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The Sitcom: *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* as an Evolution of *The Office*

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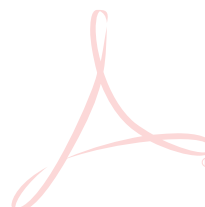
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ABSTRACT

The situation comedy or sitcom (a term formed by clipping the words 'situation' and 'comedy') is one of the best known and more enjoyable genres of current TV shows, and it is globally acclaimed by its originality and diversity of plots. The sitcom stands out for its unique and fixed cast set in a series of fixed settings. This project explores the definition of the sitcom as well as its origins and development, and its elements to be identified as such by the audience. The methodology followed to provide complete information about the sitcom consists of works by experts about film, television, humour, and entertainment. The theoretical framework of this project consists of the definition of the sitcom, its origins, its genres, and the classification into traditional and contemporary sitcom. The definition of a sitcom is not always complete; therefore, in this paper, the definition will be accompanied by an investigation of its origins as 'radio comedies', its transition to television and the differences between its genres. The division between the traditional sitcom and modern sitcom will be accompanied by the elements that form both of them and the main differences between the two. Apart from giving an exact definition of the sitcom, the main aim of this project is to demonstrate how two different and current sitcoms, *The Office* (NBC, 2005–13) and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (Fox, 2013–18, NBC, 2019–), can be considered the same sitcom, but modernised to fulfil society's current norms. These norms are part of the changing cultural landscape of society, and the resulting product of following them reveals indications about topics such as diversity and humour. The relationship between these two sitcoms will be established as an evolution, treating the newest one (*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*) as an evolution of the oldest one (*The Office*). This connection can be also considered a transition from the traditional sitcom to the contemporary one, displaying the changes and improvements to be correct and socially accepted. To achieve the goal of this project, both sitcoms' components, for instance the plot, characters and setting, will be fully analysed following the information established in the theoretical framework that make up a

traditional sitcom and a contemporary sitcom. In the analyses of the case studies in question, there will be a comparison between both sitcoms including similarities and differences to make the existing relationship clearer and support the purpose of the project. These analyses examine specific aspects that can be found in any of these sitcoms, such as characters, historical and cultural background, and the humour accompanied with its evolution. After the analyses, I will include a section containing the conclusion of the research that summarises the important aspects highlighted from the previous sections. Lastly, the final section of this project will be consists of a list of works cited throughout the entire paper.

1. INTRODUCTION.

In the last few years, the situational comedy or sitcom has been gaining notoriety and has been recruiting a large following regardless of cultural factors such as age, race, gender, sexuality, etc. Since the usage of these terms when the sitcom moved from being broadcast on the radio to being broadcast on the television, this genre has increased globally to the extent of being considered one of the more popular genres of comedy. Even though is the most common genre found in today's TV shows, every sitcom produced is very different from the rest, offering a settled range of characters in fixed setting that are faced with a problem. This project aims to demonstrate a connection between two different sitcoms that seem to follow the same pattern, establishing an evolution of their elements such as characters, plots, humour, and even their cultural settings.

One of the reasons for the choice of this topic for this project is the importance that the sitcom has nowadays in the mainstream era. In today's society, sitcoms hold a noticeable influence over millions of people, who declare themselves fans of a sitcom and live their lives being influenced by what they like to watch in their spare time. The audience of sitcoms is formed mainly by adults; however, teenagers and young adults belong to a group that can be considered as impressionable and gullible, and this type of fiction can play a big role in their lives. Another main reason for this topic is the development of a connection or relationship not officially established between the sitcoms *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

Therefore, to fulfil the purpose of developing my argument for the evolution between two sitcoms I will define in the theoretical framework of this project what a situational comedy or sitcom is by giving the most complete definition possible. Then, also included in the theoretical framework, I will offer a section explaining the origins of this genre and its evolution from radio to television, and a section classifying the sitcom in multiple subgenres. The last sections that complete the theoretical framework are the classification and definition of the

traditional and contemporary sitcoms, underlining their elements as means of highlighting the changes they suffered during the transition.

The project will include two case studies. The first one is the analysis of the main elements that form the 2005 sitcom *The Office*. The second case study will consist of the analysis of the main elements of the 2013 sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. In the last section of the case studies, I will compare these two sitcoms to establish and support the main argument of the project: to demonstrate that the sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is an evolution or cultural update of the sitcom *The Office*. Finally, I will include a personal conclusion about the aim discussed, as well as a conclusion to the general topic of the sitcom, and a list of references of the sources consulted.

1.1. Purpose.

This project contains two aims. The main goal consists of the theoretical evolution between the sitcoms *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, highlighting both differences and similarities between the two of them. The second purpose can be considered less important yet it is still relevant to the main aim, namely the formulation of a complete definition of the sitcom, as well as the identification of the traditional sitcom and the contemporary sitcom. Therefore, this project aims to answer a series of questions that are listed below:

How can a sitcom be defined?

A sitcom can be easily identified by the different elements that it contains, for example, a fixed main cast and a fixed setting in which it is developed are the most recognizable elements of this genre. When these elements are identified by the audience, then they can recognize other factors that are considered more superficial, for instance, the length of the episodes or the main and/or secondary storylines. Furthermore, a sitcom must feature a humour based on a 'running gag' or 'inside joke' that can be repetitive throughout the entire series (Metz, 2008).

Is it possible to establish a connection between two different sitcoms?

Many sitcoms are very different from each other as there are a large number of plots, from fiction to reality, and several types of characters. However, a connection between different sitcoms that do not have anything in common is possible. Moreover, this connection is created by the audience noticing similar elements such as identical jokes, similar characters with the same personalities, and even physical factors, for instance, the camera setup or the details in the setting in which the sitcoms are filmed. Therefore, as long as a sitcom resembles another in any of their characteristics, a connection or evolution can be established.

If there is a connection, can it be called an evolution or continuation of a previous sitcom?

A connection between two or more sitcoms cannot always be called evolution or continuation. There are multiple ways of creating said connection, for instance, *Schooled* is connected to the sitcom *The Goldbergs* because it is a spin-off starring some of the original characters; however, every one of them requires the existence of parallel elements that demonstrate to the audience the presence of some kind of relation. The label of evolution or update established within two sitcoms that are completely different can be a difficult task, but not impossible.

In this project, the label of evolution is applied to the case studies in question. As developed in that section, the analyses and the comparison will determine how anyone can indicate if a series of sitcoms are related to each other in any way, either because they share the same joke or because their elements such as plot or characters coincide.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

2.1. Defining the Sitcom.

A definition of the term sitcom can be found in many physical and digital dictionaries. For instance, sitcom is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as "a television series in which the same characters are involved in amusing situations in each show", and the Collins English Dictionary defines it as "amusing television drama series about a set of characters. Sitcom is an abbreviation of 'situational comedy'". However, the problem with these definitions is that they are generic or simple, failing at establishing details that help the audience to define what a sitcom is. Mintz (1985, p. 115) defines the sitcom as a half-hour series divided into finite episodes in which a set of characters in a settled setting encounter a problem that is solved by the end of the episode. In his definition, Mintz included the element of the live audience's laughter, which is recorded (sometimes it is even augmented) for the audience to be aware of the comedic factor. Also related to the structure, he highlights the common aspect of the characters overcoming the obstacle presented to achieve a happy ending.

At the same time, this definition does not seem to satisfy everybody. As Mintz's definition revolves around the structure of the sitcom, Mills (2005, pp. 26–37) explains that defining the sitcom is complicated due to the type of narrative it follows and the humour it presents (including the characters' response). Furthermore, he declares that not every sitcom presents the same narrative structure and his examples to prove this point are *The Young Ones* and *The Strange World of Gurney Slade*. Even though sitcoms have traditionally been recognised by the audience by their narrative structure combined with the comic reactions of the characters and the jokes they make, this does not make the definition complete. Moreover, Mills (2013, p. 28) states that a sitcom to be identified as such must be composed by three aspects. These aspects are the setting focused on recurring places and characters, the aesthetics

and the artificiality of the sitcom's text, and the narrative referring to the repetitive nature of the sitcom stories.

Lastly, Dias Branco (2013, p. 95) offers a generic definition of the sitcom, similar to the ones mentioned before in this section. He defines it as "a type of series in which an established set of characters are involved in recurring comic situations". What makes this definition stand out from the other is that the author affirms from the beginning that it is in fact a basic definition that is only applied to the classical sitcoms.

Finally, it is almost impossible to define a sitcom properly without naming and classifying the elements they contain. Moreover, a differentiation between the traditional sitcom and the contemporary one will clarify how a member of a sitcom's audience can determine whether the series they are watching belongs to this comedic genre or not. This distinction will be developed in sections 3.4 and 3.5 of this project.

2.2. Origins of the Sitcom.

Sitcoms have evolved since they were introduced in the broadcasting media to this present day and have their origins in broadcasting institutions wanting to exploit the famous comedians who performed in music hall and vaudeville prior to the invention of the television and radio. When the comedians were transferred to broadcasting, first to the radio, they constructed the jokes around a narrative (Mills, 2005, p. 37).

Marc (2005, p. 15) establishes that any mass communication media is introduced when the economy is stable enough to allow a commercialization of said technology, along with original content to carry out the process of communication. However, sitcoms were not born directly at the same time as television appeared; instead, television sitcoms are a continuation of the radio comedy programmes that are named by some as 'radio sitcoms'.

Neale and Krutnik (1990 pp. 211 –26) locate the focus of the importance of radio comedies in the United States and Britain. In the United States, comedy programmes were most successful from the early 1930s to the mid-1950s in a broadcast radio dominated by two major organizations: the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). A notoriously common thing shared between the American radio sitcoms and the current sitcoms is that the American radio networks made commercial arrangements between the advertising agencies and the individual radio stations to attract listeners on a regular basis, and included also the element of 'canned laughter', or in some cases, studio audiences. Furthermore, Jack Benny established with *The Jello-o Program* and *The Jack Benny Show* (which was later transferred to television) a structure that heavily influenced the later comedy shows. On the other hand, in Britain there was only one company that brought continuous and regular broadcasting in 1922, t he British Broadcasting Company (BBC). The BBC programmers were inflexible about broadcasting entertainment and were strongly biased in favour of light band music, refusing to imitate the American commercial models. However, the magazine-style *Band Waggon* was created to emulate American-style comedy formats and was the first comedy show designed specifically for the radio. The success of *Band Waggon* from 1938 to 1940 led the corporation to attempt further comedy series/shows. Marc (2005, p. 16) notes that two of the longest-running and most popular 'radio sitcoms' to be adapted for television were *The Goldbergs* (premiering on the NBC as *The Rise of the Goldbergs* in 1929) and *Amos 'n' Andy* (premiering in 1929 in the CBS radio network).

Finally, television started supplanting radio as the major homebased medium between 1948 and 1952 in America and after 1955 in Britain. The competition between the different American networks started to intensify as they wanted the best position in radio entertainment and, at the same time, to secure top-rated talent for their television services. Therefore, the radio-comedy stars were in high demand because of their long-term familiarity to audiences

(Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 231). Marc (2005, pp. 16–7) specifies that not only radio-comedy stars were moving towards the television but studio-era movie stars such as Crosby, Donna Reed, Robert Young and Jimmy Stewart also transferred to the new medium after the feature film production began its decline in the 1960s.

Apart from the sitcom transferred to television, other formats also followed such as the soap opera serial, the drama series, panel shows, quiz games, and the 'personality'-hosted variety show (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 232).

2.3. Genres of the Sitcom.

The term sitcom is already considered as a subgenre inside the genre of comedy. However, throughout the years of the evolution of the sitcom since it was introduced on television, it has become a full and rounded genre from which some subgenres are derived. Many studies indicate several categories or genres within a sitcom, and all these classifications can be considered correct depending on the type of the categorization. In this section, two of the many classifications possible of sitcoms will be exposed.

One author that mentions the genres within sitcoms is Vilches (1996, pp. 152–3), who collects an analysis made by Arthur Hough in 1981 in which he states the development of the sitcoms from the year 1948 until 1978 establishing the following (my translation):

a) Family sitcom: «The traditional family» (1948–1955); «The nuclear family» (1955–1965); «The eccentric family» (1965–1975); «The social family» (1970–1978).

b) Non-domestic sitcom: «The first comedies» (1948–1955); «The military comedies» (1955–1970); «The workplace comedies» (1960–1965); «The fantasy comedies» (1965–1970); «The rural comedies» (1960–1970); «The

adventure comedies» (1965–1970); «The professional group comedies» (1970–1978).

Hartley (2015, pp. 96–8) distinguishes two main types of sitcom: family sitcoms and workplace sitcoms. Family sitcoms are specialized in the drama of family behaviour routinely set in a home environment. This type focuses on internal family roles, usually parents, children and siblings, presented as blood family (*Roseanne*), melded family (*The Brady Bunch*) or a metaphorical family (*Cheers*). Family or domestic sitcoms were important as they would teach the audience how to watch television (media literacy) and how to live in families with tolerant mutual accommodation (life skills). A special characteristic of this type of sitcoms is that they show a kind of family that was not the traditional model, for instance, a father and his daughters in *Full House*, a father and sons melded with a mother and her daughters in *The Brady Bunch*, and even a type of family that was fantasized for example monster families in *The Munsters*, vampire families in *The Addams Family* or alien families in *Third Rock from the Sun*. On the other hand, workplace sitcoms focus on the drama of sexual exploration set in the workplace. This type of sitcom follows the stereotype of finding a sexual partner among workmates, and seems to be generically driven to be about sexual chemistry rather than occupational specificity as the characters are almost obsessed on focusing on the situations provoked in the relationships and not in this workplace, although at the end, workplace sitcoms tend to navigate towards reproducing the family formula. Lastly, Hartley highlights the pioneer *Are You Being Served?*, *Taxi* and *Cheers* as examples of sitcoms in which flirting occurs in the workplace.

Mintz (1985, pp. 116–7) states that a system of classification of sitcoms can be very flexible and almost every study about this topic includes one. Moreover, he selects three authors and their corresponding lists. The authors are: Horace Newcomb, John Bryant and Rick Mitz. Mintz considers Newcomb's subdivision of comedy-drama the most important as he establishes two categories: situation and domestic comedy, considering that domestic comedy is based in

a home setting and contains differences within its tone. This division can be confusing as all domestic comedies follow the structural rules for sitcoms, and sitcoms can be domestic or family-oriented. The second author, John Bryant, provides a list consisting of eleven types of sitcoms: domestic, man-woman, parent-child, single man, single woman, professional/military, ethnic, hick, fantasy, town hall or community, and parodies. Lastly, the third author that Mintz cites is Rick Mitz and his seven basic categories: "domcoms", "kidcoms", "couplecoms", "SciFicoms", "corncoms", "ethnicoms", and "careercoms".

However, Smith (1999, p. 39) explains how sitcom cannot be conceived as a genre. Films can belong to a certain genre such as horror, suspense, action, sci-fi, buddy-cop, coming of age, personal redemption, etc. Smith clarifies that linking a sitcom with a genre will help the audiences to expect seeing certain story elements. Moreover, Smith states that even though sitcoms fall into broad categories (domestic, odd couple, out of the closet with a vengeance, etc) does not mean that they are full genres. As an example, the sitcoms *Married... with Children* and *Cosby* would be both domestic sitcoms from the eighties, sharing the same category they belong to but not the story attributes. To conclude, Smith finalizes by saying that is useful to think about each sitcom's story as its own genre, and that the unique attributes of each series will determine their distinct style of comedy.

Finally, it is important to comment that Feuer (2015, pp. 103–4) mentions a type or subtype of sitcom that during the nineties could be considered ahead of its time, and that can be included in the category of family sitcoms made by Hartley: the gay or queer sitcom. Even though this can be considered as part of the family sitcoms, it is often treated as a category of its own. The gay sitcom usually begins with an ambiguous or confused situation about the sexuality of the gay characters, who later come out. Feuer highlights the sitcom *Ellen*, in which the lead character played by Ellen DeGeneres (a lesbian herself) would convince the audience about her being heterosexual and the show would confirm it in a coming out episode.

2.4. The Traditional Sitcom.

After the introduction of television in America and Britain substituting the radio as the major home-based medium, the radio comedies now transformed into the early sitcoms were trying to draw and maintain a regular audience with their episodic structure and repeatable narrative.

2.4.1. Elements.

The structure of the early sitcoms include a kind of play based on the continuity of the events and the forgetting of the events of preceding episodes, although this structure can be modified as happens in the domestic sitcoms *Bewitched* and *I Love Lucy*, where in both sitcoms a husband and a wife have children, the children grow up and go to school and so on, including additional characters (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp. 233–6).

The system of writing in the traditional sitcom successfully consisted in a writer or writing team creating a script and then submitting it to be put under the process of rewriting known as 'roundtable writing', a process in which a group of writers (five, ten or even more) would go through said script and rewrite the lines needed to increase the joke count or remedy any story problems. However, there is a difference between a talented group of rewriters and an amateur group, leading to a poor and tasteless humour (Smith, 1999, pp. 21–3).

A new camera system was created to capture the humour in its entirety, as it would record the moment when a character tells the joke and at the same time the reaction of the other(s) character(s). The model established by Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz and Karl Freund called the 'three-headed monster' for the sitcom *I Love Lucy*, consisted in a set-up of cameras that while one of them would shoot the two characters on screen separately, the third one would record them together (Mellencamp, 1992, p. 322). Putterman (1995, p. 15) says that this 'three-headed monster' is "a three-camera set-up with studio audience format that freed television

situation comedy from its stiff stage restrains". Apart from camera angles to accentuate the humour, Neale and Krutnik (1990, pp. 213–4) comment that to 'cue in' the laughter of the home audience it is used either studio audiences or the 'canned laughter', a practice first used on radio. However, it is important to mention that an older camera system of filming sitcoms with a single camera was still relevant as it was used in *Sex and The City*, *The Office*, or *The Addams Family*, for example.

Another important element that is part of a sitcom is the cast of characters. Mintz (1985, p. 117) points out that much of the appeal of a sitcom relies on a good selection of characters. Most of the characters presented in classic sitcoms meet the types introduced in the *Commedia dell'arte*, an early form of theatre that was popular in Europe from the 16th to the 18th century. These archetypes include the wise-fools, braggarts, cowards, out-of-it pedants, con men, tricksters, termagant wives, bullies, etc. Naturally, these models have evolved into much modern characters. Mintz also states that the characters of the sitcoms are not flat, suffering a psychological and sometimes physical growth. Smith (1999, pp. 20–1) connects the jokes to the characters as the lines must be something that the characters would say. Furthermore, the humour must be consistent and flow naturally from a story, because if not, the audience would lose interest. Lipovetsky (2002, pp. 137–47) states that the humour employed was more ruthless, with a component of aggressiveness that as time passes, loses it ability to make the audience laugh. Moreover, during the first half of the 20th century, characters will laugh at the misfortunes of other characters that are considered a "derivation from the norm" (my translation).

Klika (2018, pp. 19–94) identifies a 'key' character that is under the power of someone, alongside their sidekick who lacks power. The characters that fall into the category of the sidekick are denominated by Klika as 'echo' characters. These 'echo' characters deliver some of the comic content of the sitcoms and are always victims of the 'key' character. Some of the

'echo' characters this author cites are Phoebe and Joey from *Friends*, Woody from *Cheers*, Georgette from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, or Rose from *The Golden Girls*.

2.5. The Contemporary Sitcom.

Since it first evolved, the sitcom has conserved its structure; however, its content is what has developed significantly as it explores many contemporary social issues, trying to portray social changes that were happening at that time. The sitcom's evolution it is also affected by wider comedic trends. The humour suffered a transformation, accepting more the feminist movement and portraying women's contradictory roles within society, as the changes produced in the domestic structure of the family unit. Therefore, the writers and producers attempt to create realistic situations that their audiences live in their lives, as sitcoms are only a reflection of social changes (Mills, 2005, pp. 42–5).

Vermeulen and Whitfield (2013, pp. 103–5) argue that the 'traditional' sitcom style has not disappeared; however, the sitcom has suffered certain industrial and technological changes that altered the meaning and the style of the American sitcom. Mills (2005, pp. 48–49) clarifies that while the sitcom was a big success and the dominant genre in the television of the United States, its popularity was in decline in Britain. Furthermore, Mills states that the sitcom started to abandon its theatrical origins to become a genre itself, being adapted to please the audiences but not earning the popularity that post-war radio comedies earned.

2.5.1. Elements.

Vermeulen and Whitfield (2013, pp. 105–11) mention that Mills took *Arrested Development* as an example of the new sitcoms, as it employs different elements such as flashbacks, callbacks, foreshadowing, live audiences, laughter track, a single-camera shooting with mobile cameras, and a variety of sets and outdoor locations. Another important element of this sitcom is the 'pull back and reveal' gag. This method of 'pull back and reveal' is defined

by Herring and Caulfield ("The Comedian's Toolbox") as "A term derived from the TV practice of panning out from a close-up to discover a humorous situation. Essentially you are holding back a piece of pertinent information until the end of the story." Finally, Vermeulen and Whitfield consider this method important as it "reconceives the correlation between style and meaning, and the relationship between programme and its viewers".

Mills (2005, pp. 49–52) highlights the importance of the use of a laugh track. This laugh track would not only help the audiences to identify the programme they just put on, but also to indicate when a joke is made even though the audiences do not find it funny or do not catch the joke. Also, the laugh track will make the experience for the audience be better as it will make it more live. However, even though the laugh track is important, in recent years it has been abandoned, especially in British sitcoms.

In modern or contemporary sitcoms, we find two varieties depending on the use of the camera: single-camera sitcoms and multi-camera sitcoms. Miyamoto ("Single-Camera vs. Multi-Camera TV Sitcom Scripts: What's the Difference?") states that single-camera sitcoms, such as *Modern Family* and *Silicon Valley* are "shot as much more like a film, without a live audience", while he defines multi-camera sitcoms, such as *The Big Bang Theory* and *Friends*, as "everything filmed in front of a live studio audience". Therefore, the difference in their use of the cameras is found in whether there is a live audience or not, that also affects the humour and the character's movements as multi-camera sitcoms are similar to live theatre.

Lastly, the characters of the modern sitcoms have evolved too. Sedita (2006) introduces and explains the characteristics of eight specific character archetypes: The Logical One, The Loveable Loser, The Neurotic One, The Dumb One, The Bitch/Bastard, The Womanizer/Manizer, The Materialistic One, and the character that is always In Their Own

Universe. These models will help to analyse the contemporary sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* in section 4.2. However, not every sitcom's characters will based on this model.

Finally, Lipovetsky (2002, pp. 137–47) mentions an evolution from the 20th century's humour to today's humour. The character that conventionally tends to be the victim of sarcasm, is not longer considered at such and the audience will laugh less at the characters' misfortunes. Now, characters will help others when "their image of the other loses consistency and becomes humorous by force of singularity". Furthermore, the funny characters cannot observe how they behave and are unaware of their image; thus the element of humour relays in the situation the characters create through their absurd actions and gags (my translation).

3. CASE STUDIES.

In this section, I will analyse the sitcoms *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* which constitute the case studies of this paper. After the analysis, I will make a comparison to demonstrate the relationship between them, confirming an evolution.

3.1. The Office.

The Office is an American sitcom adapted from the UK original series with the same name. *The Office* (UK) aired on BBC Two starting in 2001 and ending in 2003. The British version was created, written, and directed by Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais, who also stars in it. In 2005, t he National Broadcasting Company (NBC), one of the two major broadcasting companies in the United States, aired the adaptation of the British version listing *Saturday's Night Live*'s Greg Daniels and Michael Schur as writers and producers for this new show, and Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais, the creators of the original, as executive producers.

The Office aired on NBC from March 24, 2005, May 13, 2013, producing a total of nine seasons, alongside winning several prestigious awards such as a Golden Globe Award, five

Primetime Emmy Awards, three Television Critics Association Awards, and three NAACP Image Awards, among others. It aired, *The Office* has created an impact in pop culture that is still relevant in today's culture as it has influenced later sitcoms such as *Parks and Recreation* or *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, as will be demonstrated in section 3.3.

3.1.1. Plot.

The Office is an American sitcom that follows the format of a mockumentary, a blend formed by the words 'mock' and 'documentary' meaning that the events and stories presented as a documentary are fictional, making fun of the documentary format as it is supposed to be serious. This mockumentary follows the lives of a branch of a paper company called Dunder Mifflin Paper Company, located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. All the characters are aware of the cameras filming for the documentary, having interviews with the characters, and in episode 12 of season 9, the camera crew of the documentary is revealed, adding the element of reality.

The Office does not have a fixed plot as the documentary only follows the lives of the workers at the paper company; therefore, the real plot would be what happens in their everyday lives. However, this sitcom contains microplots and main storylines that are followed since the beginning and that are even considered the show's plot. Since the first season of *The Office*, the main storylines that are developed are the gradually slow relationship between Pam Beesly and Jim Halpert, the failing attempts of Dwight Schrute to become the branch's manager, and the blooming capacities of Michael Scott to be a successful boss and sales manager. As new seasons of the show are written and filmed, these storylines get more complicated with the new narratives and characters introduced.

3.1.2. Characters.

The Office's cast is formed essentially by the manager and employees of the Scranton branch of Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. Although there is no protagonist, during the first

season, the regional manager Michael Scott is considered as the main character, alongside with the characters of Pam Beesly, Jim Halpert, Dwight Schrute and Ryan Howard. In later seasons, most of the secondary characters or recurring roles will be promoted to regular characters, for instance, Andy Bernard or Angela Martin, while some of them will be demoted as guests in one episode or two, such as Kelly Kapoor or Jo Bennett. During the interviews of the documentary, the characters answer questions made by a fictional interviewer in a separate room, and they are placed in front of the outer window like Jim Halpert or in front of the inner facing window, like Angela Martin. These placements mean that characters with hope or a future outside of the office would be in front of the outer window.

Michael Scott is the regional manager of the branch and is portrayed by Steve Carell from season 1 to season 7. Michael Scott is an excellent salesman but an awful manager as he prioritises his interest in comedy, making inappropriate jokes in the workplace and always throwing parties without a valid reason. He is introduced in season 1 until he leaves Scranton in season 7 to live in Colorado with his girlfriend Holly, but making an appearance in the series finale.

Pamela 'Pam' Beesly is the receptionist (later saleswoman and office administrator) of the branch and is portrayed by Jenna Fischer. Pam is a shy, boring and insecure woman that is not happy with her job, only being happy when she is with her best friend and later lover Jim Halpert. She has a passion for art, as she attends art school in season 5, and is mainly the target of Michael's jokes, especially the sexual ones. She is introduced in season 1 and appears in almost every episode until the series finale.

James 'Jim' Halpert is part of the sales team of the Scranton branch and is portrayed by John Krasinski. Jim is with Dwight the best salesman of the branch, being rivals and clashing with each other. He is the 'goofy' one as he always pranks his co-workers, especially Dwight.

In season 4, he starts a relationship with Pam, whom he marries and has two children with. Jim appears in every episode of the show, since the first season until the series finale.

Dwight Schrute is a salesman and assistant to the regional manager of the Scranton branch before being promoted to regional manager in the final season. Dwight is portrayed by Rainn Wilson and he is known as the 'weird' character as he lacks social skills. His personality tends to be gullible and intense, most of the times annoying everyone in the office. He also appears in every episode of *The Office*, since season 1 to the series finale.

Lastly, Ryan Howard is the intern of the office and is portrayed by B. J. Novak, who is also a producer, writer, and director of the show. He seems to not care about his job or co-workers, always criticising what the rest of the employees do. He starts a relationship with Kelly Kapoor, a co-worker at Dunder Mifflin. He later gets a promotion and a demotion, becoming an intern again until season 8, his last season.

As the show progresses, some of the secondary characters are unofficially being considered part of the main cast. This is the case of the characters of Angela Martin, who gains notoriety in the show as she develops a relationship with Dwight Schrute, and Andy Bernard, who in the last seasons is promoted to regional manager of the Scranton branch. The secondary and later upgraded to recurring cast includes the characters of Andy Bernard (Ed Helms), Angela Martin (Angela Kinsey), Kelly Kapoor (Mindy Kaling), Oscar Martinez (Oscar Nuñez), Stanley Hudson (Leslie David Baker), Creed Bratton (Creed Bratton), Roy Anderson (David Denman), Darryl Philbin (Craig Robinson), and Erin Hannon (Ellie Kemper).

3.1.3. Setting.

The Office aired from 2005 to 2013; therefore, it is a traditional sitcom that experienced the transition towards the contemporary sitcom. Projected to having a long run, *The Office* techniques and elements are more typical of contemporary sitcoms but keeps some elements

from traditional sitcoms. The writing system of this sitcom consists in the infamous 'roundtable writing', with some of the writers going over the script to rewrite the jokes to maintain the humour. The camera system used to film *The Office* was not the 'three-headed monster' introduced in *I Love Lucy*, but the single-camera system that was older, filming the series in a movie-like manner. The show does not include a 'laugh track' or 'canned laughter' as it tries to simulate a documentary. The normal episodes of *The Office* had a run of about 20 minutes, extending the time in the last episode of season 2 and introducing the first hour-long episode in season 3. The humour of this sitcom flows naturally as the lines are what the audience expect from them after identifying their personalities and the type of characters they are. Lastly, as Mintz (1985, p. 117) states, throughout the entire series these characters become more mature and grow since they were first introduced. Also, there is a 'key' character with a sidekick as Klika (2018, pp. 19–94) mentions, and in the case of *The Office*, the 'key' character is Michael Scott and his sidekick is Dwight Schrute, who does Michael's 'dirty work' and always accompanies him in his adventures.

3.2. Brooklyn Nine-Nine.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine is an American sitcom that follows the everyday lives of the police workers in the fictional 99th Precinct of the New York City Police Department in Brooklyn. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* started airing on Fox from September 18, 2013, to May 20, 2018. On May 10, 2018, Fox announced that the show would be cancelled after five seasons; however, NBC picked it up for a sixth season and renewed it for a seventh one, starting airing it on January 10, 2019. The show was created by Dan Goor and Michael Schur after being inspired by American sitcom *Barney Miller,* which also takes place in a police station in New York. Aside from Goor and Schur, some of the show's producers are Phil Lord, Christopher Miller and David Miner.

Since its premiere, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* has received many nominations and awards for its portrayal of modern issues and representation of LGBTQ+ characters. The nominations and

awards include three consecutive nominations for the Primetime Emmy Awards, People's Choice Awards, GLAAD Awards, Critics' Choice Television Awards and Golden Globe Awards, among others. The show has been acclaimed because of its representation of the LGBTQ+ community and people of colour.

3.2.1. Plot.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine follows the everyday lives of nine police workers at Brooklyn's fictional 99th Precinct. The main storyline of the show is the rivals-to-lovers relationship between the detectives Jake Peralta and Amy Santiago; however, the rest of the characters also evolve though the seasons, such as Rosa Diaz, who comes out as bisexual, or Gina Linetti, who settles down, has a child and decides to leave her job in the 99th Precinct.

The plot of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* consists in a group of detectives trying to solve cases, such as the Pontiac Bandit case or the Giggle Pig case, while also resolving personal problems that often pit the characters against each other. Some of the episodes from different seasons continue to develop the same plot, for example, through seasons 1 to 5, the episodes "Halloween", "Halloween II", "Halloween III", "Halloween IV", and "HalloVeen" continue the tradition of the Halloween heist started by Jake Peralta and Raymond Holt.

3.2.2. Characters.

The main cast of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is formed by the detectives Jake Peralta, Amy Santiago, Rosa Diaz, Charles Boyce; Raymond Holt, the captain of the precinct; Terry Jeffords, the sergeant and later lieutenant of the precinct; and Gina Linetti, a civilian administrator and Holt's assistant. The characters of Michael Hitchcock and Norm Scully have a recurring role during the first season, but from season 2 onwards they are promoted to main characters.

Jacob 'Jake' Peralta is a detective at the 99th Precinct of the New York City Police Department in Brooklyn and is portrayed by Andy Samberg, who is also an executive producer

of the show. Jake is a childish but skilful detective, solving the majority of the cases. In the first season, he and Amy Santiago bet who can solve more cases, ending in them going on a date and eventually Jake realizing his feelings for her, marrying in the fifth season and having a child in the seventh season. Jake has 'daddy issues' as he grew up without a father figure and most of the times his relationship with Captain Holt resembles a father-son relationship.

Amy Santiago, portrayed by Melissa Fumero, is a detective of the 99th Precinct and former rival of Jake Peralta. She is an intelligent, perfectionist and boring woman. She starts as Jake's rival, competing to solve more crimes than him, but eventually they fall in love. Although she is a very monotonous character as she is organized and strict, she becomes a more lively person after she starts dating Jake.

Rosa Diaz is portrayed by Stephanie Beatriz. Rosa is a bisexual and ruthless detective, being feared by the majority of her co-workers due to her mean personality. She evolves and becomes a warmer character, especially since she comes out as bisexual.

Charles Boyce, portrayed by Joe Lo Truglio, is a detective and Jake's best friend. He begins the show with a love interest on Rosa Diaz and starts a short sexual relationship with Gina Linetti, but eventually settles down and adopts a child. He is a hard-working, clumsy detective who idolises his best fiend Jake.

Gina Linetti is a civilian administrator and Captain Holt's assistant, and is portrayed by Chelsea Peretti. Gina is Jake's childhood friend, and has a witty and charismatic personality, accentuated by her passion for dance and her obsession for social media. She is a main character since the first season but leaves the show in the sixth season.

Raymond Jacob 'Captain' Holt is the new captain of the 99th Precinct. He is a very uptight and serious character, showing his 'funny' side without smiling or laughing. He is a

black and homosexual man, representing a minority part of the LGBTQ+ community. Captain Holt is portrayed Andre Braugher.

Terry Jeffords, portrayed by Terry Crews, is the sergeant of the 99th Precinct. He is a tall and muscular man with a fear of working in the field because he does not want to leave his daughters fatherless. However, he changes and becomes a brave man, going back to do field work to help his co-workers.

The last two characters are only part of the main cast since season 2 onwards. These are Michael Hitchcock and Norm Scully, two detective partners part of the 99th Precinct. Michael Hitchcock is a lazy and creepy detective that was once a hardworking employee. Norm Scully is a passive and gluttonous detective with a passion for singing opera, and like his partner Michael Hitchcock, he was one of the best detective of the precinct back in the day, dismantling an important drug mafia.

Lastly, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is a contemporary sitcom and according to the eight character labels of comedy explained by Sedita (2006), the characters would be labelled as the following: Jake Peralta and Charles Boyle would be The Lovable Loser, Amy Santiago would be The Neurotic, Rosa Diaz would be The Womanizer, Gina Linetti would be The Bitch and The Materialistic One, Captain Holt and Terry Jeffords would be The Logical Smart One. Even though the classification of the different comedy characters can be applied, some of them would have the same label. Finally, Klika (2018, pp. 19–94) mentions the 'key' character accompanied with a sidekick. Even though this formula is used in the analysis of traditional sitcoms, it can be applied to this sitcom as Jake Peralta fulfils the role of the 'key' character while Charles Boyle would be his sidekick; and Captain Holt could also be a 'key' character with Terry Jeffords as his ally.

3.2.3. Setting.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine aired from 2013 to 2018, when it was cancelled. It was picked up in 2019 and it continues being aired in 2020. It is considered a contemporary sitcom due to the year it was premiered and its treatment of serious matters without being overly offensive. Even though the show is modern, it does not use the multi-camera setup and is filmed using the classic single-camera technique, shooting it in a movie-like format. The running time of the episodes is about 23 minutes. The show does not have a 'laugh track' or 'canned laughter' and the humour that the writers utilize is intelligent and witty, reminiscent of the traditional sitcom humour but without making fun of minorities or other vulnerable groups. Moreover, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*'s impact in today's culture is the treatment of racial issues, for example, police brutality against people of colour, and a considerable representation of characters part of a minority, such as Captain Holt, who is a black homosexual men, or Rosa Diaz, who is a Latina bisexual woman.

3.3 The Office vs. Brooklyn Nine-Nine.

In this section, I will make a comparison between the sitcoms *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to establish a connection and prove the evolution between them. Both sitcoms share some elements but differ in others. The similarities they share are the setup, storylines, characters, and jokes. The differences between them are the changes the modern sitcom suffered in contrast to the traditional one.

Although it is a traditional sitcom and started filming after the invention of the 'three-headed monster', *The Office* is filmed using the older single-camera setup and adding the movement of the zoom of the characters' faces to increase the delivery of a joke. In the case of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, the setup is the same as in *The Office*, the single-camera system with the technique of zooming characters' faces to accentuate their reactions. The sets of *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* also share the similarity of being dull places: an office and a police

department. Both shows also have a connection due to *The Office*'s producer Michael Schur being the creator of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

The main storylines of these two sitcoms are basically the same. *The Office* does not have a fixed plot, it changes all the time, but the main storyline is the love story of Jim and Pam. They start as best friends who work together, realize that they are in love, start a relationship, get married and have two children. In the case of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, the love story between Jake and Amy is the main storyline that is fixed apart from the events that happens in their everyday lives. In *The Office*, Pam is engaged to Roy (a worker at the company's warehouse) and is Jim's best friend. After Jim confesses her his love, he decides to leave the branch only to come back with Karen, his new girlfriend. Pam after breaking up with Roy and Jim with Karen, will start a secret relationship that will end up in marriage. In *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Jake and Amy start as rivals, fighting to be the best detective of the precinct. After losing the bet, Jake and Amy go to the worst date ever, but slowly fall in love with each other. Despite their feelings, Amy starts a relationship with another man and Jake with another woman, only to confess his love to her. They start a secret relationship and end up marrying. Both of these relationships are in essence the same and seem to follow the same pattern: co-workers-secret lovers-public relationship-marriage-children. Both couples were in a previous relationship when they started falling in love for each other and both of them started a secret relationship that was discovered by cameras: Jim and Pam's were discovered by a camera of the documentary, and Jake and Amy's were recorded in the security tapes. They also share the similarity of having a wedding gone wrong, in the case of Jim and Pam, they solved it by escaping and getting married on a boat under the Niagara Falls; and in the case of Jake and Amy, their wedding is ruined by a bomb threat and they solved it by getting married in the precinct with their co-workers. The main difference between these two relationships is the

beginning as Jim and Pam were best friends while Amy and Jake were rivals, completely the opposite.

Not only the storylines of the relationships between Jim and Pam, and Jake and Amy coincide, but the characters of both sitcoms are also connected. The main difference is the number of the cast, while in *The Office* there are five main characters and the rest have recurring roles, in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* there is a fixed cast of seven main characters (later nine). Jim Harper and Jake Peralta share the same personality but Jake's is more exaggerated. Both of these characters have a hatred towards holidays, in Jim's case, he hates Halloween and dressing up as is revealed in the episode "Halloween" of the second season; while Jake reveals that he dislikes Thanksgiving in the episode "Thanksgiving" of the first season. Furthermore, the character of Jake also reminds us of Michael Scott as both of them are fans of the movie *Die Hard*. Pam Beesly and Amy Santiago are also the same character but Amy is modernised to follow a more feminist idea of an independent woman. During the third season of *The Office* is revealed Pam's interest on art and later she attends art school, which is also reflected on the character of Amy as she studied art history in college. The character of Rosa Diaz is the female version of Creed Bratton, as they are both mysterious and transmit a gangster and threatening aura, but with a more important role in the show. Charles Boyle's personality is the same as Andy Bernard's, a person that seeks the acceptance of the rest and tries to be the best but fails; however, his actions resemble Dwight Schrute's as his behaviour and weird interests make him bizarre and he is always idolising someone else (Dwight idolised Michael Scott). Gina Linetti is a modern actualization of the character of Kelly Kapoor, both witty, heavily invested in current pop culture and not interested in their jobs. Terry Jeffords resembles Oscar Martinez as they both logical and reasonable characters but also vulnerable. Lastly, Raymond Holt fulfils Michael Scott's job as they are the bosses, but with a difference. The counterpoint between these two characters is that Michael Scott is a goofy man that jokes around the office all day

and does not get any work done, while Raymond Holt is a serious man that spends the entire day locked in his office working. Furthermore, Michael Scott is white and straight, and Raymond Holt is black and homosexual, extending the counterpoint to the physical appearance.

The last similarity they share and that confirms the idea of an evolution is the jokes. As a traditional sitcom, *The Office* started using basic sexual-themed jokes, most of the time directed to women, for instance, the show's most common joke is Michael's punch line "That's what she said", and is used by almost every character. This punch line is classed as a joke as in every serious conversation involving Michael, he responds with it to create a humorous atmosphere, for example, in episode 21 of season 2, Angela says "You already did me" and Michael replies with "That's what she said". This type of joke is defined by Attardo (1994, p. 298) as a 'conversional or situational joke' that does not require an introduction like 'canned jokes' and are produced in a conversation context charged with 'con-textual and co-textual links'. However, as the show progresses, the jokes are becoming a little bit more mature but keeping the same nature. Furthermore, each character will always make a joke that is related with their own personalities, making sure that the humour makes sense with the character. On the other hand, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is a contemporary sitcom and the jokes already start being mature and funny at the same time, as it is a comedy that tries to raise awareness about certain important social matters, for example racism. Most of the jokes in this show are related to the police field, as it is set in a p olice department. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* also contains a 'conversational or situational joke' that is used through the entire series by all of the characters and is the equivalent of *The Office*'s "That's what she said", and it is "Title of your sextape", which also makes a reference to sexual intercourse and is modernised. Attardo (2001, p. 89) defines these 'inside jokes' or 'running gags' as a 'final punch line' delivered by the characters after a serious intervention to add humour to it. Another shared element of humour between these two sitcoms is the punch line "Ya boring/basic". Also, the characters of *The Office* joke

about the abbreviation of the invitations for Pam and Roy's wedding, Save The Date, being displayed as STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease), and this is picked up in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* as the cast make the same joke about Charles Boyle's wedding invitations as he calls them "his STDs".

Finally, these sitcoms share several physical elements that help the audience to create a connection between them. In the break room of both sets, the same coffee machine appears with the message "Fresh Brewed Coffee. Cup After Cup." and the same image displayed in it. In Michael Scott's office, the audience can notice a colourful ball that can be opened and closed, and the same ball appears in Jake Peralta's desk. Another element shared by them is the film *Die Hard*. The character of Jake Peralta is a fan of the movie, always quoting it and even visiting a location of the movie in an episode. In *The Office* there are explicit references to the movie *Die Hard* as Michael Scott expresses that is one of his favourites movies and in the episode "Threat Level Midnight" he shows his co-workers the movie he made influenced by *Die Hard*. In the episode "Dwight Christmas" from the ninth season, the character of Pete watches Die Hard with Erin, trying to impress her by reciting the dialogue by memory. Lastly, some of the actors from *The Office* make guest appearances in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* such as Craig Robinson, Ed Helms, Kate Flannery, and Oscar Nuñez.

4. CONCLUSION.

After analysing both sitcoms and comparing the similarities and differences between them, in this section I will state the conclusion to the evidence provided in order to demonstrate the aim of this project. In section 1.1, I proposed a series of questions that are part of the two purposes of this project: demonstrate that *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is an evolution of *The Office*, and offer a complete definition of the term sitcom. The complete answers of these questions are displayed in the theoretical framework and the case studies.

The theoretical framework is composed by a breakdown of the term sitcom and its components, compiling information about its origin in the radio as 'radio comedies' and its transition to television, the different genres that are part of the sitcom and complete the definition, the two biggest types of classification of the sitcom (the traditional and the contemporary one) and its evolution through time, highlighting historical and cultural changes. In order to define what a sitcom is, the sections which are part of the theoretical framework offer a historical background about its development, starting in the radio and shifting towards television expanding the idea of what a sitcom is. Then, the classification of the traditional sitcom and the contemporary sitcom through the analysis of their different elements establishes a division for the audience to understand the main changes. To be considered as traditional or contemporary, a sitcom must follow a pattern adequate to the type of sitcoms of that time, contemplating when it was created and released. The case studies of this project are the sitcoms *The Office* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. Through two in-depth analyses applying the theory explained in the theoretical framework, the main elements of these sitcoms such as the characters, the storylines, the setting, or setup are displayed. Then, in the same section, the comparison between the two sitcoms exhibits the similarities that conform the evolution from *The Office* to *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. Both shows include a panel of characters that are essentially the same, sharing the same personalities and behaviour, and the humour of these sitcoms are very similar, recycling the same jokes but updating them to meet society's new norms.

Both sitcom share resemblances in many of their elements, especially in the characters, confirming the use of the same prototype of those characters and upgrading them. The humour of *The Office* is more conventional as the jokes, which are mostly sexually based, are mainly directed against women and minorities, reinforcing the idea of a white straight male dominating society, which was society's model at that time. On the contrary, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* employs the same kind of jokes and puns but improving them to be adapted to what is socially correct

today, without intentionally offending anyone. Therefore, the common points collected demonstrate that *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* started as a reset of *The Office*, trying to create the same impact by introducing the same plot with similar characters but in a different historical and cultural context. Following the same love storyline and humour patterns but adequate to its current time of airing, the evidence compiled in the analyses and comparison determine a progression of the components of these sitcoms confirming the existence of the evolution from *The Office* to *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

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