# 1. Introduction - Objective of this THESIS

On the following pages, I will use elements of the TV show *Two and a Half Men* to highlight the American Dream in popular American sitcoms. I will also examine if TV sitcoms, which represent the American Dream, have a future. I have chosen this topic because sitcoms are an important part of my life and because I believe that the TV show *Two and a Half Men* is the best example for a sitcom which represents the American Dream. This topic is important for the producers of TV shows, who are working on sitcoms, which also represents The American Dream because it is important to know whether a sitcom will be successful or not.

# 2. Concepts and Technical Terms

In this THESIS, I will use the different element types of the American Dream to analyze their representation in *Two and a Half Men*.

**The American Dream**

If you work hard, you can achieve success, it does not matter where you come from or how much money your parents have. According to Peter Freese the American Dream is a concept that consists of seven main elements.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Success** is the conviction that everybody can realize his highest ambitions by means of their own endeavors.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Liberty** means the freedom of the individual. This element is strongly linked with the equality element.

**Equality** is the belief that everyone deserves to be treated the same regardless of race gender or religion.

**Melting pot** is a place where different people or different cultures all come together and begin to merge and mix.

**Progress** is a steady improvement of individual, communal and societal conditions of existence.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Manifest Destiny**

**Sitcom**

A sitcom is a show that is on television regularly that is comprised of a group of characters who are involved in different funny situations.

# 3. Summary of *Two and a Half Men*

***Two and a Half Men*** was published in 2003 and was directed and written by Chuck Lorre and Lee Aronsohn.

The sitcom is about a jingle composer named Charlie Harper who lives an easygoing life and has many short lived relationships with various women. His life changes dramatically when his wife moves out and his brother Alan Harper moves in. On weekends, Alan looks after his son Jake as well. Charlie finds himself with two new roommates in his large bachelor pad on the beach in Malibu. As Charlie tries to keep his life as a swinging single, he often ends up in hilarious and embarrassing situations for all. Charlie's brother Alan is the exactly opposite of Charlie. He does not agree with Charlie’s way of life but he must learn to live with it because he is living in Charlie’s house. In addition, Evelyn, Charlie and Alan’s mother makes both of their lives hard. Charlie’s housekeeper, Bertha, is not happy about additional work that she must do since Alan and Jake moved into Charlie’s house. Furthermore, there is Charlie’s stalker, Rose, who is always lurking in the background ready to add more fun to this insane plot.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Charlie has everything a successful man needs: money, a large house on a beach, a great job, lots of women, and loads of free time. Alan in contrast is working hard for his money but cannot seem to crack the code on getting ahead. This leads to him to subsequently asking his brother Charlie for loans.

## 3.1 Summary of season 8 episode 11

It is Alan’s girlfriend Lyndsey’s birthday and Alan wants to buy her an exciting gift. To earn money for his gift, he offers massages to shoppers at the mall. After many hours of work, he had earned enough money to buy Lyndsey a pearl necklace. Unfortunately it is from an untrustworthy vender in the parking lot of the mall. A short time later Alan discovers that the pearl necklace is a fake. Then he decides to sneak into his ex-wife’s house and take her diamond earrings to give to his girlfriend Lyndsey.

# 4. Elements of The American Dream which are represented in season 8 episode 11

The question is how are elements of the American Dream represented in *Two and a Half Men*. Directly at the beginning of the episode (00:35min) you can see a strong contrast between the main characters and their girlfriends. Charlie and his girlfriend are wearing a tuxedo and a black dress. They are looking rich and happy. Alan and his girlfriend are wearing old and casual clothes.

Furthermore, they are playing scrabble, drinking cheap wine, and eating chips. In addition, they don’t look really happy about their evening. Their unhappiness is better expressed after Charlie has given his girlfriend an expensive diamond necklace gift at 01:18min. Lyndsey said “Looser”[[5]](#footnote-5) to describe Alan’s character in contrast to Charlie. After Charlie and his girlfriend leave the room, Alan tells Lyndsey that he wants to give her gifts like Charlie does for his girlfriend. Lyndsey response, “I don't need those things! I mean they're nice, they're more than nice, they're what every girl dreams of, but let's face it, some dreams just have to die”[[6]](#footnote-6), this means that she appreciates expensive jewelry but she knows that she will never get that from Alan. The addition of background laughter sets a tone for the viewer that she meant it as a joke.

Image 1 Alan, Lyndsey, Charlie and his girlfriend

At 04:01min Alan is searching for a present in a low price catalog, which expresses the part of the American Dream, which says that you must spend your money smart to achieve success. There is also a reference to the **liberty** element in this scene. Charlie does not want to limit his lifestyle and is often careless with Alan’s feelings.

The best representation of the American Dream can be found at 07:28min to 09:55min. Alan goes to the mall and offers neck massages for a cheap price. In these scenes there are two references to the **melting pot** element of the dream. The first is at 08:19min when a very large black woman wants a massage from Alan. Alan is less than happy to provide a service to her as the audience laughs at his response to this precarious position. The second involves a man who appears at 08:45min. He appears to be a rather flamboyant Mexican man with big muscles and tattoos all over. As he enters the scene he hugs Alan. The next reference is at 09:05min where Alan is massaging a midget person. Looking at all three scenes, we see that Alan is treating everyone the same way. This is a reference to the American Dream element **equality** because all three people have a different nation, culture, are gay or have an illness. In the next scene, an Asian masseur appears and offers neck massages for a lower price and for more time. This is also a reference to The American Dream because Alan must work harder and longer for less money to achieve **success**.

Alan mentioned that he had worked for three weeks straight, 16 hours per day, to buy Lyndsey the pearl necklace (10:10min). He is proud of his effort but his dreams explode after he has noticed that the pearl necklace is a fake. In addition, the background laugher comes back when he pulls the necklace out of his jacket. This is also another signal for the viewer that something is wrong with this necklace. When Bertha appears at 11:40min she mentions that she found the pearl necklace in the wastebin, which is another reference to Lyndsey’s statement from the beginning of this episode. Even Alan believes now that he cannot buy Lyndsey expensive jewelry.

## 4.1 Characters and their representation of The American Dream

**Charlie Harper:**

Charlie definitely represents The American Dream. He made career by creating jingles for advertisements. Furthermore, he lives in a large house on a beach in Malibu. In addition, he has a housekeeper named Bertha who keeps his house clean. He drives an expensive car and has no fears about money problems. Because he lives an easy life, everyone idolizes him.

**Alan Harper:**

Alan is the exactly contrast to Charlie but he also represents The American Dream. He is working hard to achieve his goals and dreams but can never seem to get ahead. He drives a normal car and must pay alimony and child support to his ex-wife who still lives in his house. Because of these factors Alan often has to borrow money from his brother Charlie.

Another episode of *Two and a Half Men* (season 4 episode 1 “Working for Caligula”) is a perfect example of Alan's bad luck in life. Alan has marries to his wife Kandi when he goes to a casino and hits a jackpot worth $500,000. But this dream does not last long when four months later Kandi leaves him and takes all of Alan's money leaving him exactly $11.

**Conclusion:**

All in all Alan represents the tragic part of The American Dream and Charlie represents the successful part. The sitcom uses this as a stylistic device because many people are dreaming of success in life.

## 4.2 Character change of Charlie Harper to Walden Schmidt

Since season 9, Walden Schmidt replaces the main character Charlie Harper after Charlie is tragically killed in an accident. The question is whether Walden also represent the “winning” part of The American Dream.

The answer is definitely yes. Walden Schmidt is a computer programmer who sold his revolutionary program to Microsoft for millions of dollars. He bought Charlie's house which subsequently included Alan as a roommate. Walden lives the high life much the same way that Charlie did and he fills the gap of Charlie’s loss readily

# 5. Characterization of Charlie and Alan Harper

**Charlie Harper:**

Charles Frances Harper, later also known as Charles Waffles, is 44 years old and he has been working as a jingle composer before he became a children’s songwriter. He is a casual guy with a laid back sense of style, he is very confident in his words and movements, charming and manipulative. Charlie has had a hard time expressing emotions we watch Charlie grow from season to season as he shares his emotions and problems with his psychologist Dr. Linda Freeman.

**Alan Harper:**

Alan Jerome Harper, also known as “Zippy” is 48 years old and the brother of Charlie Harper. He is working as a chiropractor and he has a son named Jake Harper. Alan has many shortcomings especially compared to his brother. He could be described as a frumpy, clumsy, and controlling person with a habit of repelling women. He is also jealous of Charlie’s lifestyle. Alan is timid when it comes to women and most of his friends and family suspect that he is gay, which comes true in a later season where Alan marries Walden.

# 6. Comparison of *Two and a Half Men* and *The Big Bang Theory*

I chose *The Big Bang Theory* for a comparison because Chuck Lorre also created it and because the main emphasis of this sitcom is not based on The American Dream.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Season** | **TV season** | **Ranking** | **Viewers**  **(in millions)** |
| 1 | 2007-08 | 68 | 8.31 |
| 2 | 2008-09 | 40 | 10.03 |
| 3 | 2009-10 | 12 | 14.22 |
| 4 | 2010-11 | 13 | 13.14 |
| 5 | 2011-12 | 8 | 15.82 |
| 6 | 2012-13 | 3 | 18.68 |
| 7 | 2013-14 | 2 | 19.96 |
| 8 | 2014-15 | 2 | 19.05 |

Table 1 Viewers and ranking per season from *The Big Bang Theory*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Season** | **TV season** | **Ranking** | **Viewers**  **(in millions)** |
| 1 | 2003-04 | 15 | 15.31 |
| 2 | 2004-05 | 11 | 16.45 |
| 3 | 2005-06 | 17 | 15.14 |
| 4 | 2006-07 | 21 | 14.43 |
| 5 | 2007-08 | 17 | 13.68 |
| 6 | 2008-09 | 10 | 15.06 |
| 7 | 2009-10 | 11 | 14.95 |
| 8 | 2010-11 | 17 | 12.73 |
| 9 | 2011-12 | 11 | 14.64 |
| 10 | 2012-13 | 11 | 13.78 |
| 11 | 2013-14 | 27 | 10.66 |
| 12 | 2014-15 | 23 | 11.95 |

Table 2 Viewers and ranking per season for *Two and a Half Men*

15.31 million Viewers watched the first season of *Two and a Half Men*, which was a brilliant start for the sitcom. Four years later when *The Big Bang Theory* launched their first season in 2007 with 8.31 million Viewers, *Two and a Half Men* lost around 1.6 million Viewers since their start in 2003. *Two and a Half Men* held their Viewers in the range around 12 to 15 million per season, while *The Big Bang Theory* grew from season to season until the sitcom had reached 19.96 million viewers in 2013/14 with season 7. After the replacement of the main character Charlie Sheen to Ashton Cutcher, the viewers increased to 14.64 from 12.73 million viewers. Since then, the viewers dropped down to 10.66 million. Since 2011 more and more people started watching *The Big Bang Theory*.

# 7. The future of “Two and a Half Men”

*Two and a Half Men* was successful when Charlie Harper was the main character of the show. Would *Two and a Half Men* become successful again if Charlie Harper returned as the main character to the sitcom?

Charlie was the main character for eight different seasons. Furthermore, the actor of the character became older and no one wants to see a sitcom with old people (that is an ageists statement). In addition, the replacement of the replacement could bring some viewers back to the sitcom but as the past already showed, Charlie cannot reach more viewers. He holds the viewers in a range.

**Is this the future of "Two and a Half Men"?**

**Is this the future of Two and a Half Men?**

It is my opinion that Charlie represented The American Dream much better than Walden. Walden’s character is too childish to represent The American Dream, although he made millions of dollars with his work in the past. In addition, Charlie has many fans who will probably watch the sitcom again if he comes back. Moreover, Charlie became a symbol for the sitcom because he was the main character since the beginning of *Two and a Half Men*. Probably the most people know him from this sitcom.

All in all *Two and a Half Men* was a successful TV-show but the focus of modern sitcoms has changed from **The American Dream** to nerds. Probably the return of Charlie Harper could bring *Two and a Half Men* back to the glory days but for how long? The past teaches us that there was no development for *Two and a Half Men* since their second season.

# 8. Bibliography

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**Images:**

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**Tables:**

* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Big\_Bang\_Theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Bang_Theory%20) [22nd March 16] *Data from “Episodes” table The Big Bang Theory season 1-8*
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_and_a_Half_Men> [22nd March 16] *American television ratings “Two and a Half Men” season 1-12*

1. Freese, Peter: *The American Dream Humankind’s Second Chance?* Langenscheidt 2005, P. 4/5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Freese 2005, P. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Freese 2005, P. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Wikipedia Deutschland, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_and_a_Half_Men> [Visited 10th March 16] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Season 8 episode 11 | 01:18min (English episode) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Season 8 episode 11 | 02:41 - 02:52min [↑](#footnote-ref-6)