

Jewish Rom Com Movie Night

Source sheet compiled by Adira Rosen

August 2025



TV Family Tree: The Racial Roots Behind Jewish Media Stereotypes By Jonathan Branfman written for the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute

They crack us up, they make us proud, and sometimes they embarrass us: the neurotic Jewish men and domineering Jewish women of American TV evoke complicated feelings for many Jews...While many American Jews know and love/hate these media stereotypes, most of us don't know the racial history behind them. Today's "common-sense" notion that Jewish men are neurotically feminized and that Jewish women are masculinized (aggressive, domineering, sexually overpowering) descends from about eight centuries of racial anti-Semitism. By the 14th century, though, European Christian art and writing had begun to depict Jews as bodily different from gentiles, introducing patterns that would later shape anti-Semitic racial pseudo-science ... and American TV.

- In what ways do these stereotypes resonate or not resonate with your experience of Jewish representation in media?

The Effect of Media Representation on My Jewish Identity by Michael Friedman Ph.D. written for Psychology Today

During our interview...Bob the Drag Queen said something that really struck...me. He was talking about how important it is for people to see themselves represented in media images, and how the lack of representation or the presence of stereotypical representation can undermine one's ability to develop a healthy identity. This hit a nerve with me because Bob was articulating something that I deeply craved growing up as a Jewish kid in the 1970s and '80s. Let me be clear — I am a cis white male in a society in which that identity has extreme privilege. And yet in talking with Bob about his intersectional identity — which includes being Black, non-binary, queer and from the South — I realized that while I felt privilege on one level, being Jewish made me feel not a part of the majority society and vulnerable to the biases that minority groups can experience. And feeling so vulnerable as a cis white male because only one aspect of my identity is not represented (or is represented unfavorably) in the media, I can only imagine how hopeless it feels when you see no aspects of your identity reflected in [media]. And this further magnifies just how crucial it is to have representation...It wasn't all bad. [Jewish] stereotypes and cultural reference points were comforting in a way. I mean, based on media representation, I never questioned whether I could become a doctor, a lawyer, or an accountant. On that level, I felt like I belonged somewhere. And I knew many of the actors or musicians I saw in the world were Jewish. But overall, even with all of the privilege, I felt limited in terms of who I was and who I could be.

- How has Jewish representation in media shaped or effected your own life, if at all?
- Has there ever been a time when you felt your Jewish identity was well represented in the media? How about poorly represented?

Getting to the Roots of Jewish Comedy by Julie Yue written for the National Endowment for the Humanities

When large waves of Jews from Eastern and Central Europe flooded into America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were quickly initiated into the

Jewish Rom Com Movie Night

Source sheet compiled by Adira Rosen

August 2025



American brand of racial humor. To homegrown Americans, these foreigners looked funny: their dark hair and beards, their distinctive noses. And their Yiddish, by many accounts, sounded comical too...All of this made them easy targets of ethnic-based mockery. To the regrettably popular blackface comedy, American comics added the Jew-face. They put on putty noses and false beards and made jokes about Jewish shopkeepers setting their businesses alight for the insurance. Instead of resenting this kind of racial comedy, Jewish entertainers decided that they would be better at making fun of themselves than anyone else. Jewish comics honed their skills first to Jewish-only crowds in New York City, then later in the Jewish-dominated resorts of the Catskills, known as the Borscht Belt, and finally into mainstream American consciousness.

- What role does comedy play in your life?
- Do you feel like your sense of humor is shaped by your Jewish identity? Why or why not?

Leviticus 19:18

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...

- How does love manifest/appear specifically in your Jewish identity?

Love in Judaism Aish.com

Judaism uniquely defines love as the emotional pleasure experienced when one identifies virtue in another human being. The depth of this emotion is contingent on how one perceives the virtues of the other person. Love, according to Jewish teachings, is a commandment, emphasizing that individuals have the power to choose to love others by focusing on their virtues. In essence, feelings of love are a direct result of one's thoughts. To attain love, one must concentrate on another person's virtues – the positive aspects of their character. The more intimately one knows and understands someone's virtues, the stronger and deeper their love becomes.

- How do we love our "neighbors" (broadly speaking) when they are unkind to us, or we have trouble seeing their virtues?
- How does your understanding of love in Judaism shape or re-shape the way you respond to the representation of Jews in the media?