

# Television and Beyond

Television has been shaping and reflecting our perceptions since its rise as a mass medium in the 1930s. In 1981 the Jewish Museum established the National Jewish Archive of Broadcasting, a collection of television and radio materials related to the Jewish experience. At that time, it was a bold statement to align television with other art forms in a museum. The Archive is a record of how Jews have been portrayed and have portrayed themselves on American TV over the decades. Inspired by the Archive, *Television and Beyond* draws on other programs and materials to further explore these issues.

## TV Therapy

16 min., continuous loop

Therapy has been depicted in television since its early days. This installment of *TV and Beyond* presents therapy scenes excerpted from television shows from several decades.

The television format itself mirrors some aspects of therapy: like a session with a therapist, many TV programs occur in a series and in episodes of a little less than an hour. On television therapy is sometimes presented in earnest but more often with humor, which is not surprising since the discomfort inherent in a therapy session is perfect fodder for comedic set-ups.

On television the doctor is most often white and male, frequently bearded, and may resemble Sigmund Freud. His office may contain a white-noise machine. His name is likely to sound Jewish. Indeed, many shows bring up the perceived Jewishness of psychotherapy itself. By extension, many connections are made between psychotherapy and New York, since the city has replaced Vienna as the center of Freudian theory.

# **“Pax Soprana,” The Sopranos, season 1, episode 6**

HBO, 1999

David Chase, creator

Alan Taylor, director

David Chase and Frank Renzulli, writers

James Gandolfini and Lorraine Bracco, cast

1 min., 7 sec.

*The Sopranos* became strongly associated with the psychoanalytic process. Much of its wit stems from the incongruity of a mobster engaging in the type of self-reflection associated with therapy. Tony Soprano, a Mafia boss, is an often-reluctant patient, skeptically debating the validity of therapy with his analyst, Dr. Jennifer Melfi.

In this excerpt he tells Dr. Melfi how he came to select her as his therapist. She is Italian American like him, and he invokes the ubiquity of Jewish therapists by commenting that his other choices were “two Jewish guys.”

# “Buddy Sorrell Man and Boy,” *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, season 5, episode 22

CBS, 1966

Carl Reiner, creator

Richard Erdman, director

Ben Joelson, Art Baer, and Carl Reiner, writers

Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore, cast

1 min., 7 sec.

National Jewish Archive of Broadcasting, T 717

Rob and Laura Petrie, the main characters in the classic 1960s sitcom *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, are typical “white-bread” suburban Americans. Rob is a comedy writer who commutes into Manhattan where he writes for the fictional *Alan Brady Show*. His cowriters are Sally Rogers, a single woman eternally in search of a husband, and Buddy Sorrell, a wise-cracking Jewish man married to a woman named Pickles, who is never seen onscreen.

This excerpt uses humor to cement the association of New York, and by extension Jews, with psychoanalysis. The reference to the Upper West Side—a neighborhood where many Jews live—reinforces this idea. The show was quite forward-thinking in addressing the unease some people felt in the 1960s about therapy, ultimately taking care to have Laura, always the voice of good sense, destigmatize it.

# “Games People Play,” *Sex and the City*, season 2, episode 13

HBO, 1999

Darren Star, creator

Michael Spiller, director

Darren Star and Jenny Bicks, writers

Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, Cynthia Nixon, and

Willie Garson, cast

1 min., 27 sec.

By the time *Sex and the City* came on the scene in the 1990s, the association of New York and therapy was self-evident. For Carrie Bradshaw and her circle having a therapist is not only accepted, it is often expected; in some cases, a therapist can be a status-elevating accessory. In this excerpt, Carrie and her friends debate the merits of therapy compared with other coping strategies. Though this program aired more than thirty years after *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, television’s Manhattan remains a perceived epicenter of psychoanalysis.



# **“Guess Who?” Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist, season 3, episode 6**

Comedy Central, 1996

Jonathan Katz and Tom Snyder, creators

Carl W. Adams and H. Jon Benjamin, writers

Jonathan Katz and Harvey Greenberg, cast

48 sec.

Dr. Katz, the alter ego of the comedian and writer Jonathan Katz, treats patients often voiced by guest stars. The show makes an implicit case for stand-up comedy as a form of therapy by depicting its inverse: celebrities trying to entertain Dr. Katz.

In this clip, Dr. Katz seeks help from his therapist, Dr. Greenberg, who gives him some straight talk and then ends his advice with a classic comedy punchline. Dr. Greenberg is coded as the ultimate therapist: Jewish and bearded like Freud. He even has a wave machine.

# “Hawk’s Nightmare,” *M\*A\*S\*H*, season 5, episode 13

CBS, 1976

Larry Gelbart, creator

Burt Metcalfe, director

Burt Prelutsky and Larry Gelbart, writers

Alan Alda and Allan Arbus, cast

1 min., 30 sec.

The long-running television series *M\*A\*S\*H*, set in a mobile army hospital during the Korean War, features a psychoanalyst as a recurring character. Dr. Sidney Freedman treats and advises the surgeons and other characters, but is friendly and approachable, rather than cryptic or intimidating, like many TV shrinks.

Sidney is unmistakably Jewish, identified by his name, his appearance, and his straight-out-of-Brooklyn manner, as well by the Yiddish words he frequently tosses into his conversation (here he uses the word *farshimlt*, which means moldy or a mess).

True to tradition, he asks his patients about their dreams and their childhoods; his overall demeanor is nonjudgmental and comforting. His kindly character presents psychiatry as deeply humane and sympathetic. Consistent with his desire to comfort, Sidney gently mocks the conventions of psychoanalysis even as he employs them to treat and—always—cure his patients.

# “Second Opinion,” *The Sopranos*, season 3, episode 7

HBO, 2001

David Chase, creator

Timothy Van Patten, director

David Chase and Lawrence Konner, writers

Edie Falco and Sully Boyar, cast

3 min., 40 sec.

While it certainly has humorous moments, *The Sopranos* is very much a drama, and many of the therapy sessions are extremely serious. Here, Carmela Soprano seeks advice from a therapist named Dr. Krakower. Krakower differs from the show’s main psychiatrist, Dr. Melfi, in that he is Jewish. Carmela seizes on this fact when, feeling judged by Krakower’s tough critique of her husband Tony’s actions, she aggressively brings it up to emphasize their differences.

Krakower is drawn as a morally confident Jew who dares to counter the advice Carmela has gotten from her priest. With his deep voice and Freudian beard, he comes across as a representative of the God of Judgment. Feeling cornered and distressed by his harsh advice to her, Carmela manages to strike back with a snide, rather anti-Semitic comment, exclaiming, “that’s a new one,” when the doctor tells her he will not accept her money.

# **“Paul and Gina: Week Eight,” In Treatment, season 1, episode 40**

HBO, 2008

Rodrigo García, Hagai Levi, and Nir Bergman, creators

Rodrigo García, director

Davey Holmes, Rodrigo García, and Hagai Levi, writers

Gabriel Byrne and Dianne Wiest, cast

1 min., 40 sec.

*In Treatment*, based on an Israeli series, has a straightforward structure: each weeknight, a different patient sees Dr. Paul Weston for a therapy session, thus simulating an actual therapy schedule.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and religion is brought to the surface in this excerpt, in which Paul has a session as a patient with his own therapist, Gina. Paul is experiencing a personal crisis that has led him to question the validity of the psychoanalytic method. Much like a priest or rabbi having a crisis of faith, Paul refers to analysis as something that requires belief.



# **“Down Neck,” The Sopranos, season 1, episode 7**

HBO, 1999

David Chase, creator

Lorraine Senna, director

David Chase, Mitchell Burgess, and Robin Green, writers

Nancy Marchand, Robert Iler, cast

1 min., 16 sec.

During a visit to his grandmother Livia, A. J. (Anthony Soprano Jr.) mentions that his father, Tony, has been seeing a psychiatrist. Livia is incredulous and dismisses therapy as “nothing but a racket for the Jews.” In her world, the historical notion of psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science” still has currency. Her other *idée fixe* about therapy is that all patients automatically blame their mothers for their problems.

# “The Thong,” *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, season 2, episode 5

HBO, 2001

Larry David, creator

Jeff Garlin, director

Larry David, writer (uncredited)

Larry David, Rob Reiner, and John Pleshette, cast

2 min., 9 sec.

One could argue that *Curb Your Enthusiasm* is one long therapy session for its creator and main character, Larry David. Larry’s neuroses are the *raison d’être* for the series itself; he is presented as the ultimate neurotic Jew, constantly obsessing over the minutiae of everyday life.

In Larry’s endlessly overanalyzed world, not only therapy itself but even leaving the therapist’s office can be a comically charged situation in which social awkwardness is inevitable. He encounters his friend Rob Reiner in their therapist’s waiting room, and the two poke fun at themselves and the therapeutic situation, ultimately agreeing, like the four friends in *Sex and the City*, that “you can’t bother your friends with this stuff.”

# **“Laura: Week One,” In Treatment, season 1, episode 1**

HBO, 2008

Rodrigo García, Hagai Levi, Ori Sivan, and Nir Bergman, creators

Rodrigo García, director and writer

Gabriel Byrne and Melissa George, cast

28 sec.

Though Laura, a new patient, is feeling despondent, she and Dr. Weston must adhere to the rules and end their session when the clock dictates. This clip reel closes, like a therapy session, when time is up.