Identifying the 'Female Schlemiel': The Composition and Representation of the Female Jewish Archetype in Mid to Late Twentieth Century Texts.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that the appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The construction and representation of the schlemiel is a subject deeply linked to archetype, culture, perspective, gender and comedy. The history of the archetype itself is steeped in a rich background of character, one that only a small part of it is recognised through the past seventy years of comedy. The title of this dissertation refers to its intent to examine the composition and representations of the schlemiel, and how the visibility of the archetype has lent itself towards a male perspective, and what that means for inclusivity within the archetype. The first two chapters will cover the definitions and interpretations of the schlemiel, which will be linked through the discussions of gender, comedy and 'Jewishness' and the remaining chapters will be used to discuss four primary examples of the female schlemiel, who in themselves feature similarities and differences between male and female representations of the same archetype. These collective schlemiels will be examined through a term written by Ruth Wisse, that the schlemiel is a 'model of endurance', and will be applied to the primary texts. The main examples used within this research are Joan Rivers, Gilda Radner, Elaine May, and Madeline Kahn and the importance of these women as primary resources is due to; the decades on which this research is directed, from the mid 1950s to the late 1980s, the fact these women are all Jewish, that they are known for their comedy work, and each have worked within sectors of the comedy industry. In utilising these key factors, the analysis of the female schlemiel and its representations will work to create cohesive structure that will lead to its overall conclusion.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to examine the archetype of the schlemiel from varying definitions in order to examine and apply them to selected case studies of Jewish female comedy performers. The definitions found in within the primary texts individually contribute their own perspectives of the schlemiel as a foolish character and each of these definitions written by those in the field, such as Sanford Pinsker, Irving Howe, and Ruth Wisse, feature their own interpretations of the archetype that specifically link the schlemiel to defining characteristics. Pinsker takes the approach within his alteration of Leo Rosten's soup adage, that the schlemiel is a tragic figure. In that metaphorically buttering both sides of his bread he is ensuring his own ill-fate, and in doing so he is foolishly ignorant of his mistakes. For Irving Howe, the schlemiel could be the innocent, the eternal innocent, and connects to the archetype that features within Jung's *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.* This act of being the eternally innocent applies to the schlemiel's intention and suggests that the intention of doing-good allows the schlemiel's mistakes to be accepted by others within the narrative, and the audience. This relationship between the archetype and the audience is very important to note further along in this research, since it ensures the acceptance and welcoming of an archetype in a performative space.

These initial definitions assert that the schlemiel is a fool, but they further emphasise that the schlemiel represents more regarding their intentions, actions and representations. For the purpose of this study, the schlemiel is a foolish character who is used as a model of endurance. This working definition is based on the understandings of the schlemiel through academic and etymological definitions, that the schlemiel is a fool, and utilises a specific account of the schlemiel, Wisse's 'Model of Endurance', to create a more intricate and specific research subject.

The value in addressing Ruth Wisse's model of endurance is such that it allows for analysis that is not specifically targeted towards one gender. The sexual schlemiel and the eternal innocent are beneficial in that they address the relationship between the schlemiel and perception of morality and immorality. Regarding women, this is particularly important because there is an uneven ground on which we as an audience are willing (or unwilling) to accept them in these roles. The gender binary is primarily the driving force of these analytical perceptions of the schlemiel, but in the case for Ruth Wisse's model, the topic of endurance can be introduced and assessed by placing Jewish women in the forefront of that perspective. That is not to say the male schlemiel is not accepted within this model, but that the discussion of the gender binary within it can be loosened to a certain degree. The goal of this is to discuss the female schlemiel in the same way in which we discuss the male one, but to truly reach that goal in equality, the gender binary should be silent. This, however, is perhaps not realistic in academic theory since gender is a prominent and integral theme to archetype, and in a world in which such binaries still exist it would be difficult to completely erase it in discussion of the texts created such an environment.

The schlemiel is an archetype that has been encoded within narrative through the cultural link and understanding of Jewishness and, through the understanding of the fool as a male role. The schlemiel itself is seen as a fool, whose neurosis and intention lead them to inevitable failure and clumsiness. Ruth Wisse states that the schlemiel is 'a model of endurance' (1971, p.5) that exists in a narrative in which they must navigate and endure; it is an immoveable consequence of their archetype that they must fail at their own hand because it is the role they play within the sequence of events. The schlemiel is described as 'the man who spills the soup' (Pinsker, 1991 p.6) who metaphorically, and in some cases literally, spills his trouble onto those around him; this establishes that for the archetype, the schlemiel

must endure his own clumsiness since it is a fact of their archetype that they cannot escape, they can however derive success from it.

Contemporarily, the research on the female schlemiel is currently found within the texts that prominently discuss the schlemiel as a male figure, particularly one found in literature. The inclusion of a female schlemiel is found to be a more a secondary analysis, particularly regarding David Biale's work in *Eros and the Jews.* In contemporary analysis there is a growing mass of articles that work to consider the female schlemiel, and Menachem Feuer's article '*Women Can Be Schlemiels? Reflecting on Contemporary Schlemiels of the "Opposite Sex"'* addresses the neglected nature of the female schlemiel and works to address contemporary representations of the archetype; Feuer found examples of the female schlemiel in contemporary individuals like Amy Schumer and Greta Gerwig. This is a positive change in the direction of the research field as it suggests as growing trend for the visibility of the female schlemiel, but it however is a trend that is relatively new and does not specifically fit address the case studies found within this research.

When women are then introduced within the schlemiel archetype, an archetype that has been largely described as male, we must find the intersection between what endurance means for the schlemiel and the feminine perspective respectively; If the intersections used follow Wisse's model of endurance they can be found in foolishness, understood as both a gender stereotype and archetypal image, or may be found through the commonality of shared trauma. As described, that "comedy plus time, equals tragedy" (Downey, 2001.,p.279) ascribes the relationship between the two, comedy and tragedy are intrinsically linked through cause and effect, and as a model of endurance the schlemiel is perhaps a best exemplification of this.

Endurance lies within a struggle that is created through systematic hurdles that must be overcome in order to succeed in the same way as the dominant culture or gender; this is paradoxical in a way, since the result of success is the same but the route in which it was achieved is inherently unequal and therefore can never be 'the same'. Building on this idea of shared structural commonalities, we can also learn to identify the female schlemiel through the ways in which it does not adhere to other stereotypes that are given to Jewish women. This is important because absence of similarity is just as relevant as the presence of it and the collective unconscious which is the 'part of the unconscious that is not individual but universal' (Jung, C, 2014., p.3) is influenced by both inclusion and exclusion. This is seen particularly in the case of gender which does not purely sit as a marker for genetics, but instead itself has cultivated a social foundation built on patriarchal tradition, stereotype and oppression. Culturally these traditions differ and evolve, but the template for the harmful attitudes towards the "other" are buried within the collective unconscious. This is seen most clearly through archetype and stereotype.

What separates stereotype from archetype is that the stereotype lies within what could be described as a "conceptual model". The accumulation of features and traits of a set of existing examples are used to form one version of that "type". This means that the foundation for the stereotype it steeped in generalised and often only surface information 'in this they are, like the more innocuous sense of 'typing', a form of shorthand, reducing the complexity of an individual, group, or situation to a familiar and quickly understood and defining set of attributes' (Long, 2014,. p.108). There is seemingly no depth to this stereotype, because a rich texture of character needs to feature specificities. Regarding the narrative placement of stereotypes versus archetypes, what audiences see in stereotypical roles is a smaller trait-driven character that is not meant to be more than a generalisation, whereas the

archetypes are inherently narrative-driven characters whose actions are coded to be anticipated by audiences. It is because of the two-dimensional nature of stereotypes that they are pervasive characters that often represent misogynist, racist, xenophobic, or homophobic tropes that become quickly outdated yet still presented on screen.

The difference between the two is apparent but the similarities lie within the established preconceptions that inherently form the acceptance of both. The problem of the stereotype is the eventual problem of the archetype and so the perception of realism is purely dependent on the curation of the archetype over time, and its acceptance by audience.

Carl Jung defines the archetype as ‘an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear’ (2014, p.5). This is an understanding that the archetype itself is one dimensional; a vague construct, that only attains meaning through existence and perception. Archetypes, therefore, have power to become mirrors of the culture and society they represent; the hero archetype becomes a hero through actions that society perceive as heroic, and society then determines the criteria and the limitation. The benefit of the archetype is that it is similarly useful to produce narrative, for archetypes have roles to play within an arc and do so effectively, when adhering to the set perceptions. Character and archetype are intrinsically linked through narrative and the individual characters don’t necessarily have to follow all the traits of an archetype, but when they do it is best understood by audiences. This can be seen clearly within the production of film as ‘the form of narrative film is particularly suited to placing archetypal content’ (Singh, G, 2014., p125).

There is stagnation in these modern characters that have been cultivated through narrative entertainment because the creation of them is not always representative of real-life for those who are considered ‘othered’ by dominant culture, in this regard the dominant culture refers to the westernised white perspective that largely holds power in the industries in which archetypes thrive, such as narrative film and television. The ‘other’ in this case is anyone who does not fit the norm of this perspective but is typically placed on the presence of Black and Asian communities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and those with religious and political beliefs that do not subscribe to largely westernised, Christian conservatism. The interplay between archetype and stereotype is one that relies on this sense of perception and the way in which the dominant culture regards the marginalised. It is not always active discrimination that feeds into these ‘types’ but the ambivalence that perpetuates the belief that a group or individual is peripheral; this ‘produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability, which for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved’ (Simpson, s, 2004., p.335).

There is deviation in these archetypes and over time they themselves become widely recognizable; for example, the ‘hero’ who acts immorally to benefit the overall good, becomes the ‘anti-hero’. What is at first an introduction to a complex and darker representation of heroism, becomes a mainstream and well-understood deviation of the archetype that is both enjoyed by the producer and the audience alike. Archetypes are made to represent individuals, themes and concepts that can be found in life, but instead what is created is ‘stereotype’. Oversimplifying a character this way leads to popularised characters that cannot offer balanced representation and often demonise and insult.

The overall structure of this thesis is designed to first approach the concept of the schlemiel and introduce the female schlemiel to build a context and foundation for the case studies that follow. Arranging the structure of the research this way follows a proposed chronological time frame that links both the history of the schlemiel to the development of the female schlemiel, and to analyse the case studies in relation to each other. Elaine May and Joan Rivers cover their respective works of Jewish female performance during the 60s and early 70s, and Gilda Radner and Madeline Kahn do so in their work during the 70s and 80s. The original intention was to approach the case study chapters in a direct chronological timeline, however there was merit to alternating them in order to highlight a before/after comparison between the four, Rivers and Radner, May and Kahn.

In the following chapters there will be an aim to find the commonality and cultivation of the female schlemiel, through perspectives that differ based on industry, gender perspectives and society of the time. The first chapters look to establish on what grounds the schlemiel is found to be recognised, and through the lens in which it is most obvious to audiences; the model of endurance for example is one that is easily followed due to its association with trauma, it is also the one that is most easily encoded naturally through discussions of gender struggle, feminist discussion, and religious and cultural evolution. After this has been ascertained, the research will be directed towards four women who came to fame within the mid to late twentieth century and are most famous for their place within the comedy genre and industry. While they may be also known for their alternate projects, this analysis will focus on their most famed and relevant line of work and will be organised through stand-up, sketch comedy, writing, and acting. Due to the intersection of these there will be commonalities between each individual and their work as many of

these women followed a career trajectory that involved one or more of these sections.

The study of the female schlemiel falls into a multitude of disciplines. As it is the study of a Jewish archetype, it may be first assumed that it only fits within Jewish studies, however the intricacies of the themes found within the schlemiel place it as an interdisciplinary subject that broaches feminist studies and the study of archetype itself. Due to the wide array of texts that it is found in, the schlemiel can fit comfortably in the study of literature, film and television, with the works of Phillip Roth, the Coen Brothers and Larry David representing the schlemiel in those fields. What at first seems to be a small subject extends widely to a large portion of contemporary arts studies, and therefore it is important to continue addressing the appearance of the schlemiel in these areas, as to not lose the opportunity to discuss archetype in an interdisciplinary way. As a broadly interdisciplinary study, these chapters will work to discuss the relationship between the schlemiel and gender but will use a Jewish studies critical perspective as an approach to rationalising different interpretations within the analysis. As the schlemiel is a Jewish archetype, this is necessary in understanding the cultural perspective in which these women, all Jewish women, are raised. This is not to say that they all feature the same background or relationship with their ‘Jewishness’ but that the inclusion of it is necessary in categorising the differences of the female schlemiel when compared to the male representation.

The intention of this work is not to ascertain the existence of the female schlemiel, but to assume its existence and understand the limitations and variances in which it appears to audiences. The theme of comedy is essential in further linking all themes of religion, society, gender, industry and archetype, since it is the genre

that allows for all these to be discussed. As ‘comedy may question anything that’s said or done, nothing is off-limits' (Helitzer, 1992., p.168), therefore, it works in tandem with the natural disciplines linked to the schlemiel archetype.

Chapter One:

Defining the Schlemiel.

1.1 Introducing the Schlemiel

In introducing the term schlemiel to a concise description of character, it is important to first note that the etymology of the word in Jewish history is contradicted by many scholars. From Chamisso to Pinsker, there is a seemingly muddled account of where the word originates despite their agreement on the general meaning. In relation to other archetypes found within Jewish storytelling, the schlemiel can work in tandem with both the schlimazel, and the schmuck. Unlike the schlemiel, these other two terms have a more defined provenance; schmuck was first derived from the Yiddish term for ‘*penis’* (Stevenson, 2010, p.1591), and schlimazel originated from the Hebrew/Germanic words for *‘crooked luck’* (Stevenson, 2010, p.1591). While it is then understood that the etymology of the schlemiel is inconclusive, the Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia considers the schlemiel as ‘one who is dogged by an ill luck that is more or less due to his own ineptness’ (Pinsker 1991, p.2). From

this there can be an assertion that the schlemiel is largely an unlucky archetype, like the schlimazel, but the parameters and contexts of that luck are largely open to interpretation. The schlemiel could possibly be unlucky in love and successful in career or vice versa. Combinations of this dynamic are found within the schlemiels of Woody Allen's on-screen characters, whose careers in particular are often not dissimilar to the roles found in Allen's own creative career and 'more often than not, these professions are central to the plot, as many of Allen's characters are somehow creatively or professionally blocked at the start of their respective films' (Soules, 2016). In further expanding these parameters, the phrasing used in the encyclopaedia '*dogged* by an ill luck' implies the notion that the schlemiel is perpetually unlucky and that their successes may be an accidental product of their ill luck or doomed to an unpredictable *oncoming* of ill luck.

In many narratives the roles of the schlemiel and schlimazel are independent from each other, but the consequences of one's actions can often directly affect the other. For example, Leo Rosten suggested that the schlemiel is the one who spills their soup, and the schlimazel is the one it lands on (Pinsker 1991, p.2). This anecdotal definition of these two archetypes says that one is the creator of the disruption and the other is the victim of disruption, but *both* are unlucky. Sanford Pinsker in his revision of his book *The Schlemiel as Metaphor* created his own version of Rosten's narrative that fits with this, suggesting that, 'When a schlimazl's bread-and-butter accidentally falls on the floor it always lands butter side down; with a schlemiel it's much the same - except he butters his bread on both sides first' (Pinsker 1991, p.2). In buttering both sides, the schlemiel is guaranteeing their own loss, but the schlimazel is simply unlucky every time.

From this initial description of the schlemiel, what both Pinsker and Rosten prove is that the schlemiel as a term is used to describe an unlucky fool that concurs with the description found in the Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia. The 'ill luck' may refer to both an idiocy and stupidity in action, but may manifest a naivete or social clumsiness that causes events of ill luck; as Rosten's unlucky schlemiel is clumsy and Pinsker's is idiotic, both have guaranteed their own loss simply through their existence.

The characteristics that schlemiel consists of can be broad and not limited to physicality; this is often dependent on the mediation and portrayal of the archetype from traditional Yiddish storytelling to westernised American-Jewish narratives. This mediation can be traced through anti-Semitic propaganda of non-Jewish perspectives as 'we find in the publications of the anti-Semites all the ancient charges, which were brought forward in the Middle Ages, and which the seventeenth century revived, accusations which find support in popular belief' (Lazare 2006, p.321). Alternatively they can be found in representations of Jewish people through Jewish storytelling and personal accounts. The broadening definitions of the schlemiel ultimately are then birthed from the definitions of Jewish people of the time, compiled insider and outsider perspectives. Hannah Arendt engaged with the understanding of the 'Jew as Pariah' and offered the definition that the conscious pariah was both an insider and outsider to their own culture and diaspora as they "became marginal not only in relation to European society- as all Jews were- but to the Jewish community as well" (Arendt 1978, p.18). This suggests that the perceptions of marginality are somewhat dependent on the distance from their origin, the second generations of American-Jews are displaced from the traditional home of Israel, and vice versa. The Jewish communities become split, and therefore become marginal to each other.

As an example of the broadening perceptions of the schlemiel, Irving Howe in *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humour* argues that the schlemiel is “the eternal innocent” (1990, p.23) and that the schlemiel’s ability to say and do the wrong thing is with good intention. Sidrah DeKoven Ezrahi similarly used the term “innocent” to describe the traditional Yiddish characters within the large works of Scholem Aleichem; stories which were later adapted to American-Jewish theatre such as *Fiddler on the Roof (1964).* In these long-lasting narratives and their respective analysis , the notion of the schlemiel as an innocent does fit within the examples of Jewish people as victimised by their neighbouring religions and cultures, but that does not wholly imply that innocence equals to victimhood, since it could be argued that in labelling one as a victim there is present an act of microaggression. Subtextually this means that the schlemiel is innocent of the sins that atheistic culture allows (these being rules on sex and consumption that are not determined by religion) and similarly asserts they are victim to the spreading of Christianity as an opposing religion despite their similar monotheistic beliefs.

1.2 Development of the Archetype

In opposition to the idea of the schlemiel as the ‘eternal innocent’, this character can be viewed through the analysis of Menachem Feuer and David Biale, who examine the concept of “the sexual schlemiel” in *The Body of Jewish Comedy (2015)*, and *Eros and the Jews (1992)* respectively. In regarding the schlemiel as such, the title of ‘innocent’ then becomes contradictory when considering the societal perceptions of sex as both a taboo and sinful topic, particularly in a premarital context and particularly in regard to women. Asserting the schlemiel as a sexual

being then creates a more contemporary and revised perception of character that can be applied to a multitude of Jewish texts from the novel and theatre through to film and TV due to changed perceptions of sex.

Biale first suggests in his analysis of *Portnoy's Complaint (1969)* that there is a representative image of the "sexually and militarily potent Isreal" but also, an "Impotent American Jew" (1997, p.205). The latter of these develops from the American-Jewish, specifically New York, comedy scene where "The Jew as sexual schlemiel has its roots in the Yiddish theatre of the Lower East Side of New York, in comedy of the borscht belt in the Catskill Mountains" (Biale 1997, p.205). In this paradoxical perception of the non-sexual and sexually potent Jewish character the schlemiel can be considered both but this is dependent on the origins of the narrative and character.As Biale suggests, if the character is perhaps a representation of unmigrated Israel then the schlemiel is considered "sexually potent", however in an American-Jewish context the schlemiel is impotent. The ways in which the schlemiel's sexuality is understood is also influenced by the perception of the Jewish role in the narrative as 'the schlemiel is no stranger to sexual errancy' (Block 2018, p.45). For German Poet Adelbert Chamisso the schlemiel hails from a character who is caught engaging in sex with the wife of a Rabbi and is killed as punishment. For Heinrich Heine, the schlemiel is a character who witnesses an illicit sexual act and is wrongfully murdered (Block 2018, p.45). In both of these narratives the schlemiel is a component of a sexual act, but the context and result of both is dependent on the schlemiel as innocent, or as sexually potent.

These beginnings of the schlemiel archetype develop along with the narratives of popular modes of storytelling. The Hebrew Bible, for example, features characters that could be compared to the role in terms of their linguistic connection;

“a character mentioned in Numbers (9:19) - Shelumiel ben Zurishaddai” (Pinsker 1991, p.2). This link establishes that the interpretation of this archetype can be traced from the more contemporary definitions of the schlemiel, such as the ‘sexual schlemiel’, to the traditional religious role it may have taken, to be understood as the ‘eternal innocent’.

The importance of the visual representation of the schlemiel is to find its definitive imagery, or to at least link definitions to a corresponding aesthetic that fits. In the case of the sexual schlemiel, its comedic edge perhaps works with a visual representation that does not fit the ideal sexual partner. As in incongruity theory ‘at the “punch line” the expectation suddenly vanishes' (Roeckelein 2006, p.331) and the overall goal of the joke is to subvert the expected response as “humour’s in-and-out grouping power can also function as a means of questioning and subverting dominant discourses” (2009, p.64), determined by Eva Knopp. This imagery of the schlemiel often points to a male orientated archetype. As the dominant aesthetics of the schlemiel in texts, and paradoxically in the texts analysing those aesthetics, one can find that the question of the female schlemiel is left somewhat unaddressed, and if it is addressed at all it is similarly unanswered. To look into the feminisation of the schlemiel is to similarly look at the overall representation of the Jewish people, and the development of their humour in which this feminisation persecutes the Jewish male and leaves little room for Jewish women; ‘All Jews are womanly; but no women are Jews.’ (Pellegrini 2014, p.18). Theodore Reik categorises Jewish humour by “an oscillation between a masochistic and a paranoid attitude...contradictions that characterise the Jewish situation in our civilisation” (1962, p.299) which establishes the significance of their history as a persecuted culture and religion to their modernised forms of humour which utilise that fear for comedy.

In pre-war texts the portrayal of the Jewish people was that they were oppositional to the idealised gentiles of Christian religions; ideals that were examples of hyper-masculinity, which itself refers to a 'set of behaviours and beliefs characterized by unusually highly developed masculine forms as defined by existing cultural values' (Aronson, A B, 2004,. p.418) and in comparison, to those practising Judaism; "Denied the right to bear arms, ride horses, duel, joust or arch competitively, diaspora Jews, in return, rejected the competitive-drive ethos of what they disparagingly called *goyim naches*" (Abrams 2012, p.91). Within Abrams's assertion that the diasporic Jew became a rejection of the gentile way of life, there can be found a similarity in Biale's representation of the 'sexual schlemiel'; particularly, that in the diasporic American-Jew there is a sense of impotency, but traditionally the men are as potent and successful as their gentile counterparts. Menachem Feuer develops this notion further to demonstrate the comedic element of this visual representation and how it is important to the composition of the schlemiel. Feuer states that,

> 'an important aspect of the comical stereotype of the Jewish body's appeal is the fact that it draws on a kind of social awkwardness and weakness that is at once imagined and real' (Feuer, 2015)

and from this it can be concluded that, for Feuer, the schlemiel is linked directly to this perception of weakness as an integral contribution to the schlemiel archetype. The weakness and denied right to the traditional masculine actions culminate in a traditional feminisation of Jewish males that develops over time to become part of Jewish humour, from propaganda to punchline. This notion is easy in defining the schlemiel in terms of one male character however in feminising the male 'for laughs'

the intention of it is lost when applied to a female character as they are already inherently feminised.

1.3 Feminising the Schlemiel

Understanding that the Jewish male was then feminised, the schlemiel is used as an example of incongruity theory in joke-telling and accepts the idea that this feminisation is funny because it is a male character, and the 'laughter is a reaction to the disparity between expectations and perceptions' (Roeckelein 2006, p331). This leaves the female schlemiel open to a different kind of subversion in which the comedy lies in their masculinisation or the mocking of hyper-feminine perspectives. For actors such as Madeline Kahn, her work alongside Jewish filmmakers such as Mel Brooks infer a co-creation of a male and female schlemiel. Her presence on-screen appeals to this comedic hyper-femininity in which the male schlemiel is responsive to her while she is both oblivious yet hyper-sexualised. It is within the confusion of defining a female schlemiel that,

> "The proclivity of the dirty joke to disparage female anatomy and to reduce women to the sum total of her genitalia is a power-related process, intended among other things to imply that the teller of the joke is superior to the fictional butt of the joke, and to the female listener" (Ziv 2017, p.118).

However, for a female character participating in these jokes, she is exerting autonomy of her own humour. She does not subvert this femininity by 'acting' masculine in the way the male schlemiel is feminised, and is engaging in a self-

awareness of misogyny by addressing how female sexuality can be used as both a contradictory positive and negative in patriarchal discussion. For example, in linking the physical appearance of the female schlemiel with the naivete of the male 'eternal innocent' we can see the traditional correspondence that women are innocent, and therefore not meant to talk about sex. Pertaining to the women of the mid-twentieth century, they are "indoctrinated from adolescence with the idea that it wasn't feminine to like sex" (Nicholson 2015, n.p) and therefore the outward appearance matches the social perception of that gender. If the actions of the sexual schlemiel were tied to the image of womanhood, a subversion of traditional femininity would occur as they become masculinised when compared to that of other women, through becoming autonomous in their sexual desires. In being a masculinised woman, she is marginal to both sexes, much like the schlemiel; 'she does not wish to relinquish her claims as a human being; but she is no more willing to be deprived of her femininity; she chooses to join the masculine world' (De Beauvoir 1997, p.430)

The sexual schlemiel may be feminised to undercut the aggression in which sexualised males are typically represented as dominant, while the 'eternal innocent' schlemiel may represent a more conventionally masculine model to compensate for a weaker sexual interest. This can be seen throughout the examples of the schlemiel in film and television, as these forms of media are the ones that best associate character and visual aesthetic. Understanding this from a male perspective, the audience can associate a schlemiel with a physically smaller and psychologically neurotic form, ideas more readily associated with women due to gendered psychological terms such as "Hysteria" (meaning *Womb*) (Karlyn, K R, 2017,.p, 1), as unattractive to the desired sex. However, there is a popular schlemiel model that exists with Feuer's assertion that the Jewish male is considered awkward and feminised compared to the non-Jewish other, but is still attractive to the female sex,

perhaps without intention to act upon his desire In his analysis of Thomas Pynchon's novel *V.* (1963) Feuer asserts that the schlemiel is an object of attraction to the women in the book, 'They also want him, sexually. But perhaps because he is a schlemiel, he can't give it up to either of them' (Feuer, 2017).

In applying this to the masculinised Jewish woman, the sexualisation of what may be considered a powerful/strong/independent-woman or *Belle Juive* may also benefit their ability to project a persona that allows for a more explicit form of comedy or art. In their subversion they are adopting the qualities of one gender as an armour against scrutiny, while being sexualised still, by that same gender.

These women are their own protagonists, as they are not simply the 'love interest' to the comic male hero, they are instead Jewish women in the midst of their own narratives, in which they battle with their inherited aesthetics and femininity "each protagonist experienced part or all of her body as misshapen and transgressing socially acceptable norms" (Antler 1998, p.124). For masculinised women the idea of misshapen could signify "flat-chested" and therefore unfeminine, but for Jewish women also, the "misshapen" could simply mean "*Jewish*." Compared to the westernised vision of beauty, their ethnicity does not fit in this. It is because of this that the subversion has been a tool in which Jewish women use to portray an image of themselves not cultivated by outsider perception.

Gilda Radner is an example of such subversion with her experience in sketch comedy. Her characters are often hyper-feminising women to a masculine extent, the use of lipstick becomes a weapon as her smile is overdrawn, becoming clownish and threatening. Radner, in her SNL character as news correspondent 'Roseanne Roseannadanna', exaggerates her speech, her hair, and her make-up to take on a 'drag-like' impression of femininity that subverts and satirises sexualised women. As

the male schlemiel is feminised and the masculine female schlemiel is desexualised, the traditional parameters of the concept of the schlemiel are lost within the idea that feminising an already female character is essentially useless.

For a female schlemiel it is perhaps the use of masculine attributes that lead to more likely comedic set up, but the hyper-feminine attributes lead to a more likely punchline. As Roberta Mock states in *Jewish Women on Stage, Film and Television,* the 19th century motif of *La Belle Juive* (The Beautiful Jewess) is somewhat masculine in its attraction. While "*La belle Juive* is both hyperfeminine and perversely masculine" (2007, p.19), the same could be said for the contemporary performers of the 20th century. It may not be in looks that these women are made to emulate their male counterparts, but their topics and presence within their own narratives is what is tailored to match a masculinised ideology. The perversion that Mock refers to is that men may only find women funny if they *copy* the male majority; 'furthermore, those who *were* considered funny...were considered to be extraordinarily "masculine" aberrations' (Mock 2016, p.3).

From the collection of mid-to late twentieth comics, the difference between the male and female schlemiel perspectives is found within the role in which they are placed in the 'home life.'this is not to necessarily suggest their *own* homes, but the homes of their audiences, whose values determine the placement of that performer. The role of the schlemiel is then perhaps to subvert that initial perspective and in doing so trick their audience into accepting them, and their perceived societal flaws. For example, comics of the 1960s visually exert an element of the social ideals of the time and therefore the audience are placed to trust that their values match their visual markers. The men are often wearing suits which suggests a vision of corporate, political manhood while the women dress demurely and conservatively to

mirror what the audience believe is a picture of morality; “Since the 1960s comedians have tended to dress much as their audience do” (Ritchie 2012, p.35) and in so doing, earn their trust. The same could be applied to the insertion of women into domestic spaces, as the gender seemingly aligns with the desired expectation. The female schlemiel may then use this idealised imagery to curate a hidden masculinised and subversive viewpoint that contrasts this visual cue. This idea of ‘to masculinise’ does not translate to literal imagery of men but refers to topics or attributes associated with the dominant sex of the time such as money, sex, career and politics. Comedy is an avenue in which this can be done to a degree of accessibility and subterfuge, for these subversive viewpoints can be deemed ‘satire’ or ‘sarcasm’ and not just immediately taken at face value because ‘irony is a trope that needs to be interpreted, but like some others, it can be slippery’ (Henderson, 2006., p.43).

For the mid twentieth century, such a display may discourage the female schlemiel’s successes in relationships, both social and romantic, and therefore her humour is rooted in social clumsiness and rebellion. The female schlemiel is not exercising a physical foolishness like her male counterpart, but rather an interaction with social expectations of women that results in foolishness. In the case of Jewish women and their place within this society, there are cultural differences that allowed Jewish women to prosper in areas that the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) “type” may not have. As in the larger Jewish communities the desire for women to attend university was more widely established since ‘Jewish women were prominent in pioneering generations of university women’ (Friedenreich 2002, p.1) Jewish women then demonstrate a well-educated perspective that places them as the “other” within their social circle of non-Jewish women. This is a parallel to the earlier definitions established by Abrams that the rebellion of Jewish men against hyper-

masculinity was through the means of education. This is the same rebellion for Jewish women, except that theirs is against a perceived passivity of uneducated women. *A Jewish Feminine Mystique?* (ed. Antler, 2010) addresses this notion of rebellion for Jewish women, particularly in the years post the second world war; “Jewish women of the post-war years did not retreat obediently into their trim, suburban homes. They often complicated, and sometimes even rebelled against the dominant middle-class femininity that threatened to circumscribe their lives” (Antler, et al 2010 p.3) which comments on not only life for the Jewish people after their repression in the second world war, but also on the similarly dictated repression of women that continued in the home; a repression which they rejected.

1.4 Matter of Endurance

For the female schlemiel, a close definition that will be prominently featured both apply to the specificities of gender and culture would be within Ruth Wisse’s *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* in which she states that the schlemiel has become a ‘model of endurance’ for the Jewish people as:

> ’the *schlemiel* embodied those negative qualities of weakness that had to be ridiculed to overcome. Conversely, to the degree that Jews looked upon their disabilities as external afflictions, sustained through no fault of their own, they used the *schlemiel* as a model of endurance’ (1971, p.5).

Endurance becoming a key theme for women in the emerging comedy scenes, the fight for Jewish women to subvert and endure the notions of passive womanhood in a male industry was growing through each appearance of a female comic. Independence for Jewish women was a powerful theme through which to dominate male comic material, which beforehand had focussed on the 'mystery' of an idealised woman that was easily generalised and created by men for male audiences, and "in both literature and popular culture, Christian and Jewish men have portrayed Jewish women according to their dreams and values" (Antler 1998, p.70). This, to a certain degree, is important to the identification of a female schlemiel, as what has previously been seen of the female Jewish comic has often been a mirror image of the male one; their "dreams and values" are not representative of Jewish women, rather an instruction booklet pushing women towards the male "ideal". The female comics and the female schlemiel's endurance is not only from the clutches of tradition but also fantasies of that tradition.

Understanding the ways in which Jewish women demonstrate themselves as schlemiels and how they adhere to that archetype in their works is to then understand that the parameters and characteristics that are placed on the male schlemiel do not simply stick to women. While the word itself may adhere to a gender-neutral wording (by this meaning the lack of pronoun within the etymology) the use of it is heavily gendered towards the male character. The concept does not find itself easily placed within schlemiel theory, and when it does it does so usually in relation to men. David Biale in his theory of the sexual schlemiel attributes the growth of a female schlemiel only as a mirror image reactionary to the male schlemiel, suggesting that "In some of Allen's movies the Jew's sexual ambivalence infects the gentile women and turns them into mirror image of himself: even gentile women become "Jewish." (Biale 1997, p.207). The implication is that the schlemiel is

a constant and constructed character for a Jewish male but for a Jewish woman it is evolutionary and allowed only by the presence of a male template. It is interesting that in Biale's theory, the woman is not Jewish, suggesting that the male schlemiel excludes Jewish women as sexual partners as they "have the libidinal energy to win over gentile women from their desiccated WASP culture" (1997, p.206). Within this sexual attraction towards non-Jewish women, it cultivates growth for a non-Jewish female schlemiel, made in the image of the male, instead of an independently made Jewish female schlemiel.

Female representation for a character like the male schlemiel lands within Biale's definition, but for a female Jewish character without a male counterpart the role of Jewish American Princess could also be applied. As the 'Jewish American Princess' is 'hyper-American' and a rejection of "old-world Jewishness" (Berger, 2017., p.80) she has 'picked up the worst of American culture, its gross materialism, and self-centeredness' (Berger, 2017., P.80). She is often an oppositional product of the 'Jewish American Mother'. While the mother "has children, overly concerned about kids, scrimps and saves" the princess "avoids sex, [is] overly concerned about self, and spends money" (Berger 2017, p.80). The characteristics of the Jewish American Princess are similar to that of the schlemiel in that they are both "sexual neurotics" but the "male schlemiel gives us access to his thought processes while the JAP is viewed extrinsically" (Brook 2006, p.216). In allowing his thought processes to be understood the male schlemiel is given a platform for a comically neurotic outsider that attracts others, but the actions of the Jewish American Princess being materialistic or overly Americanised repels the traditional female roles (the notion of the eternal innocent) as they are sexually neurotic, and the conscious pariah, who is not integrated enough to the adopted diaspora. It is then important for

the female schlemiel to work against the confined spaces of male imitation and, to an extent, work to reject and confront the limits of stereotype.

A female schlemiel role can occur through a multitude of comedic and narrative industries. These extend to, but are not limited to, film, television, stand-up comedy, stage comedy, and theatre. If the schlemiel itself is a Jewish expression of the foolish outsider, as described by theorists such as Pinsker and Arendt, then it is within these forms that this expression is best and most widely presented to Jewish and American audiences owing to their popularity within the growing leisure culture. The Jewish comedian has the ability within these environments to appeal to their select audience, but the inclusion of live audiences within some of these forms like stage comedy, variety theatre, and live TV mean that the outreach for jokes is much wider and diverse as they are able to “capitalize on the rich humour of their dual origins” (Littenberg 1997, p.14) with a guarantee of also being able to manipulate their material to respond to the reactions as it occurs. For female comedians this was an advantage that could help dictate how far they pushed the audience - too far and it may not have been the same payoff compared to “sick comedians like Lenny Bruce, who was very popular despite his often obscene delivery and language and was hailed as refreshing criticism; “He is a rebel, but not without a cause, for there are shirts that need unstuffing” (Kercher 2010, p.409).

However, like Bruce, sexual-satirists like Joan Rivers are examples of women existing in these industries as independents within the mid-twentieth century, despite their limitations due to the couple style comedy (male/female duo) which was found more popular for women, and the male dominated individual style being more profitable.

Rivers herself is considered “usually gentle in her satire about Jewish culture...but she is not above exploiting the Jewish American Princess stereotype” (Antler 1998, p.76). It is the combination of these specific cultural and gendered experiences, disguised through more recognised analogies, that allowed her loud and sometimes aggressive material to grace the stage in more national and widely televised ways. As an American-Jew, Rivers holds the dual perspectives of both inside and outside American life which allows her the ability to mock both sides of the cultural divide, not fitting into the traditional role of the Jewish home-maker matriarch, nor the conservatism of the White Anglo-Saxon protestant, she adopts the role of the conscious pariah. This is not the only role she adapts to fit her material, as her frequent use of the Jewish American Princess stereotype exhibits an interchangeable perspective in which to disguise certain ideologies on men, finances, marriage etc.

As the Jewish American Princess was previously recognised by a disinterest in adopting the home-centric desires of women in the twentieth century, a rejection of such values towards an audience that contribute to those ideologies could be an example of foolish comic strategy. But the audience are not laughing at the rejection, rather the package in which it is delivered. As the ‘funny Jew’ has evolved from an outsider of America, to a modernised princess of America, who is materialistic and looking for a husband, but not looking for sex. A further evolution continues:

> “the JAP transforms into the female schlemiel whose sexual neuroses and inner conflicts move to centre stage and are explored sympathetically, taking precedence over differences of class, religion, or ethnicity, while the Jewish

male is either objectified or excluded altogether as an object of desire" (Brook 2006, p.216).

As the Jewish American Princess evolved to become a product of the Jewish American Mother, the question of how the schlemiel becomes a product of the male character must be explored to determine how it can apply to women. Understanding that from Pinsker and Rosten's 'soup' routines there is a simple narrative between schlemiel and schlimazel as disruptor and victim, there must, be similar narratives that can be found between the Jewish American Princess and the female schlemiel If not the case of evolution, then the examination of the narratives that form for women as 'the eternal innocent,' 'the sexual schlemiel,' 'the conscious pariah,' 'the fool' and 'the model of endurance.'

Chapter Two:

Finding the Female Schlemiel

2.1 Defining the Schlemiel

For the purposes of this thesis the schlemiel will be defined loosely along Wisse's theory of the schlemiel as modern hero, in that the schlemiel is simply a 'model of endurance' (1971, p5). A broad definition yet it alludes to the competing definitions mentioned; the schlemiel endures their own stupidity, their outsideness and, their ill luck; '...his absolute defencelessness the only guaranteed defence against the brutalizing potential of might' (Wisse, R.R. 1971, p.5). This model can be paired with humour theory and applied outwardly to the men that portray it, but these lines blur when applied to women. To propose an equation for the archetype it could be theorised that the following exists for the male schlemiel: A model of endurance plus incongruity theory equals the schlemiel. For example, the Jewish male character plus the feminisation of that character equals the schlemiel.

Being that the Jewish male represents the model of endurance, and the feminisation represents the incongruity aspect. However, if this simplified theorisation is applied to women and the model of endurance changed, it would have to be applied to humour theory in a different way, as the same application of incongruity would not necessarily be incongruous to an already feminine character. If one were to change the feminisation of women to the masculinisation of them, then the element of incongruity applies, the development of the female schlemiel begins to look like this: A Jewish Woman *plus* Masculinisation *equals* the Schlemiel.

While a theoretical pattern for a comedic character is not an all-encompassing application, it is a visualisation of incongruity theory as a subversion of expectation, applied to women and men in comedy, in order to cultivate a comedic archetype. However, the flaw within this example of the masculinisation of women is that, as taken from extracts of Mock's book, the masculine Jewish woman is considered the *Belle Juive;*

> 'The *belle Juive* evolves into a bold, proud and occasionally vulgar woman, sometimes more accurately described as a *Juive fatale*. Invariably handsome, she turns exploitative, canny about money and determined not to be done out of it' (Schiff, 2012, p.23)

Which is established as a character separate from the schlemiel, and a highly sexualised one at that.

2.2 The Incongruous Masculine/Feminine

A performative character, nonetheless, the sexualisation of the *Belle Juive* adheres to Laura Mulvey's seminal male gaze theory in that, despite the occurrence of masculinisation in women, they are still sexualised by men, because the gaze is 'active/male' and 'In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed' (Mulvey, 1975. P11.). This applies to both women simply existing in a visual form for men and those like the *Belle Juive* who are actively performative. The body of women, masculinised or not, is coded to appeal to men in the sense that men have largely been the leading influence on female beauty

standards. The role of clothing is a pertinent example of this, as trousers coded as a masculine clothing item in the late nineteenth century because ‘the culture of the Victorian era associated trousers with male authority’. Once women began to rebel against this constraint in tandem with feminist liberation movements, the ideal changed to include trousers as a unisex product and ‘the widespread acceptance of pants by middle-class women appears to have been pioneered by marginal groups’ (Crane, 2012., p.124) That rebellion became conformity, and one that didn’t exclude the sexual gaze of men.

For the masculine female schlemiel, the evident lack of overt sexual interest that has become a component of the male schlemiel, is not present. Similarly, for this equation, the feminised male is often a staple of comic unexpectedness as applying the perceived “weaker” attributes to the “stronger” gender subverts societal expectation. In switching these to fit a female character the societal expectation is subverted but does not necessarily reach to a comic conclusion and yet, ‘it is possibly also the logical culmination of an internal process, in which a formerly feminine virtue becomes redefined as masculine and then the abandoned masculine trait is eventually assigned to the female.’ (Last Stone, S. ed, Tirosh-Samuelson, 2004. p.283) As women who are masculinised become “improved,” the men are becoming “weaker” and this is where the comedy of this subversion lies, in its impact on the character within social expectation.

The hypothetical equation stays the same, but the result changes, and it is therefore essential to question all approaches in identifying a schlemiel. In order to define the differences, or lack thereof, between the female schlemiel and the *Belle Juive*, it is in understanding the relationship between humour theory and gender within the cultural contexts that create the foundation of the archetype. The

subversions between feminine and masculine, funny and unfunny, work within incongruity theory in a comic sense but are not limited to comedy ‘for the incongruity theory amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way.’ (Morreall, J, 1983. p.16). The female schlemiel acts in a way such as this, what we expect is not necessarily what we as an audience get from the archetype paired with the gender, this does not always result in laughter, and Kant described incongruity theory as an act of ‘emotional release’ (Moreall, J. 1983. P.16) that is accountable for laughter.

There is a sense of nuance and timeliness for incongruous joke telling, for women especially, since the limitations and expectations are perhaps harsher in the realm of polite society. A 1960s audience do not expect women to joke about politics, or sex, and so when it occurs it plays into that emotional release discussed by Kant. The audience question the expectedness of the situation and react through laughter. What must be questioned also is the placement of incongruity as a more subtle and in-depth understanding of the nature of performance. For example, can an audience question the presence of incongruity theory within gender, to for example identify a schlemiel, and instead find incongruity in aspects other than gender? Perhaps one could define a moment of incongruity as the presence of a Jewish character in a non-Jewish narrative, or vice versa.

An example of this would be in the 1967 film *The Graduate* which was directed by Mike Nichols, one half of the comedic duo ‘Nichols and May’. The novel on which the film is based, and its author are not Jewish, however discussions of the film since its release, such as the article *‘50 Years Later, Just How Jewish was The Graduate?’* (Laurie Gwen Shapiro, The Forward), have alluded to its ‘Jewish feel’ and that the reason for this is within the inclusion of Mike Nichols as the director, and

Dustin Hoffman as the lead actor; both of which are Jewish men. In place of an originally non-Jewish text, Nichols presents a film made through the lens of a Jewish perspective. While this act is not incongruous to a comedic effect, the result of this film featuring a cultural perspective that was not explicitly intended is unexpected. The result of this particular film nourished a different understanding of two cultures, youth and Jewish, that felt similar social fears, one the author of the novel itself admitted to; “Though neither Fred nor I are Jewish, we gave the rights to the ADL because we felt they had influenced us in a profound way, to understand prejudice in all its forms and victims.” (Los Angeles Times, 2002).

2.3 Jewish Humour and Female Identity

For Jewish humour this self-referential incongruity is comprehensive with the history of Jewish comedy and language. That for example,

> ‘Yiddish was inherently contradictory...They *required* forms of speech that incorporated incongruity and sought out expressions that bordered on absurdity’ (Wisse 2013, p.99). The discussion of performativity which ‘in its deconstructive sense, signals absorption’ (Parker, Sedgewick, 2004., p.2)

and ‘playing Jewish’ begins to come forth into the examination of archetype when analysing texts that use incongruity in narrative, and how comedy theory becomes

an overarching template in determining the relationship between author (the creator of the role) and character.

In understanding the female schlemiel as an incongruous archetype that is also a model of endurance, there must be an understanding in where and when the incongruity of the archetype lies. For a female character existing as a schlemiel their incongruity must be conclusive of what an audience believe the opposite of women to look/act/sound like and furthermore what they perceive Jewish women to look/act/sound like. The comic incongruity of the schlemiel only works with opposition, and if determined that a clumsy woman is a funny schlemiel, then audiences must believe that a non-schlemiel woman is *not* clumsy.

This gives us the opportunity to understand by process of elimination what is believed to be the ideal of women. If the female schlemiel is a specific collection of characteristics, we can determine that the opposite of those characteristics is considered the attractive template, and by attractive, it must be noted that what is meant is, attractive *to men*. However, the ideal woman changes depending on the societal choices determined by men. Identifying a precedent in which the representations of Jewish women change, alongside immediate societal development or destruction, is easy considering the history of the Jewish people's relationship to suffering, trauma and oppression. For Jewish women, endurance is an act that is not unfamiliar as 'where the portrayal of the *Yiddische mama* was affectionate, the post-war American Jewish creation of the Jewish Mother was not' (Abrams, 2012. p.48). This change in society then, and the surrounding culture, has essentially not only determined the new perception of women but has triggered the reshuffling of comic archetypes. When the perceived understanding of women changes, the archetypes and stereotypes must also.

If the female schlemiel is an archetype that goes against these ever changing yet traditional patterns of femininity, social placement, and value, then it is understood that the element of endurance is present throughout all these themes, and not just the simple subversion of gender. Furthermore, as the word ‘schlemiel’ itself is a gender-neutral term, one that has had gender enforced upon it throughout the years, the question of whether or not there is a female schlemiel is inherently moot: There must be a female schlemiel, because the word itself does not exclude the gender. It is the surrounding male archetypes that work to overwhelm the representation that is there and rename it to a misogynist and prejudiced degree.

The issue with this statement however lies in the assumption that words are not interpretative, which they are. The word ‘schlemiel’ has been used throughout masses of media, literature, folktale, theoretic study, and character discussion, and as it has been used its meaning has changed. If one study of the schlemiel refers to the archetype as ‘he’, then within that discussion the schlemiel is only male, but if referred to as ‘they’, the interpretation can be applied to both male and female at the same time. This leaves little room in the suggestion of inherent and social difference that applies to this collective ‘they’. In society, the male schlemiel may be a fool with ill luck, but he would still earn twenty-one cents more than a female schlemiel would; they may both be schlemiels, but they are different in that aspect; ‘Equality is not when a female Einstein gets promoted at the same rate as a male assistant professor, but when a female schlemiel gets promoted as fast as a male schlemiel’ (Nyquist, E.B.,1976 p23). There are plenty of instances where this structural difference would apply, and that is the foundation of pinpointing the female schlemiel. For,

> ‘There were ebbs and flows in women’s social and economic power through Jewish history - the early modern period, for example, which offered new possibilities, also saw an upsurge in some of these comic opportunities and performances...Comedy can be about presentation of breaking down structures rawly, subverting them from the inside, or consolidating stereotypes, but women didn't get a chance to do any of those things, in any fundamental way, until the twentieth century provided the necessary upheavals.’ (Dauber, J, Chapt.5)

Because of this newfound opportunity in which women began to tap into the schlemiel and its comic availability, the economic and social limitations of women still factor into this sense of inequality but are similarly used to cultivate material that creates an added layer to the archetype.

2.4 Women Aren’t Funny

The myth of ‘women aren’t funny’ is one that there have been studies to prove (disprove?) ‘but proving this does little to diminish the persistence of that belief’ (Abrams, 2017. P.241) similarly plays into a gendered stereotype of women in comedy, but it is often unclear of what this means in relation to why it is believed women are not funny. Their traditional role in the home perhaps represents safety and modesty that is a marker for the American dream but it is understood as a patriarchal dream, as ‘Friedan argued, often brilliantly, that American women,

especially suburban women, suffered from deep discontent' (Bogle, 2001., p.97). Particularly in the mid-twentieth century, the roles in the home become an uncomfortable topic of scrutiny, which for different forms of comedy such as satire, is incredibly important in joke telling. The masculine quality, the bias and aggression of punchlines (that 'punch') does not lend well to the perceived simpering sensitivities of women. The perception of women as 'stupid' is a stereotype that is born from medical assumptions of women's physiology as 'one of the oldest claims centres on the fact that women have smaller brains, which was considered evidence for intellectual inferiority' (Robson, 2012) which contributes to the perceived understanding that women's intellectual prowess is linked to their physiological difference. The link of intellectualism and comedy is therefore a gendered discussion that proposes that wit is something only accessed by those with a degree, this is perhaps not a common perception, but is encoded within the aesthetic of the comedy during the 1960s and 1970s which references politics and philosophy (two seemingly intellectual topics). This is not the same for some Jewish women, as mentioned that the culture requires women to be encouraged towards further education, Jewish women extend to an academic environment that gives the perception of qualification to discuss the topics that are usually broached by men. This is, of course, not essential to comedy as education and qualification are part of a classist ritual that does exclude the low-working classes, but during the comedy scene of the 1960s gave a sense of legitimacy that helped women gain success in the comedy industry. The topic of qualification within the binary of men and women is apparent in comedy, and how the perceived natures of both inform their 'funniness'.

The Christopher Hitchens essay in Vanity Fair titled "Why Women Aren't Funny" made assumptions of humour and women that are boiled down to the

intrinsic natures of men and women; why humour is important for natural selection, finding a mate etc. ‘Women don’t need to be funny’ and as Linda Mizejewski asserted in her analysis of the essay in *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics:*

> ‘Funniness for Hitchens is like height or good teeth - advantages for natural selection. There are very funny women, he conceded, but they tend to be “hefty or dykey or Jewish, or some combo of all three.”’ (2014)

In assuming that ‘funniness’ is not an essential character that women need to possess to be attractive to the opposite sex, then applying funniness to the “hefty, dykey or Jewish” implies that these three qualities detract from women, and the addition of good humour seemingly benefits or adds to the quality of that individual, and limits valuable attributes to the aesthetic. The result of this becomes regurgitated through the analysis of women in the media, a sentence repeated; ‘it is acceptable to be one of these three things, but only if you’re funny’. Problematic in that it perpetuates fatphobic, homophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric, but also in that it is only the woman who is the specific target. In expanding this to Jewish women, this notion of endurance and the schlemiel as pariah lends itself further to the struggles that women face in the society built on male ideology; the idea that gentile women don’t need to be funny, but for Jewish women it is an aid to attraction, is a pervasive theory of women and comedy.

It is interesting to note that in Mizejewski's analysis of the article, the question of when comedy becomes masculine is clarified by the attributes placed unto women; 'He explained this remark by claiming that Lesbian and Jewish humour, as well as the humour of large bodied comedians like Roseanne Barr, is "masculine" and thus does not actually fall into the category of women's comedy.' (Mizejewski, 2014. p.1) Unfortunately, for women, the defining markers for what is 'masculine' is changeable because as Tirosh Samuelson asserted that the 'abandoned masculine trait is eventually assigned to the female' (p.283). If there were to be a catalogue of what was previously considered masculine, then the development of womanhood could be considered a *man*-made concept; If a female comic is attracted to women, like heteronormative tradition asserts men are, then all comedy written and performed by lesbian women is in fact, masculine. This is a fundamental flaw in arguing against female comics because it ignores the paradox of its own generalisation; if women are making 'masculine' jokes, which are understood as funny, then women are funny.

2.5 The Female Schlemiels: Rivers, Radner, May and Kahn.

Within this research the presence of the female schlemiel will be assessed by looking at examples of Jewish 'funny women' within key sections of the comedy industry, Stand-up, Sketch, Film, and Writing for both stage and screen. The timeline

that is the foundation of these sections is important in understanding how they are applied to the female schlemiel in relation to feminist theory within the traditional roles of both Jewish and non-Jewish women and their relevant era. In clarifying the relationship of race and religion with the roles of women within there must also be presence of a discussion on performativity and culture: the question of 'Playing Jewish' is important in understanding the caricature nature of the schlemiel physically/culturally. Similarly, for women, the balance between performative femininity and what is considered 'genuine' is blurred because of the presence of the male gaze; as women are always considered to be 'watched', they are seemingly always in a state of performance.

The nature of their work in relation to their personal relationship of the Jewish culture, whether that be the race, religion or heritage of them both, is also important in understanding how the female schlemiel perceives their own archetypal history. The archetypes of Jewish characters are born from such historic religious and communal tales, as they have been written by those who wish to continue and enhance them; 'In Judaism, stories and storytelling are major tools for learning and passing along the Jewish faith, culture and tradition […] A great many Jewish folktales and legends portray the shared religious themes of Judaism' (Schram, p., 2008. P.6). From these tales the contemporary archetypes we see are made to fit our current social climate, and the stereotypes that appear alongside them will have been forged from an, often prejudiced, caricature of the original characters.

The female schlemiel will therefore be understood from a varying degree of approaches, from a main comparison of the male counterpart, but also from the feminist theory of Jewish and non-Jewish women, and the performativity of 'Jewishness' on stage and screen. This is due to the largely performative comedy of

the schlemiel with the use of physical comedy, and character comedy that is heightened through presence of neurosis, sexual frustration/fascination, and its relation to Jewish culture and history. For women the presence of neurosis and sexuality is one that is considered both a traditionally feminine problem, and a signifier of self-awareness and strength. In the case of neurosis the historic precedents for women and diagnosis have been twisted to either validate pseudo-psychoanalytic theories on the perceived 'lesser-brains' of women, or to demonise those with genuine conditions. The term 'hysteria' in particular refers to the womb and was used to exploit women in both instances. For Jewish women however, particularly the Jewish American Princess, the Americanised culture of educated women of the borscht belt applies to the separation from the upper-class wholly American tradition but does not fit into the blue-collar classes of urban America. 'Most early feminist theories about women were really about white, heterosexual, middle-class, educated women. Such theories rendered both poor and wealthy women "other" (Chesler, 2018). Jewish women were encouraged to aspire to higher education and when they moved to America were similarly encouraged to assimilate, but their existence as Jewish women placed them within a default position of otherness in regard to these theories written by and for white, heterosexual, middle-class, educated women.

Jewish women of the mid-twentieth century, who neither fitted into the lower-classes or the upper-classes of America, fit perfectly into this middle ground of analysis that - during a time of great change for women and Jewish diaspora - was an asset to Jewish stereotypes in regards to mental health; Jewish guilt and the 'self-hating Jew' became staple topics for the Jewish comedian performing to Jewish audiences. Utilising and playing to this sense of outsider-ness is imperative to the

role of the schlemiel, as Hannah Arendt's theory of the 'Jew as pariah' asserts that the schlemiel is always an outsider, even when in a perceived inner circle of friends, co- workers, relationships etc. And as Lassner emphasises that 'the schlemiel tackles the problem of social injustice and hypocrisy at its root - that is, an aspect of the social rather than the political hierarchy in his society' (2008. P72) So, while the schlemiel for Arendt is consistently on the border of social acceptance, there are following theories that determine that the schlemiel is aware of it, and in turn works to change their position.

The 'Return of the Repressed' argues that 'the black and/or female other seems to represent the alter ego of the white male protagonist, it appeared that refused meanings return in the form of these marginalized others' (Fowler, 2000., p.ix) and as the female schlemiel appears as the representation of the refused meaning, the issue of social injustice runs deeper than perhaps being Jewish in a circle of gentiles but rather being a Jewish woman in circle of men, who are the accepted meaning. The injustice they tackle is intrinsic to their placement, or lack of it, in the world and the life they live. The female schlemiel is an outsider to their gender, their race, and their archetype. There are Jewish women in the industry of comedy that are examples of this previously mentioned sense of endurance and 'tackling', and in terms of their influence on comedy for later generations, dominate the form of female-specific comedy that translates and develops into the female schlemiel archetype.

The women that will be specifically discussed feature within the stand-up comedy scene, television sketch comedy, script/stage writing with on-screen presence, and careers in film and are as follows, Joan Rivers, Gilda Radner, Elaine May, and Madeline Kahn. The careers of these women fit along a timeline of

changes in the comedy industry during the mid to late twentieth century, changes that have impacted the comedy of women in contemporary culture, as well as decided the direction of humour and schlemiel theory as a whole. Their work within the small-time comedy scene is as important as their work in the popular scene and the social changes of the time were integral to creating the groundwork for the next generation of female comics. As Kessner states;

> ‘In every successive generation, Jewish female comedians helped shape the contours of American comedy. These comic pioneers were followed by a new cohort, schooled in the academy of improv clubs, and liberated by feminism, which led them to invent new forms of comedy, more satirical and openly rebellious then their predecessors. Elaine May, Joan Rivers, Gilda Radner, Roseanne Barr and Elayne Boosler were among these innovators’ (p.125, 2010. Kessner).

These women are the innovators of Jewish female comedy coming from a perspective that is new and rebellious in a culture of male dominated joke telling. The damaging and enormously problematic myth of ‘women aren’t funny’ directly ignores this history of women changing the way comedy is created and seen; not only in the change in humour style, but how it is told to an audience. For the female schlemiel, an element of this rebelliousness comes from a differing interpretation of what the schlemiel is and how it is different to the male performance of it.

The comedy career of Joan Rivers began in the early 1960sAfter a short stint in the Off-Broadway scene, she moved onto American daytime television with appearances on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson who hosted from 1962 to 1992 and made similar appearances with Jack Paar as host from 1957 to 1962. It was on these talk and game shows of the 1960s that her stand-up career blossomed, and like most other male comedians who were playing similar gigs, Rivers relied on the comedy club scene of New York. These clubs, like *The Bitter End, The Duplex, Cafe Wha?* became synonymous with the development of the influential comedy writers of the time, particularly the Jewish comedians, like Joan Rivers, Woody Allen and Lenny Bruce.

Throughout the years from 1960s female comedians similarly used the comedy club scene as a steppingstone towards other comedy forms. Gilda Radner, for example, began her career in the Toronto comedy troupe *The Second City* and later went on to write for *National Lampoon,* along with comedians like Chevy Chase and John Belushi; this was before her hire as the first *Saturday Night Live* cast member and writer who became a template for the future female cast members; 'The most beloved of the original cast - in the years between Mary Tyler Moore and *Seinfeld's* Elaine, Radner was the prototype for the brainy city girl with a bundle of neuroses' (*Rolling Stone,* 2015). From what we see in stand-up and sketch, the movement of comedic women to move to film and writing seems to be a development from the stage as Rivers and Radner began their careers in such a way before moving onto TV and film, we can see that careers of other women such as Elaine May and Madeline Kahn develop in the same way.

For Jewish women in film, Kahn's role as a sexualised sidekick often appearing opposite Mel Brooks firstly reads as a woman who is no archetype, but

rather a subject for the male gaze. However, the comedic role of Madeline Kahn often blurs the lines of what is typically expected from a love interest or dumb blonde trope. Her appearance in *High Anxiety* (1971) for example is a film which accentuates Kahn's ability to utilise character acting:

> *'High Anxiety* gave Madeline the pleasure of looking both gorgeous and funny, since she got to wear Victoria's little-old-lady disguise. The airport scene requires Madeline to create another character, entirely different to Victoria and from the majority of Madeline's other roles.' (Madison, 2015. p.29).

It is in this opportunity where Kahn takes her Jewishness and makes it as part of the character as Brooks does in his roles. For the beautiful love interest, the act of disguise and 'playing ugly' emphasises the range in which female comedy can exist in one space. Kahn's willingness and commitment to this small piece of character places her in a transformative light, one that moves quickly from one character to another. There is a meta element to this form of comedy, for she is a beautiful actress playing a beautiful woman who is playing a little-old-lady.

For these examples of female characters with clear visual cues and representations, Elaine May is an example of a female Jewish comedian that visually acts with a sense of character ambiguity. She is not overly sexualised like Kahn, or exaggerated in her character as Radner is, but she is perhaps instead more closely comparative to Joan Rivers in visual appearance. Both May and Rivers dressed in

fashionable conservatism which, for Rivers, was a binary opposite to her brash and loud character. May is instead a representation of the Jewess who is ‘a *zaftig* (plump), awkward and neurotic brunette, the female counterpart to the *schlemiel.* The key film that highlighted this Shiksa Jewess romantic dichotomy was Elaine May’s *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972)’ (Abrams, 2012. p.49-50). What is most interesting about this description of the Jewess, is that Abrams closely associates this as the ‘female counterpart’ to the schlemiel, as opposed to accepting it as a schlemiel in and of itself.

The classification of female ‘counterpart’ of the schlemiel implies that the existence of a female schlemiel is possible but that it is not accessible through equal labelling and distinction. This uncovers the inequality in which the schlemiel is discussed regarding the female perspectives. Since they are not described as a female schlemiel, or even just schlemiel, they are instead characterised by the archetype as a relation of the male schlemiel, or a counterpart. There are understandings of the female schlemiel that are limited to visual expectations of women and more specifically Jewish women. For example, the Jewess is considered ‘plump and brunette’ yet we can see examples of the opposite in comics such as Joan Rivers and Madeline Kahn. To determine that these two women are not themselves a Jewess because they do not fit this template inserts a limit that is based entirely on visual coding. The same can be said for the schlemiel; since the visual and social characteristics are tailored towards a male role, the existence of the female schlemiel extends a limit that was previously only understood as male accessible. The creation of the female schlemiel must be done by analysing how these limits might affect the female fool.

These limitations of the components are what is important in understanding to what extent the schlemiel interacts with the gender binary, the social change of the time and the application of intersectional feminism.

Chapter Three: Stand-Up and Sketch Comedy with Rivers and Radner.

3.1 Joan Rivers on Stage

From the early 1960s the introduction of stand-up comedians became the norm for American entertainment; chat-show hosts were parading their up-and-coming comedy finds on their stages, and the daytime game shows featured them as the comic relief. For Joan Rivers, this was how her career began, from club to the Johnny Carson Show she marketed herself as the young gossip girl; 'Joan Rivers proclaims her gossip reputation...Joan cajoles guests by pretending that millions are not watching, feigning the behaviour of private gossip, a standing joke of repudiation' (Mellencamp 1992, p.175). While Rivers is associated as a Jewish American Princess with her superficial ideals of success for women, most often expressed in material aspirations and 'gossipy' tales. Her rejection of this idea of 'private gossip' places herself in the role of a fool, one that stupidly gives away all her knowledge without realising, or caring, that everyone can hear. She is a smart performer in this regard as she *plays* idiocy as a part of her persona and in doing so lends herself towards the archetype of the schlemiel. Since the inherent understanding of the

schlemiel is that of a fool, Rivers adheres to this both conversationally and in her presentation on stage.

The apparent femininity in her costume as well as the styling of her large blonde hair is a visual component of great importance to the representation of female idiocy, following tropes such as the ‘dumb blonde’. In her early appearances on talk shows, the discussion of women and intelligence is one often raised by Rivers herself and is no better encapsulated by her appearance on *The Carol Burnett Show* in 1970 when she said, “It kills me because dumb doesn’t matter when you’re beautiful, which is why I am educated”. In this joke Rivers tells the audience who her character is, and in doing so plays to the punchline that her intelligence is to her detriment as well as her advantage. It is due to her intelligence that she can see her place in society and how different she is treated by men, and once seen she can critique via the guise of small circle gossip. In her appearance on the Ed Sullivan show she declares incredulously to the audience “A girl, you’re thirty years old and you’re not married, you’re an old maid! A man, he’s ninety years old, he’s not married, he’s a catch!” (*The Ed Sullivan Show*. April 23 1967). Her anger towards inequality is mellowed by her hypocritical and witty point of view of womanhood, she is easily bought by the aesthetics of superficiality but similarly disparages their association of lack of intelligence. Linda Mizejewski summarises Rivers’ comedy style to highlight the nuances of her perspective in the following:

> ‘Rivers’s approach to sex, glamour, men, and relationships is grounded in anger against men and male power structures. Rivers became famous with comedy focused on inequalities in marriage and women’s

need to manipulate their way to power and money in a man's world' (Mizejewski, L. p.35).

As a female comedian during the 1960s we can see in Rivers' work the beginnings of the changing gender politics happening in society at the time, with 'what feminists came to call "body politics" was an activist stance that emphasized all women's right to reproductive freedom (including maternity); to sexual health and self-expression; to freedom from violence; and to freedom from corporate and media driven standards of beauty' (Maxwell, 2018 p.226) she cultivated a comedy style whose main objective was to highlight these issues specifically, through gossip-style joke telling and up front confrontation of her own body issues. Rivers was ahead of the curve in her use of social critique as an accessible and as easy-going form of comedy and audience interaction. For Mizejewski, the fact that Rivers is angry in her comedy is her trademark, and one that is indiscriminate in many ways; she thought men were stupid, but she thought women were stupid too. A key routine in Rivers's set was to approach the women of the audience and comment on their diamond rings, pressing their wearers to use sex to extort their husbands for better ones (Mizejewski, 2014. p.35). This is an example of her hypocrisy, for Rivers on stage is a dumb blonde *and* a smart blonde, she cannot navigate her way through relationships or society but she can navigate her way through educated conversation and wit because, by her own assertion, she is *not* beautiful, but she *is* educated. If Joan Rivers diverted from the role of the Jewish American Princess, it would therefore be rooted in her lack of tact as she is smart enough to be educated but possesses an idiocy that is most often aware in polite conversation. Furthermore, this lack of social grace applies mostly to the construct of gentile and essentially non-

Jewish social grace, despite her audiences featuring both Jewish and non-Jewish population, it is the non-Jewish and Christian society of America that dictates the assimilation of diasporic cultures to America and therefore instructs the traditions or lessons of decorum that are to be abided by.

3.2 The Schlemiel and the Single Girl

Joan Rivers endures her duality as much as she utilises it, in that her comedy can flip from her critique of the modern woman to her desire to be one and Joshua Louis Moss asserts in his discussion of subversive Jewishness that 'Joan Rivers mined the comedic potential of the lonely single Jewish girl trying to find a husband' (Moss, J.L., 2017, p.140). In the potential of single girl comedy lies a stereotype of women that both adheres to and rejects the ideal of heterosexual and partnered living, and the assumption that women only want from men is part of the anti-feminist ideology of these male power structures. The fact that single women are considered predatory, they want to *nab* a husband, is a perspective that Rivers hones and perfects. She is predatory and in being so allows her audience to see the idiocy of such a stereotype; 'a challenging inverse of the poles of domination and subordination' (Mellencamp, 1992. p.341). If Wisse's model of endurance is a marker in which the schlemiel can be judged, we can see clearly that the jokes of Joan Rivers fall largely in that field. She endures her place as a woman and boldly refuses to become ignorant of it. She turns the process of female repression into a punchline, and forces both men and women in her audience to confront such notions, either through picking at their wedding rings, or commenting on their shared routines as a whole. We can problematise this notion of female endurance, and the

female schlemiel, as it does not challenge representations of otherness and suffering but rather makes it an essential for acceptance in comedy. For the belief that suffering is inherent to joke telling, those who are to be revered in comedy, or to be considered a schlemiel, must bear the weight of oppression, prejudice, or trauma. Can we therefore legitimise comedy as an accessible and aspired profession when its main qualification is pain? For women, certainly this pain that must be endured is simply another hurdle in which to navigate, one that is unfairly determined by biology and the assumptions of its presence.

Moss is somewhat limited in his description as he implies that the comedic potential of Rivers work is in the persona of ‘single Jewish girl’. For women, the words ‘single’ and ‘girl’ join to create a stereotype that limits their potential, in that for their place in society the single girl is not as important, or successful, as a married woman. The fact that Rivers is also a Jewish woman further places her as an outsider compared to the married gentiles. She is not just a single Jewish girl, she is a social pariah and one that is foolishly loud in her projection of gossip and scandal. It is because of this that she is a schlemiel, as she becomes an outsider on stage in her tactlessness, she presents a model of endurance for the limitations of women on stage at the time.

3.3 A Feminist on Paper

Joan Rivers throughout her career became not just a comedian, but a pop culture personality. Her work on talk shows and stage ignited her career in daytime television over the decades which in turn made her familiar in other forms of media,

such as book writing and filmmaking. Her books, for the most part, are autobiographical that border on self-help and as a woman who has brushed arms with many famous faces, feature ideas of gossip and fame that are prevalent in her comedy in the later years of her life. Before her death in 2014 she had written twelve books that focussed on a wide variety of topics such as marriage, grief, comedy, Jewishness, and even jewellery, but their major commonality is that they expose, to a certain extent, the character in which Joan Rivers has portrayed throughout her career. Her experience in surgery for example is not only a comment on the nature of body standards but a comment on women's own perception of importance; 'When I cared more about schtupping and wanted big breasts, I didn't have them. When I cared about fashion and didn't want them, I got massive big boobs' (Rivers, 2008 n.p). In regard to her own breast reduction, Rivers makes clear that her view of her body changes given the things she desires from the world. When that desire was sex, she wanted a body image that is typically desired from men in order to get it, and when it was fashion, she wanted the opposite image to feel better in it. Both desires of course, are cultivated by male wants. This is perhaps most obvious in the link between male desire and big breasts but is also subtly coded in the desire to have smaller breasts in order to make her dress 'look' better, since the fashion industry is targeted to women but is founded from male perspectives of beauty. Rivers discussion on these topics, whether it be through her experiences as a married female comedian during a time of great limitation for women in the industry, or the beauty standards in which she consciously or unconsciously ascribes to, work their way through a Jewish perspective and can be seen to be part of her Jewishness as well as her womanhood. In regard to her Jewishness and her relationship with plastic surgery, the first procedure Rivers confesses she had was in her late teens, to get her nose reduced and as 'Women who did not fit American

norms had to cut up. Thus by the mid-century “Jewish and Italian teenage girls were getting nose-jobs as high school graduation presents”’ (Williams, H, 2007., p.77). Rivers’ association between her love of plastic surgery is perhaps rooted in the desire to fit the American model of women and reject the physical association of her heritage and in doing so accentuates the anti-stigmatisation of the act, and the meaningless-ness of attributes.

Her earlier titles focus largely on her youth, specifically on navigating her Jewish womanhood, and give witty and satiric advice for other female readers. Her books published in her later years feature the changes of her career that are born in fame and ageing womanhood. The timeline of her books are essentially a chronological timeline of her character, and the titles are as equally as telling; *Having a Baby Can Be a Scream* (1974), *Still Talking* (1981), *From Mother to Daughter: Thoughts and Advice on Life, Love and Marriage* (1997), and *Men are Stupid...And They Like Big Boobs: A Women’s Guide to Beauty Through Plastic Surgery* (2009). Each of these titles feature not only a specific insight into the life of Rivers but glean an important feature of interest in regard to the assumed timeline of all women. Girls are pressured to conform to a domestic timeline; ‘In the height of the post World War II baby boom, women faced intense pressure to become mothers’ (Plott, Umansky, 2000., p363). Girls and women, regardless of biology or binary gender, are victims to social pressures of beauty standards that are present through all aspects of life for them ; social interaction, career, relationships (romantic or platonic), and even hobbies and sports. The pressure for women to ‘look’ a certain way is one that is a feminist issue that prevails despite the successes in first, second, third and even fourth wave feminism. These waves are similarly guilty of perpetuating such pressures, through ideas of counterculture-like dressing and aesthetics that insist women are only feminist if they dress or look unlike the feminine ideal of the time;

‘feminists in the 1970s proposed alternative modes of dress to substitute for fashionable styles, specifically various forms of trousers’ (Crane, 2012., p.124). This is often done to the detriment of the movement, as it insists that explicit feminine dress is an unworthy representation of women, but similarly disregards non-binary, androgynous or queer women from the conversation of cultural aesthetics and the perception of such. Essentially, women who dress masculine are considered ‘feminist’ but non-binary or queer women who dress in the same way, are still not considered within the agenda of the movement. This can be seen most clearly in second-wave feminism, where the political agendas of the women’s liberation movement toyed with the lesbian community in order to gain favour or present their ideals in an all-woman ideology; ‘Even among feminists who were less than radical, Heather Love observes, to be a lesbian was to put one’s feminism into practice. The “Conflation of lesbian activity and feminist consciousness” redefined lesbianism “as a personally beneficial, politically meaningful activity for women”. (Maxwell, Shields, 2018. P.207). Part of this issue was that for those within the second-wave feminism who perpetuated this idea, that lesbianism is the ultimate practice of the true feminist, it excluded the women who already felt separated from feminism. Those who had a husband, who they probably did love, and children, who they probably didn’t resent, felt as though they could not be a feminist unless they renounced those things. It similarly put pressure on lesbian women as it placed an ‘otherness’ on their sexuality, that the way they were attracted to women was not the same as the way they could be attracted to men, but instead was packaged as a commodity of the feminist. This forced lesbian women in the community to announce their sexuality into a political and social perspective, one that at the time would have been a risky and life altering change. Feminism and sexuality have always been an intrinsically linked discussion, and it is within personalities like Joan Rivers who exemplify the

image of the disillusioned woman of the sixties; a straight, Jewish, married woman with children who hates the patriarchal set limits of her gender, yet does not feel welcomed by the community of feminism with its young, middle-class, essentially white concentration. The sexuality found in these archetypes and on-stage characters is therefore either a representation of the beneficiary of feminism at the time, perhaps white and middle class, or a representation of those who are left out of that movement; black, lesbian, and transgender women.

3.4 A Jewish American Princess?

From her early stand-up comedy, we as an audience can see her performativity as a Jewish woman represent itself through the Jewish American Princess stereotype. In the previously used definitions of that character, the young Jewish woman associates success and femininity in material pleasures due to the mixture of Jewish traditionalism and new “American” influence on the diaspora of Jewish-Americans. For Joan Rivers, this materialism is clear in her jokes. For example, in her stand-up routine on *The Carol Burnett Show* in 1970 she muses to the audience her displeasure with the expectations of married women and the traditional roles they are given; “If the lord wanted me to cook he’d have given me aluminium hands, why me?! These hands were meant to hold charge cards!”. In asking the audience, and also God, she expresses the point that if her hands were meant to cook they would have been different from male hands, which they are not, and is therefore rejecting the stereotype of the American housewife. By suggesting that her hands were meant to spend money she is adhering to the stereotype of the

Jewish American Princess, but she is similarly evaluating the stereotype by forcing both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences to accept its ridiculousness.

> ‘Joan Rivers may have satirized Jewish princesses, but her very words offered liberation from the image. A Jewish woman listening to Rivers could compare her value system to the one satirized, offer an internal monologue of defence or attack, and emerge from the analysis more clear-headed.’ (Antler, J. p.84)

Not only is there a clear representation of the Jewish American Princess from Rivers, there is a clear representation of other Jewish stereotypes for women that develop themselves over the years of Rivers’s career. In her candid conversations about beauty and trends, the history of Joan Rivers and her advocacy of plastic surgery is well documented, perhaps as an extension of her early work and her declaration that she finds herself comically unattractive and undesirable is a fitting preface to the stereotype that ageing women want to look younger. For the young woman doesn’t see her beauty, and the old woman wishes to reclaim it. Roberta Mock stated that ‘the infantilized Jewess who has cosmetic surgery is, in fact, a stereotype largely created by Jews themselves. She can be seen most clearly in representations of the JAP (Jewish American Princess), which came to attention in the 1970s.’ (Mock, R. 2016. p.109-110) and the fact that Joan Rivers had this relationship with cosmetic alteration implies heavily that the role in which Rivers plays is of the Jewish American Princess, but the intention of autonomy and self-assessment of her femininity is heavily indicative of Wisse’s theories on the developed schlemiel. As Wisse argues, ‘Jewish humour focuses primarily on the

transformation of the schlemiel into a modern “liberal humanist”’ (Moss, J.L., 2017. p.140). Rivers’s performative choices become more layered and detailed to the extent that they do not necessarily fit one or the other. Joan Rivers is a Jewish American Princess except for when she is *not*, and she is also the schlemiel enduring her place, except for when she *speaks out*. What can then be further understood of the schlemiel is that it is not simply one unchanging archetype, and because of this it allows itself to develop and merge to another set of characteristics over time.

3.5 From Rivers to Radner

For Gilda Radner, her introduction to the comedy scene came from sketch comedy. By becoming a member of *The Second City* comedy troupe in Toronto, working alongside comedic actors such as Catherine O’hara, Eugene Levy and Bill Murray, she developed her career to transition into working for the *National Lampoon Radio Hour* and after that, becoming the first original member of the “Not Ready For Prime Time Players” group of *Saturday Night Live* in 1975. The importance of this trajectory is largely in its collaborative nature, for there is a question as to whether or not the schlemiel is typically a lonely figure. In regard to the male schlemiel at least, bachelor-like individualism presents a notion of independence that is associated with male privilege of the time. Male comedians were able to become their own characters, a singular hero in their narratives, but as previously understood the introduction for female comedians leant towards the inclination to find a male partner. In doing this the brunt of the controversy is lessened in a male/female comedic duo, since the ‘softer’ woman is validated by the presence of the ‘brash’

male, and vice versa. It is an example of comedic chaperone; ‘One of the staples of Vaudeville humor was the two-man act. Using opposite types of characters who are in constant conflict with each other...Opposites conflict but they also attract, making for the tension necessary in comedy’ (DesRochers, 2014. p.38).

In the differences between Rivers and Radner the audience can see the examples of individualism and collectivism. Rivers in her early work began honing her own individual stand-up routines, but this was only after a brief stint as one third of the comedic trio “Jim, Jake & Joan” which performed from 1963 to 1964. Whereas Radner started in collective comedy troupes and casts until she made her move to film and her stand-up show *Gilda Live* (1980).

3.6 The First in SNL

The clarity of Gilda Radner’s schlemiel is most apparent in her partnerships found in the sketches of *Saturday Night Live*. For every wild-haired, brash and exaggerated character that Radner plays there is a level-headed observer who is there to mediate between her and the audience. An example of this could be found in Emily Litella, a confused older woman who is the voice of the editorial reply on ‘Weekend Update’. She is a character that is there to represent the voice of the neighbourhood, but confuses the social issues around her simply by acts of miscommunication; “What’s all this fuss I keep hearing, about *violins* on television?” (SNL 1976) she croaks in the most aged of voices, and proceeds to rant on the works of Leonard Bernstein to which her partner and host of Weekend Update, Chevy Chase , later politely interjects “Ms. Litella. It was violence on television, not

violins, *violence.".* The joke is that Emily Litella is always somehow out of the loop, she is there to represent the opposition, but instead shows that the opposition is often wrong and confused. The fact that the confused opposition also happens to be a woman is similarly an important part of the appeal, but the stereotype of older Jewish women is to be one that is 'nosey' and perhaps a 'know it all', but Radner chooses to ignore this potential in Litella and instead 'while working on *Saturday Night Live* in the late 1970s, developed a repertoire of characters who gently subverted stereotypes of American Jewish womanhood throughout multiple embodiments' (Mock, R, 2016. p.191).

What Radner's most popular SNL characters feature in common is their inherent parody of 'loud' women, despite their appearance or placement in the sketch. Roseanne, Baba and Emily Litella, in particular, all present commanding presences in different representations of women; Roseanne is younger and brash, Baba is a middle-aged conservative, and Emily is an older and senile woman. This performative and caricature representation of womanhood is almost drag-like in its approach and intention. While 'drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed' (Butler, 2011, p187) Radner is using it to highlight the male understanding of women who exhibit the characteristics that she is portraying. For Roseanne Roseannadanna, she is loud and rude, and so Radner has coded that characteristic by pairing it visually with bright red lipstick. She highlights the part of the woman that is being critiqued which is essential in regard to understanding drag and performance because 'in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as it's contingency (Butler, 2011, p187). It is ironic in this example that red lipstick is evocative of sexual desire and objectification in women, dating back to examples in film noir in which a *femme fatale* (a deadly woman) is seen wearing it. When

dressing women in such ways becomes a set of ideals that are oppositional to themselves, we see a deeper understanding of the sheer idiocy and hypocritical existence that female beauty standards employ. In terms of the schlemiel, this is oppositional battling-against-oneself is perhaps similarly parallel. For the red lipstick becomes a warning and an attraction, the same can be said for the actions and understanding of the female schlemiel. Radner for the most part plays a Good Schlemiel, in that the malice of her characters is limited and, unlike Joan Rivers, does not rely on criticism. This is not to say that Radner's schlemiel is more *moral* than Rivers', for if Radner were to be classed as a schlemiel, she would have to share some of those qualities that Rivers honed. Despite this, morality for the schlemiel is not necessarily an intention for 'the Good Schlemiel can never quite deny the promise of collaboration with the Evil Spirit' (Armstrong, 2015, p.126), the existence of the schlemiel is one that is both good *and* bad. If we are to explore the soup adage, that the schlemiel is the one who always spills the soup and it is to the detriment of those around them, if the schlemiel knows they will always spill the soup, then is it moral to risk those around them? Of course, this is paradoxical in its reasoning, the schlemiel will always spill whether they intend to or not for that is their nature. For Gilda Radner this is the kind of schlemiel that her characters encapsulate, mistakes are made despite the intention to not make any, whereas Joan Rivers is aware of her scorn and makes an active choice to utilise them in her character.

3.7 Jewish Genes

Finding Radner's characters as explicitly Jewish is not essential in understanding their stereotype since not all of them are explicitly Jewish in their conversation. The importance of Radner's Jewishness lies in the details of her comedy, the parody of Barbara Walters, a Jewish American Broadcaster, for example is indicative of Radner's ease at *playing* Jewish subtly or not so subtly. Gilda Radner understood herself as a Jewish woman, and therefore could understand other Jewish women to comedic ends, and that 'Riv Ellen Prell notes that "if a minstrel-like 'Jew face' existed in the world of entertainment, Gilda Radner's routine perfected it"' (Mock, 2016. p.191). Character acting in the instance of Radner's women is nothing but a self-portrait: If any one of her characters is obvious with this, it is Rhonda Weiss.

'Rhonda Weiss and the Rhondettes' are a parody all-female disco group that are first featured in *Saturday Night Live,* who would later reappear in Radner's one woman show *Gilda Live*. 'Rhonda Weiss: Jewish Jeans' is a parody commercial for a particular brand of jeans, and Rhonda is their model of choice. As the lyrics say; "She's got designer nails and designer nose / she's the Jewess in Jewish Jeans" Radner's parading in provocative movements are suggestive of the binary opposition in which the humour of the sketch relies, similarly the play on words with "Jewish jeans/Jewish genes" become an explicit reference to Gilda Radner as a Jewish woman on the SNL stage. Rhonda in *Gilda Live* is more referential of Radner's childhood due to the song "Goodbye Saccharine" that is featured. Before she starts her song, she introduces it by mentioning, "Nothing in the sixties really bothered me, uh none of the guys I knew went to Vietnam. They all went to law school" which connotes the level of privilege that she has experienced, she is unaware of grief regarding her friends, but not in her loss of materialistic possessions (like saccharine).

As an ode to the threatened ban of the sugar substitute, only 29 calories per serving, Rhonda Weiss laments on the loss of this substitute by remembering her early years as a ‘far from slender’ kid. When these small details of the bit are combined, her privilege, weight loss and materialist inclination, she becomes not only a representation of the Jewish American Princess, but also an exaggerated version of herself; ‘The character chameleon was born into privilege...she grew up with a brother, Michael, and an eating disorder that had a doctor prescribe the ten-year-old Gilda Dexedrine diet pills’ (Littleton, D.J., 2012. Chapt.16). For Radner to portray characteristics that are like her real-life experiences, she has done so in an exercise of using suffering as a template for Jewish humour. Male comedians such as Woody Allen or Jerry Seinfeld who have used their own neurosis or emotional turmoil have honed this ability, but Radner has done this through caricature instead of realism. This endurance of suffering is encapsulated in *Gilda Live* during Radner’s song “I Love to Be Unhappy” in which the lyrics evoke the conflict of suffering and happiness; “I’m looking for a problem/ why wait until I’m old” and “I always send my steak back/ my life is overdone/”. The pairing of the lyrics with a sprightly tap dance routine becomes a satiric portrayal of the ‘self-hating Jew’ stereotype but similarly is an examination of Jewish unhappiness culture and stereotype: the idea that Jewish people are only happy when they are unhappy.

The documentation of Radner’s illness in her memoir *It’s Always Something* contains notions of struggle and suffering that goes beyond her ovarian cancer as she ‘experiences terror and depression as well as physical pain. At times her disorientation and loss of control threaten her self-worth and her very sense of who she is’ (Martin, M.W., 2012. p.79). Her comedy is no doubt influenced by this and is the reason for her motivation during such suffering but as Jewish comedian Jon Lovitz said ‘“To be funny, you have to suffer, suffer, suffer”’ (Yates, 2010.

p.225). This is referential to previous discussions on the real sacrifices of comedy, and especially for the female schlemiel whose main objective is to endure, in looking into what foundations lie underneath the industry itself. To be a comedian is to suffer to an extent, an element of being Jewish is to experience or understand a culturally shared trauma, and to be a woman is to endure the society that is made for the male population. A female schlemiel is therefore the archetype that experiences all three of these aspects and is given less opportunity to succeed with them.

Both Radner and Rivers are examples of endurance in their regard for things out of their control, for Rivers it is the male dominated society in which she is threatened because of her sex, and for Radner it is in the neurotic and physical representation of complaint and pain. They both have utilised the stereotype of the Jewish American Princess which has contributed to their continued criticisms of Jewish female representation; from this the deviation into the schlemiel has been apparent in their endurance of suffering, foolishness, and the neurotic perspective in which they view the world.

Chapter Four: Writing the Schlemiel: Elaine May

4.1 Introducing Elaine May: Writer, Director, Kooky woman.

In the works of Rivers and Radner what can be seen most obviously is an autonomous element in their work, they are the creators of their own material but are not limited to individual experience. Someone who shares a similar path is writer/actor/director Elaine May. Beginning in the comedy circuit of the late 1950s and early 1960s, she started as one half of the comedy improv duo *Nichols and May*. It was in this brief time that she began to assert her presence on stage as a prevalent Jewish and female voice for comedy that has been most notably celebrated by her directorial and script work. Her filmography includes films such as *A New Leaf (1971), The Heartbreak Kid (1972) and The Birdcage (1996),* of which she only appeared as a lead in one, *A New Leaf*. Her work with *Nichols and May* influenced her later collaborations and contributions, as she became part of the 'Jewish New Wave', but her presence as a schlemiel is one that could be described as a major component of the original contemporary understanding of the archetype. For the very early depictions of the schlemiel, what can be seen in May simply adheres to a broad category of Jewish women in comedy:

> 'Recent studies of Jewish women in comedy have distinct trends, as in Sarah Blacher Cohen's survey of "Unkosher Comediennes" - bawdy, sexually risqué female comics...Yet another archetype of women's

> comedy, one likewise associated with Jewish comediennes, is the wacky, klutzy, (yet endearing) clown' (Kaufman, 2012, p238).

While the recent studies of Jewish women have trends that do not necessarily appear in the works of May initially, specifically in terms of sexually risqué material, the archetype of Jewish women's comedy as one associated with the klutzy clown, is one that links to the early understanding of the schlemiel. These examples of 'kooky' Jewish women represent potential for female schlemiels whose careers began in the second half of the twentieth century and have continued capitalising on this persona with great successes. That is not to say all 'kooky' women are then schlemiels, but from the representations of Jewish women on screen such as the Jewish American Princess who is predominantly marked by superficiality, the Jewish Mother who is aged and embittered, and the *Belle Juive* who is largely sexualised, the archetype that stands out to compliment such a comic klutzy personality is the schlemiel.

As Kaufman later asserts that this "trend would continue with Totie fields, Elaine May, Madeliene Kahn, Goldie Hawn, Gilda Radner, Laraine Newman, Fran Drescher, Lisa Kudrow, and Deborah Messing - all kooky women" (2012, p238) Categorising these female comedians through trends that define women through their "Unkosherness" is similarly important when compared to how male comedians were categorised during the mid 1960s. This time was particularly important since most countercultures allowed for 'new' comedy to emerge through a more social and political frame of observation. Male comics, more often, were noted by Time Magazine for their 'sicknik' style (Double, 2020., p.18) 'satire', 'observational' and 'Ironic' humour that tended to subvert the traditional situational comedy found in TV shows of the time. For men, there are a multitude of comic styles that are not

descriptive of their visual appearance or aesthetic but are in reference to the comic style they represent, for women this is not the case. The terms ‘bawdy’ and ‘risqué’ are in reference to the sexually explicit nature, which could define the sort of comedy these women were presenting, but also similarly appear to be words that are inherently used to describe the women themselves. Women who discuss sex and taboo are not classed as ‘blue’ or ‘sick style’ comedians, like their male counterparts are, but instead are defined by terms that find themselves intrinsically linked to womanhood and policing womanhood specifically. For the kooky female comic, the terms used to describe these women are identical to how they describe male comics who exhibit similar characteristics. As these words describe the schlemiel, for the schlemiel is inherently the clown, there is an element of equality in how the kooky woman is compared to the foolish man, and this is due to the unassuming nature of the character itself. Since the schlemiel is not inherently sexualised, there are exceptions to this, the female schlemiel is described similarly to the male one since the characteristics of ‘kooky’ are not considered sexualised or attractive in women. For Elaine May, Madeline Kahn, and Gilda Radner, the three in Kaufman’s ‘kooky women’ category that feature within this investigation of the female schlemiel, the role of the schlemiel is interchangeable depending on the styles of each three women, but largely is connected by the clown-like nature that is ascribed to them by authors like Kaufman. This does not mean that the women discussed are not sexualised in some ways within their work, this is certainly the case for Joan Rivers and Madeline Kahn, but that the roles and personas they choose to inhabit are schlemiel-like in their comedic styling and do not exclusively lend themselves towards sexualisation or the male gaze. Since it has been established that the male gaze is present whenever a woman exists on stage or screen, it could also be argued that all female schlemiels are to be sexualised, whether it fits the archetype.

This is perhaps a difference in the way in which Elaine May is perceived as a schlemiel versus the way in which a male schlemiel, such as Woody Allen, is. As “Working-class women, and racialised or ethnicised women (such as Black or Jewish women) have been represented as hyper sensual and over-sexualised” (Seidman, et al. 2016. p330) this enforces the idea that Elaine May, while a rarely seen presence on stage or screen, is over-sexualised due to her Jewishness and such an action is not influenced by the characters that she plays or writes.

In the reception of Elaine May’s character Henrietta in *A New Leaf*, Barbara Quart wrote that "May's female version of Woody Allen’s persona predates Allen and is somehow much more painful and embarrassing than anything in Allen” (1989. p40) and it is within this quotation that the understanding of the schlemiel is challenged. As Quart writes that it is “May’s version” of “Allen’s persona”, of what we know as the schlemiel, she similarly states that it predates Allen. So, the use of language and ownership of the archetype as a Woody Allen one, a male one, Quart subscribes to the gendered language that has limited the female schlemiel. The word itself as a gender neutral one, and the female representation of it that predates the male one, indicate the knowledge and understanding that the schlemiel is indeed a female archetype. What is lacking is a clear definition and acceptance of such within the written understandings of comedy. Quart also raises issues with the insistence that women with ‘issues’ are classified as embarrassing and painful, which breeds from this ideal of women as not only blank slates in which men enforce their own wants and desires, but with a lack of autonomy that does not allow for self-actualisation that is no doubt from the generations of patriarchal moulding.

Women who exhibit this sense of autonomy, especially Jewish women, are then presented as less attractive or grossly reminiscent of their mothers. Women

who are often considered ‘past their prime’, which is linked to their ability to produce children, rather than any non-biological contribution to society. For women, the medical diagnosis on which their problems stem from is often tied to the biological signifiers of being female and is done through each major stage in their lives. Irritability, paranoia, or neurotic impulse is attributed to teenage hormones, then their menstrual cycle, and then their menopause. It is this vague timeline of cisgender womanhood that is applied to all women, by men, and ignores the systematic misogyny that is present in the creation and analysis of archetype. For Quart, the schlemiel is ‘Allen’s persona’ despite in the same sentence agreeing that it is an archetype that predates Allen himself, and the fact that Elaine May is ‘painful’ and ‘embarrassing’ implies to a certain degree that this is the version of the schlemiel that is only accessible to women.

If May’s representation of the schlemiel predates the one in which popular culture associates the term with, for Allen is cited often as the most obvious schlemiel, then it could be argued that it is Allen’s schlemiel that deviates from the precedent set before him. However painful or embarrassing the representation of the archetype, May was a schlemiel before the term was ‘cool’ as it were and the fact that her version of the archetype is considered as different to the male version, is simply due to the perception in which women are considered by male audiences. The schlemiel is a painful archetype, they are the model of endurance and therefore must exhibit pain and embarrassment to fulfil their role, but the inclusion of gender stereotypes twists the reception of the character. Where a male schlemiel is perhaps considered sexually attractive, the female schlemiel is considered a pariah, and even in a marital relationship, is still entirely sexless.

4.2 Nichols and May: A Jewish Partnership.

The assumption that ‘women aren’t funny’ is inherently one that limits the industry on a systematic level. For those who pursue a career in comedy have to do so under the assumption that their gender is one of the reasons they are, or are not, being hired. This is not to say that women do not succeed in the industry, but that comedy is a career path that is not limited to the stand-up set and while it offers more opportunities for success, it similarly offers more for inequality. It is not so simple to believe that Elaine May is a comedian, because she has made a career in funniness through many different avenues. She is a playwright, actor, comedian, writer and director. She is a professional in a male dominated tradition, one that has tailored punchlines to benefit and encourage misogynist ideology.

The beginnings of May’s career as part of a comedy duo may then place her within a category of examples in the industry that have largely disregarded women’s individual contributions to larger works, her *uncredited* script-doctoring/editing is a common occurrence, but her work within *Nichols and May* is one that solidified the trajectory as a great comedic writer and one that is also respected alongside her male co-workers; “Working alongside Nichols, Elaine did more than just break ground on a new kind of comic sensibility, she also presented a different type of funny woman - smart, complicated, and equal to any man” (Moeschen, 2019., Chapt.3). The duo were the ones that took inspirations from close and familiar perspectives, often Jewish ones, and subverted them to create a widely understood narrative that extends and questions the different social and contemporary discussion of the time, as “with Nichols and May, Jewish Angst, Freud, Literacy,

Irony, and sex were ushered into the discourse of mainstream comedy" (Lahr, 2002. p.269).

Nichols and May's difference from other comedies of the time was that they did not adhere to specific gender roles, and instead placed themselves within a "scene" and let their characters work from that point (Nachman 2003). Their inspiration was often credited to have come from people they knew, which were then adapted into these scenes. For both Nichols and May, the inspiration from their Jewish upbringings is apparent in their filmmaking. *The Graduate* and *A New Leaf* both are filmed through a Jewish lens, certainly more explicit in May's on-screen character who were often explicitly Jewish but is equally as present in *The Graduate* directed by Nichols. While written by non-Jewish novelist and playwright Charles Webb, the film itself was Directed by Mike Nichols, a Jewish refugee who fled from Nazi-Germany, and its lead was played by Jewish actor Dustin Hoffman. The importance of this is to understand the influence of the comedy stylings of Nichols and May but to also bring forth the discussion on the role of Jewish perspectives in relation to non-Jewish storytelling and vice versa, as this applies to the relationship between the schlemiel archetype and the actor playing it. It must be questioned to what extent the schlemiel is made from the author or the actor. Elaine May's character in *A New Leaf* is clearly defined as a schlemiel by the texts that refer to the film, and as Quart asserts that Henrietta is a proxy of May herself, but the separation of both author and actor is important to note in how effective the schlemiel is portrayed. For *The Graduate*, the presence of Dustin Hoffman on screen navigates the narrative to fit within Jewish identity despite the original text being un-Jewish in its production. This partnership of the two is important in understanding the background in which Elaine May began, but also contextualises the society of the time as one that was accepting and commercially interested in Jewish narratives,

especially in regards to character and character partnerships; “Nichols and May were noted not just for their verbal facility but for how they captured much of the urban angst of male-female relationships in the changing society of the late 1950s and early 1960s” (Desser, 2004. p287). While Desser wrote this in response to their comedic partnership, the same can be said for their individual works in film.

4.3 May’s Schlemiel on Film: A New Leaf (1971) and The Heartbreak Kid (1972)

A woman in a male-dominated industry, Elaine May is also a woman in a male dominated archetype. She emulates the schlemiel often in her work, whether her face being the physical representation through her acting, or in her writing which translates to the character on screen. There is a question in the legitimacy of writing the schlemiel, in that it must be understood as to what end the schlemiel is represented, and in writing a schlemiel character, does the author become an extension of that archetype.

Written and directed by Elaine May, her film *A New Leaf* is a black comedy that largely relies on the central characters being of a schlemiel/gentile partnership, and one that places the female character in the schlemiel role. Unlike *The Heartbreak Kid* which was released a year later in 1972, and was written by May and features her daughter Jeannie Berlin, the importance of the female lead being a schlemiel is integral to the character dynamic and gender politics of the plot.

Starring Walter Matthau as Henry Graham, an extravagant playboy who has run out of his inheritance, he decides that he must find a wealthy woman to marry and then murder to ensure the security of his lifestyle. Enter Henrietta Lowell, a

botany professor who despite her wealth and academic intelligence, is lacking social grace and position around her peers. She is perfect for Henry's plan, as he asserts in his assumptions of her as "single, alone, isolated", which encourages him to court her quickly in order to secure his future. Within this film, the emphasis on the partnerships of the schlemiel is most notable and takes inspiration from the stylings of *Nichols and May.* "Traditionally, a schlemiel is a person who spills the soup; a schlimazel is the one on whom he spills it. In this film the schlemiel is Henrietta (Elaine May). The Schlimazel is Henry (Walter Matthau)" (Kanfer, 1971).

The dynamic of these two archetypes is a tried and tested partnership that makes for comic success, more clearly seen in the male/female duos curated by Woody Allen, and perhaps more contemporarily by actors such as Adam Sandler, but it is usually the male that takes on the role of the schlemiel. The women in these instances are often schlimazel-like in their perspective and placement of the narrative but they are also often explicitly not Jewish. Their WASP-ness is often implied through anecdotes of conservative Christian upbringing or values. The clash of these two characters in *A New Leaf* is similar in its discussion of the gentile and the Jewish, where Matthau is told by his butler; "there are no poor gentiles around here, sir" the binaries seen within this film are as equally poignant in understanding Jewish characters and the perceptions of such, and it is further emphasised in *The Heartbreak Kid*.

> "In her first feature, May presented herself as a female schlemiel; in her second, she cast her daughter Jeannie Berlin in an equally victimized role, as the declasse Jewish girl whose go-getter husband (Charles Grodin) abandons

her on their Miami beach honeymoon to pursue a golden shiksa (Cybill Shepherd)" (Village Voice).

The desire for the Shiksa is one that is common for the schlemiel, for in the case of the *Heartbreak Kid* it is more obvious in Lenny's desire for Kelly as opposed to his Jewish wife Lila (played by Jeannie Berlin) which highlights a pattern of Jewish women being superseded or subjugated by non-Jewish women. The role of the schlemiel in this film is intended to be played by Charles Grodin as Lenny, but Lila plays a similar role in the film that can be seen in May's character in *A New Leaf*. The 'needy' and socially inept characteristics of both May's and Berlin's characters present a commonality that seems to be present in examples of the female schlemiel throughout the decades after.

For Joan Rivers, Gilda Radner, and Madeline Kahn, there is a distinct warping of social limitations and in doing so creates a persona that is wholly schlemiel-like. "Elaine May's *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) was perhaps most clearly codified the schlemiel-shiksa coupling as the privileged expression of counterculture alienation in the Hollywood New Wave" (Moss, 2017. p157). The notion of a 'Jewish New Wave' is one that sits well within the catalogue of films that were being produced at the time, certainly for Mike Nichols and Elaine May who produced their most notable films in this time and had their beginnings within the same comedy and theatre scenes, but the characters and relationships found within these narratives do as much for the filmography of the Jewish New Wave than the creators themselves:

> "Hollywood's Jewish "new wave" (a subset of the larger new wave that refreshed Hollywood content and personnel in the late sixties) had its moment between 1967 and 1973, roughly between Isreal's Six Day and Yom Kippur wars or Barabara Streisand's appearances in *Funny Girl* (Columbia 1968) and *The Way We Were* (Columbia 1973)."

The fact that both May's most popular directorial roles can be found within this time period places her as a major contributor to the movement, and thus the themes and archetypes found within these films are by extension are essential to understanding the social and archetypal contexts. Alienation and 'otherness' is a concept that is one clearly felt by the schlemiel archetype and most other archetypes found within Jewish characters. The diaspora of Jewish people can be responsible for this idea of not fitting in, either due to persecution from other cultures and religions, or through assimilation and then removal of traditional values.

What makes May an interesting example of the female schlemiel, is that she is perhaps the closest representation of the male version of the archetype through her representation of 'otherness' and endurance. In *A New Leaf* Henrietta is a successful intellectual who is manipulated by those around her, and yet she is seemingly content with this arrangement until her desire to reach outside of her comfort zone forces her to contemplate her inadequacy. She plays a 'typically male' role within this and holds the economic power amongst the other characters. Within the narrative of this film Henrietta's sheer desire to be partnered with Henry causes her to ignore his attempts of her demise and the ending culminates in Matthau's character regretting his actions with the revelation that he does not want her to die. After he saves her life, he is resigned in the knowledge that he must take care of her,

and when she asks, “I’ll always depend on you, won’t I?” he replies resignedly with, “I’m afraid so”. This interaction plays to the notion of the schlemiel/shiksa relationship, that while one is metaphorically spilling their soup the other must be present to clean it up. The dynamic itself is reminiscent of the gender roles typically placed on men and women, where one creates destruction and the other is there to obediently fix it, but the fact that May has written this in multiple pairings is testament to the importance of the archetype as a gender-neutral description, rather than a gendered representation.

The fact that Matthau is the external, non-Jewish, force that is both rooting for her demise and her protection (because the protection of her ensures the protection of her wealth) he becomes a representation of the assimilation of Jewish personalities in American society and literally become an accidental care-taker who is in charge of monitoring her schlemiel-ness, and therefore her Jewishness.

May’s directorial role within the production of the film further extends the reach that the female schlemiel has influenced as May ‘became the first major woman director since Ida Lupino after the golden age of Hollywood had ended. More significantly, *A New Leaf* (1971) and *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) remain two of the most piercing and perceptive studies of Jewish self-hatred ever committed to celluloid” (Desser, 2004, p.287). The role of self-hatred is one that appears at length within Jewish comedy but is one that specifically is present within the written works of Elaine May, within her scripts or plays, this element is obvious in its connection to the female character within the narrative, a character that is often evocative of the schlemiel. In *A New Leaf* Henrietta is aware of her own clumsiness and believes herself to be in need of someone who is wholly unlike herself to take care of her. Any sense of self-hatred is then due from a social pariahdom that is believed to be either

self-imposed, or due to her Jewishness. Alienation is similar in its interest of the archetype.

The ending to *Heartbreak Kid* focuses on this alienation. Since Lenny feels alienated throughout his five-day marriage with Lila, that he is missing out on life with the woman of his dreams, when he finds her in Sybil Shepherd's character, he assumes that his suffering has ended and it is only until he realises in the wedding reception, after failed attempts to converse with the conservative Christian members of the family, that he is further removed as he has lost his sense of belonging.

4.4. Dynamics of May's Written Schlemiels

In each of these narratives, the schlemiel is othered which leads to impending notions of self-hatred and regret. May's play entitled '*Not Enough Rope'* follows a more explicit representation of self-hatred, in that the female lead is trying to find some rope, this is so she has enough to hang herself from her apartment ceiling. This idea of destroying the schlemiel, if we believe the female character to be an extension of the schlemiel-like author, is part of a tradition of comedy that relies on the downfall of the schlemiel through their own hand; and what greater joke on the schlemiel, than not being able to commit suicide correctly. What is also a familiar comparison between the play and the film is that the female lead is faced with the possibility of death and is saved, or in one case prevented, from falling victim to it. Women dying seems to be a moment that is either used as part of a romantically tragic response to loss of love or child, the most recognised example being Juliet's

sacrifice at the loss of Romeo in Shakespeare's work, but for May the death of her characters are perhaps an escape to their suffering, an act of autonomy, and one which she believes should be a constant. Within the representation of the schlemiel in *A New Leaf*, there is an element of comic self-abuse in the way in which May writes her own character. For the most part, Henrietta is an entirely innocent woman and her opposite in Henry is important to the dynamic. For all her innocence and goodwill, all she manages to receive in return is a group of people who make it their living to take advantage of her clumsiness and ineptitude in household and social matters. Later in *Heartbreak Kid*, May's daughter Jeannie is a similar character, and encapsulates the stereotype of Jewish women growing to be just like their mothers. As "Elaine may does terrible things to what would seem, on some level, a proxy of herself in *A New Leaf*, similar to the terrible things she goes on to do, through the complex comedic play of art, to her daughter in *Heartbreak Kid.*" (Quart, 1989. p40). For Elaine and Jeannie, their on-screen characters are born from the same lack of social ability and follow the literal ageing of Jewish women in stereotype.

The similarities extend to how they're both treated by their respective on-screen partners, but also adhere to the unsexy-sexualisation of Jewish women in comedic roles. This can be seen clearly in *A New Leaf* and *Heartbreak Kid* where May and Berlin both are featured in a night-time scene. The former attempts to seduce her husband by wearing a new nightgown and has instead caught her head in the arm hole, causing her husband to untangle it from her with annoyance, and the latter is seen to be half naked in bed covered in night cream after being severely sunburned. The 'neediness' of both these women allows the male characters to take care of them, but only to disguise their secretive and immoral behaviour. Where Henry does so to ensure his fortune before killing his wife, Lenny (played by Charles Grodin) does so to hide his extra-marital affair.

Elaine May has become prolific in writing the shiksa/schlemiel narrative in her films. Even her uncredited role as a screenwriter for *The Birdcage* features a similar Jewish and non-Jewish relationship that balances on the roles of caretaker and mess-maker, the gender politics of this film in particular becomes blurred in the representation of LGBTQ+ relationships. What is interesting is also that the gender roles of May's writing are interchangeable, the schlemiel can be male or female, but also the schlemiel is not limited to sexual orientation or gender identity. In the case of *The Birdcage* in comparison to *A New Leaf*, the presence of a gay couple did not necessarily change May's approach to writing the schlemiel partnership. Similarly, she says there was no conscious effort to write particularly strong parts for women, or to deliberately write for women, (McCreadie, 2006. p.21) and therefore the lack of change in her approach to male narratives perhaps speaks to her lack of intention in writing for women. Another argument could be perhaps that the model of the industry in which May works, that is to say a heavily male one, unconsciously drives May to work from a commercially viable perspective and therefore "the totally inhospitable climate Elaine May entered as a woman feature filmmaker in Hollywood, is a partial explanation for the appalling vision of women in her work, as well as for her proclivity to work through male characters' point of view." (Quart, 1989. p39) which would explain the representations of female characters in her work as a whole.

This argument does not place being Jewish as the forefront of May's writing of female suffering and trauma, May's helplessness in *A New Leaf* is part of a history of the notion of women in need of help, but is also the antithesis of the role of the Jewish woman in the household, in which she is essentially in control of managing her family as well as her own pursuits. From this perspective, the way she has written her characters is traditionally non-Jewish, but it is similar to how Rivers and Radner portray a subversive and incongruous display of foolishness and

independence in their comedy, in which one aspect of their lives is progressive and intelligent, but the other more likely social element is lacking or disruptive.

What is interesting about the central character in May's *Not Enough Rope* is that the female lead is in a moment of suicidal intent, but this is not one that is found in the dramatic scenes of many past representations of such a scenario. There is no rush, no secrecy. The character asks her various neighbours for some more rope, since she does not have enough to hang herself with. The neighbours see her requests as inconvenient and they cannot help her since they are distracted by their own lives. Placing a woman in the central role of as one who is not necessarily scorned or even in a moment of despair, but simply wishes to end her life, is an unnatural representation of women that does not fit the imagery of women as a whole. This character does not fit the archetype of sorrowful, hysterical, sexual, or maternal, and is presented as an almost stick figure of womanhood that is as non-descript as the ones that are placed on the doors of public restrooms. This in itself a telling understanding of how female characters are written to be sensationalised in their emotions or roles; the Jewish mother is not just a Jewish woman who is a mother, she is an *overbearing* Jewish mother, and the Jewish American Princess is superficial to the extremity.

There is more to these archetypes, but May's writing of a woman as plain and unassuming is as close as a depiction of how we as an audience perceive the male schlemiel as possible. The male schlemiel is no extreme of his visual appearance, in regard to his gender at least, and he is underestimated in both his strength and weaknesses which both lead him to an inevitable failure. The female schlemiel is tied to their gender, both through explicit limitations of the gender within narrative or through the comedic verisimilitude of the Jewish woman in distress. Either way, for

Elaine May to be seen clearly as a schlemiel, one would only have to view both her written and acted roles to understand the nuance of such a concept, a nuance that is perhaps lacking in the male counterpart due to the imposing monolithic nature of male archetypes.

Chapter Five: Madeline Kahn's Schlemiel on Film

5.1 Characterising Madeline Kahn

The understanding of Madeline Kahn's relationship to comedy lies most poignantly in her own words; 'I think that I'm funny scares a lot of men' (Madison, 2015, Chapt.10). It is important because from her own perspective, Kahn associates her funniness with male perception and fundamentally proves that there is an invisible line between comedy and propriety (regarding men) in which women feel they must navigate.

Madeline Kahn began her career through stage work, starring in choruses and unsuccessful off-Broadway productions before breaking out through her performance of the operetta *Candide* in honour of Leonard Bernstein's 50th birthday. Since that performance Kahn grew into her Broadway career and in the early 1970s starred in two feature films directed by Peter Bogdanovich, *What's up, Doc? (1972)* And *Paper Moon (1973),* for which she was nominated for an academy award. This trajectory in film led her to the works of Mel Brooks, who at the time had already directed *The Producers (1967) and The Twelve Chairs (1970)* and was interested in working with her for his upcoming movies, 'he was thrilled when Madeline Kahn came to his attention. She was a striking new stage and film personality who possessed an operatic voice and a fetching figure and had a unique way with comedic scenes.' (Parish, 2008, p.8). It was this 'way' with comedic scenes that guaranteed her roles as "Lili Von Shtupp" in *Blazing Saddles* (1974) and "Elizabeth" in *Young Frankenstein* (1974). In the representation of Von Shtupp and Elizabeth, both roles

featured Kahn in a provocative way as they both utilized Kahn's looks to enhance the comedy of the character. Not limited to comedy, the first role that she was nominated for, her portrayal of Miss Trixie Delight in *Paper Moon*, is a role that has similarly portrayed Kahn as an extension of the stereotype she is perceived to be. Like many female actors of the time, the visual attributes they hold determine their ability to succeed within the industry, a misogynist tradition, and it is marketed entirely for the male gaze. Kahn's appearance in these films suggest that to some extent, her looks are a contributing factor to her success, but the critical acclaim and analysis of her work after the fact seems to determine that it is the roles in which she also utilised comedy that have gained her fame; 'Bogdanovich used her again as the sashaying slut in *Paper Moon*, an affectionate tribute to depression-era whimsy, but it was Mel Brooks who truly displayed Kahn to her best advantage.' (Silverman, 2018,.) For an attractive Broadway singer this career move would have been considered unexpected at the time, for women were often pigeonholed into roles that perhaps "suited" their physical appearance.

In the case of women such as Gilda Radner and Elaine May, the perception of the Jewish female comedian as plain and neurotic is used to offset their physical appearance, and while these women are attractive, it is their Jewishness that altered that perception of beauty to fit a more cartoonish and comedic aesthetic. This was not the case for Kahn, as the reception to her career choices were both criticised and revered by audiences and critics alike. As Judy Klemesrud wrote, "Madeline Kahn is curvaceous and red-haired, and looks as though she should be entering beauty contests instead of making people laugh," (Madison, 2015, Contents) which highlights the scrutiny in which female comedians of the time were falling victim to. Within this exists a binary in which comedy is seemingly an unexpected element of

Kahn's work, as well as her being a Jewish woman, as visually she does not fit the stereotypes that are perpetuated in the industry; this is not a new confusion, as:

> '"...It seems that popular entertainment media are most intrigued with very few particular ways of doing femininity." The authors dubbed one of them a "postmodern Prima Donna" and described it as a "mix of 'diva' and 'girl-next-door', of princess and pauper, of cosmopolitan jet setter and wholesome small town girl, of hypersexualised seductress and 'virgin'"' (Lieb, K, J., 2018. p.14).

Kahn herself fits within this sense of postmodernity, as the duality of her performances is unlike the template of female actors of the time. It is the same duality in which Rivers uses to discuss sex, Radner to parody women, and May to write comedy. In the understanding that these topics/personas were limited to women in some form, the presence of them reinforces how male dominated spaces have enforced their respective markets. It also legitimises the concept of archetypes being inherently accessible, just limited by social structures.

The notion that women then choose to be considered funny over beautiful is one that implies that there must be a choice to facilitate one or the other. For Kahn, her comedic perspective often navigated through the idea that women who are sexual subjects, things to be viewed, are inherently funny in their oppositional nature. The beauty standards of the time featured a tiptoe performance between modesty and sexual liberation; "the girl next door" trope being one that features widely on screen. A seemingly wholesome trope, the girl-next-door relies on the perception of virgin-like morality but is primarily a sexual fantasy and potential love match for the

main male character. Contemporarily it is an amalgam of these two opposing perceptions of women, and ‘although women were allowed to work, they were also expected to balance their career aspirations with their caregiving responsibilities at home. Overall, women’s roles were still much framed within traditional gender role expectations’ (O'Brien, 2009, p.376). This balancing act is represented by the ideation of the girl-next-door as a representation of the woman who can be both, a woman who is often girl-like, immature yet exposed to maturity, and who can be both sexualised by men while still maintaining a ‘wholesome’ image.

In including both visions of femininity, Madeline Kahn exemplifies the late-century changes in perceptions of funny-women, and their place in the industry as both visual and comedic stimulation. By appealing to the hypersexualised nature of idealised womanhood Kahn is questioning and dissecting the contradictory implications of what men find attractive in women. In doing this, her performances complement the parodic nature of Mel Brooks’ work, particularly in the case of Lili Von Shtupp, who is a direct parody of German American actress/singer Marlene Dietrich. Kahn’s production of this parody was to create a typically sexualised image of women, wearing feathers and silk lingerie, while singing with an over-exaggerated lisp to the lyrics of “I’m tired, of being admired.” This contradiction of caricature and sexualisation implements a comedic edge to the scene that is not typical of female leads of the time.

For the female schlemiel, the model of endurance applies to notions of endurance of societal pressure, cultural limitations, and limitations of gender. All these are intrinsically linked, for the limitations of gender are enforced by cultural and societal rules that are determined through tradition or precedence. The female

schlemiel seems to endure these traditions through both adherence and rejection, because:

> ‘In a period when Jews were leaving the ethnic enclaves of city life, entering college en masse, and experiencing new wealth in upwardly mobile positions of all kinds, a charmed reminder of the “funny girl” - always unassimilable to love, marriage and normalcy - would offer a queer social slant on Jewish femininity that could reflect back in the mirror a broad range of personal political dreams’ (Schwadron, 2017, p.52).

This social slant on Jewish femininity extends to the female schlemiel, and the funny girl who is unassimilable to the traditions of social norm is in fact assimilable to the archetype that is understood only as male. The perspective of Madeline Kahn as a schlemiel is therefore a perspective of comedy through a feminist lens that is excluded from both male definitions of comedy and westernised Christian understandings of feminism.

5.2 Parody and the Schlemiel

The schlemiel as a representation of the fool is limited in its movement within film and television as the fool is typically placed within the narrative to legitimise the actions of the hero, this could be loosely paralleled with the funny-best-friend comedy relief that is found within the romantic comedy genre, and even the horror

genre. The schlemiel is different from this typical trope, as within the past fifty years the schlemiel has been given the reins to become the main character in doing so becomes a foolish hero that parodies oneself and ‘the shtetl schlemiel is society’s loser. But through the transformative power of modernist emancipation, the schlemiel becomes the unlikely winner’ (Moss, 2017. P.140). The nature of the schlemiel is that within their quest to accomplish a task, they instead accidentally find themselves working against their own interest. This is inevitable for the archetype, and while they may find a happy ending it will most certainly be unexpected or formed purely by accidental means. Since there is a schlemiel that is society’s loser, and one in which they become a hero, there is cause to believe that the nature of the archetype is steeped in parody and as argued by Butler, parody ‘is often used to expose the distinction between culturally constructed and naturalized configurations of gender and sexuality.’ (Moss, 2017,. P.174) Through this change, the schlemiels ‘were transformed into conquering heroes, seducing idealized Anglo shiksas as beacons of the new sexual freedoms’ and are represented through the persona of Madeline Kahn on screen. A beacon of new sexual freedom paired with the comedic associations, Kahn does indeed seduce those around her, but they are not Anglo or gentile women.

The parody genre, one that is found heavily in the works of Mel Brooks, is an extension of foolishness for the nature of parody is much like satire, it utilises the more serious tropes and genres, and alters them to become comedically driven. For the schlemiel to be present, is to either understand that the material itself is in some way schlemiel-like, or that those producing it are schlemiel in themself. As it is understood that the schlemiel is a parody and the works of the schlemiel are subversive, Madeline Kahn and Mel Brooks adhere to a definition of the modern schlemiel as ‘a hybrid construction between Jewish schlemiel and sexual dynamo,

they produced what Butler describes as “subversive laughter” (Moss, 2017., p.174). Kahn given her roles as provocative fools by Brooks work in tandem to create parody of gender, culture, sexuality and archetype itself.

Regarding the work of Madeline Kahn, her parody of Marlene Dietrich in Mel Brooks’ *Blazing Saddles* adheres to the statement by Desser that ‘Laughter results when redundance replaces reverence’ (Desser, D., 2004. p.117), and of which suggest that parody is an exposure of configurations of gender and sexuality. The role of Lili Von Shtupp questions the reverence in which men perceive women, as Dietrich herself is an icon of Old Hollywood stardom, a traditional fantasy of sex, fame and idealistic aesthetics that apply to herself as well as Dietrich because ‘when she parodied Marlene Dietrich in *Blazing Saddles,* it wasn’t the usual Dietrich imitation, because she was also parodying herself (Kael, 1994,. P.603). Kahn’s version, much like Radner as Baba Wawa, highlights a specific feature of these women that they are parodying, their voice.

The female voice is metaphorically one that is ignored in the industry; it is similarly a characteristic that is commodified by the industry in order to create responses in audiences. For Barbara Walters, her voice is marketed through the news as a reliable voice, a voice of reason, and when the audience hears it, they are conditioned to respond accordingly. The same logic is applied to Dietrich, but with a different response in mind. With her distinctive and sultry voice, the response that is made is to elicit a pleasurable reaction from audiences, and as we understand that women are cultivated for the male gaze, this response is made for heterosexual men, in mind. Cultivating these responses works to establish popular culture and are effective in creating memorable catchphrases, soundbites and references that often outlive the source material. For the women who are the subjects of such systems,

their place in pop culture is determined through the perspective of men, and whether these women are so attractive that they are memorable or so unattractive that they are memorable, the duality of it is also in the idea that both ‘mimicry and parody are the complex weapons of both the oppressor and the oppressed’ (Kent, 1992., p.7). That is not to say that these women are famous for being unattractive, but that it is euphemistic for their line of work; female actors, singers and performers are remembered attractively since they are inherently performative roles, and therefore intended for the male gaze. Politicians, journalists, and scientists are remembered as unattractive or plain, because they are not always performative and are often male-dominated spaces. There are exceptions of course, but these again are entangled with a misogynist caveat that will sound something like; *“She is attractive, for a …”.* When female comics choose to parody themselves and other women, they are doing so with the conviction that they are only parodying a parody, a perception of womanhood that is cultivated by men and for men, and therefore are utilising the weapon of oppressor and oppressed.

In the case of the female schlemiel this caveat appears often, and for Madeline Kahn especially is one that is linked to the notion that women can’t be attractive and funny, and if they are, they are the exception to the rule. This limitation is equally found in the concept of the female schlemiel, as we understand it to be a male-dominated role the appearance of a feminine perspective is one that surprises and seemingly subverts the norm. Kahn epitomises this struggle in perception, for she visually adheres to the idealistic standards that are set for women but does not make the choice that coincide with the ones that are socially enforced on women.

Marlene Dietrich performed, particularly in her own individual projects, as one dedicated to herself. In that her act ‘consisted of a series of songs and costume changes designed to play on the famous Dietrich persona’ (Harbin, 2005., p.6), this attests to the level of fame and recognition of which audiences received her. For Madeline Kahn to parody Dietrich in a way that creates binary between the visual and audial, that her body doesn’t match her voice, speaks to an understanding of her subject and the generalisations of women that are harmful in their implication of idealised womanhood. This does harm in the same way that the perceptions of the American-Jew allude to the existence of a faulty Jewish person. As the schlemiel is a parody of the Jewish man that becomes the unlikely hero, it illegitimates the stereotype that Jewish people are inherently imperfect and deficient in comparison to non-Jews, the female schlemiel similarly illegitimates the parodies of womanhood by re-parodying them.

5.3 Pretty/Funny Binary and the Schlemiel

Madeline Kahn as a parodic representation of illicit womanhood on screen is one that works to prove and similarly disprove the pretty/funny binary.

> ‘The major premise of *Pretty/Funny* is that in the historic binary of “pretty” versus “funny”, women comics, no matter what they look like, have been located in opposition to “pretty”, enabling them to engage in a transgressive comedy grounded in the female body - its looks, its race and

sexuality, and its relationships to ideal versions of femininity.' (Mizejewski, 2014, p.5)

This is the idea that women in terms of performative industry, can be either pretty or funny, and women who are funny are often placed in a position in which they are the binary of pretty. In placing worth on their comic ability, the female comic must then denounce the relationship between herself and her own looks. In doing this, there is the assumption that the female comic is legitimised by her distance from adherence of idealised social constructs of beauty and is therefore opened to the ability to create comedy that critiques those who do adhere, or the act of adherence itself. Joan Rivers is a clear example of the Pretty/Funny binary, since her stand-up work largely is informed by the questioning of social structure regarding women. Not only about beauty and sex, but Rivers covering topics such as cosmetic surgery is transgressive due to the relationship between both men and women and cosmetic treatment; as women who undergo it are considered vain and men who do are considered feminine, since vanity and femininity are linked culturally.

Madeline Kahn similarly expresses a difficulty in separating herself from the classification of funny, since she has stated previously that, "I've spent all my time and money to be respectable and dignified; to be a *lady*. I'd be afraid of just walking around and doing that I think is crazy" (Parish, 2008, p.204). This self-enforced sense of limitation is one that is calculated through the mediation of women from male perspective. The model of a *lady* does not allow to include funny woman. Similarly, the model of the schlemiel does not fit to allow women, since its mediation has also been done through a male perspective.

Kahn utilises her parody of sexualised women to not only question what is considered attractive, but questions in detail what elements of women are

heightened on screen to make them attractive. To use Von Shtupp as an example, the original source material in Marlene Dietrich was used to find iconic characteristics and subvert them as Dietrich's famed voice was interpreted into a lisp. Kahn herself similarly parodied her own persona, with her natural 'operatic voice' (parish, 2008. P.8) that brought her fame on stage, her singing became a running theme in her work. With the lisp in her voice in *Blazing Saddles* and the sudden bursting out in song during a rape scene in *Young Frankenstein,* the musical theatre aspect that is associated with Kahn is just as associated with her act as her looks and her comedic prowess. Similarly, when understood through perspectives of the female schlemiel, the response of comedy to trauma is one that is unsettling in itself.

Mizejewski asserts that within comedy '"pretty" is the topic and target, the ideal that is exposed as funny' (2014, p.5) and for the women who are discussed within the construct of the female schlemiel, they utilise 'pretty' as the topic and target for their respective works. In doing this they are similarly demonising the notion of pretty to the extent that is becomes inaccessible in some instances; 'the way the Pretty/Funny binary has evolved into market demand for women comics who are drop-dead gorgeous and the feminist suspicion about how good looks trump comic talent in casting decisions' (Mizejewski, 2014,. p.88). This suspicion of pretty women evolves into a patriarchal generalisation of women that has previously been utilised through archetype; women who wear red lipstick, for example, are untrustworthy/dangerous because the *femme fatale* has encoded this on screen. This does not apply to all archetypes, but the presence of these generalised women on screen and the absence of detailed representations means that there is an uneven understanding of male archetypes and female archetypes regarding their respective origins. The ownership of the industry by men means that the archetypes

that are mediated are done so with their perceptions of gender and stereotype in mind, because of this there is a misconception that women who appeal to this perception are also perpetuating them.

Young Frankenstein uses the pretty/funny binary in a way that describes the binary between the subtextual understanding of pretty, and the subtextual understanding of funny. The subtext of these both alluding not to a visual and comedic component, but instead a moral component that is associated with both. Pretty in the case of Kahn's Elizabeth in *Young Frankenstein* is euphemistic for morality, and funny for sexually explicit. The dynamic between the two is changeable considering each stage of the narrative, in the first act Elizabeth is the elegant and moral socialite fiancée of Dr Frankenstein (played by Gene Wilder) who insists on a traditional wedding, with a traditional wedding night. However, after she is kidnapped and raped by Frankenstein's monster in the final act, she is detached from her original persona and is swayed to the 'funny'; 'The scene in which Frankenstein's monster rapes the character played by Madeline Kahn and she breaks into song is very humorous. It is only in retrospect and with a delayed reaction that we realize we are laughing at a rape' (Wiederman, 2012 n.p). She becomes lustful, crazed and overdramatic in her performance and the binary is clear in the signalling that the change happens once she has been taken to the dark side; her narrative arc is one that transforms from pretty to funny. This binary is also clear in the two female leads of the film, Kahn as Elizabeth and Teri Garr as Inga who is the vibrant young assistant to the Doctor and by the end of the film, his wife. The binary that is seen here is subtle in its relation to both pretty and funny since both roles are comedic, however the visual element of the binary is seen in their presentation on screen; 'Inga is a full-breasted blonde, whereas Elizabeth is a flat-chested brunette...Inga is a servant, and Elizabeth is a rich, spoiled brat. Inga promises immediate sexual

access and fulfilment and Elizabeth seethes with sexual repression' (Picart, 2003, p.48). Elizabeth and Inga both represent stereotypes of women and specifically are representative of the binary between Jewish and non-Jewish women. Elizabeth is the Jewish American Princess personified with her social rigidity and perfectly coiffed looks, yet Inga represents a shiksa goddess who promises fulfilment that the male schlemiel longs for. Gene Wilder and Kahn both play schlemiels in this film through their accidental acceptance of absurdity that leads to dire consequences. But Kahn's character does not leave happily with a blonde gentile woman like Wilder's schlemiel does, but finds a decidedly brutish and still non-Jewish monster, who in the end as comic punishment for her lust, becomes a frigid intellectual thinker.

5.4 Sexualising the Schlemiel

Albert Chamisso and Heinrich Heine both associated the schlemiel with incidents of illicit sexual activity, where one believes the schlemiel to be the perpetrator of the act and the other believes the schlemiel to be an innocent bystander, the similarity between each interpretation is that both schlemiels are punished. What is understood through this is the assumption that sex inherently causes trouble for the schlemiel and their action or inaction is both counteractive in scenarios in which sex appears. For women there is a parallel to this understanding since 'we live in a sex negative culture. The messages we get are shaming, cruel, victim-blaming, and disproportionately focused on women and our bodies.' (Moon, 2015 p.360). Culturally we blame women for their involvement with sexual activity, and they are punished through social shaming, medical and judicial mistrust, and are demonised in religion. When taking this into account, the concept of the female

schlemiel is therefore a case of double accusation when it comes to the topic of sex. Interestingly the roles that Kahn has chosen throughout her career are, for the most part, inherently sexually provocative. She is secretly crazed and lustful in *Young Frankenstein,* a Prostitute in both *Paper Moon* and *Blazing Saddles,* and is given the title of 'Empress Nympho' in Mel Brooks' *History of the World Part 1* (1981). *C*ontemporarily the term 'nympho' is a shortening of 'Nymphomaniac', which of course is a term which etymologically means 'bride madness' and is used to describe what is perceived to be an overactive interest in sex for women (Cavendish, M., 2010, p.577).

The fact Kahn plays a lustful Roman empress within this historical spoof is a play on both the joke of Kahn as a 'nymphomaniac' within the film, and also the fact that she, and Brooks himself, are Jewish actors both in the roles of Roman characters. The history between the two has multiple religious and historical connotations that refer to both Jewish trauma and diaspora. The film similarly contains a section on the Spanish inquisition, and Brooks plays the infamous Torquemada, leader of the group who are, by Brooks' own musical styling, "On a mission to convert the Jews". For this film in particular, the representation of the schlemiel looking back at their own history, and the representations of such, are important to understanding the contemporary understanding of Jewish men and women; the philosophers become "stand up philosophers" and the empresses become "nymphos". This historical perspective is one also found in *Young Frankenstein*, where the Doctor, who is a descendent of the original Dr Frankenstein, is haunted by the reputation of his family and seeks to find a way in which to deviate from the infamy of his name. The schlemiel is a figure that looks back on their own history and tries to learn from the perceived mistakes.

The presence of Elizabeth in *Young Frankenstein* is one that represents both previously explored types of schlemiel, the schlemiel as eternal innocent and the sexual schlemiel through 'Elizabeth's kooky, monster-smitten transformation from demure, look-but-don't-touch china doll to flouncing, come hither seductress' (Crick, 2015, p.79) The binary between these variances brings into question the relationship between the two. Elizabeth is seen to represent both elements of the doctor and monster within the narrative, where one is seemingly the picture of socially constructed morality and the other is a result of primal desire. This is a reactionary change as Kahn's representation as a schlemiel is understood as changeable through whichever social lens is most influential. The sexual schlemiel is always present but becomes an accepted persona when the situation calls for such an archetype and the scene in which this is most understood is through the mock rape scene that is depicted between the Monster and Elizabeth. After her kidnapping the monster begins to initiate sex without her consent, it is not only until he is on top of her that she changes her mind and begins to seemingly enjoy the moment. The model of endurance can be applied in multiple ways regarding this scene; as we could both see the endurance as a physical endurance of sexual assault, or as an endurance of social norms. As Claire Henry suggests, the perception of rape on screen for women is linked to the perception of her moral position, 'as in other rape discourses (in film, media, and the law), sympathy and justice for the victim still rely upon her being established as innocent – that is, not drunk, not promiscuous, not careless (Henry, 2014., p87). Since the narrative dictates the audience to believe that Elizabeth was always a sexual schlemiel but hid her true desires in order to blend in with the society around her, the scene does not garner the sympathy that a rape scene would typically receive. Similarly, the physical change that Elizabeth experiences, the white streaks in her hair that appear after her kidnapping, signal a

direct and immediate change while also parodying further the original *Bride of Frankenstein (1935)* film.

This discussion of sexualising the female schlemiel becomes also an issue of sexualising funny women as an aggressive alternative to laughter, in sexualising female comics, male audiences are placing focus on the visuality of the performer instead of the jokes themselves. This works in the reverse, in which women perceive funniness to be a detraction of beauty. Kahn herself has asserted her own awareness of the binary in which she performs in, '"I think the fact that I'm funny scares a lot of men," (Madison, 2015, Chapt.10) and within this statement proves the hypothesis that her ability to make people laugh is somehow threatening to male audiences, and by extension, male performers. Since the understanding of female performers is one of the male gaze, the female schlemiel exists on a plane that is not quite accepted by the definitions of 'funny' or 'schlemiel', as her presence as a woman seems to exclude her from both categories. Similarly, being a funny woman excludes her, at least in terms of perception, from womanhood. Since the generalised term asserts that *women aren't funny*, the logic of this statement implies a conclusion that states that funny women are neither funny, nor women. Much like the term schlemiel itself, the words and phrasing of them imply a contradictory conclusion.

Since schlemiel is a gender-neutral word it applies to every gender, and therefore it must be possible for schlemiels to be women because it is not stated otherwise. What is understood by this logic, is that the perceived lack of evidence (that there are no female schlemiels) is not supported by the definition itself. The reverse of this occurs in using gender specific wording that is proven to be wrong

when compared with the evidence; the existence of funny women in the world, proves that this statement is not true. What is gleaned from further subtextual analysis of the statement, and the generalisations that are accompanied with them, is the idea that women *can* be funny, as long as they are not conventionally attractive and are only funny to other women. Both caveats imply that there is one singular idea of women and that there is one singular concept of funniness, and that both are determined by men.

Conclusion

The aims of this research were to discuss the compositions and representations of the female schlemiel in response to case studies found within mid-to-late twentieth century texts. In focussing on these female performers and their relevant work there exists an applied feminist critical approach due to the references used and perspectives of women being an integral way in which the female schlemiel performs. In referring to a handful of definitions broached by multiple theorists, the definitions of the schlemiel are introduced to create a context for how this research will respond and apply them to female characters. The original intention was to inherently understand the construction of the female schlemiel to posit that the term is gender neutral and as such must include women. The Jewish, feminist, and comedic lens of the schlemiel determine different understanding of the archetype that cannot always fit together to create one cohesive image. This is not through fault of the schlemiel but through the inherent fault of archetype itself. As it is established that that archetype is one perspective from a multitude of distances, the archetype of one character is made through both positive and negative opinion. What can also be determined is that these opinions are created though the relationship between society, diaspora and image, and so in understanding that these perspectives that are the foundation of the archetype are different, it must also be known that the way in which they are formed is the same.

Within this research the historical context of the schlemiel, and of the industry surrounding the case studies chosen, is lightly touched upon. The decision to mention it briefly throughout the work is due to the large amount of conflicting and

complicated areas that the case studies are featured in. While all the case studies are found within the comedy industry, the individual avenues that they have worked (or are most famous for performing in) include their own specific histories regarding gender, taboos, and socio-political position which affects the discussion of gender and culture. From an industrial perspective television, film, literature and stage have varying degrees of inclusive hiring, censorship laws, and success for Jewish women; but from a cultural perspective similarly share audiences and modes of access. This means that to fully broach the wide scope of historical context that lies underneath, it would take a much larger body of research to fully represent all equally with a much larger word count than this specific research allows. The absence of such a large historical context is to promote a sense of a well-researched subject but without the risk of losing the central focus of the thesis itself, which is the composition of the female schlemiel in response to these four case studies.

The schlemiel as an etymologically gender-neutral form immediately inherently and inextricably must include women into its production. But if the word itself were to become less inclusive, this does not exclude the female schlemiel from the archetype either. Gender is a construct, one that is changeable and essentially fragile when considering the limits that they pose that are seemingly surpassed, and the discussions of gender are limited by the presumption of gender arrangement since ‘the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience’ (Butler, 2011. p12). The determination of society as whole to hold onto the construct while simultaneously deconstructing its foundations is a comic irony that exists within the schlemiel itself. Best summarised by archetypal schlemiel Woody Allen in his 1997 film Deconstructing Harry, “tradition is the illusion of permanence” meaning that by continuing tradition, one is contributing to the illusion that it is immovable. The same can be said for both understandings of gender and

archetype, that by perpetuating the perceptions of them they stay the same. This is not the case, for gender and the construction of it has changed exponentially alongside the rise of popular entertainment media. Each film, television programme, podcast, and social media app, contributes to the steady destruction of what it means to be ‘man’ or ‘woman’. From what has previously been raised in the introduction, these ‘types’ work to ‘reducing the complexity of an individual, group, or situation to a familiar and quickly understood and defining set of attributes’ (Long, 2014,. p.108) and much like the response to archetype or stereotype, the audience's inclination to follow the gender binary and its supposed conclusions slows this progress. In the act revaluation of these constants, we will begin to see the problems that lie beneath and will largely find no use for outdated hegemony. Along with them, the archetypes soon follow, not in their destruction, but in their evolution to become more representative, inclusive and beneficial to those who it appears to present.

The form of the female schlemiel fits the form of the male schlemiel in that they are both feminised, for the male schlemiel this is done to a comic extent that extracts incongruity from the association between ‘male’ and ‘feminine’. Understood as a comic trope, the idea that feminine men are funny comes from both a demonisation of gay men on screen who are portrayed in such ways to separate from the association of straight men; ‘regardless of how masculine or feminine a gay character may appear, other characters often mark the character as different from straight men by associating his gayness with femininity’ (Hilton-Morrow, 2012., p.211), but also demonises the Jewish male who are portrayed to be weakened, neurotic and small compared to the non-Jewish counterparts. The fact that these three characteristics are considered typically feminine speaks to the demonisation of women in power, and how representation in the media continues to harm authentic

and individual relationships to womanhood and replace it with a patriarchal stereotype of womanhood.

The female schlemiel is also visually feminised, but this is done through a default visual association between certain attributes and feminisation, the examples of women used in this work are all on the spectrum of idealised beauty standards, some adhere, and some do not, but again this is a default association of certain attributes and their relation to attractiveness to men. There is no comedy in this as it is, women aren't funny because they're small, like men are perceived to be, but the female schlemiel finds comedy in overemphasising their femininity to unrealistic ends. Where the male schlemiel perhaps tries to become 'manlier', this is done through subtler and meaningful acts of male dominance. The female schlemiel takes the stereotypes of women and reconstructs them to become unmeaningful acts of female submission, brashness, or earnestness. Joan Rivers takes the stereotype of loud and materialistic Jewish women and makes herself louder and more materialistic. Gilda Radner takes the stereotype of 'too serious' working women in news and journalism and gives them overemphasised comic features to make them decidedly unserious. Elaine May utilises the comic tropes of Jewish men, and earnestly places them in the bodies of women, to ensure a change of perspective. And Madeline Kahn takes the most weaponised aspect of womanhood, their bodies, and represents it as a body of comic sexuality, it becomes an inside joke alluding to the worst kept secret of male desire. What can be seen from some of the case studies is that the blurring of lines between stereotypes and archetypes is found to be present yet not wholly apparent. Regarding Joan Rivers for example, what can be argued is that she as an individual female figure, she fits into Wisse's model of endurance. As she is aware and addresses modes of inequality, she is representing an endured figure. To her audience however she is a shared figure, that on the

surface fits a culturally encoded stereotype that is more widely recognised, the Jewish American Princess. Foolishness being the key marker in which to define the schlemiel, the character that Rivers presents is acts within a subtle social foolishness that is perhaps best recognised in hindsight. The roots of the Jewish American Princess fall into a well-understood history of misogyny that is present in a lot of other stereotypes of women, and the fact that she is a stereotype implies that she is not a lead character, since narratives are created in mind of the dominant archetype. However, In Rivers' case, this is not true, since she is often not only the lead, but the only character, in her performances and plays her narratives out chaotically in such a way that cannot be easily anticipated by audiences. In this regard, Rivers subverts stereotype in both its place in narrative, and the direction of it.

The presence of a funny Jewish woman within a text may signal to a representation of a female comic element at play, and typically that representation is of the female schlemiel, Jewish American Princess, or the Jewish Mother. As these case studies all find themselves within the comedy industry, one can expect their personas to be coded to fit these archetypes and stereotypes in a way that is recognisable to an audience. All three are archetypes that deviate from the typical damsel in distress or femme fatale, which represent strict sides of good and evil. These comic archetypes live in the in-between space, and like the male schlemiel, can be both good and bad. More than these three exist, since the fragile distinctions of gender allow for every archetype to be in some way accessible to all genders, sexualities and identities.

The female schlemiel is a reactive archetype due to its changing in response to feminist change. As the focus of contemporary feminism changes over its respective eras, presenting different goals and ways of thinking, the schlemiel

becomes an archetype of feminism that is slightly out of sync with current thinking; because the schlemiel is foolish, the female schlemiel must inherit a social foolishness that presents an extreme of feminism that may be correct initially but is eventually milked past the point of sanity, or usefulness. Joan Rivers is a great example of this, because her direct form of address to women is feminist in its ideology but is perhaps un-feminist in its delivery; In her sets she would tell her female audiences to demand more from their partners, but in the same set also tell them that they must be performing bigger sexual favours depending on the price of their jewellery and as Emily Nussbaum asserts in her profile of Rivers 'If Rivers‘s act wasn’t explicitly feminist, it was radical in its own way. She was like a person trapped in a prison, shouting out escape routes from her cell’ (The New Yorker, 2015). In teetering on the edge of social issues by presenting a visual or content that is binary to the traditional thought, then the act of feminism for these women isn’t to wholly subscribe to one way of being a woman, but to use the strengths of their comedy to get some form of progressive feminist view in the world. This is a near hidden tactic that is found in all these women and highlights the full extent of how unexpectedly aware their creation of the archetype is.

The Jewish perspective and the female perspective is one that intersects in multiple ways. Most glaringly found in the history of trauma, the schlemiel as a model of endurance is one that mirrors the study of womanhood as one of similar endurance and struggle. The joke of the schlemiel is that the struggle is created by their own hand, that they are the fault of their trauma, and women are too placed within that position of blame when it comes to their own experience. Women who are victims of sexual assault, workplace disadvantage, economic disparity are told systematically that it is their own fault; they dress too provocatively, they’re too emotional, they don’t have the instinct to provide – a concept in itself that is

monopolised by patriarchal dominance, etc. and these women are told this to the extent that it becomes a common shared knowledge.

The schlemiel is held to the same fate of self-fulfilling prophecy, and in their quest to deviate from it to change their own history, they continuously make the same mistakes. The Jewish perspective is self-referential in this archetype, as the trauma that is experienced by Jewish people becomes used as propaganda to legitimize the cause and effect by outside cultures. The beginnings of this archetype are steeped in the belief that Jewish people are the reason for their own harm, just as the belief that women are the reason for their own exploitation. This repetition of language that is oppressive and naturally memorable, adds to the collective beliefs held by those inside and outside of the group it pertains to. ‘Self-hating Jews’ and ‘Female Misogyny’ are proof to the strength in which is works.

The female schlemiel exists as an evolution to an ancient tradition of male dominance in comedy and narrative. Rivers, Radner, May and Kahn are representations, however loose, of its various abilities and comic trajectories. The tragedy of these women lies in their endurance of a society that is not fair to them, because it is an industry that exploits their bodies for the male gaze. The comedy of these women is in their parody of this patriarchal structure, seemingly perceived to stumble through these stereotypes of the brash, clumsy and foolish woman In alternatively caricaturing the sex symbols of the time, what they are doing is systematically dismantling the realism of such representations. They are not taking themselves seriously, and in doing so are encouraging the audience to take not take them seriously.

The worth of this research lies in the absence of female schlemiel discussion at length. What is seen in the analysis of the schlemiel from a female perspective is

brief and largely hypothetical, as in it does not refer to specific individuals. What relatively little information there is becomes overwhelmed by the bulk of research dedicated to the archetype as a ‘him’, and neglects to address the work of the female schlemiel as a legitimate contribution to the archetype; the responses to Elaine May’s on-screen works are a particularly obvious example of this. The female schlemiel is conclusively an extension of an already existing male archetype, that performs through an agenda of stereotype intersecting with trauma. This intersection causes the archetypes that exist, the male schlemiel, to become unsatisfied by its own limitations and extends to a perspective that is similarly presented as foolish, powerless and oppressed by a dominating culture that envelops it.

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