

Jason Biggs loves being mistaken as Jewish

The 'Orange is the New Black' and 'American Pie' star has been playing Jewish roles since he was a child and calls himself 'the Jewiest looking non-Jew.'

By [Amy Klein](#) | Jun. 5, 2014 | 5:57 PM

Jason Biggs is not Jewish.

That's right: despite his dark curly hair, puppy-dog eyes, and neurotic stammering, it's hard to believe that Biggs, star of the "American Pie" film franchise and "Orange Is the New Black" TV series, which premieres its second season on June 6, is decidedly not a member of the tribe.



Jason Biggs who plays the nerdish Larry Bloom on "Orange Is the New Black." Photo by AP

"There's not a day that goes by where someone doesn't say to me, 'Wait, what? You're not Jewish?' They're totally shocked," Biggs says on the phone from Los Angeles. This, despite the fact that his Twitter tagline is "The Jewiest Looking Non-Jew."

But it's more than just his looks, says the actor, who was raised Catholic in New Jersey and is of English and Italian descent. "I think there is a physical thing, obviously, I think I have a certain look – if you can say there is a Jewish look, I would certainly fall right into that," he says. But, he adds, his characters have "a certain nervousness, a certain pathos, a certain everyman kind of quality," which are identifiably Jewish traits.

"It goes back a long, long time – I've been playing Jewish characters almost exclusively since I was a little kid," says Biggs, 36. In his first big Broadway show, "Conversations with My Father," he was a yarmulke-wearing "Yossi Goldberg," playing opposite Judd Hirsch (who won a Tony). "That was the first really obvious role, and it continued from there."

But why does he seem so Jewish? Did he grow up around it, like many East Coast kids?

"That's the funny part. Where I grew up there were only two Jewish kids in my entire school," he said. So, in other words, no. The only thing he can think of is that as a young actor, he traveled a lot to New York and played Jewish roles and had a window into that world. "I got to know and understand the religion and the culture more than most kids in my town."



A younger Jason Biggs, right, with Woody Allen. Biggs was cast in one of his earlier Jewish roles in Allen's 2003 film, "Anything Else." Photo by Reuters

Biggs brought Jewish teenage awkwardness to the big screen in 1999, playing the bumbling, virginal Jim Levenstein in “American Pie,” with a bespectacled, overbearing and oversharing Jewish father, Eugene Levy (and his other costar, an apple pie). Cue in other Jew-ish roles like Benjamin Braddock in the 2002 Broadway production of “The Graduate”; Jerry Falk in Woody Allen’s 2003 rom-com film “Anything Else”; and an Orthodox Jew in the 2004-2005 comedic play “Modern Orthodox.”

“If it wasn’t said in the script or by another character,” Biggs says about being Jewish, “it was certainly implied.”

Most recently, “Orange Is The New Black” gave Biggs the opportunity to try a more deep and soulful – and once again, Jewish – role: Larry Bloom, the accommodating nerd so enamored of his tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed fiancé, Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling), that he’s willing to overlook a few minor details. Like the fact that she’s going to prison for a year. And that she had a lesbian affair before she met him – and [SPOILER] another one in prison during Season 1.

He says it’s more than just the shiksa appeal. “She’s completely the opposite of Larry, this adventurous spirit with a wild nature, that he doesn’t get to indulge in quite often, and vice versa; I think when it works, that’s why it works,” Biggs says, describing his character as “kind of conservative, always wanting to do the right thing, always wanting to take care of everyone else first.”

What does he make of critiques saying that Larry’s parents are too stereotypically Jewish? (The Daily Beast wrote “Does ‘Orange is the New Black’ have a Jewish Problem?” This newspaper wrote, “‘Breaking Bad,’ ‘The Wire,’ ‘Orange is The New Black’: [Stereotypes without the guilt.](#)”)

He doesn’t see this as an untruthful or as a negative stereotype. “The truth is, I’ve met these types of people – the overbearing mother who wants to feed you and is in your business – and that’s real to me. I think they’re funny and human and a great addition to the show.”

Biggs should know. These days, living in L.A., he’s surrounded by Jews. “Most of the people I call my best friends are Jewish – non-Jews are in the minority.” (Sometimes he’ll say something or do something and his friends will be like, “How are you not Jewish?”)

He goes to lots of Shabbat and holiday meals, and he loves the familial, cultural aspect of Judaism. His wife, actress Jenny Mollen, was raised culturally Jewish and has a Jewish father.

Although they plan to raise their children in a multicultural way, she wanted a circumcision ceremony for their son, Sid, who was born in February (even though there was a mohel and some blessings, it wasn’t a *bris*, insists Biggs.)

But the event caused Twitter outrage after Mollen joked about it in Tweets like “Today was not a good day to be Sid’s penis,” and “Right after, we decided not to bury the foreskin in our backyard for fear that [her dog] Teets might find it and bring it into bed to sleep with us. That’s so Teets!”

“It’s crazy how reactive people were – that was quite shocking,” Biggs recalls. The big takeaway for the couple was to keep their son’s life private – but not to stop joking around in the Twitterverse.

He’s still in the middle of the latest Twitter brouhaha, after joking about Eric Hill, a “Bachelorette” contestant who was killed in a paragliding accident. “Here’s what I can tell you without watching [“The Bachelorette”] – 8 of the 20 guys are in the closet, all of them work out, and 2 can do simple division,” he also tweeted, adding, “And 19 of them are still alive. #TooSoon.”

“I hope you put air quotes around ‘controversial,’” Biggs said, completely astounded by the ridiculousness of the reaction on the web. “TMZ [the celebrity news website] paparazzi came to the airport and said, ‘Jason, would you like to apologize?’ I ignored them ... I mean, the irony in all of this is if the family was ever to hear about my tweet it’s because of all these people writing about it.”

He says that if you read the media you’d think most people hated him, but what he gets from his feed is “lots of love from most people.” He says his followers – 387,000 to date – know what kind of Twitter persona he has. After all, the note after the tagline “The Jewiest looking non-Jew,” reads: “If your kids are on my page, they shouldn’t be. Also, you’re a shitty parent.”

His latest venture, "Jason Biggs Loves SeaWorld So Much! He Just Loves It!!" is also not kid-friendly: It's a satiric ad for the animal rights organization PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). (SPOILER: He doesn't love SeaWorld.)

But what else can you expect from a sweet and sarcastic guy who is so imbued with Jewish humor that he might as well be an honorary Jew?

"I want to be very clear I am incredibly proud to play Jewish characters as often as I do. I don't want people to think I get disappointed, I actually think it's great," he says, now worrying to himself aloud in that Ben Stiller, Woody-Allenesque way that he might, perhaps, sound ungrateful ... now that he's being outed as a non-Jew.

"I'm a little nervous," he jokes. "If my parts start to dry up ... I'll come back to you to print a retraction."