Rebecca and her coworker during which Rebecca explains she is wearing panty hose because she "just [doesn't] want her [mother] to complain and kvetch about how [she's] not wearing panty hose."[27] The audience's introduction to Rebecca's Jewish Mother is through a dramatic song, sung by Naomi Bunch herself, in which she characteristically complains, demands, and criticizes: "Tell me that you have a bathroom in this hovel you call a home . . . By the way, you're looking healthy and by healthy, I mean chunky . . . God, I give you everything and still you just want more . . . It's the least you can do since you lived inside me for nine months."[28] Rebecca must lie about her life in West Covina to please her mother, avoiding confrontation by avoiding the truth, until she admits to her Jewish Mother that she is "tired of trying to bend over backwards to please someone who can never be pleased."[29] Though these Jewish Mothers do receive more visibility than Mrs. Wolowitz in *The Big Bang Theory*, Hant argues that "the Jewish mother remains a one-dimensional figure, easily recognized not only by her behavior, but by her dress and her nasally voice that always deteriorates into a whine."[30]

3. The Jewish American Princess

Another stereotype all too often exaggerated and capitalized on within the realm of American popular culture is the Jewish American Princess; Antler found that "[b]y the 1970s, the image of the Jewish American princess (JAP) had come to share the spotlight with that of the Jewish mother; they continue in tandem to define Jewish women in the popular culture."[31] The JAP is known for being spoiled rotten, namely by her parents or her partners. She concerns herself with her appearance and material culture; Dundes enumerated that the JAP "is interested in money, shopping, and status."[32] In the mockumentary comedy sitcom *Parks & Recreation*, Mona-Lisa Saperstein is *first* introduced by her own brother in the fifth season as "the worst person in the whole world. Huge skank."[33] Throughout the series, she does not prove him wrong; she is the typical Jewish American Princess, known for being spoiled, narcissistic, self-centered, socially unaware, and her daddy's little girl. When she is hired by Tom Haverford, she drinks alcohol and reads magazines on the job; she utilizes her status and sexuality to her advantage as soon as she gets reprimanded for her behavior and Tom threatens to fire her. She destroys offices and lights cars on fire when she is not given attention or the money she requested. As the Jewish American Princess Dundes describes, Mona-Lisa "represents the modern woman who wants to be taken care of—to be given unlimited credit cards and taken on glamorous trips."[34] Known for her repeated catchphrase, "Money, please!,"[35] she is either telling her boyfriend she needs "to borrow some money to do something that is none of [his] damn beeswax"[36] or getting her father to tell others to "give her some money. It's easier."[37] Later in the fifth season, Mona-Lisa finds out that her boyfriend had to borrow a lot of money in order to buy his business, and that he drinks tap water when she is not around, she shrieks and breaks up with him: "You're broke? . . . I don't eff with poorsies."[38] Mona-Lisa's character operates under this untouchable stereotype of the Jewish American Princess. She is obsessed with the acquisition of money, but does not want to work to get it. She is willing to cause destruction and refuse to acknowledge it in order to get what she wants, for "[she has] done nothing wrong, ever, in [her] life."[39] She is "the ultimate in bitchy, whining female behavior."[40]

4. The Comedic Jewess

At times, these Jewish women characters are played by Jewish women actresses and the development of their characters is in the hands of these Jewish women. Oddly enough, however, this does not always lend itself to a more nuanced or comparatively 'better' representation of the Jewish woman. With a Jewish woman at the forefront, she simply takes control of and embraces the hyperbolization of her own identity, making jokes about her own ethnicity and culture, so that others do not do it to her. In both *Broad City* and *Difficult People*, Jewish women either embody the stereotypes so that they can poke fun at themselves or utilize their position to make jabs at those who do. For these Jewish women playing Jewish characters, they make "frequent references to [their] Jewishness, combined with outbursts of risqué humor, which cannot be separated from [their] ethnicity," like modern Jewish historian Michael Berkowitz found in *Peeping Tom*.[41] In the pilot episode of *Broad City*, the audience meets Ilana Glazer and Abbi

Jacobson—"Just 2 Jewesses Tryin' To Make A Buck" in New York.[42] Both in their twenties, Ilana and Abbi are outspoken, eccentric, frugal, open about their sexuality, and largely vulgar in content and conversation; while Abbi is described as "a high-class WASP-y Jew. A Philadelphia queen," Ilana is a carbon copy of her inappropriate, cheap, street-smart Jewish Mother.[43] These Jewish women utilize comedy to tackle explicitly Jewish content such as the awkward shivas during which the daughter of the deceased accidentally pulls out a dildo over her mother's dead body; the kinds of people who participate in Birthmarc, the show's parody of Birthright, chanting "Jews! Jews! Jews!"[44] on the plane while seated according to match potential; and the stereotypes of Jewish Mothers, gaudy New York Jews, and elderly Jews toting guns in Florida.[45] *Broad City* also utilizes comedy to hyperbolize situations which are inherently Jewish-in-nature, such as going to a nail salon in which someone got a staph infection because the pedicures are now five dollars or hopping in the back of a moving van blindfolded in order to find the cheapest, best quality knockoff handbag.

Similarly, Julie Klausner in *Difficult People* is a crude, thirty-something New Yorker who embodies the attention-seeking nature of the JAP; in the pilot episode, Julie's character says, "I like saying something crazy and then leaving the room. Unless people like what I say and then I stay in the room."[46] The audience also meets Julie's Jewish Mother, who, after initial hellos, immediately says, "Don't you look pretty when you smile?,"[47] continues to compare her daughter's success to younger women who are doing better than she is, wonders why her daughter has not asked about her business and reminds her that "[her daughter] is lucky to have a mom who's a shrink."[48] Given the title of Julie's show, the Jews represented in this sitcom are not great; however, Julie embraces the fact that she and other Jewish people are, in fact, some of the most difficult people. Through this lens, *Difficult People* also utilizes comedy to tackle explicitly and implicitly Jewish content. In addition to the portrayal of Jewish stereotypes, Julie opens up the Yom Kippur episode with the sarcastic, cynical comment: "Do you think Bethenny Frankel's fasting today?" The required family gathering ensues for the holiday, full of rivalry, pettiness, resentment, condescension, and Jewish guilt.[49] Her show also caricatures the process of rising in social status through Jewish networks with Julie's selfish mission to prove that nobody is more Jewish than she is, wherein she goes to synagogue only to make show business connections, tells others in attendance that she is "not too cool for shul,"[50] and participates in shabbat. However, she relies on her boyfriend, Arthur, or her "Shabbos goy" to turn the lights on and off, turn on the television, plug things in, check her Twitter, Google her name and "only read [her] glowing praise."[51] Similar to that of *Broad City*, this episode also humorizes a shiva, but the greed and selfishness of Julie's mother is at the forefront of the depiction; her mother says that the saddest part was not watching her friend die, but that "Eileen didn't have a will. The estate lawyer had to donate everything to charity."[52] In the same episode, Julie characteristically makes crude, insensitive, and objectively anti-semitic comments, like "What is this, a concentration camp?" while at the gym, yelling "Medium-talent Jewish bitch" at herself in the mirror, and stealing her neighbor's Wifi network, "hitlerhadsomegoodideas."[53] Though these depictions are still based on the "usually overblown caricatures and pejorative stereotypes that misrepresent," which Antler analyzed in *Talking Back*, Ilana Glazer, Abbi Jacobson, and Julie Klausner wanted to create comedy which was inspired by and hyperbolized their lived experiences as Jewish women.[54] Still, unfortunately, perpetuating inglorious, stereotypical glimpses, at least these Jewish women have dominated the characterization of their own characters, utilized comedy to interpret their identities, and have made their Judaism a prominent and conversational aspect of their work. While not the most accurate or objectively 'best' representations of Jewish women, the comedic retellings and reinterpretations of the goings-on in the lives of Jewish women at the hands of Jewish women is an attempt to actively reclaim their identity; it is as the Pearls conclude, part of the "ongoing search for meaning, the human quest for identity, [which has been] at the core of television's flickering images in one form or another since its inception."[55]

5. The Jewish Adolescent

On the other hand, if a female character is Jewish and not oriented within a comedic setting, her Judaism often falls by the wayside, lost and forgotten. Her character is often othered, depicted as a villain or a victim. In both of these cases, the Jewish women are created solely to support the character development of the titular or main characters. The Jewish characters depicted in this framework have nothing to do with "show[ing] [the audience] that it is possible and desirable to to be Jewish and American," in fact, it does quite the opposite.[56] Willow Rosenberg of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Paris Geller of *Gilmore Girls* demonstrate the directorial and authorial abuse done unto the character development of Jewish women characters. Both Willow Rosenberg and Paris Geller represent the stereotype of the studious and brainy Jewish adolescent; however, the treatment and portrayal of their characters throughout their respective series reveals more about the characterization and maltreatment of Jewish stereotypes. In the third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the titular character describes Willow as "old reliable"; the principal of their high school

describes her as the "pinnacle of academic achievement"; Willow frustratingly describes herself as "doormat person, homework gal," and not much else.[57] Her Judaism is evident only through subtle, minimal comments prompted by references to Christian practices, and her dress in the beginning of the series is *tzniut*, or modest. In the second season, Willow must adorn her room with Christian symbols to protect herself from a vampire; she says to Buffy, "I'm gonna have a hard time explaining this to my dad . . . Ira Rosenberg's only daughter nailing crucifixes to her bedroom wall? I have to go over to Xander's house just to watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas* every year."[58] Though the audience meets Willow's character in the first episode, she is meek, docile, naive, nerdy, unpopular, and falls by the wayside as the series privileges the emotional development of the popular girls, the male companions, and the titular character; this holds true until Season 6 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, when the series characterizes Willow as the villain. She practices witchcraft, becomes too powerful, has no self-control or emotional stability, and lets such flaws get the best of her. Her girlfriend is murdered, Willow flays someone alive, she absorbs all the dark magic in the world, and wants to destroy it all. Very quickly, this intelligent Jewish woman loses her lover, her friends, and her mind in favor of dark power.

Gilmore Girls' Paris Geller also takes on stereotypical characteristics of the Jewish adolescent by being the brainy, teacher's pet that Willow is; however, Paris also embodies the overwhelming, talkative, loud, snobbish, obsessive, and manipulative qualities characteristic of the Jewish American Princess and Jewish Mother. In the same manner that the audience is reminded of Willow's Judaism, Paris' Judaism is discussed with slight, off-hand, somewhat self-deprecating comments. Dissimilar to Willow's character, *Gilmore Girls* sets Paris' character up to be the antagonist to Rory Gilmore, one of the titular characters. In the second episode of the first season—in which Rory transfers to Chilton Preparatory School—Paris steals Rory's school file so that she can size her up as a competitor, looking at Rory's attendance record, grade point average, and letters of recommendation. She raises her hand to answer every question asked in class and meets Rory outside to intimidate her, criticizing Rory's "nice innocent act" and letting Rory know that she's top-of-the-class, planning to graduate as valedictorian, "the school is [her] domain and the [school newspaper] is [her] domain," and that Rory will never catch up.[59] While the imagined rivalry between the two calms down and becomes less hostile throughout the first season, Paris continues to have an impenetrable superiority complex, despite her acknowledged anxieties and neuroses. Exhibiting qualities that scholar of performance studies Roberta Mock found common in her novel *Jewish Women on Stage, Film, and Television*, Paris is "confident, unapologetic, and uninhibited; with relatively little 'toning down' for a mass audience."[60] Later in the first season, Paris gets asked out on a date but has no idea what to wear or what to do, so she goes to Rory to ask for advice. Paris tells Rory that all she does is "study, . . . think about studying, then . . . study some more."[61] Paris brings her entire closet to Rory so that she can help her pick out an outfit, and when Rory asks if she left anything at home, Paris replies, "Nothing but my Chilton uniform and my bat mitzvah dress, which has menorahs on the collar."[62] Her inherent competitiveness, obsessive composure, and academic neuroses continues throughout the series. While at Chilton Preparatory School she intimidates her classmates out of auditioning to speak at the school's bicentennial, creates entire manifestos herself and distributes them to her group members for class projects, and desperately manipulates her way up the social ladder; while at Yale she becomes the editor of the school newspaper, tears down her fellow writers with comments like "the by-line should read 'Story By A Petulant Two-Year-Old Who Had One Too Many Black and Tans Last Night and So This Is What You People Get To Read,'" and gets ousted from her position.[63] Her character does bring to light that the majority conceive the dedicated, hard-working, dutifully diligent Jewish student "as thinking they are better than other students (conceited), as having too much to say about what goes on in school (powerful), as forcing their beliefs and wishes on other students (bossy) . . . and as being loud and show-offy (vain)," as found in a study by sociologists Charles Y. Glock, Robert Wuthnow, Jane Piliavin, and Metta Spencer, on *Adolescent Prejudice*.[64] However, Paris' Judaism largely disappears—the audience casually reminded of it as an explanatory and excusable contributor to her behavior—making room for her "frequently unpleasant, undemocratic, and unkind [character]. Whether there is excess in her behavior isn't up for debate. Paris is a bitch through and through."[65]

6. The (Non)Jewish Jew

In other genres—from comics to musical teen dramas to action and adventure fiction—these female characters who are purportedly Jewish are written to either be inherently ashamed of their own Judaism; otherwise it is not acknowledged, discussed, or given ample recognition. Much like the lack of attention given to the Jewishness of the aforementioned Jewish women characters for the sake of their villainization and victimization, other Jewish women characters' Judaism falls by the wayside for the sake of the drama of the genre. Kitty Pryde of the *X-Men* comics is

historically Jewish, however, over time the comics depicted this less and less; when the comics were adapted to the television shows *X-Men Evolution* and *Wolverine and the X-Men*, Kitty's Judaism was erased. In the early issue comics, her hair is curly; over time, her hair becomes straight. In the original comics, she wears a Star of David pendant; over time, that pendant is absent and replaced. Though highly intelligent, Kitty is the youngest member to join the X-Men in her initial run at thirteen-years-old in the *Uncanny X-Men* #129, and therefore treated by other characters as incredibly naive. Kitty is also not given agency over her own maturation; other characters, such as Charles Xavier, Magneto, and Wolverine, threaten her reassignment, minimize her autonomy, and use her as a bargaining chip to further their own plots. The comic books rarely discuss Kitty's Judaism or give her Jewishness the space to speak for itself, however notable the Star of David pendant is on her person in the earlier issues. She and Magneto attend a Holocaust memorial in *Uncanny X-Men* #199 and her character addresses the lack of attention given to her Judaism in *All-New X-Men* #13, saying "I'm Jewish. I don't have a quote unquote Jewish-sounding name. I don't look or sound Jewish, whatever that looks or sounds like...So if you didn't know I was Jewish, you might not know...unless I told you."[66] In every Christmas special of the *X-Men*, Kitty does get to celebrate Hanukkah. Across genres, Christmas specials seem to be an effortless way in which writers give these Jewish women characters the space to have their Judaism briefly recognized or discussed—like Willow in Season 2, Episode 17 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—even if their Judaism is mentioned only in juxtaposition to mainstream Christian assumptions. In the first season of *Arrow*, Oliver Queen wishes Felicity Smoak a merry Christmas and she spits out, "I'm Jewish."[67] In the second season, Barry Allen asks Felicity if she has any plans for Christmas and she replies with, "Lighting my menorah."[68] Felicity's character did minimally exist in the *DC* comic series *Firestorm*, but was originally depicted as brunette and curly-haired, her Judaism never explicitly mentioned. Her character did not get much recognition or character development until she was re-imagined with straight, blonde hair; even then—in later issues and in the television show *Arrow*—Felicity is valued only for her technological intelligence. Though these Jewish women were characterized as such in their original comic book settings, both Kitty and Felicity were presented in later issues and American television—which Mock also found to be a trend in stage, film, and television portrayals of Jewish women––"as 'unmarked' and 'white'"; their Judaism assumed, but scarcely mentioned, unless the outright existence of Christian practices allows for the subtle defense of their own practices.[69] This can also be seen in the sitcom *Friends*; Monica Geller is the neurotic, obsessive compulsive neat freak, who used to be overweight, insecure, and boyfriend-less throughout much of her life. The show gives space for her Judaism to exist without explicitly mentioning her Jewishness, due to her stereotypical characterization and her brother's multiple references to his own Judaism in the sitcom's Christmas episode; Monica's brother, Ross, dresses up as the "Holiday Armadillo" to teach his son about Hanukkah.[70] While these genres abandon a character's Judaism over time or mention it only in relation to the Christian majority, some of the Jewish women characters also perpetuate the image of the insecure, self-suppressive, "hypersensitive, maybe the self-hating Jew" that Barr also came across in their research.[71] *Glee*'s Rachel Berry, who is notorious for being—much like Paris Geller—a snobbish teacher's pet, idolizes Barbra Streisand but struggles with perceptions of her Jewish nose. By the second season, Rachel breaks her nose and her doctor declares that a nose job is "like a right of passage for Jewish girls," advising her that if she wants to make it in show business she should consider looking the best she can.[72]

7. Conclusion

While these Jewish women characters may have relatively high visibility within the realm of American popular culture through popular television shows, writers collectively—albeit inadvertently—construct said characters around implicit and explicit stereotypical "expressions of antisemitism (individual or more broadly) [which appear] to lurk around every corner."[73] Though more often than not, largely stereotypical, one-dimensional, and negative in nature, the Jewishness of the woman character is rather noteworthy in the comedic genre, her actions dramatized, hyperbolized, and accentuated for the effect. Opposingly, if a Jewish woman character's Judaism is either more subtle or presents itself with more regard "for an 'authentic' Jewish experience," the genre villainizes, victimizes, or erases her Judaism.[74] It is by such exploration in the construction and perpetuation of one-dimensional Jewish women characters in American popular culture that it is possible to "revise the restricted and stereotypical image[s] long viewed as the dominant or only one[s] available for Jewish women."[75]

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5. Culturally Jewish refers to those born into Judaism, who primarily, if not only, identify with the cultural aspects of Judaism. Such cultural aspects include the food, the lifestyle, the celebrations, the art, etc. Being culturally Jewish implies that the individual does not willingly participate in religious rituals or practices, but associates more with Judaism through cultural leanings, assumptions, or activities.

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