# 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 types of elements 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 element of equality.

**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** means that God has chosen America as the chosen country and that the rest of the world should convert into the American-style democracy.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Frontiers** are not necessary government rules, which must have crossed to make progress.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Sitcom**

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

# 3. 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 person 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.

# 4. 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. At the weekends, Alan looks after his son Jake as well. Charlie finds himself with two new roommates in his large house at 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, the mother of Charlie and Alan, makes both of their lives hard. Charlie’s housekeeper, Bertha, is not happy about additional work that she must do since Alan and Jake had 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.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Charlie has everything a successful man needs: money, a large house at 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 have an understanding on getting ahead. This leads to him to subsequently asking his brother Charlie for loans.

## 4.1 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 has 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.

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

The question is how elements of the American Dream are represented in *Two and a Half Men*. Directly at the beginning of the episode (00:35) 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.

Image 1 Alan, Lyndsey, Charlie and his girlfriend

Furthermore, Alan and Lyndsey are playing scrabble, drinking cheap wine, and eating potato chips. In addition, they do not look really happy about their evening. Their unhappiness is better expressed after Charlie has given his girlfriend an expensive diamond necklace at 01:18. Lyndsey says “Loser”[[7]](#footnote-7) 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”[[8]](#footnote-8). 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 means it as a joke.

At 04:01, 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 smartly to achieve success. There is also a reference to the element of **liberty** 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 07:28 to 09:55. Alan goes to the mall and offers neck massages for a cheap price. In these scenes, there are two references to the element of **melting pot** of the dream. The first is at 08:19 when a very big 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 08:45. 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 09:05 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 of **equality** because all three people comes from a different country, have a different 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 continuously for three weeks, 16 hours per day, to purchase the pearl necklace for Lyndsey (10:10). 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 laughter 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 11:40, she mentions that she has 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.

There are no representations of the elements **manifest destiny**, **frontiers** and **progress** in this episode.

## 5.1 Characters and their representation of The American Dream

**Charlie Harper:**

Charlie definitely represents The American Dream. He got to the top by writing jingles for advertisements. Furthermore, he lives in a large house at 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 likes him.

**Alan Harper:**

Alan is the exact 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 an ordinary 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 marries to his girlfriend 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.

## 5.2 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 represents 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.

# 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 the sitcom had started 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 were increase 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, which could make the sitcom boring after a lot of time with the same characters and actors. Moreover, the actor became 50 years old, which makes him probably boring for younger people. In addition, the return of the old actor 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.

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

**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 probably 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 a higher level of cleverness. Probably the return of Charlie Harper could bring *Two and a Half Men* back to the good old days but the question is for how long. The past teaches us that there was no development for *Two and a Half Men* since the second season.

# 8. Bibliography

**Sources:**

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**Images:**

* <http://images6.fanpop.com/image/photos/32100000/-Two-and-a-Half-Men-two-and-a-half-men-32148493-1024-768.jpg>
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**Tables:**

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_and_a_Half_Men> [22nd March 16] *American television ratings “Two and a Half Men” season 1-12*
* [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*

Ich erkläre, dass ich die Facharbeit ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und nur die im Literaturverzeichnis angeführten Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

Recklinghausen, den 11.04.2016           \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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. Freese 2005, P. 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Freese 2005, P. 4/5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Wikipedia Deutschland, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_and_a_Half_Men> [10th March 16] [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Season 8 episode 11 | 01:18min (English episode) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Season 8 episode 11 | 02:41 - 02:52min (English episode) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)