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Transnational Television, International Anxieties: Examining Cross-Cultural Representations of Workplace Power Struggles and Tensions over Hierarchical Standing in *The Office*

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by

Jessica Julia McGill Peters

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Master of Arts in Anthropology
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Professor Sherry B. Ortner, Chair

Though often considered a homogenizing force, global media has been undergoing a process of re-examination as findings reveal the ways in which transplanted media, such as transnational television programs, are recontextualized or transformed through local interpretations, thereby assuming more interstitial forms. This study furthers such re-evaluations, and contributes to broader investigations into the nature of globalization as concurrently homogenizing and differentiating, through its examination of culturally-specific and cross-culturally shared representations of workplace power struggles and tensions over hierarchical standing in transnational adaptations of the television program *The Office*.

A cross-cultural analysis of the televisual texts of the original British *Office* and its American remake was conducted, comparing their portrayals of the struggles for control and status or rank (the latter two acting, at times, as indicators of broader class discord) that arise among the five social categories of personnel depicted in both versions. To determine whether these representations of disputes over authority and position reveal underlying anxieties about the contemporary office workspace that are transnationally shared, locally specific, or a combination of these, I examined the types of conflicts that were portrayed and the manner in which these were depicted in the American version as compared to the original series.

Identifying which features related to power disputes and tensions over standing were the same or different in the two versions of *The Office* revealed that while such workplace strife may be depicted slightly differently based on the programs' specific contexts, they nevertheless express mutual anxieties regarding the ability to attain, preserve, and protect one's place in the hierarchical corporate environment. The expression of such transnationally-shared concerns in locally-distinct ways supports the idea that global media flows, and by extension globalization, are simultaneously processes of homogenization and heterogenization, although they generally exhibit a greater emphasis on one tendency or the other.

The thesis of Jessica Julia McGill Peters is approved.

Yunxiang Yan

Kyeyoung Park

Sherry B. Ortner, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

DEDICATION

To my amazing parents.

Thank you for your unconditional love and support,

I would not be who I am today without you.

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Introduction

Originally broadcast in the U.K. from 2001 until 2003, the television show *The Office* has been remade in a variety of nations worldwide, including France (2006), Chile (2008), the U.S. (2005-present), Israel (2010), and most recently, Sweden (2012). While these adaptations are similar in certain ways, such as using an office setting or employing character archetypes like the inept boss or sycophantic co-worker, they nevertheless remain distinctive, incorporating specific features of their socio-historical contexts to create programs neither authentically 'local' nor the products of 'global homogenization' (Straubhaar 2007). Moreover, they draw on sociocultural, political, and economic events, discourses, or attitudes that exist within the broader international sphere, thus reflecting phenomena occurring worldwide as well as those taking place in the social contexts where they are adapted (Casey et al. 2008, Fiske & Hartley 2003, Hall 1980).

Cross-cultural comparisons of different versions of *The Office* can therefore provide case studies of how globalization is "a complexly articulated, fluid process of hybridity" (Straubhaar 2007:139) where diversity is not eliminated through integration, rather new cultural forms arise combining 'local' characteristics with more 'global' elements. This thesis compares culturally-distinct and transnationally-shared representations of workplace power struggles and tensions over standing in the original British *Office* with those in its American adaptation. In doing so, the purpose is to determine whether the programs' separate depictions of conflicts over power and position reveal mutual anxieties in the U.K. and the U.S. regarding contemporary office work and the corporate workplace, as well as to assess how their commonalities and disparities contribute to questions regarding globalization's homogenizing and differentiating tendencies.

Such research is important in that it exposes globalization's multifaceted nature and discloses problems underlying the traditional conception of a global-local duality (e.g. ignoring

national influences). By examining concurrent similarities and differences in the two programs (indicative of the simultaneous, asymmetrical processes of standardization and diversification at work in transnational televisual adaptations) this thesis offers a more comprehensive scope that reveals how globalization, particularly the global flow of media, involves ongoing and evolving interactions among the local, national, (sub)regional, and global forces which emerge in different contexts (Tsing 2008, Ong & Collier 2005). This study will contribute not only to anthropology, media studies, and work on globalization, but also to cross-cultural relations, as it could enhance understanding of transnationally-shared and 'locally'-specific elements that the two series reveal.

To provide a conceptual framework for my comparison of workplace struggles/tensions over control and position in the American and British *Office*s, this thesis begins with a discussion of prior research on globalization; transnationalism; 'global-local' media/transnational television; mockumentaries/*The Office*; the corporate workplace; and how power and standing are expressed therein. Following this theoretical background, the literature review examines the series' socio-historical contexts, considering the nature of modern office-work in the U.K. and U.S., as well as the role of televisual media in both countries in terms of portraying organizational (white-collar) labor. Prior to analyzing the textual content of the two *Office*s, a brief overview of scholarly opinion on textual analysis is presented, addressing the benefits and drawbacks of this approach. An explanation of the specific methodology used in this study is then put forth, followed by an in-depth examination of each version of the show. The conclusion provides a critical analysis of the programs' mutual and unique aspects related to contested authority and status or rank, and how this mixture of transnationally-shared and locally-specific elements demonstrates that globalization is both a homogenizing and differentiating process, where either the former or the latter quality will predominate depending on the socio-historical and cultural environment.

Literature Review

❖ Globalization & Transnationalism

Theories on globalization[1] have changed considerably since the concept first emerged, and many earlier ones, like the world-systems model proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein, have come under extensive criticism for being totalizing meta-theories. Though this problem of universalization persists, theorists have continued to study globalization in an effort to clarify its seemingly contradictory effects. Scholars like Anthony Giddens (1990), for example, have posited that globalization is a process of intensification, where social relations connecting far-flung areas around the world become amplified (or 'stretched') to such an extent that events in one's immediate vicinity affect occurrences in distant areas, and vice versa. Others, including Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2008) as well as Jan Pieterse (2009), have disagreed, arguing that globalization is actually experienced unevenly, with some regions being more intensively linked than others. Nevertheless, they too have acknowledged the significance of such interactions between 'global' processes and 'local' socio-historical or cultural contexts.

This emphasis on a 'global-local' connection is now prevalent in globalization studies. While this dualism often involves "the bracketing out of the other levels, most especially that of the national" (Moran 2009a:13), it has gradually begun to incorporate the idea that global flows of products, people, practices, and the like constantly interact with processes of appropriation, adaptation, and opposition at multiple levels, such as the local, (sub)regional, or national. This inclusive conceptualization has been used as a counter-argument to the assertion that globalization is solely a process of homogenization, since demands for and examples of local,

[1] Particularly with regard to the increase in global economic interactions, globalization is frequently associated with neoliberal restructuring, promoting free trade (or the reduction of barriers to commerce) between nations, the privatization of services and resources, as well as the development of free markets worldwide, thus often working to the benefit of dominant capitalist states while putting developing countries at a disadvantage (Harvey 2007).

(sub)regional, or national autonomy and cultural identity exist alongside the amplification of global connections (Morley & Robins 1995, Giddens 1990). The television market in Europe illustrates this, as globally-disseminated programming coexists with culturally-distinct fictional shows in which national characteristics are strongly emphasized, highlighting a specific country's history, traditions, and sociocultural identity (Silj et al. 1988).

Advocates of the non-homogenizing view of globalization therefore contend that "[the] great paradox of globalization is that it is creating a world that is more localized" (Lewellen 2002:190). However, they concede that the encounter between global and local forces is not necessarily a meeting between equals, as it is generally indigenous cultures which respond to foreign pressures rather than the reverse (Hopper 2007). This admission of inequality has been used by those who insist exclusively upon globalization's homogenizing influence, as proof that it imposes standardized ideas and practices by displacing existing values and traditions. Such fears of homogenization have been espoused for a long time, as can be seen in the early work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944), who viewed the culture industry (e.g. film, radio) as standardizing the 'microcosm' and the 'macrocosm'.

Despite the fact that some globalization scholars remain entrenched on one side of the debate or the other, most now recognize that the effects of globalization actually bridge these two positions. This is because the existence and potential influence of homogenizing forces is contingent on their widespread dissemination, and such diffusion entails dynamic interactions with local, (sub)regional, and national contexts, increasing the likelihood that the homogenizing forces will be altered as a result (Hopper 2007). Such a perspective avoids the conventional global-local duality since it presents globalization as a process in which global flows do not simply impose upon or stop at fixed 'local' levels. Instead, they articulate with multiple scales in

a variety of ways, and are themselves continuously affected and/or transformed by these diverse entanglements (Heyman & Campbell 2009, Tsing 2008). Consequently, globalization can be understood as "the intermingling of all these 'levels' in a multiple and 'hybrid' form of interconnectedness" (Munck 2002:169), or as a 'global assemblage' that is mobile yet situated, absorbing elements from the different levels yet remaining relatively heterogeneous, and thus expressing homogeneity and diversity simultaneously (Ong & Collier 2005).

Studies of *cultural* globalizations—the ways in which cultures are affected by and respond to the increase in global flows and interconnections—have also been important in supporting this recent view of globalization, as they demonstrate the various interactional modes through which globalization operates. Such research has shown, for example, that commodities produced for global consumption (e.g. media, clothes) often draw on themes or issues relevant to particular national, (sub)regional, or local contexts, and that these items are increasingly being tailored to the different interests or tastes of specific cultural markets, as seen in Taiwan with the McDonald's 'McRice' burger (Steemers 2011, O'Regan 2000, Ang 1996, Smith 1990).

Moreover, these products are not foisted upon defenseless consumers, as engagement with them by international recipients can take a variety of forms: interactions may be conscious and deliberate, like active adoption and reproduction, or unconscious and inadvertent, such as through recurring contact and gradual assimilation (Held et al. 1999). For instance, African media represents a 'negotiated hegemony' where Western countries supply entertainment programming to African broadcasters, but they do so only with the consent and participation of the latter (Eko 2007). The Asian film industries further illustrate such complex interactions, since Hollywood's profit-driven model, particularly the idea that 'sex and violence sell', has not been imposed as a form of cultural imperialism. Rather, it has been intentionally adopted by many

filmmakers in China, Japan, and India: they incorporate such images and themes into their (often quite culturally-specific) movies so that they will be more profitable abroad (Rampal 2007).

Cultural globalizations thus represent forms of ongoing 'cultural intermixing', where new distinctions and commonalities are constantly being created and the outcome is not a simple dichotomy between standardization and heterogenization (Pieterse 2009, Iwabuchi 2007). In addition, they are not processes of domination by specific groups (e.g. Americanization) that eliminate local, (sub)regional, or national diversity, nor are they ones of homogenization which subsume different cultures into a larger, unified 'global culture'. Instead, "rather than being absorbed...[these cultures] do most of the absorbing" (Lewellen 2002:53), appropriating traits seen as desirable or useful, rejecting those which are not, and transforming the meanings of those which are incorporated. As noted by Yunxiang Yan (2002) with regard to cultural globalization in China, the Chinese people have actively "demonstrated a strong appetite to accept, localize, and eventually appropriate elements of imported foreign culture" (Yan 2002:44), whether this means Hollywood films, Japanese cartoons, or products from Singapore and Taiwan. Such responses demonstrate that globalization is not a single, uniform process, but in fact a series of dynamic interactions between overlapping (cultural) contexts and external (global) forces that are subject to internal (local, (sub)regional, or national) influences (Hopper 2007).

The concept of transnationalism is often included within these understandings of globalization and cultural globalizations, however this phenomenon actually demonstrates that many of what are considered 'global' flows (of media, people, etc.) are in fact positioned in several nation-states at once (Hopper 2007, Kearney 1995). Such cross-border linkages undermine the established global-local binary as they reaffirm the role of the national or nation-state, showing that communities, networks, and forms of social interaction which "[transcend]

national borders [do] not necessarily constitute globalization" (Hopper 2007:53). This is because: (1) boundary crossing does not automatically entail the erasure of boundaries; (2) despite their apparent ubiquity, these seemingly international phenomena generally do not occur everywhere in the world; and (3) they may be marked by one territorial culture to a greater extent than they are by other cultures in the various areas where they are located (Pieterse 2009, Moran 2009c, Hannerz 1990). Accordingly, they should be considered 'transnational' rather than 'global'.

Consequently, whereas globalization is often perceived as decentered (lacking contextual references), transnationalism can be seen as having a national 'anchor', albeit in multiple nation-states (Kearney 1995). Transnational practices, people, and products (like *The Office*) must therefore be socio-historically contextualized, as their existence within particular localities and time periods influences them in specific ways (Smith & Guarnizo 1998). Furthermore, while the types of mobility, trade, and interaction associated with transnationalism actually precede the existence of nations, contemporary forms of transnational movement, exchange, and networking are different from earlier versions in that they occur more rapidly and intensely (Vertovec 1999). Transnationalism is thus an example of the growth in worldwide processes and interconnections represented by globalization. It has been used to examine such topics as diasporic communities and migration; notions of shared or multi-local identity; as well as monetary, commodity, and media flows (Smith & Guarnizo 1998). This study focuses on the final topic, looking specifically at transnational adaptations of the television program *The Office*.

❖ 'Global-Local' Media & Transnational Television

The concept of transnationalism and the idea that globalization encompasses a variety of interactions between local, (sub)regional, national, and global levels are of particular importance

in the field of global media studies for two main reasons. First, many media scholars have avoided the concept of globalization altogether, despite the fact that mass media play a central role with regard to 'indigenization' and increasing internal or external connectedness between people, communities, and nations (Rantanen 2005). Second, when scholars *have* examined media in terms of globalization, the view of mass media as homogenizing and the cultural imperialism model have often predominated. These theoretical perspectives assert that globalization is in fact a process of Westernization—or even Americanization—in which media images and practices from the Western cultural 'core' overwhelm those of 'peripheral' (i.e. developing) nations.

There are three fundamental problems with such an assessment: (1) global cultural encounters are not unidirectional (i.e. from 'core' to 'periphery'); (2) they do not occur solely between the 'core' and the 'periphery' but also take place *within* the latter itself; and (3) such a view of globalization ignores audience agency and participation, whereby media are interpreted, appropriated, and resisted in accordance with local, (sub)regional, or national modes of reception (Inda & Rosaldo 2008, Lash & Lury 2007, Thussu 2007, Parks & Kumar 2003, Lewellen 2002, O'Regan 2000, Appadurai 1996, Fiske 1987). This thesis thus aligns with more recent research that follows what Michael Kearney (1995) has described as a 'cultural pluralism' model, one which disputes the notion of Western homogenization and the center-periphery dichotomy.

Studies following this model have revealed the international proliferation of media (and power) centers, rather than the existence of just a few dominant ones (Inda & Rosaldo 2008). Bollywood cinema, for instance, has experienced enormous commercial success internationally and thereby resisted 'Westernization' (Tyrrell 2012), while Latin American media conglomerates have developed fairly independently and now export their telenovelas worldwide (Lozano 2007). Such research has therefore shown that there exists "a complex network of image making that

spreads around the world" (Lewellen 2002:96). Accordingly, while certain media flows, like mainstream television programs and films from the U.S., tend to dominate worldwide, their pervasiveness does not entail the eradication or subordination of all others (Larkin 2008).

In addition to such work on global media flows, this study relates to the growing body of research specifically on transnationally-adapted media. Findings on this subject are increasingly demonstrating that local interpretations change transplanted films, television, music, and other forms of popular culture into creations that are new and unique within their particular contexts, yet which contain shared aspects that transcend geographical borders and specific identities (Lash & Lury 2007, Olson 1999, Appadurai 1996). Such adaptations thus constitute sites of 'interpretive struggle' between the original meanings of these global commodities; the national or (sub)regional ideologies that influence their exchange and subsequent modification; as well as local understandings of them (Peterson 2003, Parks & Kumar 2003). While "free and unimpeded circulation...is the great ideal" (Morley & Robins 1995:11), these transnational variations entail negotiations between the 'global' imports and 'local' responses which sometimes founder as a result of irreconcilable differences regarding specific values, taboos, desires, and tastes. For this reason, not all media products are equally exportable, as demonstrated by the poor reception of a Middle Eastern version of the television show *Big Brother* (1999-2006)[2].

Transnational forms of media are therefore constantly recontextualized as their messages, images, or sounds spread to new geographical and sociocultural settings where their content and overall meaning are transformed (Inda & Rosaldo 2008, Iwabuchi 2007, Lash & Lury 2007, Straubhaar 2007, Peterson 2003). As illustrated in studies of world music, for instance, the globalization of media is not eliminating indigenous music and sounds, rather "new popular

[2] These dates are for the original Dutch version of the series.

musics are being made, old ones altered or maintained" (Taylor 1997:197). Hong Kong director John Woo's movies offer another example, as they represent original creations born from the combination of traditional Chinese values (e.g. honor, loyalty) with characteristics appropriated from American cinema, like the machismo of Sam Peckinpah's films (Rampal 2007).

Such recontextualization or reterritorialization[3] of media is particularly apparent with the adaptation of transnational television formats, which involves boiling shows "down to minimal contents not specific to any locality, yet easily 'localizable'" (Waisbord & Jalfin 2009:71). What remains following this process is a program's format—its set designs, screenplays, and style of filming—which is then sold to be reassembled and reformulated elsewhere. This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent due to countries' rising need to supplement their national televisual output and fill all available broadcast slots (Moran & Malbon 2006, Held et al. 1999). Customizing and copying programs has occurred consistently for over eighty years, but it is only since 1990 that a formal system has evolved of trading television formats internationally (Moran 2009a).

Although audiences tend to prefer culturally-specific productions (Steemers 2007, Morley & Robins 1995, Silj et al. 1988), this process of format adaptation is a cost-effective way of generating televisual content that appears 'local' in origin, and is thus more recognizable or appealing to viewers in terms of character, narrative, and meaning (Steemers 2011, Olson 1999). With these transnational adaptations a program's format elements generally remain the same wherever the show is remade, but the characters, behaviors, language, and sometimes plotlines are translated or revised according to its new local, (sub)regional, or national environment (Moran 2011, Moran & Malbon 2006, Inda & Rosaldo 2008). Such changes are implemented

[3] This type of process has been described as 'de/territorialization' by Inda and Rosaldo (2008) with regard to culture and media, and as 'disembedding'/'reembedding' by Giddens (1990) with regard to social relations.

because internationally-remade series like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (1998-present)[4] or *Big Brother* carry with them historical, cultural, or linguistic features which may be neither relatable nor acceptable in other contexts; modifying these aspects thus allows the shows to seem 'local' despite their origination abroad (Moran 2011, Moran 2009b, Straubhaar 2007).

While there are multiple ways in which format adaptation can make transnational television contextually specific, all of them follow the same basic framework of 'cultural flexibilization' which involves "deleting foreign cultural markers...and incorporating local elements that identify the show as a domestic product" (Waisbord & Jalfin 2009:64). This process of flexibilization is used to ground programs in the reality of a time and place, though this 'reality' may in fact be an interpretation based on the producers' or creators' understandings of local, (sub)regional, or national experiences. Dubbing, altering characters' identities, and tailoring storylines to fit familiar national narratives are particularly significant techniques whereby transnational formats are made to be more intelligible and culturally accessible for viewers (Moran 2009c, Ferrari 2007). Dubbing, for example, often functions as a form of 'cultural ventriloquism', where televisual content is re-written (and thus 'domesticated') through the modification of what characters say. This erases the program's original narrative or 'voice', and one which resonates more with the new audience is inserted instead; other culturally-specific traits, such as distinctive accents, can also be added using this technique (Ferrari 2007).

Furthermore, many scholars have concluded that these 'translation' processes are used to appeal to different segments of the viewing public, as demonstrated in both film and television studies: for instance, Tejaswini Ganti's (2002) analysis of the 'Indianization' of Hollywood films shows that they are modified to fit specific values and expectations. Likewise, Divya McMillin's (2003) work demonstrates that Indian televisual adaptations vary depending on the audience: a

[4] The original British version of the series.

remake may be tailored in such a way as to seem like a completely indigenous creation, or it may be customized so that it takes a more 'cosmopolitan' approach, barely resembling the local at all.

Thus rather than eliminating specific sociocultural features or homogenizing them into a unified whole (i.e. a 'global culture'), such transnational adaptations actually draw on these characteristics in order to enhance their appeal in various locations (Steemers 2011, Artz 2007). Televisual formats in particular function as "flexible [templates] or empty [moulds] awaiting particular social inflexion and accent in other television territories" (Moran 2009c:151). For instance, when 'localizing' these formats, gatekeepers (e.g. local producers, foreign consultants) analyze current events, trends, and concerns, incorporating the most locally-, regionally-, or nationally-relevant items, and where appropriate, referencing historical narratives, symbols, or experiences as well (Waisbord & Jalfin 2009, Moran 2009b). As a result, such transnational series embody "a go-anywhere quality...yet on the other hand they also appear to have a capacity to take root and nativize themselves in different television territories" (Moran 2009c:152).

Studies of transnational flows of televisual media, such as this examination of *The Office*, thus confirm that the conventional global-local dichotomy is deceptive. Not only does it ignore other levels of interaction influencing such exchanges and adaptations, it also fails to recognize that few (if any) television programs actually conform to a strict opposition between the 'local' and the 'global' (Moran 2009a). For example, although the success of a globally-circulated television series like *Dallas* (1978-1991) is associated "with [viewers'] individual life histories, with the social situation [they] are in, with the aesthetic and cultural preferences [they] have developed" (Ang 1985:26), the show is also part of larger national and (sub)regional cultural contexts, and it is a commodity that circulates within the international capitalist market.

Accordingly, to study global or macro-phenomena while excluding the various micro-levels, or to examine local experiences without taking into account national, regional, or global events, can only lead to a partial understanding of the subject of one's investigation (Peterson 2003, Morley 2003). As Lothar Mikos and Marta Perrotta's work concerning international remakes of *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (1999-2001) reveals, "there is a complex web of similarities and differences between local adaptations of the same format" (Mikos & Perrotta 2012:94). Those elements that are shared between the different remakes may be considered more global or transnational, while those that differ may be thought of as more locally, nationally, or regionally specific. Failing to evaluate the intersections among these diverse elements and levels, which Mikos and Perrotta have labeled a 'complex web', would therefore prevent one from conducting a thorough analysis or comparison of the many versions of *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (or *The Office*).

Genre in particular has often been considered one of the more 'global' elements of transnational television. In John Sinclair's (2009) research on the exportation of Latin American telenovelas, for example, he asserts that the success of such programs abroad is due to the fact that the telenovela constitutes its own genre, one which incorporates universally recognizable and appealing themes, including family, loyalty, vengeance, and love. Studies of *Dallas* have also emphasized the importance of such cross-cultural thematic or genre proximity: the show's 'universal', 'primordial', or 'mythic' themes[5] and 'polyvalent' stories[6] are often argued to be the reason for the show's transnational success (Olson 1999, Liebes & Katz 1990, Silj et al. 1988).

Scholars like Joseph Straubhaar (2007) argue that there exist a variety of factors besides genre and theme that facilitate such transnational mobility, including shared values or cultural-

[5] This notion of 'primordial' themes also arises in studies of transnational cinematic remakes. For instance, Andrew Horton's (1998) examination of Emir Kusturica's *Time of The Gypsies*, a remake of Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* films, shows how the former retains 'universal' themes like family and business. Nevertheless, it is 'localized' in the context of Yugoslavia through changes to the setting and the characters' ethnicities, employment of the gypsy language, and allusions to Yugoslav cinema.

[6] In this context the term 'polyvalent' refers to the idea that the stories are open to multiple interpretations.

linguistic similarity[7]. However, these elements are often more regionally or nationally shared, and their importance for international televisual exchanges has been somewhat undermined by success stories like the telenovela, whose popularity extends to such disparate places as Russia and China (Sinclair 2009). Even generic proximity has come under question, as the hybridization of genres is becoming increasingly apparent in local adaptations of television series like *Yo soy Betty, la fea*. Nevertheless, familiarity with a particular genre can still facilitate transnational mobility when a genre has a long history in a specific area (Mikos & Perrotta 2012).

❖ Prior Mockumentary & *Office* Studies

This thesis examines two versions of the transnational television program *The Office*, a show which belongs to the semi-genre known as 'mockumentary'. Mockumentaries (both cinematic and televisual) present a particularly interesting case study for analyzing the processes of globalization and transnational adaptation, as they offer satirical or parodic representations of contemporary phenomena that have significance from the micro or 'local' level all the way up to the macro or 'global' level. Despite their specific cultural contexts, for instance, a mockumentary film like *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) addresses prevailing notions of masculinity while television series like *Stella Street* (1997-2001) or *Reno 911!* (2003-2009) consider, respectively, such widespread concepts as celebrity and law enforcement. Mockumentaries are thus indicative of broader social issues, attitudes, and tensions that are relevant for the cultures in which they are made or remade, as well as for the world at large (Ortner *Not Hollywood*, Dornfeld 1998).

Such relevance is enhanced by the semi-genre's unique format, that of an intertextual hybrid which self-reflexively appropriates narrative and aesthetic elements from the sitcom and documentary genres. These elements include referencing dialogue, plots, or settings of previous

[7] Cultural-linguistic similarity means that groups possess comparable traditions, language, religion, humor, and the like.

(generally well-known) documentaries and sitcoms; emphasizing comic intent or using race, class, and gender stereotypes like in the sitcom; and breaking the fourth wall[8], as seen in both genres (Mills 2009, Mills 2005). While generally considered a mockumentary, *The Office* has also been described as a mockusoap, a similar type of semi-genre which hybridizes sitcoms and docusoaps, the latter of which is a hybrid of the documentary and soap opera genres (Hight 2010, Roscoe & Hight 2001). Akin to mockumentaries, mockusoaps utilize observational filming techniques to pretend that they are documenting the everyday lives of a group of people; such programs often use a quasi-confessional mode where characters address the camera or audience directly, and their references to reality are generally intended to be satirical (Roscoe & Hight 2001). Due to the strong resemblance between mockusoap and mockumentary, this study employs the latter term, adhering to the more common practice in literature on *The Office*.

In examining mockumentaries, it is important to distinguish between their performance of satire and implementation of parody. Whereas the former approach judges the intended object of critique in a detached and often quite negative manner, the latter takes a more ambivalent stance toward the anticipated target, tempering criticism with a degree of sentimentality and sympathy (Roscoe & Hight 2001). By using satire or parody to present important political, economic, or social discourses taking place at the time, mockumentaries engage in a form of 'truth-telling' that transcends straightforward mocking and blurs the conventional dichotomy between fact—the documentary aspect—and fiction—an attribute of the sitcom (Hight 2010). For example, despite its diverse adaptations, overall "*The Office* is a comedy about humour and power, where the latter is expressed through the former" (Mills 2005:104); this allows the show to explore serious contemporary issues, like conflicts over control and status in the workplace, in a way that is both compelling and engaging. Although mockumentaries are actually fictional texts, such a blurring

[8] The act of talking directly to the camera.

of boundaries means that films and television programs within this semi-genre exist along a continuum, from those that are more realistic to those that lean further in the direction of fiction.

At first glance the mockumentary resembles Bourdieu's concept of 'newcomers' in the arts (Bourdieu 1993), breaking as it does from the typical format of documentaries and sitcoms through its employment of pastiche and parody, inversion of generic conventions, and blending of reality and fantasy, but this semi-genre nevertheless exhibits important characteristics of its predecessors. For instance, mockumentaries *do* deviate from conventional sitcoms by depicting questions of class or race as more than trivial personal quarrels and by engaging with ongoing social, political, and economic events; undertakings which the sitcom has been criticized for avoiding. However, by foregrounding such issues through its use of humor (specifically satire and parody), the mockumentary semi-genre reassumes comedy's *traditional* role which is "to say the unsayable, question the accepted and undermine authority" (Mills 2004:64).

Yet this application of humor can also provoke feelings of unease, embarrassment, or dissatisfaction (as elicited by the different versions of *The Office*), constituting a significant divergence from typical sitcoms which generally avoid anything that could arouse such emotions (Savorelli 2010). Mockumentaries are therefore somewhat unique, but cannot be completely separated from either the documentary or sitcom genres since they retain aspects of both: such features include observational, expository, or interactive styles of filming (as in documentaries); or focusing on the experiences and exploits of a specific group of characters in a particular environment (as in sitcoms). The mockumentary semi-genre thus occupies a unique hybrid position that is distinctive but which is nonetheless grounded in the two established genres.

With regard to *The Office*, this particular mockumentary program (the original and its adaptations) leans more towards realism, thereby positioning the show as a depiction of actual

behaviors and concerns in the corporate workplace, such as resistance techniques and insecurities regarding power or position (Mills 2009). As Ben Walters (2005) argues, this realistic portrayal may explain why its format has been adapted so widely—and successfully—abroad. Compared to the majority of sitcoms (and comedies in general) which tend to be too 'local' or culturally specific in terms of their subject matter (Hight 2010, Bielby & Harrington 2008, Miller 2000), the themes of authority, standing, and confrontation at work (whether in an office or otherwise) are thought to be more generalizable and hence translatable or recognizable within new contexts.

Moreover, contemporary issues of control and class (often represented by status or rank in the organizational workplace) frequently go unacknowledged or are unrealistically portrayed in the media (Fiske & Hartley 2003). This is exemplified in the U.S., where the class system in particular is rarely examined and frequently misrepresented. By directly addressing such topics as job insecurity, struggles over power and position, and societal inequality, *The Office* and its various remakes may offer viewers a way of working through social anxieties that people (transnationally) need to confront but are unable to except through fantasy (Marchetti 1989) or "via the process of debate and conflict offered by fictional narratives" (Mittell 2010:284).

Several prior studies of *The Office* have examined format-produced consistencies and 'locally'-derived variations among different versions of the series, often relying on textual analyses of the programs' content as this thesis does (Boseovski & Marcovitch 2011, Moran 1998). For instance, Alexandra Beeden and Joost de Bruin's examination of the texts of the American and British *Office*s revealed that the shows "[reflect] dominant social issues within each nation's psyche" (Beeden & de Bruin 2010:16), specifically class in the U.K. and race in the U.S. They conclude that processes of adaptation illustrate the continued importance of 'the national' with regard to 'global' flows of television: unlike direct copying, which would lead

solely to homogenization, such remakes are interpretations of the original program that also incorporate aspects of their new national contexts (Beeden & de Bruin 2010).

In a similar vein, Leila Hernandez's (2010) comparative content analysis of the U.S. and U.K. *Office*s establishes the ways in which televisual portrayals of race, class, and gender shape national cultures. Based on her findings, she asserts that the British version reinforces traditional class divides that exist in the U.K., both within the office and between the office employees and the warehouse staff, but she dismisses the importance of these boundaries in the American remake. In contrast, this thesis contends that such societal class separations—and the conflicts they induce—are in fact significant in the U.S. adaptation; however within the microcosm of the office they are illustrated through struggles over rank and status which frequently draw on class factors and symbolize larger class tensions. This underlying theme of societal class divisions can be seen when the manager, Michael Scott, repeatedly makes distinctions between the branch's blue- and white-collar workers; when one of the salespeople (Dwight) calls the warehouse staff 'the Others'[9]; or when the topic of educational qualifications arises (e.g. having an MBA).

Beeden and de Bruin (2010) and Michael Bray (2008) make comparable arguments, but they maintain that while the U.K. series has a greater emphasis on class as compared to the U.S. remake, the latter addresses the topic as well. This study supports and extends their conclusions by revealing various class-related resentments and inequalities—linked to education, family history, and earnings—which often motivate conflicts over power and standing among superiors, subordinates, and peers/co-workers. Although class (as a large-scale structure of American society) is not overtly discussed in the U.S. adaptation, the show's depiction of differing work environments (e.g. office, cubicle, or basement), income disparities, and reduced job mobility (in terms of raises/promotions)—all of which derive from one's social position (i.e. status or rank) in

[9] Season 2 episode 15: "Boys and Girls".

the organizational workplace—illustrates how class is implicitly experienced in American corporations and raises issues that destabilize the national ideology of a 'universal middle class'. Scholars like Paul Booth and Brian Ekdale (2011) have also used comparisons of these two series to argue that unlike the U.K. original, the U.S. version reinforces bureaucratic control. This thesis challenges their assertion by highlighting the ways in which lower- and upper-level U.S. characters undermine the office's hierarchical organization of power, rank (formally granted), and status (informally obtained). While on the whole they may abide by the bureaucratic system of the corporate workplace, this does not diminish their efforts to subvert it, nor should rebellions by their British counterparts be used to overlook the fact that those characters are generally conformist as well (Tinker 2009).

Other textual analyses of the initial *Office* and its multiple adaptations have studied a variety of topics, including representations of postmodernism (Vlaminck 2010); the relationship between workplace management, conformity, and creativity (Craft 2008); and how a remake's plot, dialogue, and characters can emphasize the adaptation's specific cultural identity (Griffin 2008). Emma Tinker (2009), for example, used the British version to analyze personal identity in the office, finding that workers achieve a sense of self or individual identity through "the fantasy of romance and the dream of a life outside the corporation" (Tinker 2009:768). Tara Brabazon (2005) likewise examined the British *Office*, asserting that it "does not address 'universal' truths, but the specificity of a post-Blair, post-union, post-industrial, post-feminist, insular, open-plan office...The programme is built on the local, specific and particular" (Brabazon 2005:104).

While this thesis concurs with Brabazon that the original *Office* is as culturally specific as any of its transnational adaptations, it contests the idea that the program does not address more internationally-relevant issues and realities, from workplace conflicts over power and struggles

for status or rank, to economic concerns, job insecurities, and forms of social discrimination (e.g. classism, racism, sexism). Specifically, this study contends that it is the anxieties underlying the series' themes concerning authority and position which are of particular transnational relevance, allowing it to become a "comedy that can cross borders" (Griffin 2008:162).

❖ Theorizing the Workplace

This thesis follows Peter Andersen's (2008) terminological framework regarding the concepts of power and standing in the organizational workplace, where the former is the ability to influence other employees—superiors, subordinates, or peers—to do as one says, and the latter refers to one's social position (formal rank and informal status) within the hierarchical structure which contributes to one's overall power. The study views companies' asymmetrical relations of power and standing as dynamic and subject to contestation through interpersonal interactions, specifically struggles for authority and status or rank (Limberg 2008). The following sections offer a brief overview of how the corporate workplace has previously been theorized and examined, as well as how such perspectives and techniques have influenced the present study.

▪ Work, Power, & Position

As defined by Max Weber (1947), power is an individual or group's ability to achieve their will, even in the face of resistance. This conception distinguishes between authority, which Weber describes as legitimate control, and imperative or coercive control (Weber 1947). It is organizational *authority*—in other words, the socially-accepted (i.e. legitimate) use of power in the office environment—which concerns this study, specifically that which derives from a company's formal rules or procedures (similar to Weber's 'rational-legal' authority) and that

which derives from its corporate culture (i.e. its longstanding social structures and customs; akin to Weber's 'traditional' authority). In order to facilitate this study's examination of workplace power struggles and avoid terminological confusion, the concepts of power and authority are *both* employed in the sense of legitimate control throughout this thesis.

In the contemporary office workspace, power is understood as a socially-constructed system that endows certain individuals with the ability to dominate or control while denying this to the rest of the workforce (Sias 2009, Deetz 2000). This is the structural aspect of power which exists at the 'macro' level of the corporation as a whole: people acquire authority based on their position within the organization which can then be exercised through behaviors, interactions, and communications at the 'micro' level of the office (Deetz 2000, Brass & Burkhardt 1993). In the superior-subordinate relationship, for instance, the former holds official authority over the latter based on their occupational role within the corporate hierarchy: they are formally sanctioned to assert control over employees by issuing directives, conducting evaluations and surveillance (e.g. computer monitoring), and engaging in intimidation, punishment, or terminations (Deetz 2000, Deetz 1998, Jackson & Carter 1998, Thompson & Ackroyd 1995, Rothschild & Miethe 1994).

As Michel Foucault (1977) noted, 'panoptic' observation and the possibility of being penalized leads to the internalization of discipline: subordinate personnel thus monitor their own behavior and job performance, complying with their boss' requests or demands and the rules of the company. By controlling their speech, conduct, attire, efficiency, etc., they act as both the subjugators and subjugated (Foucault 1977), reinforcing the control of upper-level personnel through their fears of scrutiny and reprimands. Yet subordinate-superior relationships can also be ones of negotiation, rather than simply the top-down or unidirectional implementation of power by those officially in control. Superiors may employ polite requests, friendliness, and rewards in

order to obtain employee obedience and increase productivity, while subordinates can influence their bosses through flattery, assertiveness, and the judicious manipulation, withholding, or disclosure of information (Sias 2009, Rothschild & Miethe 1994, Brass & Burkhardt 1993).

These practices—even when enacted by superiors—constitute 'informal' power, as opposed to the legitimate, official, or formal authority which is bestowed by companies based on hierarchical position. Attempts to assert informal dominance also occur between peers or co-workers (i.e. exchanging favors, teasing/bullying) despite the fact that these employees have comparable 'formal' authority (Sias 2009, Brass & Burkhardt 1993). These varying relations of power[10] between superiors, subordinates, and peers, as well as their competing techniques for 'doing power' (i.e. 'tactics' vs. 'strategies')[11], simultaneously function as struggles for control, either to *maintain* one's existing authority (as conferred by occupational position) or to *gain* control over others and thus *be perceived* as authoritative, thereby acquiring some measure of power (Knights & Vurdubakis 1994, Brass & Burkhardt 1993, Clegg & Dunkerley 1980).

Despite the fact that power can thus be deployed from above *and* below, making control within the office workplace diffuse and interactive rather than fixed and unchanging (Knights & Vurdubakis 1994), in corporate environments it is treated as something that can be owned, acquired, and lost. As a result, opposition to and conflicts over the distribution, acquisition, implementation, and preservation of authority routinely take place (Deetz 2000). For instance, those who do not benefit from the established organizational hierarchy may challenge it by not fulfilling a superior's request immediately or by reinterpreting directives in unexpected ways.

[10] Coercive (discipline/punishment), expert (greater knowledge), referent (confidence lends one authority), remunerative (control over wages/benefits), collegial (friendly/consensual exertion of authority), or concertive (team members are expected to conform to the group) (Sias 2009; Fox & Fox 2004; Holmes & Stubbe 2003; Holmes, Stubbe, & Vine 1999; Clegg & Dunkerley 1980).

[11] Strategies entail the prior existence of authority conferred by a company and can be employed by higher-ranking personnel; tactics may be implemented in the absence of such formal control and can be used by lower-level personnel (de Certeau 1984).

Such workplace power relations and conflicts are closely entwined with those concerning rank and status, features that can indicate broader class tensions within society as a whole. For example, teasing or noncompliance by subordinates can threaten a manager's position within the hierarchical corporate structure, potentially leading to demotion and reduced rank (Sias 2009). In addition, occupational roles—and hence organizational authority—tend to relate to educational background, often a strong indicator of class-based standing (Atkinson 2009, Walker 1979). As a result, senior personnel tend to hold university degrees and/or MBAs, as these endow them with expert power over those lacking similarly recognized credentials and entitle them to the elevated status, extensive control, and substantial income of their high-ranking positions. Authority and position in the corporate workplace thus derive from how one's economic, symbolic, social, and cultural forms of capital[12] compare to those of others (Atkinson 2009).

- **Workplace Resistance**

Though organizational hierarchies of power and position are relatively hegemonic, they cannot completely eliminate contestation by less powerful, lower-level office employees, and must therefore be understood as sites of control *and* resistance (Gottfried 1994, Gramsci 1988, Foucault 1978). As Raymond Williams asserts, "while by definition [hegemony] is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive" (Williams 1977:113), consisting instead of different forms of repression and confrontation. Opposition and coercion thus coexist in the office environment, fluctuating according to changes in the corporation's power dynamics and social structure. As a result, workplace resistance is ambiguous and contradictory since it may unintentionally involve compliance or consent, and vice versa (Mumby 2005; Thomas & Davies

[12] Different forms of capital as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu; further described in the upcoming section of this thesis entitled: "The Office as 'Field': Corporate Culture & Workplace Conflicts."

2005; Putnam et al. 2005; Collinson 2003; Collinson 2000; Prasad & Prasad 2000; Thompson & Ackroyd 1995; Jermier, Knights, & Nord 1994). For instance, self-monitoring due to supervision involves obedience since workers comply with corporate expectations, however it is also a challenge as such heightened awareness encourages employees to become "skilled manipulators of self, reputation and image in the eyes of 'significant others'" (Collinson 2003:538).

Workplace resistance can therefore take many forms, including knowledge manipulation, whistleblowing, foot dragging, humor, and cynicism (Westwood & Johnston 2011, Collinson 2003, Collinson 2000, Rothschild & Miethe 1994). The final two aptly illustrate resistance's contradictory nature: the former can be used by subordinates to covertly express dissent, to question decisions, and to challenge the established systems of control or rank (Holmes & Stubbe 2003). In both versions of *The Office*, for example, Jim and Tim's[13] recurring use of sarcasm and parody when dealing with their managers (Michael and David, respectively) indicates criticism of their boss' decisions, statements, jokes, and management styles, and hence of their overall authority. Yet humor can be similarly employed by superiors to reinforce the existing hierarchies, such as when it is used to belittle or criticize employees (putting them 'in their place') and to downplay differences in power or position by emphasizing shared norms or beliefs, generating a sense of solidarity and reducing the potential for conflict (Schnurr 2010, Putnam et al. 2005, Holmes & Stubbe 2003, Collinson 2002, Holmes et al. 1999). Humor thus functions ambiguously as "a contestive mechanism and *at the same time* as reproducing and maintaining a form of status quo" (Westwood & Johnston 2011:16, original emphasis).

Cynicism, meanwhile, is not an open way of defying corporate social structures; in fact, it is fairly conformist or accommodative: cynical subordinates generally conceal or internalize their views, while outwardly continuing to follow the established rules and corporate cultures of their

[13] Tim is the U.K. counterpart to Jim, a paper salesman in the American *Office*.

organizations (Karfakis & Kokkinidis 2011, Fleming 2005). Yet an underlying challenge is still present: cynical mockery and exaggerated deference or enthusiasm can convey tacit opposition, as do small gestures or expressions (e.g. eye-rolling, sighing) shared with like-minded employees (Fleming 2005, Fleming & Spicer 2003). These and other activities—like questioning orders, manipulating (e.g. restricting or distorting) knowledge, and wasting time—are often categorized as 'informal', 'indirect', or 'non-confrontational' resistance. However, due to the complex nature of resistance the intent behind them may not be subversive, or they may unintentionally reinforce dominant hierarchical structures; accordingly, one must take into account the specific contexts in which they occur (Westwood & Johnston 2011, Mumby 2005, Putnam et al. 2005, Prasad & Prasad 2000, Collinson 2000, Thompson & Ackroyd 1995, Jermier et al. 1994, Gottfried 1994).

In examining such organizational discord, this thesis takes the concepts of struggle and conflict to mean processes of formal or informal social interaction—interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup[14]—marked by incompatibility and/or hostility (Rahim 2001). Noncompliance, deception, and competition; feelings of powerlessness; and irreconcilable beliefs, goals, or behaviors can all lead to tensions within a corporation (Sias 2009, Rahim 2001, Walker 1979), particularly over power and position in relation to others. Divergent role expectations between employees and their superiors, for example, are significant sources of contention in the office workplace (Yaconi 2001): thinking they have greater authority or higher standing than they do, subordinates may 'do power' with their co-workers or boss, thereby provoking confrontations[15].

[14] Interpersonal means between individuals, whether superior-subordinate or those of the same hierarchical level. Intergroup means between groups (e.g. between office and warehouse workers); such conflict can actually increase cohesion within competing groups. Intragroup means within groups (e.g. within the group of office workers).

[15] This occurs with Gareth and Dwight in the U.K. and U.S. versions of *The Office*, respectively.

- **The Office as 'Field': Corporate Culture & Workplace Conflicts**

To analyze organizational conflicts over power and struggles for status or rank portrayed in *The Office*, this thesis considers the contemporary office environment from a Bourdieusian perspective. Using Bourdieu's theories of 'field' and 'capital', the corporate workplace can be understood as a 'field of production'. To begin with, the office is an institutionalized structure of social relations that generates and maintains a company's 'corporate culture', that is to say, its established rules (of dress, etiquette, verbal and non-verbal behavior), knowledge (of the profession and social hierarchy), and ideologies, which may be explicit or taken-for-granted (Crémer 1993, Schein 1990). Such features are based on "familiarity with 'the way we do things around here'" (Holmes & Stubbe 2003:122), and this corporate culture in turn establishes what forms of capital—economic, social, symbolic, or cultural[16]—are valued and promoted within the organization, thereby influencing how people function as part of the company.

Corporate culture thus consists of visible behavioral patterns, customs, and symbols, as well as an underlying level (which might be considered 'doxa'[17]) comprising shared philosophies and assumptions, like the idea that one's work is equal to or more significant than other aspects of life (Van den Steen 2010, Hoffman & Cowan 2008, Schein 1990). Furthermore, interactions between upper- and lower-level personnel—those holding dominant and weaker positions in the field—reveal fluctuating power relations and ongoing tensions over (sometimes class-related) status and rank between the different positions, since they both constitute and represent people's

[16] Economic capital refers to control over economic resources such as money or financial assets like property (Bourdieu 1986); social capital consists of social connections/relationships or networks of obligation which can be mobilized as resources by those belonging to the collective (Bourdieu 1986); symbolic capital involves access to resources based on one's legitimate/societally-recognized prestige, honor, or status (Bourdieu 1985). The final type, cultural capital, can be 'institutionalized', 'objectified', or 'embodied': the first denotes formal recognition, such as through academic or professional qualifications and credentials; the second refers to physical possessions; and the third involves the dispositions, ways of thinking, and communicative abilities that one acquires consciously or passively from one's particular environment (Bourdieu 1986).

[17] What Bourdieu defines as taken-for-granted, unconscious, and/or deep-seated beliefs or values that influence how people think and behave within a specific field (Bourdieu 1977[1972]).

possession of authority and standing in the workplace (Fox & Fox 2004). In combination with corporate culture, struggles for position thus delineate individuals' actions, and as part of the overall office 'field' these two processes help produce antagonisms and contestations regarding workplace control and status or rank.

- **The Intersection of Language, Power, & Position**

One of the primary purposes of establishing a corporate culture is to legitimize and reinforce the hierarchical positions and power relations that exist within organizations. This is achieved through everyday social practices and communication, including the use of official discourses and engagement in sanctioned verbal or non-verbal interactions (Mumby 1988). One example of this is how executives, supervisors, and managers institutionalize their authority and reaffirm their rank through events such as company meetings or annual reports, where their language and actions connect their individual objectives with those of the overall corporate culture, thereby validating and amplifying their clout within the organization (Fox 2006).

Senior personnel also use institutional narratives to assert their standing in the company; to negotiate power relations with subordinates; and to downplay challenges to the prevailing structure of authority and position, thus maintaining face vis-à-vis their employees (Linde 2001, Goffman 1967). For instance, accounts likening the corporation to a family minimize struggles between superiors and subordinates regarding control and status. They even discourage such conflicts in the first place by appealing to ideas of 'family loyalty' and commitment to the 'work family' (Holmes & Stubbe 2003; Linde 2001; Holmes, Stubbe, & Vine 1999): in the U.S. *Office*, for example, Michael often refers to the workplace as the employees' home[18]. Those in low-level positions can employ narratives as well to criticize superiors or the company and thus undermine

[18] As in season 5 episode 3: "Business Ethics" or season 3 episodes 24 and 25: "The Job", among others.

the organizational hierarchy. Such critiques can be negative (e.g. the manager should be fired) or "they may be stories of carnival reversal" (Linde 2001:529), contesting others' position and power without destabilizing the established structure, such as by covertly mocking a supervisor.

Both versions of *The Office* examined in this thesis employ the latter form of narrative: stories that less-powerful characters recount use comedy to question assertions of status or rank and implementations of authority in the workplace, engaging in power conflicts or struggles over standing with superiors through humor rather than direct confrontation (Holmes & Stubbe 2003). For instance, they may relate anecdotes about a manager's idiosyncrasies, as in the U.S. *Office* when receptionist Pam describes how her boss' love of jeans influenced his management style: "Michael and his jeans. He gets in them and...I'm not exactly sure what happens, but I can tell you, he loves the way he looks in those jeans. I know that's why he started casual Fridays" (Pam in "The Client"). As a whole, both programs use their comic plotlines in the same manner that a subordinate might employ narratives in the workplace: "as a shield for more serious criticism... and as a cloak for the expression of 'socially risky' opinions" (Holmes & Stubbe 2003:120).

Such uses of language in *The Office* are significant, as prior studies of televisual dialogue have demonstrated that characters' social interactions are mediated by linguistic behavior and can express conflict through sarcasm or parody, artificial politeness, casual to formal shifts in speech, and language evoking hostility or mistrust (Richardson 2010; Schnurr, Marra, & Holmes 2008). This can be seen in the U.S. *Office* when warehouse foreman Darryl becomes angry with Michael for preventing his workers from completing their tasks[19]: he tells Michael in a civil yet dry tone that his "biggest fear is that someone will distract us from getting all the shipments out on time" (Darryl in "Boys and Girls"), implying that Michael should leave. Characters' verbal interactions also reflect, interpret, and frame various (often conflicting) dominant, residual, or

[19] Season 2 episode 15: "Boys and Girls".

emerging cultural ideologies (Kendall 2011, Bednarek 2010), as demonstrated in both versions of *The Office* where their linguistic practices and verbal sparring reveal current insecurities and tensions within the organizational workplace, particularly ones regarding power and position.

In addition, discourse management and linguistic behavior convey information about a speaker's social identity (Kroskrity 2000, Irvine 1989). For example, by switching from small talk to formal speech during interactions with subordinates, upper-level personnel demonstrate their authority to modify the situation at will, reasserting their standing (and control) within the corporation. Moreover, superiors can act disrespectfully towards their employees with impunity, such as by 'jokingly' insulting them, while the reverse is not possible since the latter do not have the legitimate authority or rank that would allow them to do so (Schnurr 2010, Culpeper 2008, Collinson 2002). Language therefore reflects social distance and/or proximity: it can highlight or reinforce disparities between interlocutors related to power and position, and it is also a way of performing or affirming one's professional role or identity—including official control and rank, as well as informal status—in the organizational workplace (Holmes et al. 1999, Goodwin 1994).

Yet language plays a role in resistance to the hierarchical social structure as well: this can be seen not only with humor and narratives but also manipulations of the amount, relevance, or truth of disclosed information (Sias 2009, McCornack 2008)[20]; discreet or blatant refusals to speak deferentially by those from whom it is expected (Goffman 1967); and reinterpretations of corporate discourse so "that it critiques the relations of domination within which it is inscribed" (Mumby 1988:116). Such reappropriations represent 'counter' or 'alternative' hegemonies (Williams 1977), challenging the system of power and position that prevailing rhetoric and beliefs normally reinforce. Overall, these linguistic methods for 'doing power' enable lower-level personnel to undertake "riskier speech acts" (Holmes & Stubbe 2003:109,110) which allow

[20] Which can be done by superiors and subordinates alike.

them to covertly engage in contestations over institutionalized authority and standing within the organization. Moreover, the diverse uses of language implemented by subordinates and superiors do not exist in isolation: they overlap with one another in the corporate workspace, exposing contemporary organizations as sites of power struggle and tension over status and rank that reflect broader—often class-related—social frictions (Sarangi & Roberts 1999).

Framing the Two Programs' Socio-historical Contexts

In order to systematically compare the U.S. and U.K. *Office*s and thoroughly analyze the differences and similarities that arise between these two media texts, it is necessary to understand the socio-historical contexts in which the programs originated and where they were, or continue to be, viewed (Kackman et al. 2011, Vlaminck 2010). While neither series simply reflects its particular 'cultural' or 'national' setting, it is nevertheless important to examine their specific milieus as these affect both the ways in which the shows interpret contemporary phenomena and the meanings that they convey (Ortner *Not Hollywood*, Mittell 2010, Fiske & Hartley 2003). Of specific relevance to this study is how these contexts have influenced the shows' individual representations of confrontations over power and position, as well as the shared or dissimilar anxieties regarding American and British corporate workplaces that underlie these conflicts.

While labor markets and conceptions of work differ between cultural contexts, certain trends—often facilitated by or resulting from globalization—are being faced internationally, particularly in Western Europe and the U.S. (Holmes & Ryan 2009, Munck 2002). These are further analyzed in the following sections regarding the British and American contexts, however this section briefly outlines a few of the more salient points. To begin with, the continuing (and ever more rapid) adoption of technological advancements has brought about severe declines in employment security, destabilizing the notion of 'a job for life' as such innovations frequently lead to obsolescence, downsizing, and labor outsourcing[21] (Holmes & Ryan 2009, Standing 2009, Powell 2001, Beck 2000). For example, routine office work is increasingly precarious[22] as corporate work becomes automated and fewer personnel are needed, allowing corporations to

[21] Contracting out labor to domestic and/or foreign workers who are often temporary employees.

[22] From the time of C. Wright Mills (1956) to the present, white-collar fears concerning unemployment have been widespread as salaried employees rely on their jobs at a company for economic security. However, the substantial increase in such anxieties and in the number of threats to people's jobs distinguishes contemporary employment insecurities from those of the past.

"[shed] themselves of thousands of formerly 'safe' white-collar employees" (Powell 2001:40), a process which now occurs irrespective of the health of the national—or international—economy.

Shifts towards organizational 'flexibility' and the casualization of labor also mean that white-collar employment tends to be short-term or temporary (e.g. contract labor), rendering workers easily terminated and enhancing employers' ability to reduce their workforces (Standing 2009, Powell 2001). This has induced greater stress, ambivalence, and distrust among employees who are expected to remain dedicated workers in return for job insecurity and few rewards[23], and whose labor is becoming more 'individualized' as they focus increasingly on self-preservation through personal performance and individual adaptability (Holmes & Ryan 2009, Beck 2000). In response to such fears of obsolescence, termination, and unemployment, many acquiesce to the demand for flexibility, resigning themselves to reduced pay, benefits, and security (Standing 2009). In addition, knowledge is now a significant form of corporate power for both lower- and higher-ranking personnel (though it is generally controlled by the upper echelons), whether this entails withholding information, distorting it, or offering it at a price (Casey 1996). Accordingly, in the organizational workplace the "distribution of and access to knowledge [has] become a key element of new social inequalities and conflicts" (Beck 2000:41), leading to greater competition between superiors and subordinates as well as among peers/co-workers (Standing 2009).

Finally, in framing the two programs' contexts it is important to note the U.S.' extensive history of importing and adapting U.K. television series, for which the primary motives have been cost-effectiveness, a sense of originality or difference, and the 'cultural cachet'—the sense of taste or quality—associated with British programming (Miller 2000). In the 1950s American broadcasters were quite open to British imports, and comedies made up a substantial portion of

[23] Including reduced pay and pension cutbacks.

these, particularly those which could be changed to address the socio-historical conditions of their new context or which "spoke to the concerns of that generation by ridiculing the quotidian assumptions of [their] predecessors" (Miller 2000:113). During the 1960s and 1970s more conservative British programs (including sitcoms and crime series) were increasingly imported, adapted, or used as models in the U.S. Many of the comedies, such as the sketch series *That Was the Week That Was* (1964-1965)[24], eschewed topical satire, focusing instead on institutions (e.g. government, the military) that were familiar to audiences in both nations (Miller 2000). This set the stage for shows like *The Office* (2001-2003)[25], which likewise parodied institutions—in this case business organizations—but also poked fun at current or relevant subjects (e.g. downsizing). Despite a decline in the 1980s, by the 1990s American producers were again looking to British shows for inspiration or reinvigoration of tired genres and formats; this has continued into the present, as seen with such U.S. remakes[26] as *The Office* (2005-present), *Free Agents* (2011), *Prime Suspect* (2011-2012), *Shameless* (2011-present), and *Being Human* (2011-present).

❖ The British Context: Class, Office Work, & Media

▪ Class & the Sociocultural Context in the U.K.

It is important to recognize the distinction between Britain (i.e. the United Kingdom or U.K.) and England, where the former is understood as comprising not just England but also Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and has only existed in this territorial form since 1922 (Fowler 2004). Problematically, these terms are often used interchangeably, particularly by the English themselves but also in academic research about the British socio-historical and cultural

[24] Dates are for the American broadcast of this British television import.

[25] Dates are for the original British version.

[26] All dates are for the American remakes of their British counterparts of the same name.

environment (Walton 2004). This thesis focuses solely on Britain in order to contextualize its analyses and conclusions about power struggles and tensions over hierarchical standing in the U.K. *Office*, avoiding any extrapolation from English society to the larger British milieu. In addition, class in the U.K.—which frequently relates to workplace status or rank in the British *Office*—is a broad and complicated topic, thus the purpose of this section is not to explore it at length but to provide a brief overview that will enhance the subsequent episode analyses.

Three models of the British class system have predominated for several hundred years: hierarchical, three-tier, and two-tier[27]. Though all are fairly similar, the most enduring has been the hierarchical model, where due to the "formal system of rank and precedence" (Cannadine 1998:22) prestige or status accorded to a specific class may be inherited. Position within this system is also predicated on other socially-significant variables, including profession, earnings, educational background, and such elements as standard of living, comportment (e.g. behavior, bearing, dress), ancestry, and accent. These constitute class symbols which are akin to the formal ranking system (though more unofficial), "[dividing] the social world into categories of persons" (Goffman 1951:294). Accordingly, as Irving Goffman asserted over sixty years ago (and which holds true today), behaving in specific ways (e.g. etiquette, gesture, attitude); employing certain dialects, vocabularies, or types of inflection; and displaying wealth or refinement through attire or furnishings (reflecting scholastic and familial background), all indicate that one belongs to a particular class. These informal hierarchies thus operate in concert with the formal ranking system to yield the overall class structure in Britain (Cannadine 1998).

Such class divisions are asserted most clearly through media images that reveal class stereotypes and their underlying intra- or inter-class tensions (Donald 2009). As illustrated in David Morley's (2009) examination of British reality television and the U.K. series *Shameless*

[27] Three-tier includes the upper, middle, and lower classes; two-tier includes the upper and lower classes.

(2004-present), the former generally portrays middle-class lifestyles as admirable and those of the poor (i.e. the working class and 'underclass') as vulgar and dysfunctional, while the latter presents its impoverished working-class protagonists as having strong familial loyalty to one another despite their unruliness and criminality. The upper class and aristocracy likewise inspire contradictory televisual depictions in the U.K.: though often glamorized, since WWII these two groups have "[become] figures of fun and derision; they rarely get a sympathetic representation in British sitcoms" (Rhodes & Westwood 2008:96) today, except in nostalgic period pieces.

Furthermore, depictions of class in transnationally-exported British films and television (e.g. costume dramas, heritage programs) often portray U.K. class relations inaccurately, offering picturesque or idealized visions that obscure real class dilemmas or conflicts (Sydney-Smith 2004). These images increase the success of such media products abroad, but they promote misunderstandings of class realities (and other social, political, and economic phenomena) in Britain. Unlike the transnational exports described above, *The Office* draws attention to issues of status and rank rather than concealing them, and instead of romanticizing such class-related tensions and experiences, the show portrays them realistically, facilitating this thesis' focus on its representations of workplace power struggles and conflicts over hierarchical standing in the U.K.

- **Office Work in the U.K.**

Before analyzing such contestations and their underlying anxieties as depicted in the U.K. *Office*, one must first understand the office environment in contemporary British society. Studies from the 1990s and early 2000s indicate that diverse changes (or intensifications) have transpired in the last twenty years. These include: (1) a significant increase in contingent employment such as part-time, fixed-term, and temporary work, which has contributed to the 'flexibility' of the

workforce (i.e. its ability to be adjusted or reduced at employers' discretion); (2) greater demand for workers to be 'multi-skilled', able to fulfill several jobs besides their own; and (3) a growing emphasis on employees' commitment to their companies through such practices as 'problem-solving groups' and 'teamwork' (Kersley et al. 2005, White et al. 2004, Cully et al. 1999).

Despite the prominence of teamwork since the late 1990s, such rhetoric has remained insincere, as teams may not actually work together, they may not have the autonomy to oversee a task, and few are permitted to choose their leaders or methods (Kersley et al. 2005, Cully et al. 1999). In addition, employees are pressured to be 'functionally flexible'—to develop their skills and knowledge so they can undertake multiple tasks in accordance with organizational needs—but less are being trained to do so (Kersley et al. 2005). Flexibility and continuous learning are thus increasingly demanded, but it is the workers who are expected to be individually proactive in constantly updating their abilities as company requirements change (White et al. 2004).

Modern office workspaces in the U.K. are also seeing the continuation (and escalation) of outsourcing and downsizing, often labeled 'corporate restructuring' (Standing 2009, Kersley et al. 2005, White et al. 2004). In conjunction with rapid technological advances—particularly in information and communication systems—these cost-reducing trends have led to considerable decreases in employment (e.g. obsolescence, redundancies) and the rise of 'lean production', which conveys the idea of "stripping away the fat, to leave a fitter, meaner organisation [*sic*]" (White et al. 2004:5). New forms of information and communications technology (ICT) have become prevalent methods for monitoring employees as well (White et al. 2004), a usage which has "been likened to a modern-day Panopticon, with management using technology as a surveillance device" (Cully et al. 1999:114) that allows higher-level managers, supervisors, and executives to keep records of personnel performance, absenteeism, and work progress or

productivity. Setting targets that workers are expected to reach and conducting performance reviews are two other common ways of monitoring and assessing employees (White et al. 2004). Such evaluations begin even prior to joining an organization, as personality and performance are important aspects of recruitment: applicants must not only demonstrate competency, but also conform to the overall corporate culture of an organization; to ensure this, tests may be given to evaluate a candidate's disposition or attitude (Kersley et al. 2005, Cully et al. 1999).

In terms of intraorganizational communication in the U.K., specifically between upper- and lower-level personnel, information tends to be disseminated in a 'top-down' manner through general meetings or team briefings, while emails tend to be used less (Kersley et al. 2005, Cully et al. 1999). Though such assemblies frequently allocate time for questions and feedback, they are really forums for the downward transmission of information rather than occasions for equal participation. In addition, disclosure of company information by superiors, particularly data or documents regarding organizations' financial positions and employment plans, has decreased in the last twenty years, since the possession of certain types of knowledge is increasingly linked to individuals' authority and standing within corporations (Kersley et al. 2005, White et al. 2004).

The importance of knowledge or information can also be seen in how the corporate hierarchies of power and position function. Managers, for instance, do not set organizational policies: their task is to follow and implement policies established by their own superiors, illustrating their lower rank and lesser authority. Another example is how information collected about employees through monitoring systems and performance appraisals is frequently withheld from the workers themselves, or is not revealed in full: supervisors maintain control by providing employees with minimal or no information, since anxieties about retaining their jobs and being promoted will cause the latter to work harder and be more obedient. Similarly, job influence (i.e.

status and clout) differs between employees depending on their skill-level and credentials: those with less training and education have a reduced amount of control over their work, while those who are more skilled and knowledgeable have greater autonomy and sway (Cully et al. 1999).

Disparities in terms of benefits and income have become more substantial as well. Compared to subordinates, higher-ranking personnel (including managers) generally have larger salaries and are more likely to be entitled to private health insurance, better pension plans, and more paid leave per year (Kersley et al. 2005). Consequently, lower-level workers tend to have negative opinions of their relationships with their bosses, and conflicts may arise as a result of such status-based inequalities; they may also develop due to the aforementioned discrepancies of knowledge or information. Likewise, resentment over the use of ICT for continuous employee monitoring, as well as contrasts between superiors' and subordinates' work-related expectations, values, and objectives, can produce strife or opposition (White et al. 2004, Cully et al. 1999).

Overall, British corporate employees are working longer hours, approximately fifty per week, sometimes for additional money but often because they "are compelled to work overtime as a requirement for their job" (Cully et al. 1999:156). In fact, the U.K. is thought to have longer working hours than most other European nations (Holmes & Ryan 2009). Longer hours are also the result of employment insecurities, such as how 'flexibility' makes workers feel vulnerable since they can be used as needed and then downsized. The rhetoric of teamwork similarly leads them to work overtime because they feel pressured to complete assignments so as not to let their co-workers (i.e. 'teammates') down. Moreover, the possibility of losing one's job in the current economic climate is high, especially as redundancies, outsourcing, and the automation of routine tasks intensify, and it is increasingly difficult to acquire a new one (Standing 2009, White et al. 2004, Cully et al. 1999). Such concerns, as well as feelings of powerlessness or lack of influence

in the workplace, have brought about more work-related anxieties and higher stress, borne by both temporary and permanent staff, the latter of whom often feel less secure about their own positions as a result of working alongside short-term or part-time employees (Cully et al. 1999).

- **Comparing Prior Televisual Depictions to *The Office***

Employing the workplace as a setting and incorporating work-related themes into British television shows—especially sitcoms—is not a new phenomenon (Rhodes & Westwood 2008). Issues concerning relations and behaviors in offices, factories, and service jobs have been mined for comedy from programs like *The Rag Trade* (1961-1963, 1977-1978), *Dustbinmen* (1969-1970), and *On the Buses* (1969-1973), to *The Brittas Empire* (1991-1997), *The Office* (2001-2003), and *Absolute Power* (2003-2005). Studies of the U.K. *Office* tend to agree that unlike most British series centered on the corporate workplace (including ones mentioned above), this show offers an extremely realistic portrayal of the organizational work environment: it presents a less stylized and more authentic representation of clerical work (e.g. repetitiveness), the cubicle layout's lack of privacy, as well as the uneasiness of modern workers whose employment has become less secure (Brabazon 2005, Walters 2005). Its episodes also diverge from the 'neat and tidy' ones of conventional U.K. sitcoms, as most lack catharsis or a sense of resolution; however the concluding Christmas specials *do* offer a greater degree of reassurance (Walters 2005).

Frequently underlying the work-based subject matter of such programs is a subtext concerning power and class, specifically the hierarchical structuring of social relations between employees and their superiors or among co-workers. British sitcoms in particular exemplify this, often presenting farcical depictions of workplace relationships concerning authority and status or rank that use parody and transgression to highlight and comment on the current situation of such

relations (Rhodes & Westwood 2008). While *The Office* continues this tradition, it does so in a more restrained manner, and its heightened realism adds a more cynical or darkly humorous edge to its comedy. The show's subtlety adheres to the post-1980s trend of less-overt class depictions in television programs which followed the idea (endorsed by Thatcher and Blair) of the U.K. as a classless society. Thus while class-related topics and conflicts remain important traits of genres like the sitcom, the idea of class division is "more nuanced and less discernible in crude social stereotypes and social positions as it is in the subtle semiotic codes to which the British are so finely attuned – codes of speech and language, dress, taste etc." (Rhodes & Westwood 2008:97).

The Office is also unique in its depiction of issues related to employment and power in the U.K. (Brabazon 2005). For example, in contrast to earlier series where incompetent bosses were easily duped or manipulated by subordinates (Rhodes & Westwood 2008), it illustrates the reality of lower-level employees' frustration at their lack of authority to influence or change their manager's (often inappropriate) behavior. The program's complex portrayal of blue- and white-collar workers is also distinctive: it shows them interacting in ways that go beyond conventional class tensions—such as friendship, wariness, romance, and hostility—and rejects an entirely derisive presentation of the working class or a wholly affectionate one of the middle and upper classes, typical representations in British media (Rhodes & Westwood 2008). Moreover, its workplace conflicts over power and position are often made overt through blatant superior-subordinate confrontations, unlike the implied critiques of educational and class-based inequality in series like *Hi-de-Hi!* (1980-1988) or the more subdued portrayals of strife in such shows as *On the Buses* and *The Rag Trade*. In addition, making such contentions explicit subverts a tenet advocated by the structural model for British television (i.e. public service broadcasting), which

is that televisual programming should enhance social cohesion (Buscombe 2000). Instead, *The Office* reflects the prevailing lack of unity within contemporary organizational environments.

❖ The American Context: Class, Office Work, & Media

▪ Class & the Sociocultural Context in the U.S.

Class in America is difficult to define due to a lack of public discourse on this subject and the problematic ideology of a 'universal middle class' (Harvey 2007, Ortner 2006). Following enduring trends in the literature, this study delineates class in the U.S. as an individual's social position as both a producer and consumer, denoting a specific level of prestige or distinction—based on wealth[28], education, social connections, and lineage—in comparison to the positions of others (Zweig 2012; Kendall 2011; Ehrenreich 1989; Coleman, Rainwater, & McClelland 1978; Mills 1956). Occupation is also an important aspect since it affects income, and hence lifestyle or the ability to consume, and because class is strongly linked to authority and standing in the corporate workplace (Zweig 2012, Kendall 2011, Mills 1956): those with more control occupy higher-ranking organizational roles that carry greater status and larger salaries, forming the upper and upper-middle classes; those with less control fill lower-ranking roles with limited status and reduced pay, constituting the middle, lower-middle, and working classes. Thus with regard to the office workplace, the most significant division of power and position exists between those who own the company or their direct representatives (the upper, upper-middle, and middle classes) and the employees that these two groups outrank (the lower-middle and working classes).

In addition, studies show that upward mobility—a key goal of 'The American Dream' which asserts that anyone can move up through hard work and perseverance—is increasingly unattainable (Perrucci & Wysong 2003, Coleman et al. 1978). This is because capitalism requires

[28] The total amount of money/assets one has acquired over time; a higher income can thus facilitate greater wealth (Zweig 2012).

a large working class in order to function and it cannot be maintained if too many people are in charge: individuals can only rise up the corporate ladder if positions become available, and as this rarely occurs or openings are filled by those already in the upper tiers, very few can increase their rank or status (Zweig 2012, Perrucci & Wysong 2003). Corporate restructuring has made such elevations in standing even more unlikely as it involves *downward* movement within the organizational hierarchy through outsourcing and downsizing. Although notions of widespread social mobility and a 'universal middle class' have (until recently) prevailed in the U.S., movies and television can challenge these established beliefs by framing the situation in a more accurate way (as *The Office* does), despite the fact that they may be fictional texts (Kendall 2011).

- **Office Work in the U.S.**

To contextualize the corporate workplace setting of the American *Office*, that is its social-spatial milieu or behavioral-linguistic environment (Goodwin & Duranti 1992), one must address the general conditions of office work in the contemporary U.S. Since the 1970s, such labor has undergone radical structural and organizational changes: for instance, workloads have increased dramatically in terms of the pace and amount of work, and the development of technologies such as the internet, email, and activity-monitoring software now allows information about projects, transactions, and personnel activities to be instantly relayed to the highest levels of a company. Such analytical tools and immediate transfers of data enable a 'panoptic' form of surveillance within corporate institutions, since "these technologies put real-time maps of resources and performances on screen" (Sennett 2006:51). This type of electronic monitoring is enhanced by the open-plan layout of modern offices (e.g. cubicles, packed-in desks), as the lack of privacy offers superiors the possibility of constantly observing and regulating employees (Casey 1995).

The abovementioned technological shift has also led to the growing automation of white-collar work: such mechanization of previously 'mental' labor allows organizations to dispense with a variety of jobs (Sennett 2006), resulting in the destabilization of working conditions and the overall 'casualization' of labor. For instance, positions in the corporate office are now more likely to be temporary or subcontracted to specialized short-term employees, while contracts and benefits are continuously truncated. Moreover, restructuring, downsizing, and obsolescence have become chronic threats (particularly since the mid-1990s) as organizations relentlessly innovate: personnel are expected to adapt or update their work-related skills and knowledge as companies transform or they will be made redundant (Ehrenreich 2005, Perrucci & Wysong 2003). Workers must therefore continuously compete for positions within corporations due to the fact that "[work] identities get used up...when institutions are continually reinvented" (Sennett 2006:141).

American offices also explicitly encourage a sense of 'family' or 'teamwork', high levels of commitment to the organization, and temperaments conforming to the corporate environment. Such standards are meant to encourage employees to "identify, absolutely and unreservedly, with their employers" (Ehrenreich 2005:234): they are expected to demonstrate this identification and prove their dedication by continually presenting themselves as affable, flexible team-players and by working long hours or weekends (Casey 1996). These beliefs and practices are intended to create solidarity by enhancing workers' feelings of belonging and empowerment, yet they can be problematic. The notion of family, for example, is "hierarchical, paternalistic and deferential to higher external authorities" (Casey 1996:324); this 'egalitarian' rhetoric thus misleads employees while fostering power and status inequalities between lower- and upper-level personnel. Family/ team approaches engender stress as well (Sennett 2006). This is due to the contradiction between companies' espoused ideals of group unity and the internal competition they subtly endorse to

maximize productivity, and because adherence to corporations' philosophies does not protect employees from layoffs, despite the fact that they are supposedly vital members of a cohesive team or family to which they "[are] expected to express total fealty" (Ehrenreich 2005:235).

As a result of these inconsistencies, contemporary office workers often view themselves as expendable and endure feelings of confusion, uneasiness, and vexation concerning their labor in the organizational workplace. For instance, many feel conflicted with regard to the rhetoric of teamwork/family because they believe (often rightly so) that to achieve individual advancement or to escape outsourcing, downsizing, wage reductions, and benefit cuts, they must compete with and outperform their teammates/family by working longer and harder than everyone else (Zweig 2012, Casey 1999). Research indicates that the team/family ploy also encourages interpersonal distrust, rivalry, self-reproach, and condemnatory behavior like publicly criticizing one's failings or those of others, leading to greater co-worker conflict (Sias 2009, Casey 1999, Casey 1995).

In conjunction with panoptic technologies and office layouts, such conduct has led to the decentralization and internalization of discipline, as fears of being criticized by or in front of peers, constant evaluation, and concerns that objections will result in negative repercussions all prompt employees to self-monitor (Deetz 1998); one example of this is how workers often push *themselves* excessively to manage their ever-increasing workloads (Fraser 2001). In addition, they must suppress or conceal their anger and ambivalence regarding this unpredictable and taxing environment in order to avoid the consequences that expressing such emotions might incur. Some try to alleviate these feelings by increasing their productivity or by resigning themselves to the situation; others cope by distancing themselves, "resorting to black humor or...psychologically [detaching] themselves from a bleak workplace situation over which they have no control" (Fraser 2001:167).

Ultimately, these changes in the post-industrial office have produced greater disparities among corporate personnel in terms of income, benefits, and hierarchical standing (Zweig 2012, Perrucci & Wysong 2003, Victor & Stephens 1994). Such inequalities are the result of three factors in particular: a significant wage-gap between corporations' upper- and lower-levels due to disproportionately-high compensation of senior executives; wage stagnation for middle-tier employees (Kendall 2011, Sennett 2006); and an overall lack of upward progression/job mobility (e.g. promotions) for mid- and lower-level personnel. Thus "[at] just the time that organizational commitment to the employee has been thoroughly violated, the employee is expected to exhibit feverishly enhanced commitment to the organization" (Victor & Stephens 1994:481). Despite the injustice of this situation, many workers comply as they are fearful of losing their jobs. The value of office work has therefore shifted from being founded on occupational status or prestige—in other words, on symbolic or cultural capital—to simply being a means of acquiring the financial resources (i.e. economic capital) one needs in order to get by: accordingly, "resistance, while always possible, is truncated and circumscribed by private survival" (Casey 1999:174).

- **Comparing Prior Televisual Depictions to *The Office***

While the American *Office* is not the first television series in the U.S. to employ the office environment as both its setting and a key feature of its plot, the show is quite distinctive in its emphasis on realism, offering a more complicated and comprehensive depiction of corporate labor (Craft 2008). As early as the 1960s, American television programs (e.g. *The Lucy Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*) had begun to situate their narratives in a variety of workplaces for entertainment purposes (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman 1994). Series set in organizational offices often portrayed those in charge (e.g. managers, executives) as fools or as corrupt taskmasters,

and their storylines ranged "from personal conflicts between supervisors and their subordinates to competing loyalties between institutions and personal conscience" (Lichter et al. 1994:191), however such tensions were used more as sources of drama than as representations of reality.

Unlike these earlier televisual depictions, but comparable to those which began emerging in the 1970s, *The Office* presents a more accurate and critical portrayal of corporate institutions, organizational practices and ideologies, and the workplace relations that exist in such companies. To begin with, the show uses specific plot developments to call attention to contemporary issues like downsizing, corporate restructuring, precarious employment, obsolescence, inequality in the office, as well as "the costs and benefits of hierarchical authority structures" (Lichter et al. 1994:202) and arrangements of status or rank. Furthermore, the program is more realistic in its representation of organizational standing and power dynamics. Unlike preceding series from the 1960s which depicted illusory versions of the workplace where subordinates worked around their superiors, confronted their bosses, or took charge even if they lacked the official authority or ranking to do so, *The Office* illustrates how lower-level personnel actually feel helpless; they are unable to take control without being punished for overstepping the bounds of their position.

Finally, the show portrays the corporate environment from the perspectives of blue- and white-collar (i.e. middle, lower-middle, and working class) characters normally consigned to the margins of the central storyline (Lichter et al. 1994, Jhally 1989). Their views highlight struggles over power and (class-related) status or rank in the modern office that are generally glossed over in American media, both factual and fictional. While using comedy to emphasize social distinctions and conflicts has been criticized for creating and/or sustaining potentially negative societal divisions (Mills 2005), *The Office* employs such humor for neither purpose. Instead, by accentuating differences in organizational standing and authority, the series underscores current

anxieties regarding “specific distributions of power and influence” (Williams 1977:108) in the workplace that are often concealed by the social structures and ideologies which maintain them.

Reading *The Office* as a Text: Methodology

❖ Scholarly Views of Text Analysis

In looking at television as 'text', it is important to view it as a "bounded communication system that can...convey meaning and can express ideas" (Mittell 2010:159) whether visually, aurally, or linguistically. These meanings and ideas arise through the particular content elements of a televisual production, especially through its cultural codes or signs which represent shared ideologies, conventions, and understandings of the world. These are presented onscreen through storylines, dialogue, particular settings, as well as characters' interactions and behaviors (Mittell 2010, Casey et al. 2008, Peterson 2003, Hanks 1989, Fiske 1987, Hall 1980).

While televisual texts (and media texts in general) are often examined as sites of struggle between the meanings intended by producers and those interpreted by consumers (Peterson 2003, Deming 1986, Hall 1980), this study focuses specifically on conducting a qualitative analysis comparing content elements from the televisual texts of the American and British *Office*s. It thus omits the processes of production and reception in order to concentrate on the two shows' depictions of power struggles and conflicts over status or rank (which sometimes derive from larger class tensions) in the office workspace, as well as the anxieties that underlie these.

This type of textual analysis generally examines a program's narratives and how these are structured; its themes and potential meanings; the ways in which characters are portrayed (e.g. archetypes, stereotypes); as well as how social relations or current events are represented (Casey et al. 2008). These manifest and latent components of the text are described and analyzed, then their significance is interpreted with respect to one another and as expressions of relationships within the broader society (Peterson 2003, Hanks 1989). Consequently, a potential concern that arises is that "interpreting the meanings of these texts forces analysts to make interpretive

judgments" (Peterson 2003:83), which may involve subjective assumptions about cultural codes and contexts. To reduce the risk of making such problematic assumptions, this study involves not only textual analyses of the two *Office*s but also detailed examinations of their socio-historical and cultural settings, as seen in the previous sections concerning the U.S. and the U.K.

Some of the literature on globalization and on television and film analysis asserts that 'global' commodities such as transnational media texts (e.g. the content of movies or television episodes) should not be considered independently from their socio-historical conditions of production and reception (Kackman et al. 2011, Tsing 2008, Dornfeld 1998, Morley 1992, Deming 1986). As argued by Kay Richardson (2010), for instance, analyzing characters and their dialogue offers only a partial understanding of televisual texts, as it omits the writers' perspectives, ideologies, and intentions. While acknowledging the importance of conducting such comprehensive investigations, scholars like John Fiske and John Hartley (2003), Jason Mittell (2010), and Michele Hilmes (2009) nevertheless contend that textual analyses of televisual and cinematic content can still be beneficial for understanding the sociocultural processes, experiences, beliefs, and references that are depicted therein.

This study adheres to the latter position, examining episodes from both the American and British versions of *The Office* as sites where 'global' realities take on 'local' or 'national' appearances (Appadurai 1996), and as transnational televisual texts which can be read through an analysis of the various storylines, uses of language, and behaviors[29]. Doing so facilitated my determination of whether these programs illustrate cross-culturally shared and/or locally-specific anxieties concerning authority and standing in the corporate workplace. Moreover, despite the lack of production or reception analyses, this thesis attempts to contextualize the two *Office*s as

[29] Prior examples of this kind of textual analysis (specifically for *The Office*) include Beeden & de Bruin 2010, Hernandez 2010, Savorelli 2010, Vlaminck 2010, Bray 2008, Craft 2008, and Griffin 2008.

much as possible. This can be seen not only in the earlier sections outlining the socio-historical and cultural contexts of the two series, but also in the study's treatment of power and position in the corporate workplace "as socially, culturally, and historically specific categories that are always contested and in flux, rather than natural, foundational" (Kondo 1997:4), or static.

❖ Analytical Framework of the Study

Employing textual analyses of both the U.S. and U.K. versions of *The Office*, this thesis proposes that the programs depict transnationally-shared concerns about contemporary organizational labor, specifically insecurities about power and position (i.e. status and/or rank) in the corporate workplace. Accordingly, this study argues that these two mockumentaries operate as "satiric [explorations] of the sociality of contemporary workspaces" (Hight 2010:291), and that through their focus on realism and disclosure of the hidden aspects of corporate culture they reflect "not 'mere appearances' but the 'reality' behind these: the 'inner nature' of the world" (Williams 1977:95) of office work. This reality includes the various disputes over control, abuses of—or resistances to—authority, and rivalries concerning hierarchical standing that exist in modern organizations behind the mask of corporate ideology.

Though this study somewhat resembles existing research comparing the U.S. *Office* to the original, its approach is unique: instead of using such comparisons in order to generalize about national cultures, this thesis analyzes how the programs' similarities and differences contribute to ongoing questions regarding the nature of globalization. Furthermore, unlike prior textual examinations which focused solely on content elements, this study incorporates a thorough consideration of the shows' individual contexts into its analyses of the two versions of *The Office*, comparing and contrasting the American and British portrayals of power struggles and

conflicts over status or rank that arise among the five[30] social categories depicted in both series. These categories are: (1) company owners, Corporate Executive Officers (CEOs), Corporate Financial Officers (CFOs), and Vice Presidents (VPs); (2) supervisors and senior administrators; (3) mid- and lower-level managers; (4) office workers, such as the sales staff, accountants, and receptionists; and (5) warehouse employees, such as truck drivers or those who handle inventory.

This study examines both seasons of the British *Office*—including the two Christmas specials—and the first seven seasons of the American adaptation[31]. While the U.S. version's first and second seasons were closely modeled on the original program, subsequent seasons no longer had this template to follow as the British *Office* only had fourteen episodes total, allowing differences between the two shows to become more apparent as the American series progressed (Moran 2011, Savorelli 2010, Vlaminck 2010). In these later seasons, writers for the series began producing their own scripts and storylines, revealing a more culturally-specific representation of office workplace relations, yet one which nonetheless shares many aspects with the U.K. series.

The three primary questions posed in this study are: (1) How does the American version of *The Office* depict contestations over power and tensions regarding hierarchical standing among the five represented social categories as compared to the original series? (2) What underlying anxieties about workplace relations, control, and status or rank are revealed through such conflicts, and are these anxieties the same or different in both programs and sociocultural contexts? (3) If some concerns are shared and others are not, what does this indicate about global processes like transnational televisual adaptations, and thus about the nature of globalization itself? To answer these queries, this study followed "a 'bottom-up' approach...[looking] closely at the micro-level of individual workplace interactions" (Holmes & Stubbe 2003:12) and the

[30] Though this number is contested in the literature on class, this study adheres to five as it is the number most frequently used.

[31] The eighth season and (final) ninth season were unavailable during the stages of researching and writing this thesis.

networks of social relationships—based on occupational role, level of authority, and hierarchical position—that exist among the characters.

Resembling organizational studies of real companies, these content elements were examined at multiple levels, including: "(a) observable artifacts, (b) values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions" (Schein 1990:111). The first category comprises characters' interactions—both verbal and non-verbal—and the narratives they recount; the second includes overt ideologies, perspectives, and feelings that could be established through the characters' intentional behaviors and one-on-one interviews with the 'documentary' film crews; and the third consists of less obvious or more subconscious concerns and beliefs that were discovered through the interviews or as a result of the filmmakers' more covert footage of the office[32].

While this study does not distinguish content elements precisely according to the three-level framework above, it does examine a variety of components from the different analytical levels. These include characters' interpersonal relations, communication, and conduct which are shaped by their work-related roles or identities, levels of authority, and formal rank or informal status; their explicit beliefs about and sentiments towards the corporate workplace; as well as implicit conflicts and anxieties expressed through their social interactions in the office. These elements were analyzed using the characters' verbal exchanges (e.g. sarcasm or irony, confrontations, politeness), non-verbal behaviors (e.g. gestures, facial expressions), and the overall plotlines of the episodes (e.g. how activities were depicted), since it was through these that struggles over power and position were made manifest and that underlying anxieties could be assessed (Guerrero, Hecht, & DeVito 2008; Goodwin & Duranti 1992; Goffman 1967).

[32] The premise in both the British and American versions of *The Office* is that documentary film crews have decided to record the everyday work lives of employees at the Slough and Scranton branches of paper merchants Wernham Hogg and Dunder Mifflin, respectively. The two shows are shot in the style of 'fly on the wall' or 'cinéma vérité' documentaries: consequently, although the characters participate in interviews and are mindful of the film crew, they are not always aware of when they are being filmed, allowing the filmmakers to witness more 'natural' interactions and/or events.

Episode Analysis

In both the U.S. and U.K. versions of *The Office*, there arise three specific types of conflict regarding power and position in the office workplace: those between superiors and subordinates in which the former is the instigator; those between superiors and subordinates in which the latter is the initiator; and those between co-workers or peers in which one person tries to exert themselves over someone of equivalent authority or standing. In this section ("Episode Analysis"), these three categories of interaction are examined in terms of how they are separately portrayed in the two shows, and in relation to the anxieties that provoke them. They are then analyzed in the following section ("Conclusion") with regard to how the two programs' depictions of such conflicts—and their underlying anxieties—are similar or different.

❖ Tensions over Standing & Power Struggles in the British *Office*

The characters of the U.K. *Office* often express anxieties about their positions in the corporate workplace through conflicts over status or rank and struggles for control in the office. These confrontations are enacted through insults or criticisms (both explicit and covert), threats, humor, and nonverbal behavior. For example, the manager's use of comedy with his staff allows him to maintain a sense of importance by acting as the center of attention, as well as to exert his authority and assume an air of superiority by including or excluding whomever he pleases. Similarly, the office staff's use of indirect criticism, such as commenting on their boss' physical appearance behind his back, actually functions as a critique of his management style and as a way of undermining him (Schnurr 2010, Beeden & de Bruin 2010, Tinker 2009).

In looking specifically at tensions over workplace power and standing wherein the actions of superiors prompt conflicts with their subordinates, it becomes apparent that these

occur most frequently between David Brent (the regional manager) and his employees. For instance, David often uses 'humorous' derogatory terms to address his subordinates, thus diminishing the latter's social status and any authority they might have within the corporate hierarchy. This can be seen when he calls the warehouse foreman a 'slag'[33] in front of others, demeaning the man while reinforcing his own higher rank and greater power. David is also adept at reducing the significance of his employees' roles within the organization, as exemplified by the particular manner in which he repeatedly corrects Gareth (one of the salespeople) regarding his title: while the latter calls himself Assistant Regional Manager, David makes sure to put him in his place by saying "Assistant *to* the Regional Manager" (David in "Downsize").

Likewise, David distinguishes himself from his subordinates by acting as though 'their level' of work is quite different from his in terms of difficulty, responsibility, and the knowledge required, thereby highlighting occupational and educational distinctions as a way of emphasizing his authority and elevated position while denigrating theirs. He also consistently places his individual goals ahead of those of the rest of the office staff, such as by accepting a promotion that will lead to the branch's closure in season 1 episode 6 ("Judgment"). Such behavior causes substantial conflicts with his employees: while David frames his actions in this particular situation using familial terms like 'cutting the apron strings', his subordinates respond by angrily telling the camera crew that he is a 'wanker'[34] who sold them out for his own sake.

These superior-subordinate contentions also arise between David and his own superiors, particularly Neil Godwin[35], the Co-Managing Director, and Jennifer Taylor-Clarke[36], a senior

[33] Term meaning a prostitute or contemptible person, used by David in season 1 episode 1: "Downsize".

[34] A contemptible, idiotic, and incompetent person.

[35] David's supervisor starting in season 2 episode 1: "Merger"; he was originally the Swindon branch manager and David's equal, but was promoted over David.

executive and David's former supervisor. This can be seen in season 1 episode 1 ("Downsize) when Jennifer threatens to shut down David's branch of the paper company Wernham Hogg (located in Slough) if he cannot convince her of its productivity and his ability to successfully incorporate the organization's Swindon branch. Doing so emphasizes the fact that she is the one making the decision about which branch to maintain, thereby reasserting her power over David while confirming her higher-ranking position within the company.

This demonstration brings Jennifer into contention with David, whose sense of self-importance often leads him to oppose the edicts of the company's Head Office (i.e. the upper executives) as a way of portraying himself as more powerful than he really is in front of his staff. One example of this is how David acts as though he has sole control over the branch and any redundancies that occur, as illustrated in season 1 episode 1 when he calls the office *his* 'ship' and claims to have told Jennifer that: "If Head Office try and come here and interfere, they got me to contend with, okay?...I'm the head of this family. And you're not gonna fiddle with my children – I am. If anyone does" (David in "Downsize").

Likewise, when Jennifer patronizes David, such as by belittling or questioning his capabilities as manager, she not only emphasizes her standing in the organization but also incites David to challenge her in order to reaffirm his own rank and authority, which he sees as being undermined. This occurs in season 1 episode 2 ("Work Experience") when Jennifer becomes angry with David for not having made cutbacks, slighting his managerial abilities and insinuating that he does not deserve his position (and hence his official power and status): "you don't have the guts to do your own job. If you're not man enough to do your job, I *will* do it for you" (Jennifer in "Work Experience"). In response to her insults, David tries to regain face by

[36] David's original supervisor in season 1, she was later made a partner at their paper company, Wernham Hogg, and became both Neil and David's superior.

retorting: “You’re not the boss here” (David in “Work Experience”), thus playing down her ability to control him while she is in ‘his’ branch. When Neil takes over Jennifer’s position as David’s direct supervisor, he similarly uses condescension to reduce David’s authority and standing while increasing his own, such as by ridiculing David’s managerial techniques, saying that he is there to ‘look after’ David[37], or calling David a ‘petulant kid’[38].

As with Jennifer, Neil’s actions generate tensions with David, who tries to covertly minimize or destabilize the former’s power and status by disseminating misinformation to the camera crew and other employees, saying that Neil is jealous of the Slough branch, daunted by his new position, and that Jennifer is “holding Neil’s hand” (David in “Merger”) by overseeing the transition so closely. However, when David’s resistance becomes too blatant, his interactions with Neil turn into overt conflicts wherein the latter asserts his formal authority much more directly. In season 2 episode 2 (“Appraisals”), for instance, after David openly mocks Neil’s attempts to be friendly with the office staff, the latter severely admonishes David, telling him: “I will not stand for it...I don’t let anyone talk to me the way you just did. Not my staff, not my boss, no one, and certainly not you. Do you understand?” (Neil in “Appraisals”).

A similar situation arises in season 2 episode 4 (“Motivation”) when David causally tells Neil not to have a cow (showing a lack of deference or respect) and the latter reprimands him publically in order to show David who is in charge and to demean him in front of his subordinates. In addition, when David asserts that he does not need Neil to monitor him constantly like a babysitter, Neil weakens David’s authoritative stance by replying: “I think you *do*” (Neil in “Motivation”). Yet David continues to resist and contest Neil’s authority, going so far as to dare the latter to fire him, threatening that there would be a staff mutiny if Neil tried to

[37] As seen in season 2 episode 1: “Merger”.

[38] As seen in season 2 episode 2: “Appraisals”.

do so. David's competitive, antagonistic attitude eventually forces Neil to take the final step in their struggle over power and standing: he terminates David in season 2 episode 5 ("Charity").

Education is also a significant source of conflict between superiors and their subordinates in *The Office*, as demonstrated by the 'knowledge competition' which transpires between David and his new employee Ricky[39]. Since the former does not have a college degree while the latter does, David feels that his knowledge and (supposed) expertise in the workplace—thus his status and influence as manager—are in jeopardy: he therefore tries to defend his position and assert his authority by competing intellectually with Ricky. Moreover, David and his peer, Chris Finch, try to put Ricky and Tim (a salesman who also attended university) in their place, calling them 'college boys' in sneering tones and implying that students are jobless, unproductive couch-potatoes: "bloody students. Waste of space" (Chris in "The Quiz").

Later, during the office's quiz night, Chris and David make fun of Ricky and Tim whenever they answer a question wrong, insulting their superior education by saying that they "[just] need to spend a few terms at the University of Life" (Chris in "The Quiz"). Desperate to win the competition—and thereby reaffirm their power and hierarchical standing—David and Chris eventually resort to a physical challenge: throwing a shoe over a building. When they succeed, despite the fact that the challenge had nothing to do with knowledge or education, Chris gloats to Ricky that: "Your university education didn't help you there, did it? Now, let that be a lesson to you, eh? Respect your elders, and do not fuck with the big boys" (Chris in "The Quiz"). Education is thus a form of distinction in the organizational workplace: while managerial personnel like David may officially be ranked above their subordinates within the corporate hierarchy, their informal sense of status can be threatened by the presence of someone who is more educated than they are and could thus potentially humiliate or even replace them.

[39] Season 1 episode 3: "The Quiz".

Conflicts between superiors and subordinates in which the latter acts as the initiator can be understood as 'resistance', where tensions or dissatisfaction regarding power and position—both one's own and that of one's boss—are brought to the fore. David's repeated contestation of the authority of Wernham Hogg's Head Office is one example, as illustrated in season 1 when he tells the receptionist, Dawn, that "there's a special filing cabinet for things from Head Office... called the wastepaper basket" (David in "Downsize"). Likewise, David's employees engage in acts of resistance with him that indicate underlying struggles for control, status, and rank, but they must generally do so using indirect techniques like humor and insinuation so as not to be caught, since they do not have the same license to tease their boss as he does to joke about or insult them. In "Downsize", for instance, after David implies that Dawn is a 'loose' woman, she intimates that he is a drunkard under her breath; however David overhears Dawn and criticizes her for not being professional, despite the fact that he was rude in the first place.

While Dawn's surreptitious attempt at opposing David was unfortunately noticed, *The Office* illustrates several other covert methods whereby superiors may be challenged by their subordinates, including cyber-humor. This type of opposition is demonstrated in season 1 episode 2 ("Work Experience") when an anonymous picture of David's head attached to the body of a nude woman having sex with two men is disseminated via email around the office, much to the staff's delight and David's embarrassment. Similarly, the humorous nicknames used by lower-level personnel amongst themselves in reference to David (such as 'Bluto' and 'Mr. Toad') also function as a hidden form of contestation, since they allow the employees to disrespect and undermine their higher-ranking, more-authoritative boss.

However, these conflicts are sometimes more explicit, such as when David is angrily mocked by a warehouse worker that he is trying to fire[40]—illustrating class-related tensions (i.e. blue collar vs. white collar)—or when Tim quits his job in the middle of a training seminar[41], contesting David and the assembly leader's control by saying: "This is a waste of time. I can't take any more of this nonsense" (Tim in "Training"). Furthermore, when Gareth tries to exert influence or authority with David, he does so by explicitly challenging the role expectations associated with his position as Assistant to the Regional Manager: despite the fact that he has neither the formal rank nor the official power to lead meetings, to fire or hire employees, and to do other similar activities, Gareth continuously inserts himself into David's sphere of control, standing next to him during meetings and acting as though he has given David permission to address the rest of the staff. Such actions subvert David's authority and standing, while presenting Gareth as having a higher position than he actually does.

David behaves in a similar manner during his interactions with Neil. In season 2 episode 3 ("Party"), for instance, after Neil gives Tim a message for the warehouse foreman (Glynn), David tells Tim to inform Glynn that *he* authorized the message as well, as though Glynn requires David's permission rather than Neil's. In addition, following the merger of the Swindon and Slough branches of Wernham Hogg at the start of season 2, the former Swindon employees engage in activities and behaviors that undercut David overtly. One of the female office workers, for example, bluntly tells David that the new employees are bored and preferred their old branch, and she questions his managerial style by saying: "We're actually used to doing stuff, like workin' hard, you know. Being motivated" (Trudy in "Appraisals").

[40] Season 1 episode 6: "Judgment".

[41] Season 1 episode 4: "Training".

Lastly, there are conflicts over control and status which arise between co-workers or peers of equivalent power and rank, often expressed through insults like 'twat' or 'knob end'[42]; pranks, such as putting someone's stapler in jelly[43]; appeals to authority (e.g. Gareth often asks David to fire Tim); as well as competitive and self-centered attitudes or behaviors. An example of this last tactic, for instance, occurs in season 1 when Gareth explains to the camera crew that he is not concerned about his co-workers being downsized, calling it 'natural selection': "In the wild, some people wouldn't survive" (Gareth in "Downsize").

Such competition between peers can also be seen in the interactions between David and Rowan, a management expert and training facilitator who appears in season 1 episode 4 ("Training"). Although the two men have comparable power and standing vis-à-vis the office workers, David is intimidated by the fact that Rowan has special training and an MBA, thus he tries to downplay Rowan's presence by telling the film crew: "I could have done this myself" (David in "Training"). Moreover, during the training seminar David constantly interrupts or interjects, takes over the role-play exercises, and eventually commandeers the entire meeting, acting as though he is the one with the requisite expertise. Though Rowan attempts to maintain authority, his control over the seminar is gradually eroded and he ends up sitting in a chair with his arms angrily folded, powerless to affect the situation.

Occasionally, lower-level employees will attempt to exert more 'formal' authority, especially Gareth who believes that he is the office's 'team leader' and thus has power over the rest of the staff. Gareth's behavior in season 1 episode 5 ("New Girl") illustrates this, when he acts as though he is more important than the new office employee, Ricky. When the latter tries to ask him a question, Gareth does not even deign to look at him, simply holding up a finger to stop

[42] These terms mean that someone is an idiot and a contemptible person, respectively.

[43] Tim has done this to Gareth three times; this prank can be seen in episode 1 season 1: "Downsize".

Ricky from talking while he continues to type. Upon finishing, he then turns to Ricky and says "Yes?" as though it is a waste of his time and energy to do so. Gareth also uses his tenure and experience at the company to give the impression of higher status so that he can wield control (which he does not actually have) over his peers, particularly over inexperienced or temporary workers like Ricky who threaten his sense of security. This occurs in season 1 episode 2 ("Work Experience") when Gareth asserts that he is 'higher up' than Donna, a new employee, and is therefore her boss. Such behavior leads to conflicts with the rest of the staff, who know that Gareth's position carries no greater power or higher rank than their own. Tim, for instance, challenges Gareth directly by telling that "team leader don't mean anything" (Tim in "Merger").

Specifically class-related conflicts are particularly prevalent between the warehouse staff and office personnel (including upper-level executives), as seen in season 1 episode 2 ("Work Experience") when warehouse foreman Glynn disrespects Jennifer, undermining her authority and tarnishing her high-status image by making sexual innuendos about her. In addition, during her visit to the warehouse the workers are engaged in watching a video of two dogs having sex: Glynn uses this to denigrate both Jennifer and the upper class to which she belongs, telling her: "You'll be next. Gazza likes them posh" (Glynn in "Work Experience"), in reference to the posh or upper-class Jennifer being shagged by one of the dogs. Another example of such tensions between the white-collar office employees and blue-collar warehouse staff takes place in season 1 episode 3 ("The Quiz") when Tim laughs at Dawn's joke about dreaming of having a cleaning job, and her warehouse-worker boyfriend (Lee) becomes angry with him, believing that Tim thinks he is better than them based on his occupational role as a salesman within the company.

There is one particularly explicit example of class friction which occurs in season 2 when Tim takes the former Swindon employees on a tour of the warehouse, telling them that they are

"about to enter a warehouse environment. Now, I must warn you that some of the people in there will be working-class. So, uh, there may be ass-cleavage, so just find a partner and hold hands, don't talk to anyone though, okay?" (Tim in "Party"). This use of pejorative stereotypes to describe blue-collar or working-class individuals unequivocally indicates the presence of inter-class tensions. Moreover, during this encounter between the office staff and the warehouse workers, class-based discord is further exposed when the latter make unconcealed derogatory remarks about their white-collar visitors. While the blatancy of such class conflict is unique to this episode, it does recur to a slightly lesser degree in "Christmas Special – Part 2" when the warehouse employees crudely insult a member of the office staff while attending the branch's Christmas party, displaying overt resentment towards their better-paid co-workers.

To prevent these diverse struggles over power and status or rank from undermining the existing hierarchies (and prevailing interests) in the organizational workplace, the company implements such strategies as electronic monitoring (e.g. firewalls)[44], as well as a rhetoric of teamwork espoused by upper-level personnel (e.g. David) and reinforced through training seminars. The use of this latter strategy is demonstrated in season 1 when Rowan is brought in to facilitate the Slough branch's training session, leading the staff through team-building exercises that in fact naturalize Wernham Hogg's asymmetrical systems of authority and standing, while also emphasizing the idea that the employees are simply (low-ranking and powerless) cogs within the larger wheel of the corporation.

The training seminar therefore implies that lower-level personnel should know their place and should not try to disrupt the corporate hierarchy through resistance or contestation, thereby promoting compliance among subordinates. Such encouragement of conformity, or of being obedient to the existing hierarchical structure, is not only supported by this type of team rhetoric,

[44] As seen in season 2 episode 4: "Motivation".

but also through promises of eventual promotion, in other words, of a better position with more power and a higher rank. As David advises Tim in season 2: “You keep your head down. In a few years’ time you could be in the hot seat, like me” (David in “Appraisals”).

Superiors can further minimize or avoid conflicts with subordinates by veiling their authority, such as how David acts in a collegial manner, uses humor, or evades culpability when firing someone. This is particularly apparent in season 1 episode 6 (“Judgment”), when David tells a forklift operator whom he has decided to terminate that: “This is the worst part of my job...But, you know, it’s out of my hands. And even if it were in my hands, my hands are tied” (David in “Judgment”). Instead of taking responsibility, David blames the man’s redundancy on “cutbacks being what they are” (David in “Judgment”), asserting that the decision was made by an executive who is higher up the corporate ladder, and that the duty to fulfill it is simply being imposed upon him. This effectively transfers the blame onto the hierarchical structure of the company, making a nameless and faceless bureaucrat responsible instead.

Overall, David’s motto aptly expresses the underlying anxieties in the office workplace that fuel interpersonal conflicts over power, status, and rank: “Be careful. ‘Cause there’s always someone ready to step in to your shoes and do your job better than you do it” (David in “Party”). Throughout the series, the different struggles and contentions which arise illustrate that in the current economic climate, corporate employees—from warehouse workers to upper executives—all fear threats to the stability of their positions within the organizational hierarchy (i.e. losing their authority, standing, and income). Even after David is fired, for example, he and Gareth continue to compete over the managerial post (which Gareth was asked to take over), as the former wants to regain the security of his powerful, high-ranking position, while the latter needs to maintain his newfound authority and status. Consequently, Gareth criticizes David’s

management techniques[45] and taunts him for having groveled in order to get his job back. David, meanwhile, implies that Gareth stole his job, mocks his lack of education (he only has one O-level), and demeans Gareth in front of the camera crew, calling him Neil's puppet and saying: "Gareth is not General Manager, as such, like I was when I was here. I was sort of omnipotent, and uh, he's doing a much more watered down version" (David in "Christmas Special – Part 1").

❖ Tensions over Standing & Power Struggles in the American *Office*

Akin to the U.K. *Office*, the U.S. version depicts tensions and anxieties concerning power and position in the corporate workplace through three types of conflict: those between superiors and subordinates that are initiated by the former, those instigated by the latter, and those between co-workers or peers. Like its predecessor, the show portrays such conflicts through characters' language use—including humor, critiques, and threats—as well as non-verbal behavior. It also illustrates how the organization (Dunder Mifflin Paper Company, Inc.[46]) tries to reduce these contestations, such as by endorsing teamwork or familial solidarity in order to promote "group unity and [project] an image of the corporation as a compact whole" (Fox & Fox 2004:136), despite underlying competitiveness for authority and standing (at all levels). For instance, Michael, the Scranton branch manager, frequently calls the office 'home'[47] and himself the employees' 'daddy'[48]: this belies the reality that the corporate workplace is a cutthroat environment where people try to improve their status and increase their power by pretending to be sociable while planning to stab one another in the back (Ortner *Not Hollywood,* Fraser 2001).

[45] Gareth tells the camera crew: "I learnt from his *mistakes*" (Gareth in "Christmas Special – Part 1").

[46] In season 6 Dunder Mifflin is bought by the Sabre Corporation, an electronics conglomerate, and becomes a division of Sabre.

[47] Season 5 episode 3: "Business Ethics".

[48] Season 3 episodes 24 and 25: "The Job".

A particularly good example of this type of aggressive interpersonal conflict—which occurs among co-workers/peers as well as between superiors and subordinates—can be seen in season 3 episode 3 ("The Coup") when Dwight goes behind Michael's back, meeting with the latter's supervisor (Jan Levinson) in an effort to usurp the managerial position. Dwight does so in spite of the fact that he normally acts as Michael's obsequious lackey and "most trusted ally" (Michael in "The Coup"). In his conversation with Jan, Dwight also casually asserts that he would eliminate many of his fellow employees, sneeringly declaring: "I could care less about my co-workers" (Dwight in "The Coup"). To punish him, Michael first allows Dwight to think he received the promotion, then humiliates him in front of the rest of the office by revealing the lie.

While believing himself to be manager, Dwight's demeanor and language change: he stands taller and smirks at the camera, condescendingly calls Michael 'Mike', thanks him for 'staying on' and mockingly tells him that he can still be Assistant *to* the Regional Manager[49]; he even ridicules Michael's car for which he had hitherto professed admiration. Yet upon learning of Michael's deception, Dwight instantly reverts, taking back everything he has said and done, begging not to be fired, and eventually kowtowing to Michael as he apologizes profusely and pretends to cry. Michael subsequently forces him to stand in the middle of the office on a box wearing a sign around his neck that says 'liar'. This episode illustrates Michael and Dwight's struggle for control of the workspace, as well as how they 'do power' in different ways in order to assert their authority over one another: Dwight tries to overthrow Michael through duplicity, while Michael attempts to emasculate Dwight through public humiliation. As Michael himself realizes during this episode: "Business is like a jungle. And I am like a tiger. And Dwight is like a monkey that stabs a tiger in the back with a stick" (Michael in "The Coup").

[49] This is Dwight's position, which he always insists is really "Assistant Regional Manager".

In addition to this superior-subordinate conflict instigated by Dwight, another type of hierarchical confrontation appears in this particular episode. It takes place between Jan and Michael, when the former questions Michael's ability to run the branch, telling him to get control of the office (i.e. prevent people like Dwight from undermining him), and asking whether she needs to hire a babysitter to look after him. Such questioning and condescension is reminiscent of the ways in which Jennifer and Neil assert their command and standing over David in the U.K. *Office*, and like David, Michael resists this undercutting of his position in the workplace. Consequently, he too acts in ways that challenge the authority of the company's upper executives and supervisors, such as in season 3 episode 7 ("Branch Closing") when under threat of closure, Michael asserts to the camera crew and the office staff that the branch is *his* house, not the CFO's, and that he is "not going to take this lying down" (David in "Branch Closing").

Similarly, in season 5 Michael contests his new supervisor's (Charles) greater power and higher rank by not cooperating with him, ignoring Charles' requests[50], and telling the employees that he (Michael) is in charge: "this is my branch. You don't ask Charles, you ask me" (Michael in "New Boss")[51]. Later in the series, Michael again undermines a supervisor's (Gabe)[52] control and status by threatening to go over his head and talk to the CEO of the company[53], as well as by boasting to his subordinates that: "Better men...have tried to be my boss" (Michael in "Viewing Party")[54]. Furthermore, when Michael is chastised by Gabe for having an office romance in season 7 episode 16, he retaliates by insulting the organization in front of the camera crew: "I love working at Dunder Mifflin, a division of Taliban enterprises" (Michael in "PDA").

[50] Season 5 episode 21: "Two Weeks".

[51] Season 5 episode 20.

[52] Gabe, the Coordinating Director of Emerging Regions, works for Sabre; he begins overseeing the office in season 6.

[53] Season 7 episode 6: "Costume Contest".

[54] Season 7 episode 8.

As can be seen, when Michael feels that his authority and standing are at risk, he instigates conflicts with those whom he sees as endangering his power and position within the company, both superiors and subordinates alike. Such conflicts can also be the product of Michael's fears of replacement, as in season 2 episode 4 ("The Fire") when he learns that his new temporary employee, Ryan, is attending business school at night. Not having attended business school himself, Michael feels threatened and therefore challenges Ryan to quiz him about managerial and business-related information, saying: "Come on egghead. Let's do it" (Michael in "The Fire"). This resembles how David reacts to Ricky in the U.K. *Office*, as does Michael's subsequent embarrassment when he is not as knowledgeable as he pretends to be. Moreover, akin to how David and Chris gloat after 'besting' Ricky and Tim with the shoe-throwing contest, Michael mocks Ryan upon learning that the latter caused an accidental office fire: "Well I guess they don't teach how to operate a toaster oven in business school...Hey, did ya miss that day there Ryan?...Toaster oven 101?" (Michael in "The Fire"). Likewise, in season 6 episode 3 ("The Promotion") after Jim is promoted to Co-Manager alongside Michael[55], the latter sees him as a rival and thus tries to undermine Jim in front of the rest of the staff.

Even after Michael quits his job in season 7 and is finishing his last few days at Dunder Mifflin, he retains these anxieties about potential threats to his position and about being supplanted, and thus continues to engage in power and status confrontations; this is akin to how David continues to struggle with Gareth over the managerial post following his dismissal in the U.K. *Office*. In season 7 episode 20 ("Training Day"), for example, Michael clashes with his replacement, Deangelo Vickers, who is trying to assert his new authority and rank prior to Michael's departure. When Deangelo tries to take over Michael's office and impress the staff by having a barber shave him while he holds a meeting, Michael has someone come to shave him as

[55] This promotion occurs in season 6 episode 2: "The Meeting".

well, and he interjects while Deangelo is talking. Likewise, when Deangelo tries to work at Michael's desk the latter sits there as well, in such a way that Deangelo must reach around him in order to use the computer, and when Deangelo calls a meeting, Michael orders the staff not to go in, trying to reassert his now defunct influence and standing as boss.

As was previously described, subordinate-superior conflicts in which the former is the initiator often occur between Michael and his supervisors; however such struggles (or resistance) also arise between Michael and his staff when the latter critique or challenge him. Though this type of opposition is generally covert, as exemplified by Jim's recurring use of sarcastic humor or Darryl's furtive appeal to Gabe in order to circumvent Michael[56], it can occasionally be more explicit. One such overt confrontation can be seen in season 3 episode 8 ("The Merger"): following the incorporation of Dunder Mifflin's Stamford branch by the Scranton branch, a former Stamford employee criticizes Michael's management style in front of the entire office and then quits, embarrassing Michael and destabilizing his sense of command over the office.

Engaging in these unconcealed conflicts often results in negative repercussions, as employees can be fired because of such actions or they can be disciplined in ways that may be either sanctioned or unsanctioned. In season 2 episode 15 ("Boys and Girls"), for instance, when the warehouse workers complain about their smaller compensation and decide to unionize, they are threatened with termination and the closure of the entire branch; as Jan warns them: "I would think long and hard before sacrificing your savings and your futures just to send a message" (Jan in "Boys and Girls"). In a similar vein, when the office staff explicitly compares the corporate workplace to a prison in season 3 episode 9 ("The Convict"), Michael tries to regain control and maintain face by locking them in the conference room as (an unauthorized form of) punishment,

[56] Darryl's appeal to Gabe occurs in season 7 episode 6: "Costume Contest".

saying that they disrespected both him and the office and that he will "leave them in there until they can appreciate what it's like to have freedom" (Michael in "The Convict").

Such subordinate-superior conflicts—both overt and covert—take place with other high-ranking personnel as well, like in season 5 episode 25 ("Broke") when Jim undermines Charles, Michael's new supervisor, during an important meeting with Dunder Mifflin's CFO, David Wallace. Charles tries to ingratiate himself with David by saying that he was going to suggest the exact same solution for handling a difficult situation, however Jim replies: "Oh, but you didn't" (Jim in "Broke"), subtly implying that Charles is simply being sycophantic and is not in fact the competent boss that he wishes to seem. A similarly oblique expression of this type of subordinate-superior contention over power and position can be seen when the office workers employ cyber-humor in season 7 episode 15 ("The Search"), sending each other instant messages with humorous insults regarding the company and their upper-level supervisor, Gabe.

A more direct confrontation arises in season 4 episodes 7 and 8 ("Money") when Darryl does not wish to attend a meeting: he looms over his boss Ryan (previously the office's temporary worker), staring him down without saying a word until Ryan takes a step back (moving out of Darryl's way), averts his eyes, and brushes off his chest as though that was the reason he looked away. In a different episode Pam[57] likewise challenges a superior, but she does so through assertiveness, manipulation, and withholding information rather than physical intimidation. This occurs in season 7 episode 2 ("Counseling") when she attempts to increase her workplace power and rank by assuming the title of Office Administrator, pretending that the paperwork has been lost and claiming that she has held this position for a long time. Although Pam's assertions are questioned by Gabe, she does not admit to the deception; instead, she slyly bribes him with a nameplate in order to secure her newly-acquired influence and standing.

[57] Though Pam is initially the office receptionist, she later becomes a salesperson and eventually the office administrator.

When Deangelo takes over from Michael in season 7, these superior-subordinate tensions and conflicts—initiated by both upper- and lower-level personnel—become even more apparent, particularly between Deangelo and Dwight, the latter of whom resents not having been promoted to the managerial post. For instance, when Deangelo leads his first official meeting as manager in season 7 episode 23 ("The Inner Circle"), he threatens the employees, displaying his higher rank and greater authority by informing them that: "Big changes are coming, and they're coming fast. And if you don't like them, this is called a door, you can walk right through it, all right? I'm not here to be your friend" (Deangelo in "The Inner Circle"). In this same episode, Deangelo tries to exert collegial power with Dwight and win him over by buying him coffee; however the latter defies him by throwing out the coffee, insinuating that Deangelo is gay, and telling him: "I do my job well, so why don't you just leave me alone, and let me do it" (Dwight in "The Inner Circle"). Such explicitly confrontational (and subversive) behavior infuriates Deangelo, and he threatens to fire Dwight if he does not obey orders: "Damn it, Dwight, enough! Get your ass downstairs, or find a new place to sell paper!" (Deangelo in "The Inner Circle").

One of the series' more significant conflicts over power and position in the corporate hierarchy arises in season 4 episodes 3 and 4 ("Dunder Mifflin Infinity") between the recently-promoted Ryan[58] and his former co-workers and boss (Michael), now his subordinates. In these episodes Ryan has begun to implement a plan which will make the company "younger, faster, more efficient" (Ryan in "Dunder Mifflin Infinity") by digitizing its transactions through a new website. The organization is supporting his idea in an effort to track, expedite, and augment sales; increase its client list; and attract younger customers. However, Michael and the older office employees feel threatened by this project—they fear becoming obsolete—and therefore

[58] Ryan starts off as a temporary employee, briefly becoming a salesman in season 3 before being promoted to Vice President of Regional Sales at the end of that season.

contest Ryan's plan: Michael, for example, attempts to prove that the old methods of customer service and making sales are better by trying to win back ex-clients with gift baskets.

Moreover, when Ryan tries to assert his new authority with Michael by canceling one of the latter's meetings, Michael orders him to "Have a seat like everybody else. Still my office, Ryan" (Michael in "Dunder Mifflin Infinity"), exhibiting the same antagonistic possessiveness that David displays with Jennifer in the U.K. *Office*. During this joint episode Ryan continues to try and gain control of the office by 'doing power' in various ways, such as by interrupting or ignoring Michael and his former peers while he sends text messages. There is also an underlying suggestion of tension relating to status and rank that runs throughout this episode, since Ryan's goal is to sustain his own "meteoric rise" (Ryan in "Dunder Mifflin Infinity") up the executive ladder and into the highest strata of the organization, regardless of how this affects lower-level personnel in terms of increased job insecurity, obsolescence, and downsizing.

Such conflicts over power and position do not arise solely between characters at different hierarchical levels, they also occur between peers who hold comparable occupational roles. These struggles are often the result of competition and fears of unemployment, like the tension expressed between salesmen Andy[59] and Jim when the Stamford and Scranton branches merge in season 3 episode 8 ("The Merger"). Andy is anxious about downsizing and therefore wants to impress his new boss (Michael), but he cannot obtain any information from Jim as to what he can do to win Michael's approval; Andy thus threatens Jim, saying: "Playin' your cards close to the vest? I get it...Cross me, and I will destroy you" (Andy in "The Merger"). The existence of such deep-seated job insecurities and the subsequent need to compete with one's co-workers in order to survive in the corporate workplace is displayed more fully in season 3 episode 13 ("Traveling Salesman") when Andy tells the camera crew: "Five of us transferred from Stamford. There's

[59] Andy is a salesman from the Stamford branch of Dunder Mifflin who joins the Scranton branch in season 3.

two of us left...It's like we're touring Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, and dropping off one by one. Well guess what: I'm not falling in a chocolate river" (Andy in "Traveling Salesman").

Conflict can also arise between peers due to small disparities in authority or income, as is made apparent in season 6 episode 20 ("New Leads") when the company begins to assert that "it is [the office's] duty to support the sales team" (Michael in "New Leads"), and hence to increase the organization's overall revenue. On account of this new ideology that the "[salesman] is king" (Dwight in "New Leads")—and their now slightly-heftier paychecks—the sales staff becomes arrogant and disrespectful, particularly with their co-workers (though with Michael as well): they speak condescendingly, order people around, and ignore emails from non-sales employees; one even calls Michael 'numb nuts'. Angered by such treatment, the rest of the office begins to protest, going so far as to obstruct the salespeople's ability to do their job by refusing to give them the necessary sales leads; this constitutes both a power- and status-related conflict, as it threatens the sales staff's marginally-higher authority and somewhat-privileged standing. Moreover, the salespeople must make amends for their rudeness by apologizing to the other employees and presenting them with a gift (they make a peace offering of pastries): the balance of power—and to a certain extent, status—between the office workers is thus restored, even if their different incomes prevent them from holding completely identical positions.

There are two significant and ongoing struggles between co-workers which persist throughout the series: the first is between Dwight and Jim, the second is between Andy and Dwight. Whereas the conflict between Dwight and Jim involves the latter's attempts to keep the former from becoming overly self-important—through pranks and playful teasing—the struggle between Dwight and Andy is a competition for control and position within the company. For instance, when Dwight gets a taste of power, such as by being given a title like 'Assistant to the

Regional Manager' or 'Acting Manager', he becomes cruel and demanding, eager to intimidate and downsize his co-workers[60]. As such titles do not really endow him with a higher rank or more power, Jim will 'remind' Dwight of his actual status and authority by jamming Dwight's desk drawers[61], putting his stapler in Jell-O[62], pretending to start secret organizations that are plotting against Dwight[63], and the like; tactics resembling those used by Tim in the U.K. version of *The Office* in order to keep Gareth relatively civil and tolerable.

Andy and Dwight, on the other hand, are trying to secure their places by removing those who threaten their positions (i.e. each other): they thus compete over their titles, over who has Michael's ear, and over symbols of status or power in an attempt to marginalize and get rid of one another. This competition can most clearly be seen in season 3 episode 8 ("The Merger"), where Andy actually calls their workplace rivalry a 'battle'. The two start off by claiming that each works for the other: Dwight contends that Andy reports to him as he is—or at least believes himself to be—Assistant Regional Manager (omitting the 'to'), whereas Andy argues that Dwight should report to him since he was the Regional Director in charge of sales at the Stamford branch. They then strive to ingratiate themselves with Michael and become his right-hand man, praising Michael obsequiously while maligning each other[64], and finally, they even compete with one another over who has the better car and the more clever insults.

It is important to note that workplace ideologies promoting conformity can also lead to struggles concerning power and standing (among peers as well as between superiors and

[60] As seen in such episodes as season 3's "The Coup" and "The Job" or season 7's "Dwight K. Schrute, (Acting) Manager".

[61] In season 7 episode 18: "Todd Packer".

[62] In season 1 episode 1: "Pilot".

[63] In season 7 episode 24: "Dwight K. Schrute, (Acting) Manager".

[64] Such ingratiation can also be seen when Andy critiques Dwight and uses flattery in order to curry favor with Michael in season 3 episode 13: "Traveling Salesman".

subordinates). This is because they are used to ensure that only certain people—such as those with recognized educational credentials or desirable backgrounds (the requisite institutionalized or embodied cultural capital, respectively)—attain elevated positions and greater authority, forms of symbolic capital (Collinson 2003). Such discrimination is concealed by companies' seemingly egalitarian aim "to foster a unitary, collective image of 'the organization' as a homogeneous, functioning whole which [the superiors] consensually manage" (Clegg & Dunkerley 1980:274). Yet because it leads to biased mobility with regard to occupational advancement (i.e. obtaining a higher rank), it incites conflict among employees at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.

The Office illustrates this emphasis on conformity (particularly with regard to education), as well as the subsequent discord which arises, when Ryan is promoted to Vice President of Regional Sales in season 3 episodes 24 and 25 ("The Job"). One of the primary reasons Ryan receives this appointment is his academic and experiential resemblance to the executives he will be joining—the 'corporate elite'—due to his having attended business school. As Ryan's new boss, David Wallace, tells him: "It'll be nice to have another MBA around here" (David in "The Job"). None of the other applicants for the job went to business school, thus they do not have the necessary institutionalized or embodied cultural capital, yet Michael, Jim, and Karen[65] (the other candidates) are all more qualified for the position, as each has more years of in-office work and sales experience than Ryan. As educational conformity is therefore valued and rewarded over potentially more important qualifications, it reinforces power inequalities and status disparities (in this case class-related ones), heightening tensions between superiors and subordinates.

Consequently, Ryan's promotion leads to confrontations between himself and the employees he now outranks, especially Michael and Jim. Thus while Ryan tries to flaunt his

[65] Karen is an employee from the Stamford branch of Dunder Mifflin who joins the Scranton branch in season 3; she leaves after breaking up with Jim at the end of season 3.

newly-acquired hierarchical standing by wearing "really cool rich guy clothes" (Andy in "Dunder Mifflin Infinity"), and to assert his freshly-minted authority by telling the office staff "I *am* your boss now" (Ryan in "Dunder Mifflin Infinity"), both Jim and Michael find ways to oppose and undermine him. For example, Michael threatens to report Ryan to his boss (David) when the latter tries to prevent him from holding an office assembly, later humiliating Ryan during an organization-wide video-chat[66] for the launch of Ryan's new Dunder Mifflin Infinity website (intended to boost sales), saying "I just think you should know that one of my salesmen beat your stupid computer. So take that, [*bleeped out curse word*]" (Michael in "Launch Party").

While Michael only intimidates Ryan with the threat of reporting him, Jim actually *does* go over Ryan's head by talking to David about the Dunder Mifflin Infinity website (causing Ryan to retaliate by giving Jim a 'formal warning')[67]. In season 4, Jim even leaves a defiant phone message for Ryan about the latter trying to get him fired: "I bet you think I don't care enough about this job to actually fight back, but you're *wrong*, because I *do*, and I *will*. So you can *keep* trying to push me out of this place, but guess what – *I'm* not going anywhere" (Jim in "Goodbye Toby"). This message not only challenges Ryan's power to terminate Jim, it also subtly threatens his position by insinuating that Ryan will not be able to retain his new job.

Such conflicts based on educational and social distinctions—in other words, disparities of institutionalized and embodied cultural capital, like those explored above—also take place among co-workers of the same occupational rank and authority. Oscar[68], for instance, displays his substantial intellect, and thus his sense of superiority, by correcting his colleagues' grammar,

[66] Episodes 5 and 6: "Launch Party".

[67] Jim and David's conversation is not seen in the show; instead it is discussed by Jim and Ryan in season 4 episode 16: "Did I Stutter". It is also in this episode that Ryan gives Jim a formal warning as punishment.

[68] One of the office accountants.

interjecting facts into their conversations, and embarrassing them in discussions concerning topics about which he is extremely knowledgeable[69]. Likewise, Andy frequently reminds his fellow employees—as well as the film crew—that he attended Cornell and comes from a wealthy family. In season 7[70], for example, Andy references the university repeatedly while telling Darryl about his time at "the *Cornell Daily Sun*. This was at *Cornell*" (Andy in "Costume Contest"), and casually mentions the school's "Walter Bernard Hall" which was named after one of his relatives. Andy engages in such behavior in order to present himself as 'better' than his peers and (often) to gain Michael's approval or support, going so far as to use his academic background as a means of undermining his co-workers. This can be seen in season 3 when he scornfully tells Dwight: "You should be an English professor at Cor-*not* University" (Andy in "The Merger"), thereby highlighting the educational (and hence, status) differences that separate them.

These types of co-worker or peer conflicts are further illustrated when Andy meets Jim for the first time in season 3[71], and subsequently proclaims to the filmmakers: "I'm not threatened by him. I went to Cornell. You ever heard of it?" (Andy in "Gay Witch Hunt"). Moreover, Andy consistently wears fancier clothes than the rest of the office employees, such as expensive sweater-vests, cuff-links, and tie-clips; and he boasts to the documentarians about how his family has a domestic staff that attends to their every need[72]: "In my family you don't really go out and get things. If you want something, you write it on a list, and then the housekeeper goes out and gets it" (Andy in "Search Committee: Parts 1 & 2"). Irked by his pompous attitude and pretentious anecdotes, several of Andy's colleagues challenge his class-based arrogance.

[69] See season 7 episode 10: "China" for an example of this final tactic.

[70] Episode 6: "Costume Contest".

[71] Episode 1: "Gay Witch Hunt".

[72] Season 7 episodes 25-26: "Search Committee: Parts 1 & 2".

Episode 5 of season 5 ("Employee Transfer") is a particularly good example of such a challenge. In this episode, Dwight belittles Andy's connection to the 'illustrious' Cornell by pretending to apply to the university. He begins wearing Cornell attire; adorns his work area with the school's bobble-head, pennant, and mug; and presents himself as Andy's equal—if not his superior—through various insults, such as: "if someone who barely out-sells Phyllis[73] can get in, I should be fine" (Dwight in "Employee Transfer"). When Andy tries to reassert his status by making himself Dwight's admissions interviewer, the latter says he is no longer interested in Cornell and is "going to go to the vastly superior Dartmouth. Ever heard of it?" (Dwight in "Employee Transfer"), mocking the way Andy will mention Cornell and then ask if someone knows it, as if they obviously should. Finally, when Andy tries to eat a raw beet at the end of the episode, Dwight turns to the camera and scoffs "Cornell", denouncing the school's reputation and prestige as well as Andy's intellect and supposedly higher standing. Cultural capital, like education and personal history, is thus a significant source of conflict among co-workers, reflecting anxieties about how one's position within the corporate hierarchy compares to others.

Resembling the British *Office*, the American adaptation also depicts how upper-level personnel attempt to thwart such struggles over power, status, and rank—between themselves and their subordinates or among the employees themselves—by naturalizing or concealing the hierarchies of authority and standing that exist in the organizational workplace. This is demonstrated in season 2 when Michael tries to prevent hostilities from erupting between the office staff and the warehouse workers over their unequal incomes, telling them: "Now you may look around and see two groups here. White-collar, blue-collar. But I don't see it that way. And you know why not? Because I am collar-blind" (Michael in "Boys and Girls").

[73] Phyllis is one of the older salespeople at the Scranton branch.

Humor is likewise used to diminish the possibility that conflict will arise, as it "[attenuates] the explicit or bald enactment of power by a superior over a subordinate" (Holmes & Stubbe 2003:116). This can be seen in how Michael frequently makes jokes to create a sense of camaraderie with his employees, giving the impression that he is their friend when he holds meetings, conveys directives, or otherwise exerts his authority. However, senior administrators, supervisors, and managers (like Michael) only act in this sociable manner when it suits them, and will switch abruptly to 'boss mode'—from informal to formal language and behavior—if they feel that their authority and rank are threatened in any way, thereby reasserting control over the situation. In season 1 episode 1 ("Pilot"), for instance, Michael greets Jim and Dwight with a loud "Wassuuuup!" (Michael in "Pilot"), to which they respond with awkward laughter. Feeling demeaned by this reaction and the silence which follows, Michael retreats to his office saying "Back to work!" (Michael in "Pilot"). Such superficially friendly or humorous interaction with subordinates is therefore revealed to be a mask of solidarity, one which attempts to conceal a superior's hierarchical position in the workplace until such time as they wish to express it.

The idea of bureaucracy—an organization's official rules or regulations—also directs attention away from the decision-making clout of high-ranking personnel, acting as a scapegoat for any negative impacts that affect subordinates (e.g. downsizing). This manipulates disgruntled employees into seeing themselves as victims of an impersonal and autonomous system that no one controls, thereby deflecting responsibility for corporate problems away from those in charge and reducing the likelihood of superior-subordinate conflict (Mumby 1988). One example is how rather than holding himself accountable for his decisions to fire certain people, Michael—like David in the U.K. *Office*—blames administrative policies (e.g. company-wide cutbacks), saying

such things as “Corporate has deemed it appropriate to enforce an ultimatum upon me” (Michael in “Pilot”), or “They told me I need to let somebody go” (Michael in “Halloween”[74]).

While the workplace struggles discussed thus far take place between individuals, these contestations can be directed at the company itself, as in season 6 episode 26 (“Whistleblower”) when Andy challenges the entire organization by alerting the press to the existence of a dangerous product defect. Additional examples include employees’ pranks, jests, small talk, romances, and other forms of social interaction (or procrastination) throughout the series which distract them from completing their prescribed assignments, undermining the combined power of their manager, his supervisors, and the chief executives, in other words, that of Dunder Mifflin as a whole. These behaviors constitute minor acts of rebellion that can be categorized as ‘slacking’, a term denoting lack of investment in or concern for one’s work. Accordingly, since corporations rely on workers being committed to their jobs and disciplined in the performance of their tasks, slacking can be regarded as a subversive endeavor (Ortner *Not Hollywood*).

Illustrating such insubordinate activities are Pam and Jim’s flirtation[75], Jim encasing Dwight and Andy’s possessions in Jell-O[76], and Oscar and Kevin’s pastime of ‘hateball’[77]. Low-level employees may also draw subversive images regarding corporate practices or tell covert jokes about the company, contesting their particular superiors’ status and control by challenging the overall organization. This can be seen in season 7 episode 15 (“The Search”) when Gabe prohibits a caption contest for a drawing done by Pam after finding an anonymous doodle of a printer posted in the office kitchen with subtitles mocking the company (e.g. “I’m a suck-suck-

[74] Season 2 episode 5.

[75] Pam and Jim flirt in seasons 1-2.

[76] In season 1 episode 1: “Pilot” and in season 3 episode 1: “Gay Witch Hunt”, respectively.

[77] Oscar and Kevin are part of the office’s accounting team. Their game is discussed in season 2 episode 3: “Office Olympics”.

suckety Sabre!"). Such humor is seen as a threat to the corporation's established structure of authority and rank, and therefore to the individual power and standing of higher-level personnel.

There is one setting in particular in the U.S. *Office* where conflicts occur most frequently and where such clashes are more openly conducted: the workplace meeting. As studies of corporations have shown, "those people who occupy positions of power in the organizational hierarchy use this context to signify their power, and thus to reaffirm their status" (Mumby 1988:68). Michael employs this device regularly, calling meetings on various topics like downsizing, disability, and job orientation[78]; and taking charge of seminars that are being run by others[79], whether or not he has any knowledge of the subject. In both scenarios, the real purpose of the meetings is to provide Michael with forums in which he can reinforce the influence or clout accorded to the managerial station by wielding different forms of power. These forms include: (1) power of position or the license to direct others' behavior, such as by convening these meetings in the first place; (2) reward power, where giving subordinates prizes for hard work reinforces their loyalty and dedication[80]; and (3) expert power, where imparting one's ostensibly superior knowledge to employees—such as about feminism, safety, or Indian culture[81]—serves to motivate them and increase their respect (Fox & Fox 2004).

As displays of authority and rank by higher-level personnel are more conspicuous in this type of setting, and as participation by lower-level employees is often involved or encouraged, meetings lend themselves to more obvious contestation of superiors by their subordinates. For instance, the questions that the latter ask, the comments that they make, and the behaviors that

[78] In season 1 episode 1: "Pilot", season 2 episode 12: "The Injury", and season 3 episode 8: "The Merger", respectively.

[79] As occurs in season 1 episode 2: "Diversity Day" and season 5 episode 3: "Business Ethics".

[80] Such as by allowing them to watch a movie, as seen in the season 3 episode "The Coup".

[81] In season 3 episode 22: "Women's Appreciation", season 3 episode 20: "Safety Training", and season 3 episode 6: "Diwali", respectively.

they perform—such as interrupting, not paying attention, or snickering—are all overt ways of undermining the control and status of the manager, supervisor, or executive running the meeting. Consequently, the implementation of such actions by less-powerful, lower-ranking personnel explicitly challenges the "structure of control, hegemony, rule and domination which...[appears] to be *the* natural convention" (Clegg & Dunkerley 1980:481, original emphasis), both within the meetings themselves and at the level of the organization as a whole.

One such confrontation occurs in season 4 episode 16 ("Did I Stutter"), when Michael's power is challenged by Stanley (one of the salespeople) who refuses to participate during a meeting. After repeatedly declining Michael's requests that he make a suggestion for how to energize the office, Stanley finally raises his voice and demands "Did I stutter?!" (Stanley in "Did I Stutter"). Michael then pretends to fire Stanley in an effort to reassert his authority and rank, however the latter further humiliates him, shouting: "You are out of your damn little pea-sized mind! What is wrong with you?! Do you have any sense at all?!...You are a professional idiot!" (Stanley in "Did I Stutter"). Stanley's first remark subverts the normal function of meetings, which is to reaffirm a superior's power and standing within the workplace, and his subsequent diatribe completely inverts the social structure by calling into question Michael's position as boss. Moreover, at the end of this particular episode it is Stanley who allows Michael to reinstate his authority, thereby defying the corporate hierarchy wherein the manager, as the higher-ranking employee, is in complete control of the organizational workspace.

Overall, the struggles for power and the conflicts over status or rank which arise in the American version of *The Office* are indicative of current anxieties regarding the contemporary corporate workplace. These include occupational burdens and income insecurities; fears of downward job mobility and unemployment (particularly downsizing or redundancies); as well as

concerns about the increase in interpersonal competition and the concomitant possibility of replacement by co-workers or subordinates. Such anxieties are unambiguously expressed in season 3 when Dwight is forced to leave his job and announces to the office before departing: "remember, while today it is me, we all shall fall" (Dwight in "Traveling Salesman").

Likewise, when Michael is passed over for promotion in that same season, he tells the office staff that he is "going nowhere" (Michael in "The Job"). This statement has two meanings, the first of which is that he is remaining at his post, but the second is in reference to the lack of upward promotion that corporate employees now face: he is stuck in a dead end job with no prospects and relatively little power or status. Furthermore, although quitting (as Michael does in season 5) is seen as a sign of resistance by subordinates, and potentially a way of changing their position and authority, in the current economic climate it is a dangerous gamble, since finding another job is increasingly unlikely. As Oscar says in season 5 episode 21 ("Two Weeks"): "I love a good quitting story. It makes me feel like I have control over my own life. Gives me hope. Maybe I'll have one of my own someday. [*chuckles*] But I dream" (Oscar in "Two Weeks").

Conclusion

❖ Locally Specific, Transnationally Shared, or Both? Concerns about Workplace Power & Position in *The Office*

As can be seen from the preceding episode analyses, the diverse confrontations over power and position depicted in these two versions of *The Office* have many elements in common, reflecting shared anxieties relating to the contemporary organizational workspace. These anxieties include the following: (1) fears of displacement, replacement, and obsolescence due to the presence of more educated rivals, the rise in temporary or contingent labor, and the increase in automation or technological advancement; (2) insecurities regarding precarious employment in an era of continuous restructuring, downsizing, and cutbacks; and (3) concerns about growing disparities between upper- and lower-level personnel, particularly with regard to job mobility (e.g. static rankings), income, and benefits. These various anxieties become quite apparent, for example, when Ryan begins digitizing sales, thus jeopardizing the office workers' security; when David and Chris, feeling threatened, compete with the more educated Tim and Ricky; and when the Slough and Scranton branches are menaced by impending redundancies and the possibility of complete closure on several occasions.

Further illustrating these transnational tensions and insecurities are David and Michael's respective relationships with Gareth and Dwight. For instance, in both sets of relationships, the two managers express their fears of being replaced or downsized by continuously correcting their subordinates with regard to their job titles: Gareth and Dwight are repeatedly told that they are the Assistants *to* the Regional Manager and not the Assistant Regional Managers, despite how the two men tend to act towards others as they try to exert their imagined power and rank with both co-workers and superiors alike. Doing so is an attempt to remind Gareth and Dwight that

they have lower standing and less authority within the office, and to ensure that they will not usurp their boss' managerial status and control. This illustrates Michael and David's concerns about the vulnerability of their position: in order to maintain their place in the corporate structure they feel the need to expose the inferiority—whether in terms of education, rank, or power—of their subordinates, as well as to constantly demonstrate their own hierarchical status and authority. This occurs not just with Gareth and Dwight but with other employees as well, such as when Michael and David pretend to fire their receptionists (Pam and Dawn, respectively).

In addition to such contentions with their subordinates, both shows also depict how Michael and David engage in struggles over power and standing with their own superiors, indicating that similar job insecurities and forms of competition exist among more powerful, higher-ranking personnel as well. These can be seen most clearly in situations where divergent role expectations arise between what Michael and David *believe* is their official position—such as that they alone control their individual branches—and the status and authority that they are *actually* endowed with by their companies. Such discrepancies engender conflict with senior executives, administrators, and supervisors, who in fact possess the type of power and rank that David and Michael think they have, since the former feel threatened by the latter's actions. Whenever David treats Neil as an equal or Michael ignores Jan's directives, for example, their behaviors undermine the two superiors' authority and status in the eyes of other employees, thus Neil and Jan must 'do power' by giving David and Michael warnings or by publicly chastising them in order to maintain face and reassert their own higher positions.

Conflict likewise ensues if Michael and David feel that *they* have been threatened or undermined by their superiors, such as when the chain of command or pecking order is disrupted. This occurs in the U.K. *Office* when an employee complains directly to Neil about not

having been paid[82], and in the U.S. *Office* when Darryl brings an idea straight to Gabe, going over Michael's head[83]. Under these circumstances, David and Michael assume that their roles have been slighted or made to seem redundant, and consequently, that their positions must be in danger. Accordingly, they confront their superiors in order to prove that they are essential personnel, as well as to reestablish their control and hierarchical rank. Such attempts to retain face—not only by Michael and David but also by Jan and Neil—thus reflect shared fears in the U.K. and the U.S. regarding the tenuous nature of employment in the contemporary office workspace, where threats to one's power or standing increase the precariousness of one's position within the corporate hierarchy, as well as the likelihood of demotion or termination.

As depicted in the two shows, these conflicts and anxieties do not take place solely between superiors and subordinates: they also arise among peers or co-workers within both the lower- and upper-tiers of the organizations (Wernham Hogg and Dunder Mifflin). For instance, Michael competes with Deangelo—a colleague of equivalent power and status—over authority and esteem in the corporate workplace, in other words, over "the responsibility required of an office manager who must separate himself from the employees and...the part of 'Mr. Popular'" (Boseovski & Marcovitch 2011:147). This is because having officially-recognized power as well as a personality that "invites approval and personal liking, stimulating imitation and loyalty" (Fox & Fox 2004:54), results in greater overall job security.

For lower-level personnel, such tensions between co-workers come about because these employees are part of a shrinking workforce struggling within an increasingly casualized or flexible labor market: they must therefore compete with one another in an effort to secure their positions. They do so through the exertion of informal power—like the manipulation of

[82] In season 2 episode 4: "Motivation".

[83] In season 7 episode 6: "Costume Contest".

knowledge or data—as illustrated by how Tim and Jim supply Gareth and Dwight (respectively) with misinformation, or how Pam tricks her co-workers into believing that she is the Office Administrator. Such informal power also includes the deployment of symbolic, cultural, and social capital, exemplified by Gareth using his title as Assistant to the Regional Manager to raise himself above the rest of the staff; by Andy employing his family background and education to distinguish himself from his peers; and by both Gareth and Dwight appealing to their 'allies' David and Michael in an effort to punish, fire, or otherwise gain control and a higher status or rank over Tim and Jim. Struggles for power and standing thus emerge when characters at any level of the corporate hierarchy become concerned that their authority and position have been—or may potentially be—undermined, and that their job security will be destabilized as a result.

However, the two shows *do* exhibit differences with regard to how these workplace contentions, as well as their underlying anxieties, are expressed. These dissimilarities are the result of the programs' specific sociocultural contexts, particularly the two nations' divergent perceptions of *class-related* status and rank. For instance, although education functions as an indicator of societal divisions and a source of conflict in both the U.S. and U.K. versions of *The Office*, the American adaptation emphasizes differences between individuals based on the *type* of degree they possess, such as a master's degree as opposed to a bachelor's degree, and on the *specific* college they attended, such as an Ivy-league school as compared to one that is public or state-run. In contrast, the original British series portrays university attendance in general and the possession of a university degree in particular—irrespective of the type—as indicating that one has a more elevated social standing.

In the U.S. version, for example, high-level executives like Ryan possess MBAs, a form of institutionalized (often class-based) cultural capital that simultaneously establishes and

justifies their superior rank and income. Similarly, lower-level office workers may try to distinguish themselves from their peers and convey greater status by referencing their prestigious former colleges in everyday conversations, such as how Andy frequently mentions his alma mater, Cornell, whether or not it is relevant to the matter at hand. Conversely, in the U.K. program the simple fact that Ricky has a university degree leads other characters to presume that he is of higher standing. This is because they think that Ricky must have had the financial resources or social connections to obtain such an education, and because they believe that this academic experience endowed him with greater knowledge as compared to those who did not attend university, translating into more power and status in the information-driven workplace.

Furthermore, although struggles concerning hierarchical position which draw on larger class tensions are significant in both programs—as seen in how Dwight and Tim disparage the warehouse personnel—they are more visible in the U.K. version where elements like accent, stereotypical representations, and language use explicitly highlight class disparities. The British warehouse workers, for example, are portrayed throughout the series as much cruder than their white-collar counterparts, using coarse or vulgar language and engaging in more sexist discourse. They are also distinguished by their specific linguistic inflections and terminological choices, which are associated with a lack of education and a less privileged upbringing as compared to the accents and lexicons of the show's higher-ranking executives. Moreover, both the warehouse employees and the lower-level office staff are less meticulous in their pronunciation and use of grammar, in contrast to their upper-level superiors. These types of linguistic distinctions are not present in the American version of *The Office*, and the concept of class divisions is less overt as well. Such differences are likely due to the dominant ideology of a 'universal middle class' in the U.S. as opposed to the long, acknowledged history of the class system in Britain.

Nevertheless, the two programs are strikingly similar with regard to the types of organizational struggles over position and authority that they present (e.g. superior-subordinate, between peers), as well as the anxieties regarding employment that underlie them, particularly insecurities about being replaced or downsized. This suggests that in the case of these two versions of *The Office*, the homogenizing aspect of globalization is acting more strongly than its differentiating influence, since the shows' minor variations in how workplace conflicts and tensions are portrayed are the outcome of only slight differences in their specific 'local' contexts. As a result, the programs' depictions of struggles over power, status, and rank are very much alike, reflecting transnationally-shared concerns in the U.S. and the U.K. regarding the ability to attain, preserve, and protect one's place in the corporate hierarchy.

❖ Globalization as Both Homogenizing & Differentiating

That the homogenizing factor is so strong in this study is likely due to the cultural[84] and historical proximity of the two shows' sociocultural contexts, where the former denotes cultural and linguistic similarities—including shared values, ideologies, and behavioral norms, as well as a common language—and the latter refers to a sense of mutual historical experience (Straubhaar 2007). As illustrated by this thesis' analyses of office work, class, and power in the U.K. and in the U.S., the two nations' not only share the English language, similar cultural milieus, and a history of entanglements with one another, their organizational environments and work-related conflicts have also developed in comparable ways. This is particularly apparent with regard to their shared experiences of corporate restructuring and downsizing, increased technological

[84] 'Cultural shareability' (Singhal & Udornpim 1997) is a concept related to cultural proximity. It refers to values, themes, archetypes, and/or images that are common across different cultures and which allow transnational television programs, like *The Office*, to traverse cultural boundaries more easily.

surveillance, the obsolescence of white-collar work, and rising disparities in authority and standing within the corporate workplace.

As Joseph Straubhaar (2007) has asserted, there are other conditions under which the homogenizing tendency of global media (and hence globalization) is stronger, such as when there exists generic or thematic proximity: the first implies that a genre is easily translatable across cultural divides and can thus be shared without undergoing considerable revisions to make it culturally-acceptable and pleasing; the second indicates that certain issues and themes (e.g. hard work, love, family) are relevant and appealing among diverse cultures. While the mockumentary semi-genre into which *The Office* is classified may not be as recognizable as other genres (such as melodrama), thematically the show is cross-culturally relatable because it addresses many international concerns—such as job insecurity and wealth inequalities—that have only intensified following the recent global financial crisis.

One would therefore expect heterogenization, or the differentiating tendency of globalization, to be the stronger force for *Office* adaptations in contexts where there are greater cultural dissimilarities—such as ones related to organizational ranking, workplace behavior, and a society's particular class structure—and fewer shared historical experiences, including economic developments, technological advancements, corporate practices, and unstable office employment (Straubhaar 2007). Moreover, despite growing interconnections between nations resulting from the various processes of globalization (especially global media flows), many societies "increasingly put some influence back out to those that have penetrated them, in a form of asymmetric cultural interpenetration" (Straubhaar 2007:16). Consequently, where such interactions occur heterogenization will likely prevail to a greater extent than homogenization.

Globalization is thus neither exclusively homogenizing nor completely differentiating: to be more precise, it is a form of hybridization or 'global-local' mixing wherein both processes occur simultaneously, and depending on the varying conditions and contexts, one of these two tendencies may be more influential than the other. It is for this reason that although the workplace struggles for power and position in the U.S. and U.K. versions of *The Office* were remarkably alike, the programs' specific 'local' or 'national' depictions of these conflicts remained distinct: accordingly, in other sociocultural contexts heterogenization might be the stronger process or homogenization could be more extensive, leading to increasingly divergent or almost identical adaptations of *The Office*. This is because transnational media's "integrative effects do not simply eliminate cultural difference and diversity but rather provide the context for the production of new cultural forms marked by local specificity" (Straubhaar 2007:139).

As a whole, this thesis therefore supplements and extends current research supporting the idea that globalization, such as in the form of global media flows, is both a homogenizing and differentiating process. It does so in two primary ways: first, by identifying and analyzing features related to power disputes and tensions over hierarchical standing that are shared by the British and American versions of *The Office*, this study illustrates how the programs reflect mutual anxieties regarding corporate restructuring, income and knowledge disparities, interpersonal competition, and the tenuous nature of employment in contemporary offices. Second, by revealing that such concerns may be expressed in locally- or nationally-distinct ways, it demonstrates how transnational televisual texts function as sites of interaction between local, national, (sub)regional, and global forces (Waisbord & Jalfin 2009). As Terhi Rantanen (2005) contends, "the consequence of globalization is neither homogenization nor heterogenization, but both of these, either simultaneously or sequentially" (Rantanen 2005:116). This thesis

complements Rantanen's assertion by demonstrating that while both tendencies occur, one will generally prevail over the other in accordance with the individual situation.

Furthermore, this study shows that by depicting the everyday conduct, language use, and relationships of upper- and lower-level personnel in the corporate workspace, the two *Office*s draw attention to current beliefs (both in the U.S. and in the U.K.) about authority, status, and rank in the office. In particular, these series emphasize superiors' and subordinates' anxieties regarding their positions within the organizational structure, as well as their reinforcement or contestation of existing disparities in power and standing. Such concerns and behaviors are influenced by contemporary phenomena like downsizing, outsourcing, and the casualization of labor, illustrating how transnational television programs reflect ongoing societal conditions. Consequently, the different versions of *The Office* examined in this thesis express 'local' (i.e. 'national' or 'regional') reactions to 'global' changes, and these adaptations can thus be seen as international "[responses] to the genuine frustrations and anxieties of the workplace at the turn of the century" (Walters 2005:132), particularly those concerning organizational hierarchies in the office environment.

❖ Implications & Future Research

Though transnational versions of *The Office* may be adapted in contextually-specific ways, the results of this study suggest that current issues like corporate downsizing, the obsolescence of white-collar workers, and a general lack of job security in the organizational workplace are internationally-relatable topics, fueling mutual concerns about contemporary office employment. Nevertheless, additional comparative analyses of the texts of other *Office* adaptations should be conducted in order to confirm that these anxieties consistently re-emerge

in transnational remakes of the series, as well as to determine the ways in which the programs' distinct sociocultural contexts and conditions strengthen the influence of homogenization or that of heterogenization, and to what extent. Such research has potential implications not only for media anthropology, television studies, and ongoing work on globalization, but also for international relations, as the findings could enhance understandings of 'locally'-specific and cross-culturally or transnationally-shared elements (in addition to anxieties about the corporate workspace) that the diverse iterations of this series reveal.

Lastly, although this particular study focused solely on text-based analyses, prospective research will need to be conducted in a tripartite manner in order to be as comprehensive and accurate as possible, including both production studies and audience/reception analyses as well as examinations of the disseminated media content. This will permit a better understanding of the socio-historical and cultural contexts wherein such transnational adaptations originate and are later remade; of the specific local, regional, and/or national interpretations of these adaptations; and of the reciprocal effects that such cross-cultural media flows and their varying contexts have on one another, where neither one can be completely homogenized nor remain entirely discrete.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Filmography

This Is Spinal Tap. 1984. Director Rob Reiner. Producer Karen Murphy. (U.S.)

Appendix B: Television Programs Cited

Absolute Power. 2003-2005. BBC Two. Creator Mark Tavener. (U.K.)

Being Human. 2011-present. Syfy. Developers Jeremy Carver, Anna Fricke, Toby Whithouse (creator/writer of the original U.K. series). (Canadian/U.S. adaptation)

Big Brother. 1999-2006[85]. Veronica (1999-2000), Yorin (2001-2002), Talpa (2005-2006). Creator John de Mol. (Dutch original)

Dallas. 1978-1991. CBS. Creator David Jacobs. (U.S. original)

Dustbinmen. 1969-1970. ITV. Writers John Antrobus, Kenneth Cope, Jack Rosenthal, Dave Freeman, Adele Rose. (U.K.)

Free Agents. 2011. NBC. Developers/Producers Chris Niel (creator of the original U.K. series), John Enbom, Kenton Allen, Karey Burke, Todd Holland. (U.S. adaptation)

Hi-de-Hi! 1980-1988. BBC One. Creators Jimmy Perry, David Croft. (U.K.)

On the Buses. 1969-1973. ITV. Creators Ronald Chesney, Ronald Wolfe. (U.K.)

Prime Suspect. 2011-2012. NBC. Developers Alexandra Cunningham, Lynda La Plante (creator of the original U.K. series). (U.S. adaptation)

Reno 911!. 2003-2009. Comedy Central. Creators Robert Ben Garant, Kerri Kenney, Thomas Lennon. (U.S.)

Shameless. 2004-present. Channel 4. Creator Paul Abbott. (U.K. original)

Shameless. 2011-present. Showtime. Developers John Wells, Paul Abbott (creator of the U.K. original). (U.S. adaptation)

Stella Street. 1997-2001. BBC Two. Creators John Sessions, Phil Cornwell, Peter Richardson. (U.K.)

[85] Including special editions/spinoffs (e.g. 'Big Brother VIPs', 'Secret Story') that adhere to the *Big Brother* brand and format, one could say that the show has persisted in the Netherlands up to the present.

That Was the Week That Was. 1964-1965. NBC. Producers Marshall Jamison, Donald Baverstock, Ned Sherrin (creator of the original U.K. series). (U.S. adaptation)

The Brittas Empire. 1991-1997. BBC One. Creators Andrew Norriss, Richard Fegen. (U.K.)

The Dick Van Dyke Show. 1961-1966. CBS. Creator Carl Reiner. (U.S.)

The Lucy Show. 1962-1968. CBS. Creators Bob Carroll Jr., Madelyn Davis, Bob Schiller, Bob Weiskopf, Lucille Ball. (U.S.)

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant. (U.K. original)

The Office. 2005-present. NBC. Developers Greg Daniels, Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant (the last two are the creators of the U.K. original). (U.S. adaptation)

The Rag Trade. 1961-1963 and 1977-1978 (a re-launch). BBC (1961-1963), LWT (1977-1978). Creators/Writers Ronald Chesney, Ronald Wolfe. (U.K.)

Who Wants to be a Millionaire? 1998-present. ITV. Creators David Briggs, Steven Knight, Mike Whitehill. (U.K. original)

Yo soy Betty, la fea. 1999-2001. RCN TV/RCTV. Writers Fernando Gaitán, Liliana Hernández, Elsa Cortés. (Colombia)

Appendix C: Specific U.K. *Office* Episodes Analyzed

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 1. 07/09/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 2. 07/16/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 3. 07/23/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 4. 07/30/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 5. 08/13/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 1, Episode 6. 08/20/01. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 2, Episode 1. 09/30/02. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 2, Episode 2. 10/07/02. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 2, Episode 3. 10/14/02. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 2, Episode 4. 10/21/02. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Season 2, Episode 5. 10/28/02. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Christmas Special – Part 1. 12/26/03. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

The Office. 2001-2003. BBC Two. Christmas Special – Part 2. 12/27/03. Creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant.

Appendix D: Specific U.S. *Office* Episodes Analyzed

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 1, Episode 1. 03/24/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 1, Episode 2. 03/29/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 2. 09/27/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 3. 10/04/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 4. 10/11/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 5. 10/18/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 7. 11/08/05. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 12. 01/12/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 2, Episode 15. 02/02/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 1. 09/21/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 3. 10/05/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 6. 11/02/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 7. 11/09/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 8. 11/16/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 9. 11/30/06. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 13. 01/11/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 20. 04/12/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episode 22. 05/03/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 3, Episodes 24-25. 05/17/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 4, Episodes 3-4. 10/04/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 4, Episodes 5-6. 10/11/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 4, Episodes 7-8. 10/18/07. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 4, Episode 16. 05/01/08. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 4, Episodes 18-19. 05/15/08. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 5, Episode 3. 10/09/08. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 5, Episode 5. 10/23/08. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 5, Episode 20. 03/19/09. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 5, Episode 21. 03/26/09. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 5, Episode 25. 04/23/09. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 6, Episode 2. 09/24/09. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 6, Episode 3. 10/01/09. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 6, Episode 20. 03/18/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 6, Episode 24. 05/06/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 6, Episode 26. 05/20/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 2. 09/30/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 6. 10/28/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 8. 11/11/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 10. 12/02/10. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 15. 02/03/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 16. 02/10/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 18. 02/24/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 20. 04/14/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 23. 05/05/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episode 24. 05/12/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

The Office. 2005-. NBC. Season 7, Episodes 25-26. 05/19/11. Developer Greg Daniels.

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