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## Introduction

### The Office

*The Office* was originally made in the UK, and is a BBC television series. It was first broadcast on July 9 2001, on BBC Two in the UK. The series is produced by A. Atalia, and created, written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, both also appearing as characters in the show, although Gervais has a far more prominent role, as protagonist and regional manager David Brent. The series records the lives of office employees in a paper company in Slough, named Wernham Hogg Paper Company. It won a Golden Globe Award in 2003 for “Best Television Series: Musical Or Comedy”, as the first British comedy ever to win this award. Ricky Gervais also won a Golden Globe for “Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series: Musical Or Comedy” for his role as David Brent. Needless to say, this show has been tremendously popular, and has been adapted and remade in different versions and languages around the world.

*The Office US* is one adaptation of this show that has proven to become very popular as well. It was adapted for American audiences by Greg Daniels. The original executive producers were, along with Daniels, Gervais and Merchant. The two creators and directors of the original series, then, also worked on the US adaptation. Writers and directors of this adaptation include B. Forrester, K. Whittingham, P. Lieberstein, B. J. Novak, K. Kwapis, G. Stupnitsky, and L. Eisenberg. *The Office US* aired for the first time on NBC, March 24 2005. As in the original series, the adaptation revolves around the day-to-day lives of the employees in an American paper company, Dunder Mifflin Paper Company, located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. During its course on television, it has received 42 Primetime Emmy Awards nominations, and won five times. Steve Carell, playing protagonist and regional manager Michael Scott, won, as Ricky Gervais, a Golden Globe Award for “Best Actor in a Television Comedy or Musical” in 2006.

In other words, both shows have received a number of awards and are both critically acclaimed. The film website [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) has rated the UK version to 8.7/10 from 52 084 users, and the US version 8.8/10 from 150 565 users ([imdb.com](http://imdb.com)).

## History of the genre of the mockumentary

*The Office* is a series belonging to a rather novel genre: the mockumentary. A mockumentary is, as it might give away in its name, a mocking documentary. The characters and the plot are all fictional, but they interact with the camera, thereby not following the conventional rules when making a series or a film. Other examples of mockumentaries are *Parks and Recreation* (2009-present), *Modern Family* (2009-present) and *Trailer Park Boys* (2001-2015).

Cynthia J. Miller is the editor of the book *Too Bold for the Box Office: The Mockumentary from Big Screen to Small* (2012), and discusses, among a variety of things, the mockumentary. She says that the mockumentary ranges “from parody to hoax to active critique of documentary aesthetics, each with multiple nuances”, and that the genre of the mockumentary “holds that discomfort as central to its mission – for it is through that discomfort that we, as both audience and subject, reflect on our norms, values, ideologies, and ways of being” (Miller, 2012: 13). Miller also says that the genre of the mockumentary and its many variations and forms “holds a mirror to our flaws, pokes fun at our assumptions, and refuse to let us look away from our most cherished notions about reality and the taken-for-granted about everyday life, laying bare the audacities, frailties, and well-guarded fantasies that bring them into being” (ibid. 12). This applies to the two series in that both portray the lives of seemingly ordinary people in ordinary jobs, yet parody and mock the stereotypical assumptions one might have of people working in an office. The discomfort the viewer undergoes while seeing *The Office* might also make him or her reflect on his/her “norms, values, ideologies, and ways of being” (ibid. 13).

## The core functions

In his book *Fra bok til film – Om adaptasjoner av litterære tekster* (2013), Arne Engelstad mainly discusses adaptations from books to film. Despite it being a Norwegian author and book, it is found to be relevant due to Engelstad’s arguments regarding core functions, what must be kept in an adaptation. The core functions are more important than others in order to make up the course of events. It is Roland Barthes (1966, 1977: 79ff) that talks about splitting a text into “functions”, a term about modules that together make up the course of events (Engelstad, 2013). The one core-point leads to the next in the chain of cause and effect, and if some of these points are left out or changed, the story’s logic will be destroyed. Engelstad (2013)

gives an example from Henrik Ibsen's *Vildanden* (1885). If Hedvig had not shot herself in the attic, but instead shot the wild duck, the story would have been completely different.

If the core functions, what must be kept in order to classify something as an adaptation, are the skeleton of the story, then the meat on the skeleton can be identified as satellites (a term Engelstad (2013) borrows from Seymour Chatman (1978: 53)), which make up for other chains of events. These satellite functions can be removed or altered without affecting the fundamental structure. This is important in order for an adaptation to be considered an independent work, and not simply an exact copy from the original. The question to be asked, then, is; has *The Office US* considered these core functions, and altered the satellites where this is found appropriate? In other words, how has the adapted version maintained fidelity to the original series, and how has it made changes?

### Chapter outline

This thesis will contain a close view and analysis of selected episodes in the British and American versions of *The Office* in light of theories of cultural context and masculinity. Some of the examples have been thoroughly elaborated, which has been necessary in order to give the reader the whole context of the given examples. Season one to four in the American series is where I found scenes equivalent to the British series. In my opinion, these American seasons are those that can be considered to be adaptation. Given the American version's nine seasons and 201 episodes, as opposed to the British series' 14 episodes, the adaptation stops being an adaptation at one time and continues to be a series of its own. I could have analysed every episode and looked at how various characters negotiate romance and love in season five, and so forth, but landed on the choice to explore cultural context and masculinity in aforementioned seasons. The episodes from season one to four in the American series are not identical with the episodes from the British series, except the first episode of both series, but there are a lot of equivalent scenes to be found in them, justifying considering them as adaptations.

The first chapter contains theories of cultural context, with examples and an analysis of how the cultural context is commented on and expressed in the two series. I have chosen the topic of cultural context because it is interesting to investigate how *The Office UK* and *US* have gone about arranging the content in order for them to

appeal to their respective audiences. The theory suggests that a British audience perhaps expect a more rude and evil type of humour than an American audience, and my discussion revolves around the question of whether this is true with *The Office*. It should be noted in this context that it proved difficult to find proper academic sources regarding British and American humour, specific cultural references and popular culture, despite extensive research. I have therefore included newspaper articles as sources. Although they are not defined as scholarly articles, they nevertheless tell us something about how a given culture relates to such content.

The second chapter contains relevant theory on the topic of masculinity, and more specifically hegemonic masculinity. My focus is on the two male protagonists, Michael Scott and David Brent, to see if they possess certain traits the theory suggests that hegemonic masculinity entails. The chapter investigates how Michael and David act as men, how they want to be seen as men, and how they are perceived as men by focusing on how they negotiate masculinity, and how their employees perceive their masculinity.

Lastly, I will provide a thesis conclusion, summarizing and commenting each chapter.

## Cultural context

The audience in every country demand various details and elements with regards to TV series made in their respective countries. The Norwegian TV series *Lilyhammer* (2012), for instance, was a success in Norway. It played on various Norwegian stereotypes, depicted Norwegian culture, and made numerous comments on the cultural context. These factors might have been part of why the show became as popular as it did with the Norwegian viewers. The show has additionally been bought by the online streaming service *Netflix*, meaning that people from various countries are able to view it. This might indicate that *Lilyhammer* has fared well abroad, due to it playing on various cultural contexts. The TV show *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present), although a comedy sketch-show, is also very popular, which might be due to the cultural comments it delivers. The humour it presents may be claimed to be well suited for an American audience, although sometimes perhaps difficult for a foreign person to understand. Comments on the cultural context, then, might be claimed to be of importance when making a TV series/show, in order to appeal to a greater audience. It captivates the audience in a way that makes them feel a part of the setting; they are familiar with jokes told, people presented and action taken by the characters, and so forth. If a character in a film goes out in his driveway to shovel snow and is irritated and frustrated due to the cold and wet weather, an inhabitant from the African continent would perhaps not be able to identify with this certain situation. Cultural context and series' and films' ability to incorporate known surroundings or stereotypes are important factors in the making of these films and series. It has already been established that both series are immensely popular, both domestically and internationally. The countries are also well known in large parts of the world, perhaps making cultural references from these countries easier to grasp for an audience outside of either England or the United States.

Firstly, however, it is necessary to define precisely what the term culture means, and how one might be able to comment on a culture's context.

Culture, simply put, is according to J. Useem, R. Useem and J. Donoghue (1963), "[t]he learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings" (ibid. 169), which might be interpreted as meaning that one group of people in one culture share a certain set of knowledge from this culture. In terms of entertainment, then, as TV series are, it may be more captivating and enjoyable if it plays on known

references from a specific culture, such as *Lilyhammer* and *Saturday Night Live*. “Popular culture” is perhaps an applicable term here, signifying culture based on ordinary people’s taste, not just an educated elite (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/popular-culture>). Culture belongs to everyone, and popular culture often contains elements well known to the majority of residents in a society. The term “mainstream” might also be applicable, due to culture and popular culture playing on familiarity for many people, regardless of social class. A person’s behaviour may serve as a reference to people from one culture, but is perhaps not as understandable to people from other cultures. To comment on a culture’s context, then, means to comment on something typical of the given culture. As with aforementioned TV-shows like *Saturday Night Live* and *Lilyhammer*, which both play on the notion of well-known, mainstream ideas from American and Norwegian culture, the term might be claimed to be appropriate.

Based on these definitions, one might draw the conclusion that popular culture is well known to the majority of inhabitants in a specific culture, and commenting on a culture’s context is to point at or refer to what is typical for that given culture. This is not to say that one will not enjoy a TV show, a film or a book containing references from another culture than the one you are from. It might, however, be more enjoyable if you are able to grasp the references presented, in order to fully appreciate what you read, hear or see.

High-context and low-context cultures are terms mentioned by Edward T. Hall (1976). These terms are found to be applicable for this thesis, but before elaborating on them, a definition of the word “context” will be provided. It derives from the Latin word *contextus*, which means to weave something together, in order for it to convey meaning. The context often surrounds a text, and thereby constitutes a situation of communication. Texts, and communications, often need to be in an interrelationship, and the context is vital in order for this to be established, and in order for a sense of meaning to be conveyed (ndla.no/nb/node/63625). A certain set of cultural background knowledge might be vital here, in order for a recipient to be able to understand the message given. It might be claimed that texts sometimes demand the reader possessing certain cultural background knowledge in order for the text to be correctly interpreted and understood. The same, then, might apply to films and TV series; hence it might apply to *The Office*. If certain utterances are made by characters in these series, and the viewer does not possess the cultural knowledge necessary to

fully interpret or understand these utterances, it might not be entertaining for the viewer at all.

With regards to high- and low-context cultures, anthropologist Edward T. Hall was the first to mention these terms when studying cultures, in his book *Beyond Culture* (1976). He found that the terms were contrasts when measured with each other, and could be applied when talking about various countries' cultural understanding. Hall claimed that the terms high-context culture and low-context culture refers to the tendencies a culture has in the use of conveying messages with a high context over messages with a low context, in the daily communication (1976). He argues that in a culture where high-context messages are conveyed, the culture is used to explain things, leaving many things left unsaid. Here, the choice of words becomes important. Having communication styles like this translates into a culture that will be beneficial to so-called in-groups; a social group where the members feel they belong psychologically, they identify themselves with the people in this group. In this high-context culture, few words are needed in order to communicate a rather complex message effectively, however only to other members of your in-group. People outside this group, who do not share your cultural background, might then have trouble grasping the content when communicating this way. In a low-context culture, then, the person communicating the message must be much more explicit, meaning the single word said becomes less valuable than in the contrasting high-context culture. As a Mihaela Zografu states, referring to the terms, "(...) the terms are still influential and widely used today, making them a core concept to explain differences in communication across cultures" (<http://www.managementmarketing.ro/pdf/articole/171.pdf>: 134). The terms might then be used when analysing the cultural references apparent in *The Office*, in order to try and determine if the references are something people from outside the in-groups might understand.

Having established the main differences between what constitutes a high- and low-context culture, it may now be beneficial to find out if the US and England are in fact classified as a high-context culture or the contrasting low-context culture. Copeland and L. Griggs (1986) argue that both England and the US were so-called low-context cultures, from their spectrum of levels of context in various cultures (<http://www.managementmarketing.ro/pdf/articole/171.pdf>: 136). What this means is that these countries are by scholars defined as cultures where the communication

between the members of the in-groups is more explicit, and the single words conveyed when communicating is less valuable than in the contrasting high-context cultures. They might tend to be more elaborate when talking with each other, perhaps making it more comprehensible for people who do not share their exact cultural background experience and knowledge.

Before analysing the various incidents from both series that have been investigated, it might be of interest to include some of Bill Nichols' thoughts on the subject, from his book *Engaging Cinema – An introduction to film studies* (2010). Nichols first talks about a director's/writer's particular style in the making of film. This style signals the director's/writer's "idiosyncratic way of seeing things" (Nichols 2010: 146). It is through this style the viewer senses the director's/writer's attitudes towards the story as a whole, the characters, and the world in which they live.

Another feature Nichols (2010) discusses is the audience; "Another important social context involves the audience. Different audiences, in different places, with different backgrounds and experience, and at different points in time, do not understand the same film the same way" (ibid. 167). Nichols (2010) continues, "The very different ways in which different audiences understood and interpreted films can be as important a part of the film's effect as its formal structure or its generic borrowings" (ibid.168). Again, one might notice that the audience plays an important role in relation to films and series. People have varying degrees of cultural background knowledge, and quite often also totally different background knowledge. This might then be essential for them being able to understand the various cultural references offered and displayed in the series. The question is if the references are too culturally specific, pin-pointed to one specific in-group, or if the shows have incorporated references understandable for a more widespread audience.

Having Nichols (2010) in mind, an article by Ricky Gervais in *Time*, regarding humour in Britain, entitled *The Difference Between American and British Humour*, might be significant in this context. Commenting on humour, Gervais says he does not like to generalise, but that in his view, Americans tend to be more "down the line", as he calls it, meaning they applaud ambition and reward success openly. He then writes that Britons, on the other hand, are "more comfortable with life's losers". Gervais also claims that irony is something Britons are more prone to use than Americans. He says that Brits use irony and sarcasm to tease their friends, and also as shields and weapons. In proverbial terms, they "take the piss out of people", both the

ones they like and the ones they dislike. But the important thing here is that they use it on themselves as well, which gives them the license to use such an amount of irony and sarcasm. The most important notion Gervais brings up is where he describes the difference between the American and British version of *The Office*, which reflected the above-mentioned in terms of humour, and how the Brit's humour by many are described as crude and evil, with sustained use of irony and sarcasm:

We had to make Michael Scott a slightly nicer guy, with a rosier outlook to life. He could still be childish, and insecure, and even a bore, but he couldn't be too mean. The irony is of course that I think David Brent's dark descension and eventual redemption made him all the more compelling. But I think that's a lot more palatable in Britain for the reasons already stated. Brits almost expect doom and gloom so to start off that way but then have a happy ending is an unexpected joy. Network America has to give people a reason to like you not just a reason to watch you. In Britain we stop watching things like *Big Brother* when the villain is evicted. We don't want to watch a bunch of idiots having a good time. We want them to be as miserable as us. America rewards up front, on-your-sleeve niceness. A perceived wicked streak is somewhat frowned upon (Ricky Gervais, 2011, <http://ideas.time.com/2011/11/09/the-difference-between-american-and-british-humour/>).

Dr Rod Martin led a research project on humour, and what makes British humour so unique (Vernon, Martin, Schermer, Cherkas, and Spector, 2008), which is found to be relevant due to humour being a phenomenon that might describe a country's cultural context. Martin argues that it lies in British people's genes to laugh at cruel comedy at the expense of others. He is referred to in an article by Andy Bloxham (2008) for *The Telegraph*, saying that TV shows like *The Office*, among others, "proved how Britons enjoyed cruelty more than those from other countries" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1581251/British-humour-dictated-by-genetics.html>, 2008). Martin also said that the difference between David Brent and Michael Scott proved this point; "In the North American version of *The Office*, the lead character is much less insensitive and intolerant than in the original UK version" (ibid.). Bloxham (2008) adds to this by writing that inappropriate and insulting jokes are typically British. 2000 pairs of twins in the UK and 500 pairs of twins in North America were surveyed by Martin et. al. (2008), and discovered that "negative humour", humour that "ranged from gentle teasing to racist and sexist humiliation" (Bloxham, 2008) was linked genetically only to Britain. "Positive humour", humour that looked on the bright side of life, was however linked to both UK and US. Martin

et. al. (2008) found that the American twins that responded to cruel jokes had learned them, rather than it being an inherent behaviour. Martin also claimed in the article, “The British may have a greater tolerance for a wide range of expressions of humour, including what many Americans might consider aggressively sarcastic or denigrating” (Bloxham, 2008). What seems to be the main difference between the two countries in terms of humour, then, are the explicitness, inappropriateness and evilness, where Britain is the country where these issues are the most prominent. Is *The Office US* more positive than *The Office UK*, and less inappropriate and evil?

### Cultural context in the two series

Having had a look at various theory regarding context, high- and low-context cultures, humour in the UK and US, and notions regarding the general cultural background knowledge sometimes required by the viewer, it is now to see how these issues find expression in *The Office UK* (2001) and *The Office US* (2005). How is the cultural context expressed and commented on? Has the British version been made with the British audience in mind, given its cruel, inappropriate and evil tone, as opposed to a milder American version?

In *The Office UK* (2001), season II, episode I, at 00:11:50, David is about to give a speech to his new employees, to make them feel welcome (*The Office*. Dir. Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant. BBC Two. 2001). Before it is his turn, David’s boss, Neil, gives a speech to them. One of the final things Neil says, after telling the staff that David now has a bigger job to do in delegating twice as much work, is, “But there will be perks for him. I’m sure he’s looking forward to having a whole new group of *men* underneath him.” The staff laughs, due to Neil’s sexual innuendo implicitly suggesting that David is a homosexual. He then introduces David; “Anyway, here’s the man at the top of the pile... David Brent!”, continuing the sexual dig at David. David is now to give his speech; “Thanks. Wait. You know what he was saying there, about me being at the top of the pile of men, like, saying I’m gay... Right, I’m not gay. In fact, I can honestly say I’ve never come over a little queer.” While saying, “(...) I’ve never come over a little queer”, David is making a hand gesture indicating masturbation and an orgasm.

Firstly, Neil’s comments toward David come across as the type of evil and crude humour Ricky Gervais (2011) writes about in his article, which depicts the typical British humour. Neil is being rude towards David, in a taunting, yet friendly

manner, and despite this, the staff laughs at Neil's jokes. When David comment on Neil's remarks, however, the staff falls into silence, signalling that they found it inappropriate. This is also to be defined as cruel comedy, as Dr Martin (2008) claims is typical for a British audience. Even though David brings the awkward silence to himself by saying what he says, the polite thing in a real situation would be to laugh, and not go silent. This sexual explicitness, and the cruel and evil humour are all found to comment on the series' cultural context, here expressed through Neil, and more explicitly through David. Both men come across as homophobic, but David is the one with the most inappropriate remarks, due to him refusing to be thought of as a homosexual, and the hand gesture simulating masturbation and ejaculation.

David is to give his speech, which he has been looking forward to. He loves doing impressions, and is quite good at it, according to himself. He gives his speech, but it does not get the appraisal he thought it would get. The awkward silence is yet again what dominates his speech, even though he tries to play on his employees' references when imitating a man who held a speech at a work conference he and some of the staff attended. None of his jokes or puns are well received, and he becomes very frustrated.

This scene functions well with regards to the cultural context in which *The Office UK* belongs. It comments on the crude and evil humour, and sexual innuendoes. In terms of in- and out-groups, it appears that David belongs to the out-group despite him thinking he belongs to the in-group. His references and his humour are not understood or appreciated by the people he works with, which makes it apparent that they do not share the same cultural background or knowledge. To the viewer, however, who is familiar with typical British humour, it functions very well. The awkward silences and the crude and evil humour might be factors the viewer of an in-group will identify himself/herself with. One does not even have to be part of this particular in-group in order to understand what is conveyed in this example. Due to Britain being part of what has been termed a low-context culture (<http://www.managementmarketing.ro/pdf/articole/171.pdf>), the messages conveyed are more comprehensible for people outside the particular in-groups, meaning here the various audiences outside of Britain. The playing with in-groups and out-groups in the series might also be a crucial point here, in the sense that much of the humour lies in David not recognising that he is "outside". By not laughing, he lunges at those who make fun of him for directing attention towards it.

A similar situation as the above-mentioned occurs in the American *The Office*, season III, episode VIII, at 00:12:23, where Dunder-Mifflin Stamford is to merge with the Scranton branch, with Michael as manager (*The Office*. Dir. Greg Daniels, Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant, et.al. NBC Universal Television Distribution. 2005). Michael wants to make a good impression, and after having greeted his new employees, given them gift bags and a nice lunch, he shows them an orientation video he and Dwight have made. This video is the equivalent to David's speech to his new employees. The video has been named "Lazy Scranton", and is a reference to the comedy sketch show *Saturday Night Live* and their song *Lazy Sunday*, which might be appealing to Americans well aware of this show. In terms of this example commenting on the cultural context, it does so by the employees' reaction to it. They find it neither entertaining nor informative, but do not show any signs of disliking it. They simply sit and watch.

Had David Brent made a video of the same sort, the reaction would most likely have been quite different, given how his employees reacted to his speech. The employees in the American version seem to be more polite than the British, who openly show how strongly they feel about Brent's speech. Michael's employees come across as more polite and not as straightforward in their actions, while the British have no issues showing their emotions. However, in *The Office* III/VIII 00:19:37, Michael introduces another way of welcoming the new staff. He places them on chairs on a table, to show them that Michael and his existing staff are not above them. Four of the five new employees are on the table, and Michael wants the remaining employee to join the table as well. The problem, however, is that this employee, Tony, is quite overweight. Tony tries to explain to Michael that it is physically challenging for him to climb on to the table, but Michael insists he joins the others. Tony approaches the table, but clearly struggles. Michael wants to help him, but Tony declines his offer. Michael does not accept this, and asks Dwight to help him lift Tony onto the table. They try to hoist him up, and Tony is clearly uncomfortable and humiliated. It ends with Tony shouting and telling them to stop, and ultimately leading Tony to resign, his reason being stated to be Michael's management style. Michael does not understand, and asks Tony, "Didn't you think Lazy Scranton was funny?" to which Tony replies, "No. Was it supposed to be funny?" Tony has now struck a nerve with Michael, who tells him, "Don't bother quitting because you're fired." Tony, rather surprised, says, "Excuse me?" and Michael answers, "You are

fired! I'm sorry, but we don't have quitters on this team. Just clean out your desk!" This causes the rest of the staff to react, sending each other looks, and creating a form of awkwardness. It also shows traits of evil humour at the expense of others, which has been termed typically British, and this cruelty is used to criticise Michael. However, the degree of it is not as high as with the British examples. It is an uncomfortable scene to watch, but it is not prolonged in order to create that extra suspense and tension.

In *The Office UK II/V* 00:02:12, the Slough branch is having its annual comic relief day, where they either dress up in costumes or do other things in order to raise money and awareness of hunger in the world. David has just explained to the camera and to Gareth that the *Slough Gazette* (the local newspaper) is coming down to take a photo. He then turns to the reception, where Dawn has put on red lipstick and a sign on her desk saying, "Kisses for 1 pound!" David notices the sign and says, "Oh, bit saucy, selling kisses for the lads, or the ladies, if there are any ladies that like that sort... I don't think there are any in this office [scouts the office, as to indicate a search for potential lesbian employees]. And if there are, good luck to them, they're all welcome, we're all equal now. So, it's different for girls, anyway, it's more light-hearted. Lower risk." Gareth, standing behind the reception and David, shoots in, "Erotic" to which David points at Dawn and says, "Well, not in this case." Dawn looks directly at the camera, and her facial expression indicates strongly that she once again finds David inappropriate and rude. David continues, "I mean, it's not a sexual day. It's, you know... [Notices Finchy approaching the reception] Oh, you thought it was bad before, here's the man, Finchy." David is very happy to see him, and they shake hands in a friendly manner. Finchy greets David by calling him "Brent-Meister". Finchy sees the sign with the kisses, and says to David, "I'll kiss you for a quid. It's a good cause." He then turns to Dawn and says, "Do you mind kissing me on the nose?" Dawn says, "No, put your quid in." Finchy then puts his quid in the jar next to the sign, pulls out a fake nose, and places it in front of his penis, "Okay. Kiss me on the nose." David finds this hilarious. Finchy continues, "Hey, what do I get for a tenner?" David says "Oh, no." as to indicate he is anxious to see what Finchy is up to now. Finchy then goes, "Squeal, Piggy, squeal. Ree ree, ooh, aah." Finchy is now simulating intercourse, and referring to Dawn as the "piggy" he is having sex with. David can hardly breathe due to him laughing so hard at this, and is at one point imitating Finchy who is still simulating intercourse. David, exhausted from laughing,

says, “Oh, God”, and Finchy, finally done, says “No, I’m not that desperate.” Dawn looks at the men around her with a look on her face signalling her mood, which is not good. She looks a mixture of resigned and frustrated. David, still ecstatic, looks at the camera with his arms to the side and says, “Who says famine has to be depressing?” while once again imitating Finchy’s simulation of intercourse, laughing and giggling, and looking at Gareth to see if he too finds it funny, which he does.

This example works on several levels, and might serve as the most important piece of evidence with regards to the UK series commenting its cultural context. The humour is explicit, rude, crude, is at someone else’s expense, and is extremely inappropriate. Dawn is here taking the role as the voice of reason, since she reacts as any other person would if they had experienced it. This might then mean the audience can relate to her character, and identify themselves with her. The humour might also be characterised as evil. David says quite clearly that seeing Dawn and another woman kissing would not be erotic at all, signalling that he does not find her attractive. Dawn might not think much of David’s opinion, but it might still be hurtful for her to hear such remarks. Finchy comes across as the most evil and crude in this example; he portrays Dawn as a prostitute, who would perform oral sex on him for one pound and intercourse for ten pounds, and then he states he would not do it, because he is not that desperate. Finchy too finds Dawn unattractive, and he does not exactly hide his thoughts on it. This scene also says something about the two men’s attitudes towards lesbianism, in that they find it erotic, just not with Dawn involved.

An equivalent might be found in *The Office US* II/II 00:18:59. Todd Packer is telling a joke to some of the employees in the office, “There’s this guy, and he’s at a nymphomaniac convention. And he is psyched, ‘cause all these women are smoking hot perfect 10’s, except for this one chick who looks a lot like...” Todd now points his finger to Phyllis, as to indicate she is like the unattractive woman in his joke. He does not know her name, and Kevin says, “Phyllis?” and Todd replies, “Yeah.” Michael, having just been given a talk about proper behaviour in the work place by his boss, intervenes in the conversation, “No, no, no. That crosses the line.” Todd looks at him with disbelief, “Ex-squeeze me?” Michael, who considers Todd to be his best friend, takes a look at Todd, and says, “Not you. Kevin. Just unwarranted. Hostile work environment, Kevin.” Kevin does not understand why he is the one pointed out as the person creating this hostile environment, and says, “Packer said it.” Michael then says, “No, you said it. He pointed. A point is not a say. Look, Kevin, we

are a family here. And Phyllis is a valued member of that family. Like a grandmother.” Phyllis shoots in, “I’m the same age as you, Michael” to which Michael replies, “I don’t know about that.” Phyllis then answers, “We’re the same high school class.” Michael, “Well, I have a late birthday and usually September is a cut off point... You know what? [directed at Kevin] You just crossed the line, okay? There is a line and you went over it. And you must be punished. So go to your corner.” Kevin looks confused, and says, “You mean where my desk is?” Michael says, “Yes, your corner. Go” and Kevin goes, while saying “Okay. I have a lot of work to do, anyway.” Todd Packer then says, “Oh, my. They [referring to Jan, the boss] really got to you, didn’t they?” Michael looks across the room and says, “They didn’t get to me. I got to them. I am still the same old Michael Scott. New and improved. You know what? I love Phyllis. You know what else? I think she is gorgeous. I think she is an [holds his arms tightly around her] incredibly, incredibly attractive person. Come here, give me a kiss. Come on.” Phyllis giggles, and says, “Michael, come on, you don’t have to worry. I’m not gonna... report you to HR.” Michael then says, “I’m not worried. You know what? The only thing I am worried about is getting a boner.” He then stands up, looks at the employees present, and gives them an “educating” look, as if what he just said should be a reminder to them to be nice to each other. Phyllis seems to be a bit uncomfortable, and gives him a look. The rest of the staff just sit idly by.

This example serves as an equivalent to the British example above in terms of humour at the expense of others. Phyllis is here the one being made fun of heartlessly, just as Dawn was. However, Michael comes to her rescue, while David joins Finchy in his simulation. Even though Michael does not dare to blame Todd, who made the joke and made fun of Phyllis, he sends a message, and becomes likeable. His last remark about the “boner” was very inappropriate, but the camera switches to the next scene quickly after, keeping the awkwardness to a minimum. The producers are here sending signals as to how they view the protagonists; David is a cruel man enjoying evil humour at the expense of others, while Michael comes to the rescue. Both scenes show traits of explicitness and rudeness, but again, the degree of it is what is crucial. The American version comes across as a more gentle and kind version, as does Michael, than the British series and its protagonist.

In *The Office US* II/IV 00:13:00, while waiting for the building to be cleared by the fire department, a number of staff members play a game called “Desert Island”,

which is a game where they are to say what they would like to bring with them if stranded on an island for ever. After finishing this, Jim introduces what he calls the “main event”, which is “Who would you do?”, a game where they tell who they would like to have sex with. Kevin asks, “Present company excluded?” and Jim replies, “Uh, not necessarily”. Kevin then bursts out, “Pam” and the same goes for Oscar. The camera switches to Pam, who is present and looks a bit appalled. Jim quickly realises this might become slightly inappropriate, and says, “Um... Okay, you know what? Maybe I’ll finish explaining the rules. Let me explain it first and then...” This scene functions as yet another equivalent to the British example where Finchy and David made inappropriate sexual jokes directed at Dawn. They are similar in content, but yet again, the degree is what differs, in addition to Pam’s reaction. Both jokes bore with them sexual references, but the British joke was far more inappropriate and rude than the American joke. A key element with regards to the American scene is that everyone in the office was involved, and risked being mentioned. Pam had a slight reaction, but was rescued by Jim, who turned the focus away from her. Kevin and Oscar did not simulate the act, either, as Finchy and David did, which made the British joke far worse. Dawn was alone with the two men who joked about her, while Pam was surrounded by friends and co-workers, making the American scene not as tense or awkward as the British scene. The American example was also quite shorter than the British, which made it far less excruciating.

Immediately after abovementioned example, Jim and Pam rush to Dwight’s car, where Dwight listens to REM’s “Everybody Hurts”. He is upset because Michael seems to be favouring Ryan over him. Dwight says, “Why didn’t I go to business school?” Jim asks, “Who goes to business school?” Dwight replies, “The temp”. Jim, “He does?” Dwight, frustrated, “Yeah, it’s all him and Michael talk about anymore.” Pam says, “You know, I bet Ryan thinks to himself, “I wish I were a volunteer Sheriff on the weekend.” She and Jim smile, because they are now ridiculing Dwight for him volunteering as Sheriff in the weekends. Dwight, unaware of the joke made, says, “He doesn’t even know that I do that.” Pam, “You should tell him.” Dwight answers, ironically, “Oh, yeah, Pam. Right. That’s gonna help things, just talk it out. I hope the war goes on forever and Ryan gets drafted.” The three talk for another minute, before Dwight thanks them for listening to him. He is unaware of the fact that they did not mean to be friendly, but rather to make fun of him without him sensing it.

Even though Jim and Pam make jokes at Dwight's expense, they are not portrayed as evil. It is a kind form of joke, a simple ridicule, and Dwight is not offended by it. However, this lack of offense taken by Dwight might simply be because he is not a part of Jim and Pam's in-group, their fellowship and understanding of each other. He simply sees two co-workers trying to make him feel better. Dwight also understands he went a bit too far when saying he hoped Ryan would have to fight in the war, and apologises. Had he not shown signs of regret, it would come across as rather insensitive and evil, wishing Ryan would die in the war. This perhaps makes the audience understand how much Michael means to Dwight, and it helps humanise him. This is a good example of the jokes made on the expense of others in the American version. There is no cruel comedy or negative humour, as argued in Martin et. al's (2008) survey is quite common for Brits to laugh at, while not as common with Americans. Even though there is a sense of irony and mockery towards Dwight, it does not signal anything mean. It might not be kind behaviour by Jim and Pam, but they nevertheless make him talk about his feelings, and help him gain perspective, even though their aim is to make fun of him for their own amusement. As for the song Dwight plays, it may function to make the audience identify with a man who had his feelings hurt, by playing the melancholic song from REM, an American alternative rock band. The song helps the viewers understand that Dwight is feeling sad, and one does not need to be part of an in-group in order to capture the lyrics heard from the song.

A British equivalent could be found in *The Office UK* I/III 00:11:25. Gareth is using a conference room to prepare for the evening's quiz. Tim and Dawn enter and ask if he can help them figure something out. He declines and tells them to get out. Tim says it is about the army, and Gareth then agrees to listen because he used to be in the Territorial Army, and considers himself to be a true soldier. Tim says, "I was wondering if a military man like you... Um, you know, a soldier... Could... Could you give a man a lethal blow?" Tim stresses the word "blow". Gareth answers, "If I was forced to, I could. If it was absolutely necessary. If... If he was attacking me." The camera switches to Dawn, who smiles slightly. Tim continues, "If he was [stressing] coming really hard?" Gareth, not noticing what is going on, answers, "Yeah, if my life was in danger, yeah." Dawn then joins in, "And do you always imagine doing it face-to-face with a bloke, or could you take a man from behind?" Gareth replies, "Either way's easy" and Dawn repeats, as if to agree, "Either way."

She then goes on and says, “And so you could do a man from behind?” Gareth answers, “Yeah” and Dawn replies, “Lovely.”

This shows the difference between the two series in terms of humour at the expense of others. It seems as if the British series’ cultural context is commented by the explicitness and cruel humour. They deliberately set Gareth up, without his knowledge, and make him answer questions that make it sound as if he would have no problem engaging in sexual and oral intercourse with a man. It is a good example of sexual innuendo, and they are most definitely “taking the piss” of Gareth, as Gervais (2011) talks about. Jim and Pam’s joke comes across as rather harmless when compared to the British version’s joke, and this might reflect how the audience respond to different types of humour. As Martin et. al. (2008) argued, the British are more inclined to laugh at cruel comedy and hearty insults, than Americans. There is strong evidence towards this being what Martin called “negative humour” with the sexist humiliation Gareth is subjected to.

Another incident commenting on the cultural context in the American version is when Michael says something inappropriate, and some of the employees raise their eyebrows as a negative reaction to his utterance. However, he is not ignored, and they move on. It occurs in *The Office US* II/IV 00:14:57. Michael approaches the group of employees who are gathered and playing games, and asks, “What game are we playing here?”, and learns it is called “Who Would You Do?”. Michael raises his hands to his sides and says, “Oh! I play this at home all the time while I’m falling asleep.” This is where he receives looks from two of the female employees present. They do not, however, react extravagantly or dramatically, nor does his statement cause awkward silences. Another employee gives his answer, and when he is done, Michael says, “Who’s next? Who’s... Jim? You’re next. Who would you do?” Jim says, “Um, Kevin, hands down. Yeah. He’s really got that teddy bear thing going on. Afterwards we could just watch bowling.” This makes the group laugh, and they are clearly having a good time. Michael then sees an opportunity to make the same type of joke, “Well, I would definitely have sex with Ryan [laughs uncomfortably]. ‘Cause he is gonna own his own business.” Ryan looks uncomfortable, while Roy says, while laughing, “You’re all gay.”

This incident gives evidence of the US version making use of humour at the expense of others, and making jokes regarding sex. Inappropriate utterances are made, but they are portrayed as neither evil nor crude, only slightly inappropriate. This

comments on the cultural context by showing how the US series uses this type of humour, but in a lesser degree than its British counterpart. The awkward silences could have been stressed more, but they are not, making it easier to watch. And even though the theme of the game they are playing might be characterised as inappropriate, they are all a part of it, and it does not seem as anyone are offended. Michael also displays how he lacks certain social codes, by telling his staff he falls to sleep while thinking of whom in the office he would have sexual intercourse with, and by saying he would have sex with Ryan.

An episode that might be an equivalent to this American example occurs in *The Office UK* II/III 00:27:20. There is an office party to celebrate the birthday of one of the employees, and David, Finchy, Neil and Gareth are standing together talking and having a drink. Neil is wondering who is singing the song that is playing. Finchy says it is “The Corrs” and David says that they did not write it, but “Fleetwood Mac” did, and he prefers their version as well. Neil then says, “Well, I know who I’d rather wake up with.” David, who is not a fan of Neil, says, “Ooh. Sexist, Neil.” Finchy answers with a sexual reference, “Oh, they can play my instrument any day.” Brent then goes, “Oh, bawdy. I don’t think you’ll pull women like “The Corrs” with that sort of attitude, Chris [Finchy].” Finchy then replies, while scoffing, “Yeah, ‘cause you’d know?” Neil laughs at Finchy making fun of David. David directs his answer towards Neil, “Well, don’t know why you’re laughing, because I’m a dark horse, so...” Finchy then replies, “Yeah, like you could get anyone like “The Corrs”.” David says, “Yeah, just because I don’t kiss and tell, doesn’t mean I don’t get...” Finchy and Neil are laughing; as to indicate how ridiculous David sounds thinking he could get a beautiful woman. Finchy, “You don’t normally kiss, so you got nothing to tell.” David disagrees, and Neil says, directed to David, “Knowing him, he’d end up with the brother.” The men laugh, except for David, who says, “No, I wouldn’t. No, I wouldn’t. No, I’d push the brother out of the room, I’d get the other three and I’d bend ‘em all over [making a hand movement to indicate him bending the women over] and I’d do the drummer, the lead singer, and that one who plays the violin [thrusting his hips while saying drummer, lead singer and violin]”. David has worked himself up, and is talking quite loud. This has led the whole office party to stop talking and looking at him in a rather unpleasant fashion. David is clearly embarrassed, and points to Neil and says, “Oh, see? Your fault, putting filth in people’s minds.”

This example shows, once again, the explicitness in the British series. The sexual innuendo is strong, and they talk about sex in a rather inappropriate manner. The cultural context is here expressed through precisely this sexual inappropriateness, in addition to Neil and Finchy making quite cruel jokes on David's expense. The silence followed by David's simulation of how he would approach the female band members also functions as a comment of the cultural context. It is a perfect example to illustrate the cultural context in light of Dr Martin and Gervais' statements regarding British humour being evil and highly inappropriate. If their statements are true, it will additionally make the British viewers able to identify with the situation, which is, as mentioned, evil, crude, inappropriate and extremely awkward. According to Nichols (2010), this is important when thinking of the audience and their ability to identify with the show. If Brits are used to this type of comedy, it has most certainly succeeded. When comparing this example to the abovementioned American example, the evidence shows that the evilness and cruelty in the humour presented in both series varies quite significantly. The long-lasting shots of the reactions in the British series also create suspense and a tension that is not as evident in the American version. This might make the British series more multifaceted, in the sense that the audience might laugh, or cringe, at a broad amount of elements, such as the number of jokes set in different tones (cruel, evil, inappropriate, sexually explicit, and awkward), as well as the tense and silenced reactions from Brent's staff. These elements also appear in the American series, yet not to the same extent. One might think that this suspense and tension in the British series is part of what Engelstad (2013) calls core functions, and that it is an element that should be kept in the adaptation. Had one seen the British version isolated, it would have been within reason to think of it as a vital element. One could assume that Michael's utterance about falling to sleep thinking of whom in the office he would have sex with, in addition to saying that he would have sex with Ryan, would have the staff fall into silence and creating a cringing sensation with the audience. The suspense is not as prolonged in the American series, however, meaning it has gone through changes and not maintained fidelity to the original series with regards to the lengthy scenes generating the mentioned tension and suspense. It has been treated as a satellite function in the American version, which might have been done in order for it to be considered an independent work, and not simply a copy.

## Chapter conclusion

This chapter has investigated cultural context, and how the cultural context is expressed and commented on in various scenes and incidents in *The Office UK* and *The Office US*. As becomes evident, the investigation revealed certain elements that applied to the notion of mentioned cultural context.

Ricky Gervais (2011) argued in his article that the typical Brit laugh at so-called cruel comedy, often at the expense of others. The same is claimed by Martin (et. al. 2008), arguing that it is in British people's genes to laugh at cruel comedy. This is proven to be true with regards to the British version of *The Office*. Numerous pieces of evidence have been found to back up this statement. The opposite is found in *The Office US*, which comes across as a kinder and gentler version of the original series. The awkward silences, the suspense, the tension and the cruelty quite evident and prominent in the British version, is toned down immensely in the American series. David Brent is portrayed as a man who lacks both knowledge of social codes and intelligence, and is not able to connect with anyone in his office. Michael, although also a man lacking knowledge of social codes, is not portrayed in such an extreme manner as his British counterpart. It seems as if the producers have made specific decisions in their depiction of the protagonists for them to suit the respective audiences, which might be argued to be what Nichols (2010) explains signals a director's style in the making of a film, or series. This style signals the director's attitudes towards the characters and the story as a whole. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, as co-producers of both versions, set the tone in terms of differences between Michael and David, and Michael being made a nicer man than David. This is claimed to be a comment on the cultural context, in that the audience in Britain might expect a character as David, and the same with the American audience and Michael. As Gervais (2011) writes, "Brits are more comfortable with life's losers". This added up with the explicit humour and language found in the UK series, might be defined as evidence when claiming they all function as comments on the British cultural context. The same can be claimed with regards to the US series, only in the opposite direction, which is toned down. Michael is made a more likeable and relatable man, perhaps more suiting to the American audience, who according to Gervais (2011) was deliberately made "a slightly nicer guy, with a rosier outlook to life", and "(...) he couldn't be too mean." This might indicate that the evilness is found in British culture

to a greater extent than in American culture. Negative humour is much more prominent in the British series than in the American series, as suggested it might be (Martin et. al., 2008), making the American series more positive.

Nichols (2010) argued that the audience plays an important role when thinking of the social context. It then seems as if the producers have made the series suit the respective countries; they have deliberately made the sexuality and explicitness less visible in the American series than in the British, in order for it to be a good fit for the American and British audience. Both countries are defined as so-called low-context cultures, which also comes across as accurate in the sense that the messages, conversations and jokes conveyed are quite often elaborate, giving each word less meaning, making it more comprehensible for viewers not residing in either Britain or the US.

*The Office UK* is most definitely ruder, more evil and more inappropriate than *The Office US*, and they both comment on and express their cultural context through this. The British audience might expect the cruel comedy presented in the British series, where highly inappropriate jokes and comments are fairly regular, while the American audience might expect a kinder, softer and more likeable version and type of humour. This is not to say that the American series does not present jokes and dialogues of an inappropriate manner, because they most certainly do. They have simply toned it down in order for a new audience to identify with the characters, hence making it comment on its cultural context. The fact that each of the series has an international audience might also have an impact on the humour. The British series with its fourteen episodes might have been too much for the international audience if it were to air as long as the American series, which went on for 201 episodes. The humour in the American version might then be argued to be more internationally mainstream, making it understandable for an audience outside of the American in-group, than the British original, and that the British series was coined towards its in-group. Although speculation, the evidence might be interpreted this way.

When it comes to the core functions (Engelstad, 2013), there have been made alterations from the original to the adaptation, namely the prolonged scenes that create suspense and tension. The camera focus often changes in the American series when a socially awkward scene occurs, while this focus is kept much longer in the British series, to stress the awkwardness and making the audience cringe.

## Masculinity

This chapter investigates how the two male protagonists in the two versions of *The Office*, David and Michael, negotiate masculinity. How do Michael and David act as men? How are they perceived as men? How do they themselves want to be perceived? And to what extent do they live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity? A various number of theories regarding masculinity will be presented, closely followed by scenes that depict the protagonist's behaviour, which will be discussed in light of the theory presented.

### Theories of masculinity

The term *masculinity* has proven to be extremely difficult for scholars to define. Definitions of masculinity, and femininity, will, according to Michael Kimmel (2004) “vary within any one culture at any one time – by race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, education, region of the country, etc.” (ibid. 95). Kimmel then goes on by saying that a gay black man will have completely different thoughts on what it means to be a man than a heterosexual white teenage boy from Texas (2004). Masculinity is a term defined by the individuals, who often take into consideration their social environment. I, who have lived most of my life in cities, or suburbs, will most likely have a completely different view on what constitutes masculinity than a fisherman from Lofoten in Norway. R. W. Connell offers a similar view where he describes the difficulties of finding one satisfactory definition of masculinity, and the fact that it is often culturally defined. Among other things, Connell (2005) says that masculinity does not exist if it is not contrasted with femininity. You need these two polarised terms in order to make claims of something or someone as masculine or feminine. He argues that *masculine* and *feminine* as terms “point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender” (ibid. 69). We would not need the terms *masculine* and *feminine* “[i]f we spoke only of differences between [i] men as a bloc and women as a bloc (...)” (ibid. 69). He also states that there are certain types of masculinity, and ways of distinguishing them.

Connell additionally says it has become quite common to recognise multiple masculinities, due to the growing recognition of the interplay between gender, race and class, such as a black masculinity and a white masculinity, or a working-class masculinity and a middle-class masculinity (2005), but argues that even this

framework is oversimplified, because one cannot think of “(...) *a* black masculinity or *a* working-class masculinity” (ibid. 76). In order to keep the analysis dynamic, as he says, one must examine the relations between the different sets of masculinity. In Rebecca Feasey’s *Masculinity and Popular Television* (2008), it is claimed that masculinity is equally socially constructed as femininity (D’Acci 2005: 379; Feasey 2008), and due to this, masculinity must be acknowledged as something the cultural environment constructed, as femininity, rather than by nature and biology. This might mean that nature makes the man and the woman, but their respective social and cultural environment defines femininity and masculinity. According to Hakala, masculinity must be understood as something “fluid, time-related and variable across cultures and eras as well as subject to change over the course of a person’s life” (2006: 57; Feasey, 2008). The latter might be of special interest for this thesis, due to its relevance when investigating Michael and David’s developing characters. According to Feasey (2008), there is a vast number of masculinities available, making it necessary to shed light on the various models of them, and how these have formed a “hierarchy of acceptable, unacceptable and marginalised models for the male” (ibid. 3). One of these models of masculinity is hegemonic masculinity, which will be the focus of this chapter.

### Hegemonic masculinity

The most essential theory for this thesis might be argued to be the hegemonic masculinities theory, developed by R. W. Connell, who again was inspired by Antonio Gramsci’s seminal work on Italian class relations. Connell (2005) defines it as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 2005: 77).

This might be interpreted as the man being the dominant sex, in control and an alpha male, thus making the woman subordinate, less in control and perhaps with a lower status in the social and gender hierarchy. As Connell says, “it is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony” (2005: 77). Rebecca Feasey (2008) argues a hegemonic masculine male is strong, successful,

capable and authoritative. The term is attributed to white, heterosexual and competitive men who dominate the world of finance, moral and culture, who's self-esteem is gathered from their workplaces. Feasey paraphrases Kimmel (2004) and writes that the hegemonic definition of manhood is "a man in power, a man *with* power and a man of power" (Kimmel, 2004: 184; Feasey, 2008: 3).

Connell (2005) also, however, stresses that hegemony is a mobile relation historically, meaning it can be challenged and changed. New groups may challenge the already established hegemony, and create a novel hegemony. If any group of men is dominating, women may very well challenge it. One example of hegemony is the gender relation between heterosexual and homosexual men, in contemporary European and American society, where the former is dominant. Due to oppression, including, among a vast amount of things, political and cultural exclusion, street violence and cultural abuse, homosexual masculinities are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy among men (Connell, 2005). Homosexuality is commonly associated with femininity, due to the stereotypical view of gay men (*ibid.*). Gay men are not the only subordinated masculinity, however. Other boys and men are also excluded from the "proper" circle of masculinity, and are often referred to with words associated with femininity, such as wimp, ladyfinger and sissy (*ibid.*).

The pattern of hegemonic masculinity is something not many men are practising rigorously, however. But, as Connell (2005) points out, the majority of men benefit from it, due to men in general gaining from the subordination of women. Feasey (2008) agrees with this, and says that most men benefit from this hierarchical model, where men's domination over women is at the heart of the hegemonic power. The majority of men are not abusive or homophobic, but most of them benefit from the model. Michael Kimmel makes an interesting point when he says that to be a man means being not like a woman, regardless of the male in question's age, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation (2004). He goes on by saying that "anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood" (*ibid.* 185), which he claims defines masculinity as something or someone you are not, rather than something or someone you are.

The hierarchic model of hegemonic masculinity comes across as somewhat extreme, and has been argued to be a model very few men follow wholeheartedly. Even though very few people in modern society practise it, it still functions as a guide for how to become real men. Kimmel (2004) goes as far as saying that hegemonic

masculinity has “become the standard in psychological evaluations, sociological research... self-help and advice literature for teaching young men to become real men” (ibid. 184; Feasey 2008: 3). Feasey (2008) then says that this “narrow image of masculinity” is not a common model to be followed, unless you are, among other things, a super hero. Yet it still functions as “(...) a standard of masculinity to which men are supposed to aspire” (MacKinnon 2003: 115; Feasey 2008: 3). The result is many men living lives in some tension with the hegemonic masculinity model.

## Hegemonic masculinity in Michael Scott and David Brent

As explained above, the model of hegemonic masculinity serves as a standard of masculinity for men to follow. Even though a minority of men follow it rigorously, the model is not discharged as the standard of how boys and men are to become real men, and that women and homosexuals are viewed as subordinate. What will now be of interest is to find out if Michael and David use this model, perhaps subconsciously, as a standard for their masculine behaviour in their respective workplace. Do they come across as bearers of hegemonic masculine traits? Are they competitive, authoritative and dominant? Are there differences between the British and the American male protagonists? And do they come across as alpha males?

I will conduct a close viewing of specific episodes from both versions of *The Office*, in order to be able to establish if there in fact are traces of hegemonic masculinity to be found in either of them. The fact that they are men is quite clear, but their masculinity, and the degree to which it is based on the hegemonic masculine hierarchy model, is an open question. The following examples and analysis will address the mentioned male protagonists' subordination of women, their subordination of homosexuals, and how they come across as masculine males in general, and will be mentioned in this order.

### Subordination of women

One of many characterizations of hegemonic masculinity is the subordination of women. Men, typically white men in the paid labour force, as David is, tend to view women as less worth than themselves. The following illustrative example occurs in *The Office UK I/I 00:02:22*, where David makes a sexually explicit joke at Dawn Tinsley's expense in front of her. David walks to the reception, where Dawn works as the receptionist. He looks at the camera, looks at her again, and says, with a big smirk on his face, "I'd say, at one time or another, every bloke in the office has woken up at the crack of Dawn". He giggles while looking at the camera, and then back at Dawn. Dawn, stunned by the joke, replies, "What?!", and gives David a look signalling she thinks of him as an inappropriate idiot (*The Office*. Dir. Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant. BBC Two. 2001). It appears that David thought the joke would serve as a pun and a genuine work of comedy, yet he does not receive the comedic appraisal he seeks. He is not seen to be making these sorts of jokes to others in the office, especially to none of the men. Because Dawn is a female, however, it seems as if

David thinks of it as natural to behave like this, because she is exactly that, a she. If the joke was not meant to offend her, it would appear to lie in his subconscious. This does not, however, justify the joke. He reduces Dawn to an object, due to the context in which the joke was told, and thereby making her a subordinate. David clearly insinuates that all of his male employees have had sexual intercourse with Dawn. For the viewer, this scene perfectly illustrates the core of the series – a man who desperately seeks attention and positive reactions to his jokes does not receive it at all from his employees.

An American equivalent can be found when Michael jokes about Pam being cute now, but much cuter before (*The Office*. Dir. Greg Daniels, Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant, et.al. NBC Universal Television Distribution. 2005. (I/I 00:01:51)). Michael introduces Pam Beesly, Dawn's equivalent, to the camera crew. He then says, "Ah, Pam has been with us, um... for... forever. Right, Pam?" She answers, "Well, I don't know..." Michael interrupts, looks into the camera, and says, "If you think she's cute now, you should have seen her a couple of years ago [imitates an animal from the feline family] Reow, reow", as to indicate he thinks she is still attractive, however used to be even more attractive. Pam looks at him, repulsed, and asks harshly, "What?" to which Michael's response is changing the subject asking if there are any emails for him. David's joke was indeed more sexually explicit, because it played on the notion of sex, giving Dawn an involuntary title as a prostitute. The content of Michael's joke was about Pam's physical appearance, and a comparison of the past and present. His joke was not as offensive as David's, but nevertheless reduced Pam to an object, whose only achievement in the workplace was to look good. Michael is making Pam a subordinate, as David did to Dawn. It is not believed that the subordination was intended, but rather a result of the hegemonic masculine hierarchy in which Michael, and David, is a part, being a white heterosexual male. He benefits from the hierarchy, just as David does.

David is eager to show his staff, and the camera, that he is all for equality between the sexes, and that women and men are equal. This is exemplified in *The Office UK I/II* 00:07:55, when David discovers an email that has circulated in the office, containing an image of him as a woman with two men ejaculating on him. He calls for everyone's attention, and says that he is angry. He is not angry because the photo was of him, however, but because, "It degrades women, which I hate". What the email actually shows is David in the role of both a woman and a homosexual,

which emphasises his non-hegemonic status. While saying this, he looks into the camera, just to make sure they got it on film what he said. He wants to be viewed as a modern man, who appreciates women as much as he does men. The problem is that he is trying too hard to be politically correct, which perhaps makes it difficult for the viewer to believe him. His staff do not believe him either, and there seems to be a consensus among them that David has a need to be politically correct, and stress how important gender equality is for him. It also seems as if David wants to protect women from seeing that sort of sexually explicit content, making him the authoritative protector of the office.

This is emphasised immediately after this. David and Gareth sit in the former's office, and David paraphrases Chris Finch (Finchy), who had once said to David, "How can I hate women? My mom's one." David then goes on by saying, "There's a lot of truth in that. And that's why when I see... Rubbish... [Referring to the explicit manipulated photos of him as a woman] I'm not annoyed cause I'm in it or I'm a prude. It offends women. It's sexist. And I hate that." Gareth agrees, "So do I" to which David replies, "Yeah, but I've said it, haven't I?" Gareth then says, "Well, we've both said it. We've had meetings where we've both said it" and David replies, "Yeah, but, you know, I really hate it." David is exceptionally eager to appear as the person who hates sexism the most, and it seems as he has a compulsory need to be viewed as a man who prioritises gender equality more than anyone. He wants to protect women from such images, reducing and subordinating them to someone who is too weak to handle a sight like that, even though David was in fact the one taking the role as both a woman and homosexual in the email. Gareth mentions meetings, in plural, where both he and David have said how they hate gender inequality. This might indicate that there have been issues where these two characters have been involved with sexist and inappropriate behaviour. David is painfully aware of the camera's presence, and wants to do what he can in order to be regarded as an initiator who promotes equality, in addition to a man who protects women, thus as an alpha male.

An American equivalent of this is found in *The Office US* III/XXI 00:04:50, when a man in the parking lot flashes Phyllis. Michael talks to the camera crew alone in his office about women and their need for safety, "In all the excitement, I forgot that my primary goal is to keep people safe. Women can't have fun if they don't feel safe". Michael is here making women subordinate to men in general, in the sense that

it is his, and all men's, responsibility to make sure that women feel safe in order for them to be able to have fun. In his mind, men should be the strong sex who looks out for weak women.

Another incident describing his thoughts on women occurs at 00:26:40 in this same episode. He starts by saying, "Any man who says he totally understands women is a fool. Because they are un-understandable". This might be said to be a rather common trope among men in general, because men are known to be having difficulties understanding women. He then asks himself a question, "Michael, how can you appreciate women so much but also dump one of them?" He answers his own question by saying, "You mean, how can I be so illogical and flighty and unpredictable and emotional? Well, maybe I learned something from women after all.". The answer he gave to his own question says something about how he views women. He sees them as illogical, flighty, unpredictable and emotional. He generalises women to the extent that their only contribution is being difficult for men to handle. He categorises them as subordinate to men, because these contributions are not positively loaded. For Michael, these traits are feminine, and as a man benefiting from the hegemonic masculine hierarchy, they do not serve as anything productive. However, he does say it in a tone one might interpret as sincere; that he actually did appreciate learning this. Yet another thing worth mentioning is how he incorporates these feminine traits to himself. Kimmel (2004) says that anti-femininity is what lies at the heart of conceptions of manhood, and that being a man is much about not being a woman. Michael displays a somewhat surprising standpoint when giving himself these female attributes, and thereby associating his own qualities with qualities often generalised as being typical feminine traits. Nevertheless, Michael shows that his view of women is in fact stereotypical, and also negative, in that these traits are the only traits women contribute.

These examples provide insight into how Michael views women in his workplace and in general. He has to be their strong, masculine protector, and he has to appreciate whatever small thing they can contribute. He does not fulfil the role of a hegemonic masculine male as Connell (2005) describes, but there are indeed tendencies to be seen, for instance the subordination of women, the need to be seen as strong and capable, and the need to dominate the moral world. David is also seen to be a man who subordinates women, and to some extent view them as the weaker gender. He, as Michael, needs to be the protector of the workplace, as men and as

managers. However, Michael comes across as a man more in touch with the hegemonic masculinity model than David, through the aforementioned examples. Even though both show traits of the model's description of what constitutes a real man, David is shown to carry them in a lesser degree than Michael. Feasey (2008) says that men's domination over women is what lies at the heart of the hegemonic power. By this, then, it might be claimed that both David and Michael display certain attributes connected with this model, in that they seem to want to be the dominant males.

### **Subordination of homosexual men**

It has become evident from the examples above that both Michael and David display characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in that they, to some extent and in varying degrees, subordinate women. It might not be on purpose, yet they come across as men feeling superior to the female gender, eager to portray themselves as "over" women.

What is now left to find out is if these male protagonists display similar characterisations towards homosexuals. The theory of subordination suggests that hegemonic masculinity view homosexuality as closely associated with femininity, and femininity is for men to distance themselves from (Kimmel, 2004). According to Connell (2005), homosexual masculinity is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, while strong, white heterosexuals are at the top. Do David and Michael see homosexuals as "worth less" than heterosexuals, and do they treat them as subordinates?

Michael learns that one of his employees, Oscar, is homosexual, in *The Office US III/I 00:03:25*. Michael jokingly called Oscar a "faggy" for enjoying the movie *Shakespeare In Love* (1998) before learning about his sexual orientation. Michael was then told by Toby, an HR representative in the office, that Oscar was offended, because he is gay. He does not want anyone else to find out, and Toby explicitly tells Michael to be discrete about this newfound knowledge. After the meeting with Toby, Michael walks out of his office and talks to Oscar, who is standing by the copier, in the middle of the office. He apologises for being so insensitive and blunt, and that he would never have done it if he knew Oscar was gay. He also says that he has been calling people "faggy" since junior high school, and that he has never "made that mistake" before. He then says that if he does not know how to behave in front of Oscar, as a gay man, it is because he is so very heterosexual, making it difficult for

him to understand. At the end of the conversation, which Oscar is very uncomfortable having, Michael suggests that the two of them have a beer and Oscar can tell him “[h]ow he does that [has sex] with another dude”. While making Oscar this offer, Michael makes a grim expression, as to indicate he finds the sexual act between two men disgusting.

Later in that episode, at 00:16:08, Phyllis, who went to high school with Michael, tells him that everyone thought he was gay back then, because of the way he dressed. Michael laughs loudly and sarcastically to indicate how insane that utterance was, and also to distance himself from everyone else thinking of him as gay. He then looks at Oscar, who found it strange that Michael would react so strongly to that. Michael then tries to save face by saying he takes that as a compliment.

This example shows that Michael is a man uncomfortable with homosexual men, and once faced with “charges” of being one himself during high school, he crushes those allegations in an inappropriate manner. He rejects the idea of being associated with anything homosexual, which might be due to the hegemonic masculinity model. Again, his need to suppress others in order to come out on top is made evident.

As for the original British series, an incident regarding subordination of homosexuality occurs in *The Office UK* II/I 00:12:16, when David is to make a welcome speech to his new employees, who have transferred from another branch. This scene was briefly mentioned in my first chapter, but will be elaborated here for the reader to be properly updated in light of current theme. Neil, David’s boss, is first to give a speech, and introduces David. Neil says, at the end of his speech, “There will be perks for him [David]. I’m sure he’s looking forward to having a whole new group of *men* underneath him.” The employees find this hilarious, and laugh at the idea of David being portrayed as homosexual. David, looking uncomfortable due to him being seen as a man interested in other men, is now to give his speech. He starts by disassociating himself from Neil’s joke, “You know what he was saying there, about me being at the top of the pile of men, like, saying I’m gay... Right, I’m not gay. In fact, I can honestly say I’ve never come [cum] over a little queer” while making an ejaculating hand gesture. He is so determined not to be associated with homosexuality that he had to make this statement, and camouflage it as a joke. For the staff to think of him as homosexual seems to be the worst they can do, which justifies his inappropriate and desperate utterance. Had he been a man feeling secure about his

own sexuality, he would perhaps not care, because he would have known the staff knew he was heterosexual, or he would simply not care about how they viewed his sexual orientation. Due to David wanting to be on top of the hierarchy, he needs to disassociate himself from anything making him look feminine or homosexual in order to conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity.

Evident from the examples just analysed is that neither Michael nor David degrade or abuse homosexual men. They do, however, signal that to be gay is something unusual, and that being homosexual is borderline feminine, and they play into common stereotypes. As hegemonic masculinity is not to be associated with women, or having feminine attributes, the same goes for homosexual men, who, from a hegemonic masculine point of view, are often associated with femininity (Connell, 2005). Michael Kimmel (2004) defines manhood as something or someone you are not, rather than something or someone you are. Michael and David try their hardest not to be viewed as homosexual men, which might indicate that they have the same idea of what a real man should be – not a homosexual, and not a woman. However, their actions and words do not imply any aggression or hatred towards women or homosexuality. It might be due to insecurity, stereotypical conventions, a fear of losing respect in the office as managers, or something completely else. The point is, they are not targeting gay men, or women. They are simply men who are under the impression that they have to prove their hegemonic masculinity at all times, and therefore disassociate themselves from anything regarding femininity.

### **Hegemonic masculinity in general**

With regards to Michael and David's displayed masculinity in general, it might be interesting to analyse scenes where they meet the criteria of what constitutes "real men" in general. Are they competitive, authoritative, in/of/with power, strong, successful and capable, as the theory claims characterise hegemonic masculine men on top of the hierarchy are? And if they themselves feel they fit the mentioned masculine characteristics, how do the other characters view them?

The first example depicting Michael's traits in accordance with hegemonic masculinity is when Dwight proudly announces that he has received a purple belt in karate, in *The Office US II/VI* 00:14:30. Jim is curious to find out which man in the office Dwight thinks he could beat up. Michael walks past them, and hears Jim asking if Dwight could beat him. Michael says confidently that Dwight would not have had a

chance, because he used to run with a tough crowd, and has previously beat up people with black belts in karate. Michael then challenges Dwight to punch him in the stomach, and says there is no chance he will feel pain. Dwight is reluctant to punch him, because Michael is his boss and role model. Michael then says that Dwight is a “wuss”, and explains how he cried when the two saw the film *Armageddon* (1998), and also how he knows a lot of 14-year-old girls who hit harder than Dwight. Dwight finally punches Michael, who screams in pain and accuses Dwight of “sucker-punching” him. Michael feels humiliated, and challenges Dwight to a rematch, in order for him to regain his respect. Michael displays his masculine and competitive side by wanting his staff to view him as the strongest male in the office. At lunch, the whole staff travels to Dwight’s dojo, where they are to fight. Michael ends up winning the fight, and is very pleased about it.

He has regained his position at the top of the hegemonic masculine hierarchy. He sensed it was about to be challenged and possibly changed, as Connell (2005) says can happen, and he was eager to take actions in order for it to maintain the same, with Michael as the alpha male. He additionally made Dwight a subordinate, by giving him feminine characteristics; being a “wuss”, hitting like a girl, and crying from a movie, which all might be claimed to be generalizations of female behaviour. Being a man is much about not being a woman (Kimmel, 2004), and Michael in this example makes Dwight look like a woman, depriving him of his masculinity, thus making him a subordinate. Michael wants to be the dominant man, and the dominant man dominates and subordinates women. By giving Dwight female traits, he thereby dominates and subordinates him as well, and makes himself look more like a masculine man at the top of the hegemonic hierarchy. Dwight is also excluded from the proper circle of masculinity by being called a “wuss”, which Connell (2005) argues is a way of subordinating heterosexual masculinity.

Michael also showed himself from a competitive side, due to him being eager to challenge the man who punched him. He could have chosen not to challenge Dwight, and simply understood the fact that he was the one who asked to be punched. Michael made his own position at the top of the hierarchy vulnerable, and no one would question his actions if he had not challenged Dwight to a rematch. As mentioned previously, Michael’s self-esteem derives from his workplace, and he must therefore do what he can to be viewed as a true man in the office in order to maintain his position at the top of the hierarchy. Also relevant in this example is that Michael

himself acts as a “wuss” in complaining like he did, which automatically punctures his status.

A British equivalent, although slightly different than the American scene just described, is when David has bought new clothes, in *The Office UK II/V* 00:00:43. In the previous episode, Neil is seen wearing a beige leather jacket. It is safe to assume that David is not a fan of Neil, and tries to compete with him in order to look better, more capable and smarter than him. This episode, David has bought an almost identical leather jacket, black boots with very high heels, and has also pierced his ear. His masculine hegemonic hierarchy is threatened, and he wants to do what he can in order for him to stay at the top of the hierarchy. What happens, however, is that David is mocked for his new style, and his employees know that he is merely copying Neil’s youthful style, although taking it to another level. David’s attempt at a fresher look fails immensely, as well as his attempt to compete with Neil. David wants nothing more than being given the attributes of capable, successful and in power, and believes he will gain these from his new look. What occurs, however, is for him to lose even more altitude from the hierarchy, made apparent by the laughs and looks from his staff.

To show how David and Michael view themselves as managers, monologues from each of them are very telling. David, in *The Office UK I/I* 00:02:40, says, “People say I’m the best boss. They go, “Oh”, you know, “We’ve never worked in a place like this before. You’re such a laugh, you get the best out of us.” And I go, you know, “C’est la vie.” If that’s true, excellent.” David’s impression of himself as a manager is here indicated by him telling the camera crew and the audience how he is viewed by his employees. He talks of a man who motivates and entertains his staff, while he in fact does neither. Due to him trying too hard to be a masculine force in the office, in addition to him lacking the social codes to truly understand and communicate with the people around him, he falls short of the standards of the hegemonic. His American equivalent is also under the impression that he is both an entertainer and a motivator, but is, as David, neither. Although Michael is not as disliked as David, the manager Michael thinks he is and the manager his employees see him as, are two different men. Michael, in *The Office US I/I* 00:02:26, says, “People say I’m the best boss. They go, “God, we’ve never worked in a place like this before. You’re hilarious. And you get the best out of us. Um... [Proudly shows a mug with the caption “World’s best boss”] I think that pretty much sums it up. I found it at

Spencer Gifts.” In addition to him seeing himself as the best manager/entertainer there ever was, he shows a lack of ability to understand that such cups are given to you, and is not something you buy to yourself.

An incident further depicting David’s management style is in *The Office UK* I/I 00:25:20, when he and Ricky sit in the conference room. David wants to pull a prank on Dawn, to impress Ricky. He calls for Dawn, who enters the room, and is told that she is to be let go, due to bad economy and being caught stealing office supplies. Dawn starts crying, and David says it was just a joke. Dawn does not find it amusing, and says to David, while sobbing, “You wanker. You’re such a sad, little man.” David’s only reaction is to ask, “Am I?”. Had David been the “alpha male” he wants to be, and thinks he is, Dawn would not have said these inappropriate and insulting things to him. What this example gives evidence of, then, is David’s actual position in the hierarchy. David thinks he is a respected manager and a good leader, but his employees do not share these thoughts. The monologue mentioned previously of David narrating how his employees view him is also uncovered as a lie, signalling how distant he is. Given Ricky’s uncomfortable body language as the joke escalates, also he finds David to be what Dawn has called him. It seems as if David treats his employees as subordinates, which he can do whatever he wants with, to a certain extent. In his mind, he is an alpha male in full control. The reality seems to be the exact opposite, with David reduced to a subordinate. Even though he is the manager and of a higher rank than his employees, he is not respected, due to the things he does and says, and his inability to actually conforming to traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. He might mean well, but the outcome is disastrous, and proves he does not belong to the in-group.

An American equivalent to this scene is found in *The Office US* I/I 00:18:30, when Michael convinces his new temp, Ryan, to join him in pulling a prank on Pam. Pam enters the office where Michael and Ryan sit, and she is told she has to be made redundant. Pam is, as Dawn, also accused of stealing office supplies. Just as David did to Dawn, Michael goes too far with the joke, making Pam cry. When revealing it was all a joke, Pam bursts out of the office and says to Michael, “You’re a jerk!”. As with David, Michael’s monologue of himself being viewed as a hilarious manager is here shown to be untrue. Ryan’s body language signals that he thinks of Michael as a “jerk”, as Ricky did with David. However, the hatred from Dawn towards David seems stronger than that from Pam to Michael. While Pam seems fairly shaken and

sad, Dawn has a look in her eyes that tells the viewer how much she despises David. Additionally, Dawn's verbal abuse to David was indeed of a stronger tone than Pam's to Michael. This might indicate that even though both managers subordinate women, in that the prank was pulled on women, David ends up being the least respected and most unpopular of the two in their respective work environments. One might assert that the hatred Dawn signals toward David is a core function, which should lead to Pam feeling the same towards Michael. This hatred is not apparent in the American series, meaning the producers have treated it as a satellite (Engelstad, 2013), due to it being altered. In terms of these examples displaying cultural differences, it might be due to Michael being the "father" and boss of his "children" and employees, whereas David is only the boss. The familial aspect, stereotypical for American culture, might then be the reason for Pam seeming shaken and sad, while Dawn is angry and signals hatred.

An incident reflecting David's lack of respect from his employees, as briefly discussed above, occurs when David has been made redundant, and Gareth is acting manager, in *The Office UK Christmas Special: Part I* 00:09:10. He talks about David after the latter have been made redundant, "I did learn a lot from David. I learnt from his mistakes. We're very different people. Um, he used humour where I use discipline. And I learnt that nobody respects him." This is the man who is considered to be David's closest ally and friend during David's time as manager. For Gareth to be uttering these words might indicate that this is what the majority of the employees at Wernham Hogg felt.

In *The Office US I/III* 00:11:15, Michael has been given a task from the head office to choose a health care plan for his staff. This plan is initially meant to cut expenses, thereby forcing Michael to choose the cheapest alternative, excluding certain perks. Before being made aware of this by his boss Jan, he picks the most lucrative and expensive plan for everyone. He says, "The most sacred thing I do is care. And provide for my workers – my family. I give them money, I give them food. Not directly, but through the money. I... heal them. Today I am in charge of picking a great new health care plan. All right? That's what this is all about. Does that make me their doctor? Um... Yes. In a way. Yeah, like a specialist". Michael considers himself to be the boss, the family's (the office members') father, and a specialised doctor. He places himself on top of the hierarchy as the strong, capable, successful and smart alpha male; a man that cares for his family and gets things done. He displays a

number of traits from hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, he categorises his employees as subordinates, which is also a typical trait for hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell (2005) and Feasey (2008). It seems as if he lives with some tension with the hegemonic masculine model, as many men do, without following it rigorously (Feasey, 2008).

When Michael is made aware of the fact that he is to present the cheapest health care plan for his staff, however, he is not the man he seems to be above. He is terrified of being unpopular with his employees, which he fears he will be if he is the one to give them the news of this rather poor plan. He assigns Dwight to the task, making him the one to take the fall and the employees' wrath. Michael as boss should be on top of the hierarchy, and display hegemonic masculine traits such as capability, being smart, being strong and competitive. As Connell (2005) says in his book, the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity may very well be challenged or changed. In this latter scenario, where Michael chooses Dwight to make the hard decisions, he changes the hierarchy himself, to some extent. He makes himself look weak, indecisive, not capable and afraid of conflict to his employees, thereby forcing them to view him in a way not compatible with the traits of hegemonic masculinity. He comes across as a man who is afraid of making hard decisions, and he also reveals his actual place in this hierarchy. His main concern is not being viewed as a good and efficient boss, but rather as a good friend.

An exact equivalent is not found in the British series. However, the theme the American example depicts is found in *The Office UK* I/I 00:28:27, when David narrates how he views himself as a man and a manager. He is talking to the camera crew by himself, giving a monologue of what is important for a company: "What is the single most important thing for a company? Is it the building? Is it the stock? Is it the turnover? [Shakes his head] It's the people. Investment in people. Yeah? My proudest moment here wasn't when I increased profit by 17% or cut expenditure without losing a single member of staff. No. It was a young Greek guy. First job in the country. Hardly spoke a word of English. But he came to me, and he went, "Mr. Brent, will you be the godfather to my child?" So... [Pauses, looks into the camera] Didn't happen in the end. We had to let him go. He was rubbish. He was rubbish.". David is here very proud of the fact that he increased the profit of the company, and cut expenditures without having to fire employees. However, he tries to give an impression of not caring as much about that, as about a human relation with a Greek

man, who turned out to be highly incompetent in his job. David shows two sides of himself, where one side is him finding a way to brag about accomplishments, and the other where he wants the audience to know how sensitive and good at heart he is. He wants us to know he is a man in power, with power and of power, as Kimmel (2004) in Feasey (2008) says is the definition of manhood. Not only did he do well for the company financially, he also did well for a human being in need. The viewer, however, sees this as showing off, because we know what type of man he is. It is as if he only does these types of things in order to be able to tell people about how kind and caring he is, and additionally to show that he is a man who possesses power. Again, as becomes evident, he does not possess the qualities and characteristics he wishes, and this blindness contributes much of the humour in the series.

To further elaborate how the two male protagonists view themselves, it might be of interest to include a scene where Michael tells about his need to be praised, and David comparing himself to Jesus. Michael, in *The Office US IV/I 00:11:31*, says, “Do I need to be liked? Absolutely not. I like to be liked. I enjoy being liked. I have to be liked. But it's not, like, this compulsive need to be liked. Like my need to be praised.” He first tries to convince himself and the cameras that he does not need to be liked as a boss. He takes on a character whose only objective is to steer the ship of Dunder Mifflin in the right direction. Then, the true Michael Scott shines through, when saying that not only does he like to and have to be liked; he also has a need to be praised. He sees himself as a hero, as a person people can look up to and glorify for all his good deeds and his genius mind. In this sense, he shows traits of what constitutes hegemonic masculinity, in that he views himself as a capable, strong leader with power and influence, and the people around him are his subordinates, who should praise him. Gods are praised, and so should Michael be. The contrast, however, is that Gods do not need praise to uphold their self-image, whereas Michael does.

David Brent, on the other hand, has been made redundant from his job at Wernham Hogg, and talks to the camera crew about how he imagines the future, in *The Office UK II/VI 00:00:56*: “I don't look upon this like it's the end. I look upon it like it's moving on, you know. It's almost like my work here's done, you know. I can't imagine Jesus going, “Oh, I've told a few people here in Bethlehem I'm the son of God. Can I just stay here with mum and dad now?” No. You got to move on. You got to spread the word, you know. You got to go to Nazareth, please. And that's, very

much like... me.”. This example makes it evident that David’s self-esteem is rather high. Which is quite odd, given how the other characters view him and how they behave towards him. Right before this monologue, David is seen giving his business card to other employees of the firm, and he tells them to call him. After he has left, the camera still focuses on those who got the card, and everyone makes a face signalling they will never use this contact information, throwing the card away. The man David thinks he is, and the man the other characters see David as, are two completely different men.

David is a man whose self-esteem derives from his workplace, which has been mentioned previously. Here, however, he takes it to another level, by comparing himself and his work with Jesus. David has just been made redundant, but refuses to be stopped from doing a brilliant job somewhere else. He will not be broken. Hence the religious reference, where God told Jesus to continue doing good. David has an image of himself as a saviour, who can make the saddest and most unmotivated employee a happy and hard worker. In David’s mind, he truly is an alpha male, a leader and a competitor. The image David gives of himself here, as a man not afraid of what the future might entail, is shattered at the end of this episode. David begs Jennifer and Neil to be kept in the company, and almost starts weeping. The future frightens him, and he shows his true colours as someone not at all as confident as he wants it to look. This is what all the other examples are hinting at, and treating with humour. David’s insecurities and vulnerability are finally exposed, shattering the image of him as an alpha male, an image he desperately wants people to have of him.

A core function (Engelstad, 2013) in these examples is how David considers himself to be a godlike man, which is also how Michael perceives himself. They believe they are strong and capable, and that their employees praise them. The adaptation has here maintained fidelity to the original. If one were to see the British version isolated, one might assert David’s downfall and deprivation of masculinity to be a core function as well. This has, however, been treated as a satellite function (ibid.) in the adaptation, due to the fact that Michael is not seen being deprived of his masculinity, or lose his job. The American version has altered the original perhaps in order for it to appeal to its target audience, for it being considered as a series of its own, and perhaps also in order for the series being able to last for 201 episodes.

## Chapter conclusion

The close viewing and analysis conducted in this chapter have been concerned with the notion of hegemonic masculinity, and how the characteristics the various theories regarding hegemonic masculinity can be found in Michael Scott and David Brent. What has become quite evident from my investigation is that both men inhabit traits of it. They carry with them traits of being competitive, dominating, subordinating, successful, capable, and authoritative. However, neither of them follows the model of hegemonic masculinity rigorously. Connell (2005) stresses that very few people live wholeheartedly by these standards of what constitutes real men, which is found to be accurate in the cases of Michael and David. However, as white heterosexual men in the paid labour force, they benefit from this hierarchy. As the theory also claims, the hegemonic masculine model functions as a guide for how men are to be real men, which also might be the case with the two protagonists, given the traits they are displaying.

Taking every incident covered in this chapter into consideration, neither Michael nor David turns out to be typical embodiments of hegemonic masculinity. Michael considers his employees to be family, with himself as the head of the family. He displays certain features of hegemonic masculinity, indeed, but as most men he does not follow the model rigorously. It seems to be Michael's main priority to make sure his employees like him, and that they have a good time working under him, despite their actual work performance.

David is somewhat different than Michael in terms of the model, even though he does not follow the model, either. He does not have the familial, or paternalistic, point of view in mind with regards to his employees, which might set the tone of the American series as more politically benign, and less challenging. David is mostly concerned with being viewed as successful. He is very competitive, and does whatever it takes to make people like him. He holds a tight grip on his position at the top of the masculine hierarchy, but he is eventually replaced as the hierarchy's chief, involuntarily, as the theory says might happen.

What the two men share, in addition to the features from the hegemonic masculinity theory, is the fact that they consider themselves to be true and real men, while their staff do not. Both Michael and David are constantly seen to be trying to impress and make it seem like they are men in, of and with power (Kimmel 2004;

Feasey 2008), while their employees know that they are in fact not. They are easily manipulated, and not respected. They are also seen to push others down in the hierarchy in order to climb themselves. There is, however, a certain lack of respect. Whereas Michael's employees do not view him as the authoritative and capable manager he wants to be, there is actual friendship and some respect to be found between him and them. This might be due to the fact that he sees his staff as family, and will do whatever he can for them, which his staff are well aware of. Despite his obvious shortcomings, he is surrounded by people who care about him. David, on the other hand, does not have a single real friend in the office. He is too obsessed with looking successful and trying to be funny, and his employees are fed up with him. They do not respect him at all, both as a manager and as a human being. He comes across as a "know-it-all", and is constantly trying to show off his success and capability. Given his uselessness, the employees do not take him seriously.

Had David tried less hard to come across as someone with the traits of hegemonic masculinity, he might have been a better-liked and more respected person. Due to him incorporating features from hegemonic masculinity, while at the same time is not given the proper respect he feels he deserves for having traits from this hegemony, he fails as a manager, and as a friend. Michael has found a balance, where his hegemonic masculine features are not as extreme as David's, thus making him a likeable manager his employees respect, to some extent. Nevertheless, Michael and David are subordinates rather than hegemonic, and they fall short of the standards of the hegemonic, but constantly try to convince themselves and others that they are in fact alpha males.

What has become evident is that certain alterations have been made in the adaptation from the original with regards to Michael and David's masculinity, both how they see themselves as men, and how their employees perceive them. It seems as if Michael's masculinity has been treated as a satellite function (Engelstad, 2013) in order for the character to better suit the target audience. These alterations do not, however, disturb the fundamental structure, in that the essence is kept. These alterations, in addition to aforementioned changes made in the adaptation, have simply toned down the American version, making it relatively mild when compared to the harsher British version.

## Thesis conclusion

This thesis has focused on close viewing and analysing carefully chosen scenes of the mockumentary *The Office*, both the British (2001) and the American (2005) version.

My first chapter set out to investigate how the two versions commented on their cultural context and how this context was expressed, and humour was found to be a cultural comment. High-context and low-context cultures were found to be appropriate when discussing cultural context, in that these terms, by Edward T. Hall (1976), explain how cultures convey messages in the daily conversation. Britain and America were by Copeland and Griggs (1986) argued to belong to the low-context culture, where the communication between members of in-groups is more explicit, and the single word less valuable than in high-context cultures. In-groups and out-groups were also terms found to be suiting, given how they explain that people inside a group are able to communicate complex messages effectively. If one belongs to an out-group, and is not a member of this in-group, and does not share the cultural background, one will face troubles grasping the content when communicating this way. Michael and David are found to belong in the out-groups in their respective workplace, whilst their employees are, to some extent, members of the in-groups. The two managers seem to struggle understanding certain social codes and ways of communicating effectively, which make it evident they do not belong in the same groups as their employees.

Michael, however, comes across as being better understood than his British equivalent, David. No matter what David says, it is either misunderstood by his employees, or it is simply too inappropriate for them. Michael seems to have one foot in his employees' in-group, while David has both feet in an out-group, separated from the rest. Given how low-context cultures' communication style is more elaborate than in the contrasting high-context cultures, it would be reasonable to think that even though one is not a member of an in-group, the communication could still be comprehensible and somewhat effective. This, however, is not the case with David, who is almost constantly rejected, misinterpreted and misunderstood, whereas Michael has his moments where he is accepted and seen as a peer and a friend. This makes the British series come across as evil and crude, which is found to be a typical trait in British culture, thereby serving as cultural commentary. This wickedness is toned down in the American series, which has been argued to be a comment on

American culture. Nichols (2010) argues that the audience and their cultural background knowledge are important in their understanding of a film. This seems to have been taken into consideration in the making of the American version, given how it is not as rude, sarcastic, sexually explicit or evil as the British version. The American audience is perhaps not as familiar with the crudeness found in the British series, and is perhaps therefore a milder version than the original. Gervais (2011) argues in his article that “taking the piss” out of people is typically British, and how he, as one of the producers of the American series, had to make Michael a “slightly nicer guy”. This, again, comments on the cultural context the series conveys. Dr Rod Martin (2008) additionally found in a study that it lies in British people’s genes to laugh at cruel and evil comedy, more than with Americans, which is also a comment on both culture’s contexts, when seeing how the two series play out with regards to evilness, crudeness and mockery. The stereotypical American and British audience have been taken into consideration in the making of both series, yet also made the series understandable for an audience from neither of these countries.

In my second chapter, I chose to focus on hegemonic masculinity, and how the two male protagonists in the series came across as men, both to themselves and to others. I found that David and Michael shared quite the amount of similar traits with regards to hegemonic masculinity. They were obsessed with the thought of being viewed as strong, capable, successful men, whom were in power, of power and with power, as Connell (2005), Feasey (2008) and Kimmel (2004) argue are typical traits for hegemonic masculinity. They were found to be on an almost constant journey to maintain their positions at the top of the masculine hierarchy. Both men were also found to be subjecting women and homosexual men to subordination, which seemed to be in an effort to come across as more masculine themselves. However, neither Michael nor David fulfil the standards of hegemonic masculinity, as very few do. In their attempts to push others down in order to climb themselves, they are made subordinates rather than hegemonic. David, however, was found to be more desperate in his attempts to be viewed as the successful and capable alpha male in the office. Even though Michael also displayed such features, he was not as extreme. What also became evident from my investigation was how masculinity changed with the two men. Hakala (2006; Feasey, 2008) argues that masculinity must be understood as something that can be changed over time in a person’s life, and this became visible after close viewing the episodes. David was found to be constant in his masculine

behaviour. Michael, on the other hand, was initially the same as David in terms of displayed masculinity, but as the show progressed, he developed to a less intense man in terms of showing off his masculine traits and convincing the other characters how much of a man he was.

Michael and David seem to be masculine men formed by their social environment. David needs however to try harder than Michael to be seen as a masculine force in the workplace, because he does not belong to the rest of his staff's in-group, and lacks the social codes needed to communicate effectively. Michael, although also trying to be seen as an alpha male and a true masculine man, is not as desperate in his attempts to come across as successful, powerful and competitive, among other characteristics. Due to him having one foot in his staff's in-group, he is more respected than David. Michael also shows paternalistic and familial features, which might make him more loveable than his British equivalent. This constant effort from David to be viewed as a man on top of the hegemonic masculinity hierarchy is also argued to be a comment on the cultural context, in that it is somewhat evil, and makes the viewer cringe. The same is argued for the American version, in that Michael's efforts are milder and not as intense.

The core functions, as Engelstad (2013) discusses, are what must be kept in an adaptation, and if these are left out or changed, the story will be destroyed. These core functions are claimed to have been kept from the original British version to the American adaptation: the socially awkward manager David/Michael, the "assistant to the regional manager" Gareth/Dwight, the salesman and voice of reason Tim/Jim, and the voice of reason's love interest, receptionist Dawn/Pam. These characters are the foundation, the skeleton of the story. What might additionally be interpreted as core functions from the original version are the prolonged scenes creating suspense and tension for the audience, and the employees' view of their bosses, Michael and David. If you were to view the British series isolated, you might assert that these features were something an adaptation would be bound to keep. The investigation has however revealed that the lengthy scenes from the original have been modified and shortened in the adaptation, making them less tense to view. As for the employees, Michael's staff do not hate him, as David's staff seem to hate him. These seemingly core functions have been treated as satellites, which according to Engelstad (2013) can be altered in the adaptation, and these satellites are important for an adaptation to be considered as something other than simply a duplicate of the original. Through the

close viewing of all aforementioned episodes, such satellites are found to consist of the various cultural comments the two series incorporate, the sexual explicitness, the crude and evil humour, and Michael and David's masculinity, all discussed above. The fundamental structure of the original series has been kept in the adaptation, and the satellite functions have been altered where it is found appropriate, without affecting the core functions. To conclude, the adapted version has maintained fidelity to the original series, and at the same time made changes in order for it to be considered an independent work appropriate for its target audience.

Through the discomfort one as a viewer experience through the scenes analysed from *The Office UK* (2001) and *The Office US* (2005), it might make one reflect on one's own norms, values and ways of being, as Miller (2012) claims is typical for the mockumentary. One might become more aware of and reflect upon how one interacts with friends or co-workers, how the jokes one tells might be inappropriate and offensive, and that it is not always necessary to prove one's strength, capacity, knowledge and power to others. Miller (2012) also mentions how the mockumentary holds a mirror to our flaws and pokes fun at our assumptions, which *The Office* has succeeded in doing. It pokes fun at our assumptions in that one might think of a boss as someone strict, professional and effective, while the bosses in the two series have none of these characteristics. They are unprofessional, ineffective, inappropriate and insecure, which might make one reflect upon one's own boss, or oneself as a boss. The reactions Michael and David receive from their employees comes across as natural in terms of how a real scenario would play out, and this might make people think twice if tempted to act or behave as them. *The Office* holds a mirror to our flaws in that all the characters have features people can relate to, both good and bad. As an audience one is able to see how these features are welcomed, and however extreme they are, it might be an indicator to how it would be welcomed in real life. To this extent, *The Office* truly accomplishes the common goals of a mockumentary. Although extreme and edgy compared to real life, many of the features found in many of the characters are features people can relate to. This, along with the brilliant comedy in the series, might be why both versions of *The Office* have become so popular.

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## APPENDIX

### My thesis' relevance for my future as a secondary education teacher

In my master's thesis, I have conducted a close viewing and analysis of *The Office*, both the original British series and the adapted American series. I have gone in-depth with regards to investigate cultural context and masculinity in the two series, and have spent much time searching for relevant examples in accordance with theoretical aspects. In other words, I have conducted a literary analysis based on close viewing.

Literary analysis and close reading and/or viewing of a text, film or series might be very beneficial for a student who want to immerse himself or herself in either of these mentioned mediums. As a future teacher, I want to encourage such an approach to literature. It might enable them to discover new sides of a chosen book, film or series, and appreciate literature to a greater extent by focusing on details in plots and characters. I believe, however, that it is important not to force the literature to be analysed on the pupils, as that may have a negative effect. If students are allowed to choose themselves which type of literature they work with, I believe the learning outcome, as well as their motivation before, during and after such a task, will be better than if they were simply given a strict task.

In terms of working with adaptations, as I have done in my thesis, pupils may benefit from such work in gaining awareness of how an adapted work has interpreted the original, and how it may have been altered to accommodate the needs of the new target audience. As seen from my thesis, the American version of *The Office*, the adaptation, has been altered, for instance, with regards to the cultural context, especially the humour, which is toned down in terms of explicitness, and is argued to be due to the American audience expecting a less rude, evil and crude series than the British audience. The students can also be assigned to write a text or make a film of how they interpret an original work, and make their own adaptation, which can be a good pedagogical approach. This will perhaps make them conscious and aware about how an adaptation always will involve a remaking of the original material.