



Celebrity Chefs and the Social Construction of Taste in Contemporary British Society

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Ariane Lengyel

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines how celebrity chefs have become an integral part of contemporary British culture through television and the media, serving as arbiters of taste and cultural intermediaries. As a figure of contemporary culture, celebrity chefs reflect shifting attitudes toward cooking, eating, ethics, consumption, class, and culinary capital.

Three paradigms were used to examine the construction of taste. Based on an anthropological and structuralist perspective, the first theory proposes that taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled. A second approach asserts that taste is influenced by external factors and political and economic changes. Finally, a post-modern approach, places the individual at the centre of the construction of taste.

Using a case study approach, the study developed a template initially based on the review of literature which was then overlaid with the additional themes that emerged from the scrutiny of chosen television shows and cookbooks of four celebrity chefs: Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay, Mary Berry and Nigella Lawson. The themes that emerged are: paradigms of the construction of taste, class, capital, habitus, food as identity, lifestyle, chefs and the media, gender roles and persona, education, civic and moral discourse, foodporn, authenticity, legitimacy and expertise, professionalism, ethnicity and culture.

The key findings of the study found that the interpretation of the texts showed that the influence of the chefs can be understood as key factor in understanding the social construct of taste in modern British society. This study has shown that both the books and the television

shows contain recursive themes that enable the chefs to act as cultural intermediaries by influencing beliefs about food, taste, class, and gender. It is these messages that in turn shape the tastes of their audiences. This thesis has added to the existing body of knowledge by explicitly positioning the celebrity chefs as co-producers of taste and cultural identity.

Potential research directions could include interrogations on audience reception and identity, empowerment and accessibility, authenticity and cultural appropriation as well as values and attitudes. The research can assist practitioners in harnessing the popularity and appeal of the chefs. Restaurants should strike a balance between providing premium experiences and ensuring affordability in order to appeal to a wider audience. They can also use the influence of the chefs in marketing and development of new products and services. To prevent unauthorised appropriation of recipes, practitioners must emphasise the importance of context and sensitivity.

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# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the study

The study of food culture is of particular importance for understanding the role of food in the rapidly changing social landscape (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). Furthermore, it has been said that food choices reflect social and cultural belonging and therefore act as important markers of social differentiation (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). 'Food indicates who we are, where we came from and what we want to be' (Belasco, 2002, p. 2). Counihan and Van Esterik (2008, p. 2) suggest that 'food links body and soul, self and other, the personal and the political, the material and the symbolic'. Research into food is thus significant.

Within this context, the concept of taste is fundamental. It is linked to the formation of identity, choices and consumption (Bourdieu, 1984; Chiaro, 2008; Harvey et al., 2011; Deeming, 2014). It can be argued that taste is interpreted in numerous ways. The first is linked to the gustatory aspect of the concept. However, taste is both aesthetic as well as physiological (Elliott, 2006; Strong, 2011; Milne, 2013). Indeed, it has become an all-encompassing term which implies that taste acts as a classifier as well as a marker of identity and difference and implies discrimination (Bourdieu, 1984; Mennell, 1996; Short, 2006; Hyman, 2008; Finkelstein, 2014). Other theories suggest, however, that taste can be viewed both as a way to relate to food and as a system for expressing socially constructed preferences (Bourdieu, 1984, Ashley et al., 2004; Albon, 2005; Arsel and Bean, 2012; Deeming, 2014). The use of taste can therefore be considered

as a measure of judging others as well as a way of determining one's position within a social or cultural context (Wright et al., 2000; Finkelstein, 2014).

Further research indicates that taste preferences are affected both by social ambitions as well as the acquisition of cultural and other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Wright et al., 2001; Seymour, 2004). The sociological treatment of food has particularly debated the role of social class in the construction of taste (Bourdieu). Atkins and Bowler (2001, p. 5) and Mennell (1996, p. 6) suggested that 'taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled' while, according to Bourdieu (1984, p. 16), 'taste classifies and it classifies the classifier' meaning that we classify ourselves through our tastes and the way we manifest those tastes in everyday life through choices of lifestyle or consumption. The choices we make 'give away our position in the social structure of society' (Deeming, 2014, p. 438).

*Distinction*, a seminal text on taste by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is discussed by Alan Warde. He contends that:

[...] for Bourdieu the possession of good taste is a weapon in social struggles. Taste is constituted through judgements concerning the aesthetic qualities of particular items and activities. Much judgment is tacit, recorded in and expressed through people's possessions, learning experiences, comportment and accumulated cultural competence (2016, p. 56).

It is these aspects of taste that this research seeks to explore. This study examines the role played by celebrity chefs in contemporary British society and the way in which they convey and mediate facets of the construction of taste in a sociological sense.

## 1.2 Taste

The field of Food Studies is a hybrid discipline involving aspects of anthropology, sociology, tourism, and geography. Tasting is a central concept in this field. The study of taste is framed by several theoretical perspectives. A structuralist approach would suggest that taste is socially and culturally constructed, where food serves as a code to structure society (Albon, 2005). This approach has been developed by socio-anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss (1963 and 2008) and more extensively by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). The materialist approach proposes that taste is connected to external influences such as economic and political changes (Mintz, 2008). Consumption and cultural changes frame the post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches that posit that individual identity is central to the construction of taste (Albon, 2005, Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012).

Based on these perspectives, the concept of taste appears to be multifaceted and ambiguous. It carries both a gustatory significance as well as an association with society, choices, and lifestyles. Numerous debates exist on the meaning and definition of taste as well as the link between taste, status and social class (Harvey et al., 2011). Bourdieu (1984) suggested that taste is socially conditioned, learned through education and intrinsically linked to social class. Bourdieu's seminal work, *Distinction* (1984), stands at the very heart of any study on the construction of taste. Bourdieu analysed how tastes were acquired, learned and transmitted within the context of French society in the 1970. He posits, through a discussion of capital, that different social classes behave in different ways with regards to their choices of music, art, clothes, decoration and food. He argues that taste is an expression of social differences and that clearly identified rules regulate how taste is viewed. His

structuralist approach contends that taste functions as a way to maintain strict social classes. He uses the term 'habitus' to describe the way in which people behave and make choices according to their belonging to a social class. Thus, taste is socially rather than individually constructed.

Central to Bourdieu's work is the notion of capital which he borrowed from Marx and built upon in his extensive research. Whilst not considered a Marxist *per se*, Bourdieu's thinking was influenced by the Marxist theories of capital and power. Bourdieu identifies four different types of capital: economic capital, social, symbolic capital and cultural capital. Although economic capital can be acquired by all classes, cultural capital will be a distinguishing factor in the struggle for cultural power between the classes. Three types of tastes are notable within cultural capital: highbrow, middlebrow, and popular taste, and they relate to the upper and middle and lower classes respectively. Hence, different classes possess different amounts of capital, some with high cultural capital but low economic capital or vice-versa. There will be characteristic behaviours among the classes as well as tastes that are inherent to their position that Bourdieu refers to as 'habitus'. Through the use of cultural capital and distinctions of taste, the upper classes will strive to maintain their power (Bourdieu, 1984; Seymour, 2004).

Before both Marx and Bourdieu, concepts of taste and social belonging were developed by Kant (Kant in Korsmeyer, 2005) and later in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by Thorstein Veblen (1899). Veblen discussed taste in the context of consumption, more specifically in their consumption and pursuit of leisure activities. This was referred to as 'conspicuous consumption.' Veblen's work examined how people define

themselves through their choices and therefore communicate status (Trigg, 2001; Elliott, 2006).

There is a perception that good taste is undemocratic and selective, and that specialised language is developed to distinguish connoisseurs from everyone else. This results in a separation between those who 'know' and those who do not. For example, how one uses cutlery in a fine dining restaurant or one's knowledge of wine pairing may reflect elements of taste. Whilst linked to conspicuous consumption and connoisseurship, the more recent notion of omnivorous taste can be described as the appreciation of various cultural genres that span high-brow and low-brow (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Kwon and Kwon, 2013). Thus, a modern interpretation of conspicuous consumption shows that taste is now more inclusive than exclusive in so far as it is 'good taste' to show a wider appreciation of things. Nuance is added by the fact that it is not so much the actual activities that are important but the way in which they are enjoyed that marks distinction and displays cultural capital (Savage, 2015). Thus, subtle signals delineate the approach to consumption and taste.

Despite the relevance of Bourdieu's theory, the notion that class is the main determinant of taste has been disputed. Bourdieu himself argues that his study cannot be generalised outside of France. The class system in the UK is different from the one in France, with different sets of values and 'habitués'. The views of Bourdieu have also been challenged by other authors, specifically from a postmodernist perspective (Holt, 1998; Ashley et al., 2004). Mennell (1996) posits that the differences in taste of diverse social classes are waning. Some argue that consumption and taste no longer adhere to strict social structures and that taste is in a constant state of flux (Holt, 1998;

Wright et al., 2000). Consumption is no longer the single factor in the structure of social classes (Holt, 1998). As evidenced by Mintz's (2008) discussion on sugar, taste fluctuates and is influenced by external factors. Further, Ritzer (2013) argued that the standardisation of modern society is leading to a levelling of taste and that class no longer plays a major role in determining taste.

Moreover, contemporary Western food cultures are characterised by an increase in novelty and choice, which may further erode the relationship between class and taste (Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Holt, 1998; Ashley et al., 2004). Similarly, Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) developed this idea and drew upon dynamic changes in 'culinary capital' and infer that capital does not move in a fixed and pre-determined way. Post-modernist thinkers argue that:

The massive proliferation of cultural meanings and the fragmentation of unitary decisions... have shattered the straightforward correspondence between social categories and consumption patterns (Holt, 1998, p. 1)

### **1.3 Celebrity Chefs, Media, Cookbooks and Lifestyle**

The term celebrity chef refers to a group of chefs and cooks who have become well known through television and cookbook publications. Thus, it is important to first consider the definition of celebrity chefs that will be used in this study. Henderson offers one definition:

Someone with a professional background who enjoys a certain element of recognition domestically and possibly globally, unconfined to the world of professional restaurants. They exercise popular appeal in a market that comprises diners, television viewers, book readers, internet users and consumers of food and food related products (2011, p. 617).



For the purpose of this study, the following definition best captures the essence of celebrity chefs:

Celebrity chefs can be understood as a diverse collection of individuals who are famous for cooking or talking about and presenting cookery via various kinds of media. Perhaps the most important of these has been television, which is almost always accompanied by supporting cookbooks and, in many cases, websites and other branded goods (Piper, 2013, p. 40).

In this definition, the chef is both one who has run a professional kitchen and is recognised through their expertise (Lane and Fisher, 2015), but also, the 'domestic cook', for instance Delia Smith and Nigella Lawson. Both groups are considered as 'celebrity chefs' in the perception of the general public.

The first 'celebrity chef' is said to be Marie-Antoine (Antonin) Carême, a 19<sup>th</sup> century chef who became famous due to the elaborate style of his cooking and the complexity of his recipes. Carême cooked for royalty and diplomats, including Napoleon (Kelly, 2005). Other names, such as Alexis Soyer or Auguste Escoffier, are also associated with 'celebrity' in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The advent of television (TV) has changed the way information is distributed and accessed. It also spawned the popularity of 'celebrity chefs' of the time, embodied by Fanny Cradock in the U.K., and Julia Child in the U.S. (Rousseau, 2012) although neither were chefs by trade. Celebrity chefs have continued to flourish in the UK over the last twenty years, in part due to the growing popularity and diversity of food programming in the media (Rousseau).

For celebrity chefs to be associated with taste, one must understand their place within contemporary culture (Hollows, 2003; Ashley et al., 2004; Bell and Hollows, 2010;

Hollows and Jones, 2010a and b; Scholes, 2011; Barnes, 2014; Lane and Fisher, 2015). From three-star Michelin chefs to television hosts, these culinary celebrities have gained national recognition and have become household names. Their first names often suffice to place them within our 'food' reality (Barnes, 2004). Celebrity chefs have positioned themselves as not just media stars, but also as social and cultural actors in their influence on taste and in their ability to disseminate messages and campaigns via their shows (Hansen, 2008). Researchers suggest that there is a growing influence of media and social media on consumer attitudes toward food, with celebrity chefs playing an increasingly important role in shaping consumer preferences (Lewis, 2010; Euromonitor, 2012; Piper, 2013).

Celebrity chefs have gained a form of cultural power that can be seen through their involvement in food governance, ethics, food politics, health, entertainment and consumption (Hollows, 2003; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Hollows and Jones, 2010b; Lewis, 2010; Barnes, 2014; Johnston et al., 2014; Lewis, 2014; Lewis and Huber, 2015; Lane and Fisher, 2015). Arguably the celebrity chefs and their shows convey a message of public pedagogy and lifestyle that may be of broader social significance (Brownlie et al., 2005). However, whilst engaged in these forms of public pedagogy, it should be remembered that the TV shows and cookbooks operate first and foremost within a commercial context.

There are arguably several interpretations of the role of celebrity chefs in the broader socio-cultural context. There appear to be two sides to the celebrity chef story. Whilst the influence of the celebrity chefs may have led to the public becoming better 'food citizens', with a raised awareness of ethical and health issues (Hollows and Jones,

2010a and b; Barnes, 2014), there continues to be a concerning rise in obesity in the UK. It is of interest that the NHS (2013) indicated that celebrity chefs have had a positive effect on people's diets. The paradox seems to be that while we are thinking and talking more and more about food, the evidence indicates it is being engaged with less and less both practically and intellectually (Caraher et al., 2000; Pollan, 2013). Today's society is changing significantly in terms of gender roles and how much time we spend outside the home. This results in less time being spent in the kitchen. This is coupled with modern appliances such as the micro-wave and the increase in the use of prepared foods. Despite the fact that celebrity chefs play a key role in British society, there is little evidence to suggest they influence culinary behaviour (Caraher et al., 200, Mintel 2002). Nonetheless, celebrity chefs, food and cooking have become increasingly popular as academic subjects (Caraher et al., 2000; Lang and Caraher, 2001; Short, 2006; Hansen, 2008; Parasecoli, 2008; Hollows and Jones, 2010a and b; Henderson, 2011; Rousseau, 2012; Gatley et al., 2014; Giousmpasoglou, 2020). There is also evidence that celebrity chefs facilitate the transfer of knowledge and practice (Zopiatis and Melanthiou, 2018; Giousmpasoglou, 2020).

Changing tastes in contemporary British society have led to a growing interest in food, and celebrity chefs have played a significant role in catalysing this interest (Bonner, 2005; Hansen, 2008; Rousseau, 2012). As our culinary experience has become highly mediated, food media such as cookbooks, cooking shows and celebrity chef shows continue to grow (Jackson, 2013). The popularity of food television has grown significantly in recent years, as more and more networks dedicate hours of programming to different genres of programming that cater to a variety of lifestyles (de Solier, 2005). An example of the popularity of cookery shows is illustrated by the

Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) which reports that TV shows such as *Celebrity Masterchef* and *Great British Menu* appeared in the top 20 viewings on the BBC in the week ending 16 September 2018, amongst a plethora of popular soap opera and news programmes (BARB, 2019). Hansen (2008) suggests that celebrity chefs are media creations and that there is no longer a direct link between cooking skills and celebrity whilst Piper (2012) contends that celebrity chefs have a role to play, as entertainers and educators, in framing the notion of good and bad food.

Due to these reasons, cookery shows have become predominant in television programming in the genre of food television, and evidence suggests celebrity chefs have an influence over lifestyle trends (Caraher et al., 2000; Ashley et al., 2004; Bell and Hollows, 2005; Lewis, 2014). However, one of the most important parts of cookery TV shows is their ability to entertain as well as educate. Lifestyle TV may link citizenship models with broader public concerns (Lewis, 2008). On this basis it may be inferred that the celebrity chefs are involved in moral debates around food, social class and taste (Hollows and Jones, 2010a and b; Piper, 2012). Jamie Oliver, for example, has been campaigning for healthy school meals and against sugar for over 10 years. He has successfully lobbied the government to introduce a sugar tax to try and reduce the consumption of sugar and curb the growing trend in child and adult obesity in the UK. In 2022 he protested against a government U-turn and delay to the ban on two-for-one deals on unhealthy food. Watching TV shows and buying cookbooks, Scholes (2011) argues, is a way for people to buy into the (glamourised) lifestyle of Jamie and Nigella. Another argument can be made that celebrity chefs represent an unattainable ideal and portray an idealized view of domesticity (Scholes, 2011). In addition, these shows appear to have broken the link between cooking,

domestic labour and everyday food preparation, portraying food preparation as 'fun' (Euromonitor, 2008; Hansen, 2008).

Studies have indicated that popular media may have changed attitudes toward civic and environmental responsibility and have helped develop a relationship between the media, culture, and government (Talbot, 2004; Lewis, 2008). This has been principally illustrated by Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in TV shows such as *Jamie's Ministry of Food* and *River Cottage* (Hollows, 2003; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Bell and Hollows, 2010; Scholes, 2011). On the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation website (2015), now called the Better Food Foundation, the chef is quoted as saying:

My charity aims to inspire people to reconnect with food. It's all about raising awareness and individual responsibility, resuscitating dying food culture around the world and, ultimately, keeping cooking skills alive.

Regarding the chef's public image, Sloan (2004) suggests that, in order to influence the mundane task of everyday food preparation, celebrity chefs must distance themselves from their unattainable images of perfection and celebrity and connect with their audience. Celebrity chefs should therefore develop a style of communication that their audiences can relate to (Sloan, 2004). The chefs must maintain a link with the public through their TV appearances. In her discussion of Jamie Oliver's School Dinner show, Talbot (2007, p. 110) describes it as: 'a combination of docu-soap, celebrity biopic and makeover.' She goes on to comment that it is essential for Oliver to put forward his persona as a 'celebrity chef' to ensure credibility. Hence, celebrity chefs enter public consciousness not only as 'keepers of culinary culture, but as charismatic and compelling leaders in terms of changing lifestyles' (Brownlie et al., 2005, p. 14).

Notwithstanding their commercial positioning, the celebrity chefs appear nonetheless to be agents of social change (Rousseau, 2012; Piper, 2013). Much of the academic interest in celebrity chefs taken thus far has focused on contemporary gender roles in and out of the home, cooking, culinary and cultural 'capital', and lifestyle as well as understanding the socio-cultural role that the celebrity chefs may play (Caraher et al., 2000; Hollows, 2003; Lewis, 2008; Hollows, 2010; Piper, 2012; Lewis, 2014; Lewis and Huber, 2015; Lane and Fisher, 2015; Matwick, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Matta, 2018). So far, however, no focused attention has been paid to the link between celebrity chefs and the construction of social taste. As such, the present study is noteworthy as it will specifically seek to explore this link and will strive to offer a new interpretation of role of the celebrity chefs through the analysis of their TV shows and cookbooks. This will lead to considering the role of the celebrity chefs as a wider sociological phenomenon in contemporary British society. Britain has been chosen as it is the country of residence of the author as well as the society that she is the most familiar with. Although celebrity chefs are a global phenomenon, this study will focus on the UK as their impact and influence may differ to that in other countries. Although it will not claim to be an exhaustive approach to the study of the food, class and taste, this study may represent one aspect that is relevant to the link between celebrity chefs and taste, a link which may manifest modern expressions of belonging from a social and cultural perspective.

## 1.4 Research Questions

Despite the fact that scholarly attention has been given to chefs in a number of contexts, there is a gap in the knowledge that links the chefs to the social construction of taste, and this thesis seeks to fill that gap by addressing a main research question which is:

- How do celebrity chefs influence the social construction of taste in contemporary British society?

In order to answer this main research question, the thesis will explore the following three sub-research questions:

- What are the key theories that frame the construction of taste?
- What role do celebrity chefs play as a wider social phenomenon in contemporary British society?
- What themes can be derived regarding the construction of taste when analysing celebrity chef cookbooks and television shows?

## 1.5 Positionality

In any research, the investigator needs to be aware of the potential that they have to influence the research and acknowledge that there is always some form of unintentional bias. This can be due to any number of factors including gender, race, social class, religion or age (Bottery and Wright, 2019, Holmes, 2020). As a result, the researcher entered this journey with the understanding that qualitative interpretative

research was likely to be biased due to the subjectivity of the data analysis. The choice for this approach was guided by the lived experiences of the author and her pragmatic and practical approach to research.

The inspiration to undertake this research journey was based on a number of personal elements. The researcher was brought up in the France of the 1970s that Bourdieu describes. In addition, her late father was the editor of the *International Social Science Journal* (a UNESCO publication) in which Bourdieu published several articles.

The second inspiration came from previous research for her Master's dissertation which focused on the impact of celebrity chefs on domestic food habits. It was during this research that the author was able to understand the importance that celebrity chefs held in the minds of the people interviewed. For the current project, the researcher wanted to take this one step further and understand how the celebrity chefs may be used in another context. Having a lived experience, she wanted to understand how the paradigms of class (that she witnessed) have changed and are to be understood in contemporary British society when applied to celebrity chefs. The celebrity chef phenomenon was something that the researcher discovered when she moved to the UK in 1998 as it did not exist *per se* in France.

In addition, as a self-confessed foodie, the researcher has always been interested in all things food. In the context of this Phd, she positioned herself as an 'insider' to the research. She has a 'lived familiarity' with, and 'a priori knowledge of the group being researched' (Holmes, 2020, p.6), in this case having cookbooks of her own and having



watched numerous TV shows. A profound knowledge of Indian and Italian cuisine, as well as extensive travel in both countries, contributed to the selection of these particular foods. These factors led her to believe that she is a suitable person to undertake this research as she understands the context of the data. The study also incorporates an element of auto-ethnography. It should be noted that possible biases in the interpretation of the texts may arise from the author's personal preferences, background and experiences. This is inherent to this type of research and has been acknowledged further in the thesis.

## **1.6 Introduction to the methodology**

This study took an interpretivist and inductive approach as it sought to investigate the influence of celebrity chefs on the construction of taste. The reality that was to be investigated was subjective and was constructed through the interactions of the celebrity chefs and their public through their publications and TV shows. It is through narrative and images that meanings come to be understood and interpreted (Tonner, 2008).

Textual analysis was the proposed method for this research (McKee, 2003). Using a qualitative approach, the researcher sought to understand and interpret the meaning of the key themes, ideas or concepts that emerged from the selected television programmes and cookbooks. The celebrity chefs were chosen firstly on the basis of their persona and popularity and on their perceived influence within contemporary British society. The second choice was based on the co-existence of both a TV show

and an associated cookbook. The data collection was undertaken through systematic and repeated reading of cookbooks and viewing of the associated TV shows. A template was created from the literature that formed a basis for the analysis of the data. The initial template was then overlaid with additional themes that emerged from the scrutiny of the dataset in order to understand the possible influence the chefs may have on the construction of taste. Chapter five will develop the methodological approaches to this study in more depth.

### **1.7 Thesis chapters' summary**

This section provides an overview of the contents of the chapters of the thesis.

#### Chapter 1

The first section of this chapter provides a background to the study. It then covers an introduction to theories of taste before exploring the celebrity chefs and their use of cookbooks and television. The chapter then covers the research questions of the thesis followed by the author's positionality. Finally, a short introduction to the methodology is discussed. The chapter concludes with the contents of the chapters of the thesis.

#### Chapter 2

A discussion of the three paradigms that frame the construction of taste will be presented in chapter two. The first is the structuralist paradigm, the second the developmental paradigm and, finally, post-modern aspects of the construction of

taste. Also discussed in this chapter are the links between taste and class, as well as the role played by celebrity chefs as agents of change.

### Chapter 3

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Bourdieu's theories which includes a discussion of the important concepts of capital. It proceeds to connect Bourdieu to the celebrity chefs before considering some of the critiques of Bourdieu's theories, starting with his very own limitations.

### Chapter 4

A discussion of lifestyle, media, cookbooks, and gender roles will be included in chapter four, which will illustrate how these factors contribute to the construction of taste. The chapter will focus on the media used by the chefs as well as their gender personas.

### Chapter 5

The focus of this chapter is on the role that celebrity chefs play in society. It is important to recognise their impact on different matters such education, civic and moral discourse as well as on national culture. Furthermore, there is also a discussion regarding gastroporn. The chapter ends with an overview of the themes that have emerged from the literature review.

## Chapter 6

A discussion of the research process and the methods used in this study is provided in chapter six. Using an interpretivist approach, the use of textual analysis as a data collection method and template analysis as an analysis tool is explained. The rationale behind the selection of the chefs included in the study is discussed here, and their biographies provide additional context.

## Chapters 7-10

A detailed analysis and evaluation of four chefs' cookbooks and associated TV programs is presented in chapters seven through ten. Based on the themes extracted from the literature, the analysis uses an initial template and overlays additional themes that emerged during the process.

## Chapter 11

A summary of the study's findings can be found in chapter 11, which concludes the study. The final template is presented and detailed. A number of implications practice are discussed in this chapter, as well as recommendations for further research. This thesis concludes with a discussion of limitations and closing thoughts.

## **CHAPTER 2 – SHAPING AND CHANGING TASTE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Food and taste have received much attention in various fields such as anthropology and sociology. Anthropologists have contended that the emergence of civilization is closely linked to food whilst sociologists have suggested that food and taste are central to an individual's identity and to their place in society. This chapter will explore the theoretical lenses through which we can examine the acquisition of taste. This will include how taste is learned and the agents that contribute to shaping and changing taste.

### **2.2 Food as a symbol – a structuralist approach**

Symbols have been assigned to food for millennia. For example, the bread and wine of communion represent the symbolic body and blood of Jesus which are celebrated in Christian faiths. The structuralist approach focuses on an anthropological interest in food and the manner in which rules and conventions dictate the way food is classified and prepared, the assumption being that the rules are embedded in underlying social structures (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997). 'As many anthropologists have shown, food, in its varied guises, contexts, and functions, can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance' (Appadurai, 1981, p. 494). The structuralist approach clearly recognises that 'taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled' (Mennell 1986, p. 6; Bourdieu, 1984).

Contributions by Levi-Strauss (1963), Barthes (1975) and Douglas (1972, 2008) regard food as a language of communication, taken from the field of semiotics (Barthes, 1973), and address how food can be understood from a symbolic perspective. For example, the choice of certain foods that are served for specific occasions is symbolic; a roast on Sunday, fish on a Friday or a cake at a wedding. Food serves as a code to structure and reflect the stratification and organisation of society (Barthes, 1973; Bourdieu, 1984; Albon, 2005; Douglas, 2008; Warde, 2016). Levi-Strauss (1963, 2008) framed his study around ethnographic research and sought to understand food as a language of communication as well as a system of symbols and meanings. There are similarities in Fieldhouse's analysis which suggests that:

Rituals and celebrations are usually centred around food; sometimes the type of food served can define the event, as with the Thanksgiving turkey or the Christmas pudding. The major transitional crises of life, the rites of passage, are marked in almost all societies by ritual or ceremonial distribution and consumption of food (1995, p. 78).

Levi-Strauss (1963) endeavours to formulate how food can be seen as a language that expresses social structures and cultural systems. He posits that food 'must not only be good to eat, but also good to think (with)'. Through his analysis of cooking, Levi-Strauss identifies a 'culinary triangle' with raw, cooked and rotten as the three points of the triangles (figure 1). Cultural and natural transformations of food connect these points. A more complex version of this model adds aspects of food preparation and methods to the initial triangle, which then becomes the triangle of recipes (figure 2).

## Lévi-Strauss's Culinary Triangle

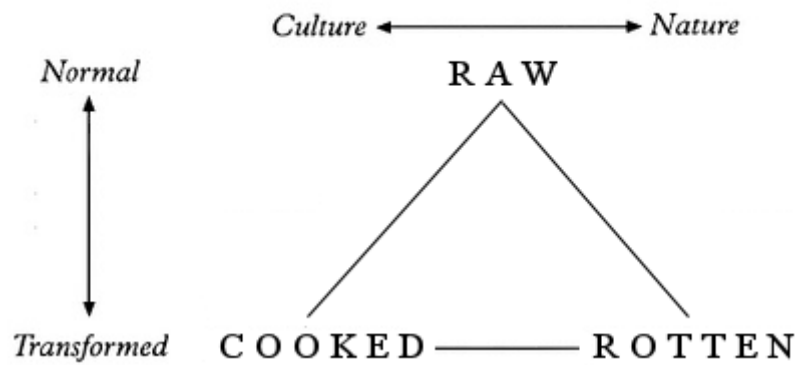


Figure 1 - The Culinary Triangle (Levi-Strauss, 2008)

The triangle of recipes has particular relevance because it incorporates both cooking practices and the opposition between nature and culture. Food is boiled, roasted or smoked. Boiled meat is traditionally reserved for domestic use ('endo-cuisine') while roasted meat is offered to guests (exo-cuisine) (Levi-Strauss, 1966, 2008, p. 42). Boiling conserves the meat and suggests economy while roasting loses juices and is linked to extravagance: 'the former is plebian, the latter aristocratic' (Levi-Strauss, 2008, p. 43). The receptacle in which the food is cooked is also important, with boiling involving a pot while grilling or roasting does not as the food is placed directly on/over the fire. As such, it could be suggested that the culinary world acts as a transition between nature and culture (Levi-Strauss) as well as a way of structuring society. Levi-Strauss (2008, p. 44) quotes Brillat-Savarin as saying: 'One becomes a cook but one is born a roaster.'

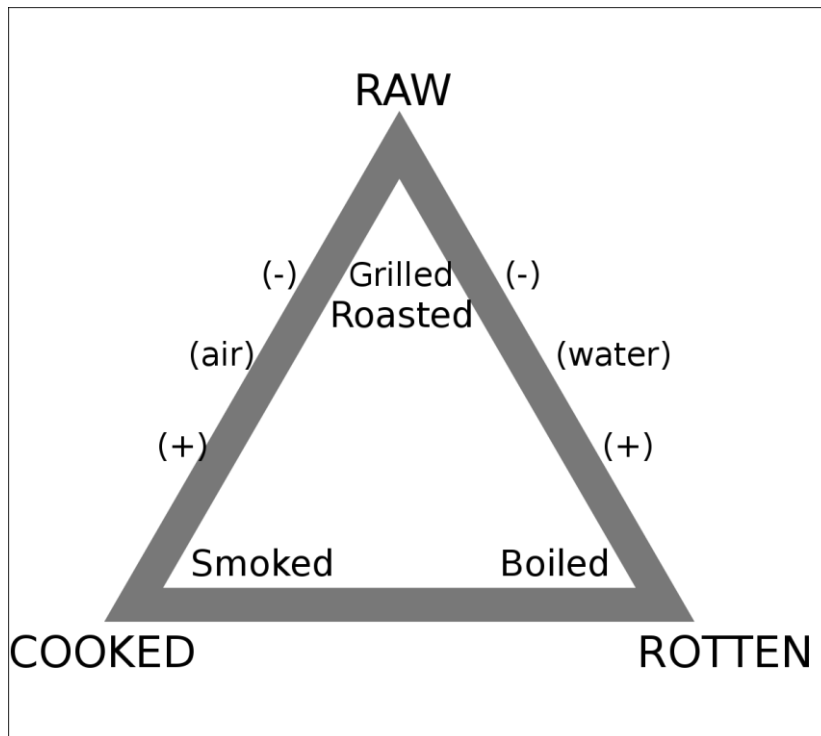


Figure 2 – The Triangle of Recipes (Levi-Strauss, 2008)

While Douglas (1972), also explores the world of anthropology, she dwells more on the symbolic structure and content of a meal rather than on Levi-Strauss' approach to food transformation and cooking methods. According to her structuralist perspective, decisions are made as a result of social circumstances rather than being independent decisions. She uses her own family to research the meal as a social object. Unlike Levi-Strauss, Douglas does not seek a universal message in the language of food. In her assessment of a meal, Douglas (1972) seeks to understand the construction of the family meal. Her argument is that the meal structure is the same regardless of the occasion and thus follows a set of dictated steps:

For analyzing the food categories used in a particular family the analysis must start with why those particular categories and not others are



employed. We will discover the social boundaries which the food meanings encode by an approach which values the binary pairs according to their position in a series. Between breakfast and the last nightcap, the food of the day comes in an ordered pattern. Between Monday and Sunday, the food of the week is patterned again. Then there is the sequence of holidays, birthdays, and weddings (Douglas, 1972, p. 37).

Food and eating appear to be symbolic of a particular social order (Douglas, 1972). Food categories, and the way in which they are eaten, convey a meaning. In Douglas' home, drinks were shared with some whilst meals were shared with others. 'Drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests' (Douglas, 1992, p. 41). The author goes on to explain how the temperature of the meal, whether it is hot or cold, indicates another level of significance. Those friends that have never shared a hot meal have 'presumably another threshold of intimacy to cross' (Douglas 1992, p. 41). The inclusion or exclusion of certain foods and people, therefore, reveals hierarchy and social boundaries. This can be linked to Levi-Strauss' notion of endo and exo-cuisine and the development of a strict social order.

### **2.3 Food as a language of communication**

Another perspective is proposed by Roland Barthes (1973, 2008) who sees food as a system of communication. He uses a linguistic analysis to understand food where he suggests that food is 'a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour' (2008, p. 29). When an item of food is purchased, it transmits a situation, it signifies. He uses the example of choices of brown or white bread as signifiers of preference.

Substances, techniques, of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and, as soon as this happens, we have communication by the way of food (Barthes, 1975 cited by Caplan, 1997, p. 2)

It is interesting to note that Barthes also suggests that: 'an entire world (social environment) is present in and signified by food' (Caplan, 1997, p. 2). Barthes' analysis uses food as a sign, as a symbol, similarly to Douglas. Where their interpretations differ lies in the fact that he uses food as a language and Douglas focuses on food as a way to structure society.

Goody, in *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), moves beyond the symbolic approach to food and cooking advanced by the structuralists. He uses Western Africa as a lens to develop the idea of food systems. His work moves the study of food from the field of anthropology into the field of sociology. It is interesting to note that he criticizes Levi-Strauss for not considering social relations and individual differences. He also suggests that Douglas neglected internal social differentiation as well as external socio-cultural influences in her analysis. Goody acknowledges the importance of culture but also argues that the political environment must be considered both at micro and macro-level, from the household to the state level. Goody compares the food cultures in Eurasia and in sub-Saharan Africa and the ways in which 'high and low cuisines' were developed across the former but not the latter. He also links the emergence of industrialised foods and their role in changing class systems. This is significant in more modern interpretations which have evolved to include pre-prepared and processed food.

Also particularly insightful on changes in food is Fischler's (1988) theory. He discusses the relationship between identity and food, and how modern perceptions of food have changed. For Fischler, food is central to our sense of identity. In his discussion, he presents a 'modern eater' who is detached from the history and origin of food as he has become a consumer of food that is devoid of identity. 'If one does not know what one is eating, one is liable to lose the awareness or certainty of what one is oneself' (Fischler, 1988, p. 291). In his analysis, food plays a significant role in the construction of the individual, which is one of the key principles of postmodernism.

Firstly, the modern eater has become a 'pure consumer' (Fischler, 1988, p. 285). The consumer is more and more detached from food production. Secondly, more and more mechanisation is involved in the preparation of food which arrives ready-made. Thirdly, economic and technical modifications as well as alterations in lifestyle have changed the approach to eating habits. His discussion of the 'omnivore's paradox' posits that as omnivores, humans have the opportunity to change their food habits and adapt to the environment; however, they cannot obtain all their nutrients from one food and therefore they need a variety.

On the one hand, needing variety, the omnivore is inclined towards diversification, innovation, exploration and change, which can be vital to its survival; but on the other hand, it has to be careful, mistrustful, 'conservative' in its eating: any new, unknown food is a potential danger. The omnivore's paradox lies in the tension, the oscillation between the two poles of neophobia (prudence, fear of the unknown, resistance to change) and neophilia (the tendency to explore, the need for change, novelty, variety) (Fischler, 1988, p. 278).

Although the structuralists remain influential, they did little to explain the social relationships of power which frame food habits and transactions (Caplan, 1997). Mennell (1996, p. 7) critiqued the structuralist approach in so far that it 'has little to say about how tastes change and develop in society over time.' Fischler (1988) can be seen to link the structuralist approach to a developmentalist debate as he acknowledges that the abundance of food choice as well as the loss of food identity are key to changes in food habits and hence addresses how tastes may change and are affected by external forces. This is significant as it clearly outlines the importance of food within societal choices.

#### **2.4 The developmental/materialist paradigm**

The developmental paradigm posits that individuals take responsibility for their choices based on micro and macro-environmental changes rather than relying on institutional organisations and that this has influenced issues relating to food (Beadsworth and Keil, 2002). Mennell et al. (1992, p. 6) suggested there was 'first functionalism, then structuralism and more recently, developmental perspectives', and that 'each of these fashions have been associated with research into different substantive aspects of food and eating'. Mennell (1996) and Mintz (2008) considered that attitudes and behaviours around food are now less structurally determined and that the significance of class and taste is waning and instead they highlight the importance of economic and political changes to the development and acquisition of taste. Such writers prioritise how there have been dynamic changes in consumption patterns over the years and argue that

contemporary tastes in food are increasingly shaped by changes to the supply and variety of foods due partly to the growing trade and industrialisation of food supply.

The developmental paradigm suggests that taste is subject to change through influences from external factors such as modifications in the micro and macro environments. Influences from country, region, religion, class, gender, and upbringing are therefore not only key to the construction of taste but also to changing tastes (Goody, 1982; Mennell, 1992; Lupton, 1996; Mennell, 1996; Mintz, 1996; Seymour, 2004).

Undeniably, culture has a fundamental impact on what we eat. This influences what we eat, how we eat, when we eat and why we eat (Fieldhouse, 1995; Seymour, 2004). Fieldhouse states that modifications in food habits occur due to economic changes, availability of food and influences from other food cultures. He also suggests that these changes are problematic and that: 'Every culture resists change; food habits, though far from fixed, are also far from easy to change' (p. 2). Here one can see a link with Fischler (1988) who suggested that attitudes towards food have changed, brought about by social changes such as the industrialisation of food. Furthermore, there have been dynamic changes in consumption over the years and it could be argued that contemporary tastes in food are shaped by changes in behaviour or access to food (Mennell, 1992).

Another view is offered by Mintz (1996, 1997, 2008) in his discussion of sugar in which he explores changes in sugar consumption in Europe. He suggests that economic

and political forces had an influence on taste. Mintz considers how the industrialisation of food production and the increase in the availability and choice of food had an impact on food consumption through the centuries. Mintz is concerned with the concept of sweetness and how it developed from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He contends that the increase in the availability of sugar had a profound effect on altering tastes of the working classes. It changed the tastes of British society and contributed to significant changes in consumption habits as well as to shifts in power and class. He further argues that political power, economic interests and nutritional requirements are also key in influencing social change and may impact upon taste.

The usefulness of the developmentalist approach lies in the influence given to external factors in the acquisition and change of taste. This approach is still applicable today as the forces of change continue to impact upon contemporary UK society. However, it is also important to highlight that further transformations in the structure of society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have led to the emergence of a post-modern approach. This paradigm gives considerable weight to the individual in the construction of taste.

## **2.5 The post-modernist paradigm**

Most sociological discussions of taste, whether adopting a structuralist or a post-modernist approach, refer to taste as embedded within social relations of 'class' (Bourdieu, 1984; Mennell, 1996). The post-modernist perspective does not entirely reject the idea that taste is socially constructed; however, it goes further in challenging the fact that changes in class hierarchies have led to modifications of rigid social

conventions. Although the post-modernists give more significant weight to consumption in the acquisition of taste, they still acknowledge, although reluctantly, the importance of class (Wood, 2004b). The force of class therefore remains an undeniable influence on choices in terms of taste, food and consumption. This point is also sustained by Johnston and Baumann (2015) who suggested that class and status have diminished as markers of distinction but still remain. Likewise, Wright et al., (2000) posited that the post-modernist world does not necessarily signify the demise of a social order.

Although post-modernists will argue that the influence of class has lessened, they also contend that 'the basis of social differentiation has changed' (Sloan, 2013, p. 4). It has been debated that the association between taste and social class is no longer valid with the advent of mass consumerism and post-modernist thinking (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). There is some evidence to suggest that changes in contemporary food cultures have involved more choice and variety, accompanied by a continuous demand for change, therefore lessening the rigid link between class and taste (Holt, 1997). The literature also suggests that changes in contemporary food cultures in the West have brought about 'demand for novelty which weakens the relationship between class cultures and food consumption' (Gronow, 1997, p. 28). Lupton (1996, p. 127) argues that 'trying new foods and cuisine is also a sign of sophistication and distinction, of a willingness to be innovative and different from the masses'. More recently, Naccarato and LeBesco (2012, p. 5) in their study of American culinary capital, contended that 'food choices function simultaneously as an exercise in freedom and as a means of containing it.' However, regardless of these changes, it can still be noted

that these modifications do not inevitably alter the significance of culture in food choices (Ashley et al., 2004).

It can also be argued that contemporary Western food cultures are characterised by an increase in novelty and choice that may bring about further erosion in the relationship between class and taste (Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Holt, 1998; Ashley et al., 2004). Nevertheless, cultural conditioning and social norms continue to influence food choices in social and ethnic groups (Rappoport, 2003). Similarly, Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) developed this idea and draw upon dynamic changes in 'culinary capital' and infer that such capital does not move in a fixed and pre-determined way.

Holt (1997) discerns six differences in tastes and consumption between those with high cultural capital resources and those with low resources. He draws three dimensions of taste which are: materialism versus idealism, material versus formal aesthetics and referential versus critical appreciation. Materialism versus idealism relates to how those with lower resources are concerned with everyday needs such as paying bills. In contrast, and echoing Bourdieu's 1984 notion of 'necessity', the upper classes do not have such constraints. However, the holders of lower cultural capital still aspire to accumulating material wealth. Material versus formal aesthetics relates to the need for things to be useful rather than aesthetically appealing. Holt reflects on the last dimension, referential versus critical appreciation, in terms of appreciation of cultural texts and the consumption of mass culture in books, television, film and music. He contends that those with lower resources may prefer texts that are relevant to their lives and programmes that are 'real'. One could link this to the manner



in which the celebrity chefs are 'consumed' by their varying publics. Some are seeking to be educated by their interaction with the chefs, whilst others seek entertainment from the interplay. There are very clear links here with Bourdieu's thinking as well as with the Reithian values of the BBC (inform, educate, entertain), the first UK broadcaster to programme cooking shows.

Furthermore, the postmodernist argument suggests that changes in the social structure, as well as a flattening of social classes, means that taste has become more standardised. Ritzer (2013) proposes that the standardisation of modern society is leading towards a levelling of tastes and that social class no longer plays a dominant role in the construction of tastes. Standardised products lead to a uniformisation of tastes and aesthetics. Although there is an illusion of choice, this choice operates within different variants of the same product. One could use the example of ketchup which can be used simply as a condiment to accompany food while others will use it in a more intricate manner, as part of more complex recipes for example. Whilst the postmodernists assert that we live in a media-saturated world with a proliferation of lifestyles, it could be argued that social order persists, with the poorer still lacking access to certain forms of capital that continue to be controlled by the rich. The idea of taste may remain a middle-class concept as it 'pre-supposes freedom of choice' (Wright et al., 2000, p. 437). A similar point is made by Bourdieu (1984) when he refers to the upper classes as being able to make decisions based on their social position. This shows that post-modernist interpretations of taste continue to incorporate class as an important influence despite originally downplaying it as a determining factor.

For Finkelstein (2014) taste is meaningful as it has become the way in which an individual expresses their personal identity. Whilst notions of status remain, taste drives consumption which in turn marks identity. Furthermore, taste acts as a marker of social belonging as the choices we make represent our position within society. Taste can therefore be seen to be the key to the way we wish to be seen and how we position ourselves in everyday dealings. 'The pursuit of taste can function as an effective means for changing our opinions and values' (Finkelstein, 2014, p. 45).

A more subtle form of discrimination became necessary, one that relied less on the ownership of goods and more on the types of goods that one owned. Taste transcended the financial cost of possession and supplied instead a reason for selecting one item over another from a wide range of functionally indistinguishable options (Finkelstein, 2014, p. 43).

It can be suggested that post-modernist discourse is useful in understanding and interpreting the message that the celebrity chefs are putting forward with regards to their possible influence in contemporary society and the role that they play in mediating cultural images and messages through choice and consumption. The importance of this can be seen in the fact that it empowers the individual with the ability to make decisions in accordance with their understanding of the chef's messages.

## **2.6 Food, taste and class**

Undeniably food and taste are intrinsically linked to issues of class. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Thorstein Veblen noted through his theory of status, that when food is a leisure activity, it connotes class and privilege. In his work, '*Conspicuous*

*Consumption*', Veblen (1899) suggests that leisure is a means of signifying one's social position. In a society where leisure is scarce, it becomes highly valued and is therefore seen as a signifier of social belonging and a marker of status. Power is held by the few who have distanced themselves from necessity (a term also used later by Bourdieu), through leisure. Veblen suggests that the pursuit of leisure was only available to the rich as the lower classes did not always have the time or inclination to pursue leisure activities as their efforts were focused on more mundane aspects of life. If one were to apply Veblen's theory to the celebrity chef, one could link notions of leisure with the 'consumption' of the chef through their books and programmes. When the preparation of food is no longer linked to a chore, the celebrity chefs are portraying it as a pursuit of leisure, something to be enjoyed in an idealised kitchen, without the burdens of daily life (Hollows and Jones, 2010a and b; Szabo, 2014).

Bourdieu (1984) suggested that social stratification and class defined taste. His concept of 'habitus' develops the notion that one is an actor within a field where there is an exchange of different forms of capital (economic, cultural and social). This capital can in turn convey notions of taste through choices of food, media or literature. Taste, and by extension, choice, is therefore meaningful as it locates individuals within a class (Bourdieu, 1984; Di Maggio, 1987). Food taste, in particular, is a cultural minefield because of what it says about us. Our taste in food gives away who we are and where we come from (Wright et al., 2000).

There is therefore evidence to suggest that taste is fixed and constructed by social factors such as class and religion (Bourdieu, 1984; Mennell et al., 1992; Caplan,

1997). However, there remains a debate as to whether taste is innate or whether it can be acquired. Bourdieu argued that taste was embedded in class. As taste in food is often acquired in early childhood, the lessons learned stand the test of time. One maintains nostalgia for the food eaten in childhood, often associated with particular events. Fieldhouse (1995) discusses a similar aspect by which food habits are acquired early in life and are long-lasting and resistant to change, echoing Bourdieu's theory. However, others argue that taste can be acquired through various mechanisms such as changes in forms and amounts of various types of capital (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012; Getz et al., 2014; Johnston and Baumann, 2015). It could be argued that Naccarato and LeBesco's research is more relevant in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain as it contends that taste has become a more democratic concept with rigid notions of taste linked to class waning.

Mennell (1996) proposes that the distinctions in the tastes of different social classes are weakening. He also argues that taste in eating is shaped by social, political and economic changes. He suggests that:

Taste in food, like tastes in music, literature or the visual arts, are socially shaped, and the major forces which have shaped them are religions, classes and nations. (1996, p. 17)

He contends that taste is shaped by social experience and the forces that shape the taste of one generation are the product of historical changes over previous generations.

In '*All Manners of Food*' Mennell (1996) observes that table manners and etiquette in European courts served to formalise class and taste hierarchies. Manners were used by the higher classes to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. Furthermore, the development of 'haute cuisine' in the French courts of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries framed a new hierarchy of tastes. To have 'good taste' meant the ability to negotiate the signs and symbols and make the right choices in food and also the knowledge of what utensils to use for which dish. Mennell, through his analysis of gastronomic writings and gastronomy, also proposes that these signs act as an articulator of elitism. Mennell therefore raises questions about the emergence of taste as a marker of distinction, in accordance with Bourdieu's theories.

Although primarily concerned with consumption, Warde (1997) is also interested in how taste is expressed through food consumption. His study of food and recipe columns in women's magazines from 1968 to 1992 is the basis for an analysis of food consumption and changing tastes in the UK. Through his scrutiny of the terminology in the magazines, he identifies eight categories of food recommendations which he further explains as '...eight social appeals, imperatives or principles of recommendation that give meaning to food items' (p. 47). These categories are: novelty, tradition, health, indulgence, economy, extravagance, convenience and care. Warde found evidence that some recipes provide a sense of security within a changing world whilst others are more novel and exciting. The words that are used serve as an indication of meanings that are being conveyed. For example, he considers that 'new, interesting, exotic, bewitching' indicate novelty whereas 'authentic or classic' convey tradition. Health is expressed through nutritional terms and discussions of slimming. Although indulgence is not recommended, terminology such as 'wicked or tempting' is

used. Economy and extravagance are conveyed through cost, the former recommending low-cost foods whilst the later suggests the use of extravagant foods for special occasions. Convenience is conveyed through words such as time and ease of execution. Warde concludes that:

These eight principles constitute four pairs of antinomies which structure contemporary food choices. They present real, contradictory appeals representing social pressures that operate on food choice....They are the context of cultural deliberation about what it is proper to eat...the four antinomies underpin contemporary taste.' (Warde, 1997, p. 49)

Although the words may have changed, this analysis is relevant as it continues to apply to the 21<sup>st</sup> century scenarios used in cookbooks and TV shows where social pressures continue to influence food choices. This has been illustrated in Jamie Oliver's work in his *Ministry of Food* where he attempts to change the way people eat with a view to make UK households eat better and healthier food.

Numerous authors have debated that taste is socially constructed and the decisions we make about what to eat are determined by social factors (Bourdieu, 1984; Seymour, 2004). Seymour suggests that:

It is possible to conceive the construction of taste as occurring within a framework of rules at different levels; the level of culture generally, including cultural rules expressed in foodways or cuisine; filtered through layers such as region, religion, class, caste, gender, family and so on (2004, p. 1).

Appadurai (1981, p. 496) proposes that food can 'serve two diametrically opposed semiotic functions. It can serve to indicate and construct social relations characterized

by equality, intimacy, or solidarity; or, it can serve to sustain relations characterized by rank, distance, or segmentation’.

Also particularly insightful is the suggestion that consumption patterns no longer act to structure social classes (Holt, 1998). Clearly there is a link between Bourdieu’s theories, heavily based on class distinction, and those concerned with consumption (Holt, 1997; Warde, 1997), particularly in a more contemporary setting. In his discussion of Bourdieu in the context of the United States, Holt (1997) notes that consumption patterns are a consequence of class reproduction. Class differences in taste are intrinsically linked to social reproduction (Wood, 2004b). In order for taste to operate as an exclusionary device, the tastes of the elite must be recognised and accepted as superior across all classes. In order to maintain this distinction, tastes must vary with social position and cultural capital must be maintained. Class boundaries are therefore maintained simply through expressing one’s taste (Holt, 1997). In his 2006 discussion of offal, Strong (2006) suggests that ‘offal has been stolen’ and that

The very cookbooks and cookery programs on television that repeatedly assert the relation between offal and the thrifty peasantry have as their audience a middle class seeking distinction through what and how they eat (Strong, 2006, p.30)

Although the notion of social class is still present, modern British society has become more fragmented in its approach to class. Historical reference points such as classical music and opera are no longer the markers of class that they were in the past and have been replaced with more eclectic references, shared across the classes.

Expertise, often acquired through the internet and social media, has become the new marker (Savage, 2015; Yates and Lockley, 2018). Snobbery, often linked to class, is measured in the way people behave. Savage (2015, p. 121) suggests that 'forms of culture which used to be restricted to the educated middle classes actually filter down to wider sections of the population' and that distinction is now marked by 'how specific cultural activities are enjoyed'. For example, going to a certain art exhibit displays 'cultural capital' as expressed by Bourdieu (1984). What is 'good taste' can be shared across classes; it is about how that taste is consumed and used. Perhaps the celebrity chef is an actor in this field with people seeking to display their belonging to a certain class through the way they interact with a chosen chef. The public are acquiring cultural and culinary capital from the chef. However, purchasing a Heston Blumenthal cookbook does not mean that the buyer will be able to afford a £300 meal in his restaurant or indeed that they will want to do so. One could argue that 'the expression of taste becomes the expression of individual, rather than class identities' (Milne, 2013, p. 217). Tastes and choices will therefore be expressed on a personal and individual basis rather than on a collective basis.

## **2.7 The Omnivore Theory**

The omnivore theory contends that consumers now have broad tastes encompassing both elite and popular cultural forms. In the past there was a marked distinction between 'elite' and 'mass' cultural consumption. We now see a democratisation of cultural consumption (Warde and Martens, 2000). Bell (2002, p. 15) posits that taste has become a marker of recognition and is 'turned inwards, to define membership



rather than mark distinction'. Peterson (1997), followed by Warde and Martens (2000), elaborates on omnivorousness as a decisive shift in consumption where the individual makes their culinary choices to reflect a 'sense of self'. Peterson conceives notions of omnivorousness as 'An openness to appreciating everything... a standard of good taste involving tastes that crossed class, gender, ethnic, religious, age and similar boundaries' (2005, p. 260).

The notion of omnivorous taste can be described as the appreciation of various cultural genres that span across high-brow activities, usually associated with the middle and upper class, and low-brow activities, usually associated with the working class (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Kwon and Kwon, 2013). Omnivores develop a taste for everything (Warde et al., 2008). The modern omnivore is a 'grazer' driven by both a class background as well as a desire to consume freely. He strives to be recognised as a connoisseur through his choices; from hamburger (maybe the gourmet version) to caviar, where culinary taste serves as a display of status (Johnston and Baumann, 2012 and 2015). The elite no longer reject 'popular culture' but embrace an eclectic mix of culture from across all spectrums. There have been dynamic changes in consumption over the years and it could be argued that contemporary tastes in food are shaped by changes in behaviour in which consumers have become 'cultural omnivores' (Warde, 2007; Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009; Arsel and Bean, 2012). As Flemmen et al. suggest, the behaviour of the omnivore has 'broad and eclectic taste orientations found amongst recent generations of the upper and

middle classes indicating a blurring of class-structured cultural distinctions' (2018, p. 130).

Variety is therefore seen as a mode of distinction. It could hence be suggested that the omnivore theory, rather than rejecting distinction through choices, supports the notion of distinction (Peterson, 2005; Warde et al., 2008). Omnivores both consume superior goods whilst trying to maintain a guise of democratised tastes and therefore become the arbiters of good taste. We are no longer in the realm of distinction through choice but, on the contrary, a wide range of consumption that is in itself a marker of knowledge and uniqueness. It may be suggested that the most ardent omnivores come from the elite classes who possess the highest levels of cultural capital (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009; Johnston et al., 2014). Consuming widely, rather than exclusively, becomes a mark of distinction and 'good taste' (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012, p. 9). There is, however, a contradiction in the omnivore's approach as it is both democratic and selective. The choices made may appear inclusive but they are exclusive by way of the knowledge that is required to make those very choices.

Johnston and Baumann's (2007) work discusses omnivorousness within gourmet food journalism in the United States. They noted that gourmet food writing provides a lens through which to understand how high class 'foodies' make choices and follow culinary trends and therefore display omnivorous cultural consumption. They posited that:

In the omnivorous era, cultural consumption that marks high status through a reliance on a few highbrow genres of culture is no longer effective. In place of the traditional high/low divide as a status marker, high status is signalled by selectively drawing from multiple cultural

forms from across the cultural hierarchy (Johnston and Baumann, 2007, p. 167).

Attitudes towards food have changed, brought about by social changes such as the industrialisation of food, the changing role of women in the workplace and at home and changes in family life and structure (Chiaro, 2008). Hence Bourdieu's rigid social classification may no longer accurately fit contemporary society in which consumers have become 'cultural omnivores' (Warde et al., 2008; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009; Arsel and Bean, 2012,).

## **2.8. Celebrity Chefs as agents of change**

Examples can be seen of how the celebrity chefs act as culinary taste makers and changers. Early expressions of influential chefs point towards the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with Brillat-Savarin and Alexis Soyer establishing a form of food culture and traditions of taste, initially for the elite (Cousins et al., 2010). More recently, Delia Smith famously created the 'Delia effect' when she promoted the use of certain ingredients and equipment, prompting the public to purchase what she had recommended (Singh, 2009). The BBC (2001) discusses how her name was added to the dictionary in recognition of her influence, with terms such as 'doing a Delia' becoming commonly used. Other chefs have been recognised as culinary taste makers such as Ferran Adrià of El Bulli fame, who instigated a new form of 'molecular cooking' (Cousins et al.). Jamie Oliver is also acknowledged as being actively involved

in trying to change food habits in deprived areas of the UK and the United States through efforts to promote healthy diets and trying to re-connect people with what they eat (Hollows and Jones, 2003; Hansen, 2008; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Hollows and Jones, 2010b; Piper, 2012; Barnes, 2014; Piper, 2015).

Through their television shows and other media, celebrity chefs show their audiences a lifestyle and a world of culinary heritage that can be 'consumed' by the public. For example, Nigella Lawson attempts to deliver the message of the 'Domestic Goddess' who can do everything at the same time: bring up a family, cook traditional Italian food, entertain friends, always looking glamorous and making it seem ever so easy. Hence, tastes are constructed through the viewers and readers' metaphorical consumption of the 'chefs' (Stringfellow et al., 2013). This can be through the viewing of the TV shows or by purchasing books and other products. Adhering to one or the other celebrity chefs forges bonds across members of a social group. Viewers that watch Jamie Oliver may identify themselves in a different way to those that prefer Gordon Ramsay or Nigella Lawson. One can see a distinction formed through preference where the consumer becomes an 'omnivore' consumer of celebrity chefs, moving seamlessly (or not) from one chef to the other. Rousseau's (2012) examination of chefs 'everyday interference' indicates that the chefs influence what and how we eat, suggesting there is a possibility to therefore change behaviour in food and taste. As we are exposed to the celebrity chefs through their TV shows and cookbooks, they may act as 'change agents' and communicate cultural values and tastes (Johnston et al., 2014). The chefs also transmit taste cultures which legitimises the cultural status of those that 'consume' them (Powell and Prasad, 2011).

It is important to note that television has played a significant role in the development of celebrity chefs. If chefs are to achieve resonance with the public, they must be able to transcend the differences of class and gender (Smith, 2020). The chef must still be able to relate to diverse audiences, regardless of whether their gender persona is strong, as it is with Ramsay for instance. Ramsay has presented a much more rounded image in recent years and uses some of Oliver's formats such as cooking in his own kitchen or with family. In recent years, there has been a transition from a largely male and white milieu to the more diverse, and female, celebrity chefs such as Lorraine Pascal, Nadiya Hussein, and Andi Oliver. An example can be found in the very popular television show *The Great British Bake Off* which features openly gay presenters and competitors. 'Pale, stale and male' is no longer a popular feature in contemporary media, which must reflect all facets of contemporary society in order to be relevant.

## **2.9 Contemporary society and attitudes towards food**

Food has always been an important part of society and a marker of class and identity. In the past 20 years in the UK, there has been a marked increase in the interest for food in media as evidenced in the sheer number of cookbooks, TV shows, blogs and vlogs about food and eating. Cookbooks by Mary Berry and Jamie Oliver were in the top 20 bestselling books on Amazon in September 2019 while TV shows on cooking, from the *Great British Bake Off* to *Masterchef* occupy our channels season after season. However, in the past ten years, there has been a significant shift towards the internet and social media which have become the new platforms for the expression of

social taste and new forms of interaction around taste. Despite the seismic changes that have emerged from these new media, while the expression and reinforcement of taste takes place online, the creation of taste still occurs elsewhere. Taste making and taste expression are articulated through likes, shares, tweets, posts, tags and others. (Paßman and Schubert, 2020).

The development of the internet as a means of sharing has led to:

the growing role of so-called ordinary people providing advice and demonstrating expertise in food and cooking, accompanied by an increasingly blurred line between professional and celebrity chefs and amateur cooks. These displays of ordinary expertise around food are perhaps the most evident on YouTube, where food videos and food channels constitute a substantial proportion of the content 'an increasingly blurred line between professional and celebrity chefs and amateur cooks (Lewis, 2018, p. 216).

The internet has changed the way in which we exchange and engage, first with streaming and bloggers, then with an amplified discussion and exchange using the social media visuals we now see on TikTok, Snapchat or Instagram. Taking pictures of what one is eating and posting on Instagram is now seen as a means to 'show off' and show one's cultural capital to the world. The use of photos has also changed the relationship between the chefs and their public (Clarke et al., 2016) as well as the levels of interaction. Restaurants now regularly market themselves by being 'Instagramable' in order to attract a specific clientele that will not only eat in their restaurant but also serve as a free marketing asset. An entire food culture has been developed on the internet. Content creation is the perfect medium for chefs and foodies alike to broadcast themselves to a world-wide public and expand opportunities for new forms of expression (Lupton, 2020). Social media has become the new

platform for the expression of social taste and novel forms of interaction around taste (Onorati and Giardullo, 2020). It is now a new space where celebrity chefs are not only able to interact with their followers, but where the followers are able to interact with one another.

The concept of 'digital food culture' has emerged as a new genre (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; Feldman and Goodman 2021). The evident visual aspect of food allows the celebrity chefs to engage directly with the audience, with live feeds and comments on Facebook (Tonner, 2008; Rousseau, 2012; Zopiatis and Melanthiou, 2018) and other platforms. Hollows (2022, chapter 2) notes that 'most celebrity chefs maintain high-profile social media accounts as part of the labour of modern celebrity, even if that labour is performed by media professionals on their behalf. Adapting to the world of social media has required celebrity chefs to modify the way in which they communicate. Gordon Ramsay appears to have embraced TikTok, a platform mainly aimed at a younger audience. Ramsay is popular with TikTok viewers for his mocking videos. Although often filmed in his kitchen, these videos are carefully curated to fit the Ramsay 'brand' complete with expletives. This is an opportunity for Ramsay to use another media outlet and for TikTok to attract an older demographic and diversify their audience base (Staples, 2021).

Research by Cifelli et al. (2020) suggests that celebrity chefs have an important role to play in establishing Gen Z's food habits which includes not only the way in which they purchase food, but also the way in which they consume and share it with others. Societal habits as well as social class and other outside influences will also play a part

in this behaviour. It is interesting to note the shift from the celebrity chef to the more 'ordinary experts' that are nonetheless trusted as experts. YouTube stars such as Joshua Weissman and channels such as 'Binging with Babish' (with 9.94 million subscribers) are now the go to for Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and everyone has become a food blogger. This digitally savvy generation no longer necessarily requires or needs the expertise of the celebrity chef. There is a tendency for these individuals to trust information from sources where the number of followers is more important than the skill and knowledge of the person. This can be seen in the reliance of this generation on social media sites such as TripAdvisor where the reviews of ordinary people are by far more important than the Michelin Guide (Onorati and Giardullo, 2020). In order to remain relevant to the younger generations, celebrity chefs will need to change their approach. Furthermore, publishers and advertisers will also have to adapt as the media will shift from television and cookbooks to online sources as this will affect sources of revenue from advertising.

The digital world has been transformed in a profound manner post-Covid, becoming a significant vehicle for the organisation of everyday life in a more meaningful way. Cooking, eating, and providing hospitality were changed by Covid with an emphasis on digital food media such as recipe databases, cooking blogs, and YouTube and Instagram instructional videos (Feldman and Goodman, 2021) . Post-Covid we can see the need for people to re-connect yet the habits acquired during lockdown periods in the UK have led to the development of new forms of behaviour which endure. Social media provides the public with an opportunity to experience the chef's intimacy, and YouTube videos are frequently edited in a conversational and relaxed manner in order to recreate authentic recordings of the chef's lives. As a result, a 'relationship' is



established between the producer and the viewers. Nevertheless, social media may obscure our perception of the celebrity chef, since chefs strive to become influencers and some influencers are now referred to as celebrity chefs (Hollows, 2022). Celebrity chefs must compete for attention with YouTube stars and influencers. While challenges are evident in the online world, there is still a quest for authenticity and professionalism (Onorati and Giardullo, 2020) which suggests that there will still be an opportunity for chefs to make their mark.

### **2.10 The foodie discourse**

A review of the literature suggests that the terms 'foodie', 'food culture' and 'culinary culture' are used to place food within a cultural setting and to describe lifestyle choices that revolve around food (Johnston and Baumann, 2009; Getz et al., 2014; Johnston and Baumann, 2015;). Johnston and Baumann described a foodie as 'somebody who thinks about food not just as biological sustenance, but also as a key part of their identity, and a kind of lifestyle' (p. 1). Another definition is offered by Getz et al. that posits that foodies are people: 'whose personal and social identity encompasses food quality, cooking, sharing meals and food experiences; foodies incorporate all aspects of food into their lifestyle...(Getz et al., 2014, p. 6)'.

Foodies pursue their interest through restaurants, farmers' markets, cookbooks and celebrity chefs amongst others. They may therefore be the purveyors of post-modernist lifestyle and attitudes. They are seemingly characterised by an overt rejection of snobbery and the traditional 'fussy' approach to food and can be casual in

their approach to food as well as highly knowledgeable (Johnston and Baumann, 2009). What sets them apart is that food is a key part of their identity. This suggests that they understand their food consumption to be of particular cultural and symbolic importance, rather than a matter of sustenance alone. Behaviour, self-identity and social identity are woven into the lifestyle of foodies (Getz et al., 2014). Foodies define themselves as highbrow; on the one hand consuming expensive food as well as going to 'cheap, hole in the wall' ethnic restaurants (Johnston and Baumann, 2015).

There are, however, lines of distinction within the foodie world, implying a form of belonging with fluid boundaries. Foodies oscillate between democracy and distinction and food serves to maintain the relationship between taste, class and power (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). Eating a 'gourmet burger' may signify democracy as it can be associated with working class food but it also marks a form of distinction as the hamburger has been elevated to a higher status and may be made with Wagyu beef (Getz et al.). Despite their seemingly democratic approach to food, foodies consider food from an intellectual and aesthetic perspective, demonstrating this through their knowledge and appreciation of all things food. Within this setting the celebrity chef may be seen to play a key role as foodies may identify with certain chefs over others, further re-enforcing notions of distinction and choice.

### **2.11 The Social Construction of Taste**

As we have seen, the formation of taste is complex. The determinants of taste are linked to one's position in life in terms of age and social positioning, as well as external

factors that influence the individual's development of taste. It is therefore important to recognise that the formation of taste remains an individual and unique process, which is subsequently integrated into existing paradigms and behaviours. This makes taste an important concept that bridges the gap between an individual's choices and socially accepted preferences and habits. Nevertheless, one can also combine interpretations of the formation of taste that integrate socialisation and 'normative influences' (1995, p.4) using Fieldhouse's analysis which accepts that these influences also contribute to shaping food habits (and by extension, food tastes which are linked to social tastes).

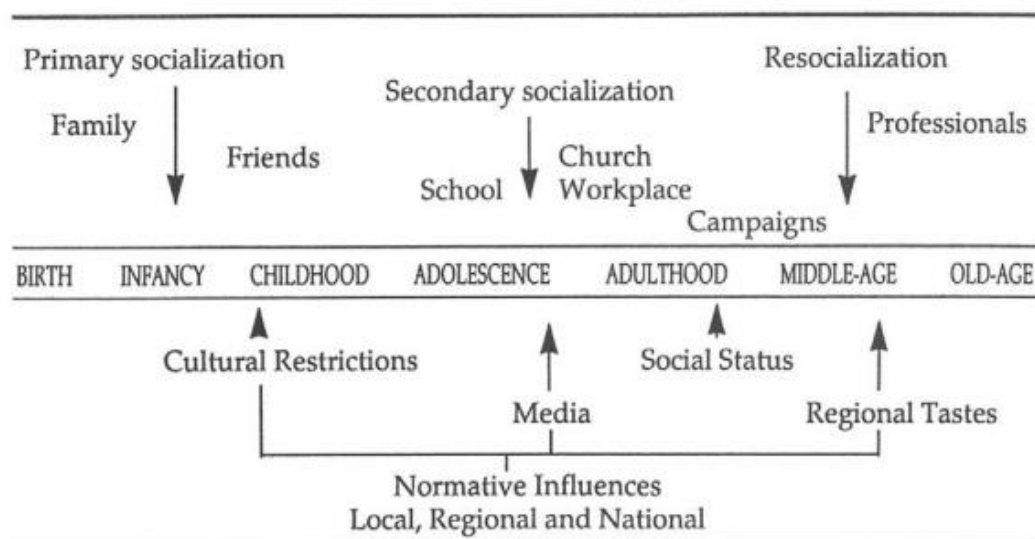


Figure 3 – Socialization and the acquisition of food habits (Fieldhouse, 1995, p.4)

Although dealing with food habits rather than taste per se, this framework suggests that socialisation impacts upon the acquisition of food habits and it could therefore also be relevant to the formation of taste.

Figure 3 illustrates how individuals respond to a variety of external factors. Primary socialisation is dependent upon the influence of the adult and the immediate family on the young child in terms of what they eat. Children are immersed in the culinary culture in which they are born. Young children learn to like what they are given, the only choice being refusing to eat. Children will mostly prefer foods that are sweet and familiar. As they grow older, external influences such as school and friends' impact upon food habits; however, it is argued that the habits acquired at home continue to prevail. What is interesting to note is how food habits are exposed to, and change with age. The impact that external factors such as media and social status can have during young adulthood and beyond is also important. One could therefore suggest that as one moves away from the influence of the family, cultural restrictions and references are less strong and one is more open to change (Fieldhouse, 1995). This is where the individual will make decisions concerning their identity and taste preferences and also where the influence of the celebrity chef may be felt.

As can be seen from the bottom portion of figure 3, normative influences have varying degrees of influence on an individual. For example, snails are rarely consumed in the UK where they are regarded as inedible. This is not the case in France. Similarly, in South America guinea pigs are widely consumed whereas in the UK and other Western societies, they are regarded as pets and hence not to be eaten. Similar examples can be found with cats in China or dogs in Korea. It could also be argued that some of the normative influences can be influenced by other elements such as religion. Other external factors, for example the power of advertising and the availability of more and more food through modern distribution systems, also act as influences in the acquisition of food habits (Fieldhouse, 1995). Here one could link the

celebrity chef as a normative influence through media as well as through social status. As mentioned, viewing the TV shows of one or the other celebrity chefs confers status. Some shows are aimed at more middle or lower class whilst others confer high status to the discerning viewer as they are perhaps more technical or involve more knowledge of food and cooking. For example, in order to execute some of Heston Blumenthal’s recipes, one needs to have considerable expertise as well as access to specialist material and ingredients. On the other hand, one of Jamie Oliver’s recent books involves the use of 5 ingredients (the title of the book) with recipes that can be executed in as little as 15 minutes.

Another useful framework suggests that there are four processes of taste formation (see Figure 4):

<i>Structural and Functional Homologies</i>		
<i>Process</i>	<i>Field of Production</i>	<i>Field of Consumption</i>
Objectification	Translation of abstract ideas into cultural artifacts	↔ Formation of cultural dispositions through homologous movements in society
Legitimization	Production, marketing, and endorsement of a new genre of cultural products	↔ Establishment through symbolic appropriation of a leading-edge community of taste
Transmission	Range of products extended to include lesser emblems of distinction	↔ Community of taste extended across different sections of society
Institutionalization	Original models exploited in the production of sentimentally evocative goods	↔ Community of taste renewed across generations through cultural reproduction

Figure 4 – The Four Processes of Taste Formation (Harvey et al., 2011, p.252)

Here Harvey et al. (2011) present a model of taste formation based upon the existence and interactions of two 'fields' as defined by Bourdieu (1984); the field of production (the economic world) and the field of consumption (the social world). The four processes involve an interaction between the two fields. Objectification defines the translation of ideas into artifacts. In the field of consumption these artifacts are transformed into the production of new products that respond to changes in society. Legitimization implies that new goods will satisfy the standards of 'good taste' and therefore be accepted as legitimate. Legitimization is further reinforced in the age of social media where it is no longer the object that defines taste, but how it is used, interpreted and shared (Paßman and Schubert, 2020). It might be possible to extend this concept to how the chefs will be 'used' by the public. There are those who may genuinely engage with the chefs and seek to learn from them, while there are others who may take a more passive approach and view them as mere entertainment. Through transmission, the range of products is extended to a wider community and therefore allows the lower classes to acquire similar goods to those of the higher classes, but these goods may perhaps be copies or counterfeits as they lack the necessary purchasing power to acquire the originals. Finally, institutionalization elevates the goods and products to the epithet of good taste and they become a cultural reference. There is more to social dominance than tastes in material goods. It encompasses lifestyles and societal norms as well. The ability to distinguish caviar from fish lump, for example, will act as a differentiator and mark class.

## 2.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the three paradigms that frame the construction of taste. The first is the structuralist paradigm which focuses on taste as a social construct, the second is the developmental paradigm which gives more weight to outside influences and the third is the post-modern approach which places the individual at the centre of the construction of taste. Additionally, the omnivore theory proposes that consumers have broad tastes that encompass elite as well as popular cultural forms. The modern omnivore is a 'grazer' driven by both a class background as well as a desire to consume freely. Further modern interpretations of taste are found in the foodie discourse where individuals are the purveyors of post-modernist lifestyle and attitudes. Foodies value casualness and knowledge over snobbery and the traditional fussy approach to food. Shifts in contemporary attitudes towards class have changed which has led to a transformation in the way individuals shape their tastes with more weight given to individual agency. In this context, the celebrity chefs play a role as agents of change.

## CHAPTER 3 – BOURDIEU: TASTE AND DISTINCTION

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the importance of Bourdieu's work, *Distinction* (1984), in the analysis and understanding of how taste is constructed through a sociological lens. While not a Marxist, Bourdieu did borrow from Karl Marx's notion of capital and the concept that the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. However, Bourdieu extended Marx's idea of capital beyond the economic and more into the more realm of culture and taste. As such, Bourdieu suggests that taste is socially conditioned, learned through education and intrinsically linked to social class. He argues that taste is an expression of social differences and contends that taste functions as a way to maintain strict social classes (Warde, 2016). Thus, he concludes that taste is socially rather than individually constructed and is slow to change partly because it is deeply meaningful to the individual as it reflects a sense of belonging within a system of set and rigid social boundaries.

Although class is only one of the facets that frames the sociological treatment of food, it has been debated that it can be used to frame the construction of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's seminal text, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, published in 1979 in French and first translated in English in 1984, is the foundation to any study on taste. He analysed the construction of tastes within the



context of French society in the 1960s and was mainly interested in cultural tastes but also the way in which taste is used as a social signifier and acts as a classifier. Bourdieu's data was collected in France in the 1960s (1963-1968) and therefore interpretations of his work must be placed within the historical and economic context of the time. France was in a period of transition from the post-second World War period and was still a socially rigid country. It was facing significant changes in its social and political fabric with events such as the social uprisings of the youth in May 1968 which were a profound catalyst to societal changes. He posits that different social classes behave in their conventional and established ways with regards to their choices of music, art, clothes, decoration and food and acquire and replicate the cultural capital that they have learned and has been transmitted. His structuralist approach contends that taste functions as a way to maintain strict boundaries between the social classes. Central to Bourdieu's analysis are the concepts of capital and habitus. Bourdieu considers society in terms of 'fields', where players compete for influence and power through the use of different forms of capital. He states that capital can take one of four forms: economic, cultural, symbolic and social. Whilst economic capital refers to monetary and material assets, cultural capital refers to non-financial assets that position an individual such as the understanding of art or literature. Symbolic capital is linked to honour or prestige. Finally, social capital refers to the networks and relationships that are available to an individual. The more capital one has, the higher one's place in society.

One of Bourdieu's important concepts is that of habitus which he refers to when mapping out what he calls 'The space of social position and the space of lifestyles (1984, p.122 and 123). 'Habitus' describes the way in which people behave and make

choices according to their belonging to a social class and refers to norms or tendencies that determine behaviour and thinking within the accepted and dictated boundaries of the given class. Bourdieu inserts the habitus between the space of social conditions and the space of lifestyles and describes it as:

the generative formulae (e.g. for teachers, aristocratic asceticism) which underlie each of the classes of practices and properties, that is, the transformation into a distinct and distinctive life-style of the necessities and facilities characteristic of a condition and a position (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 120).

'The concept of habitus is the link between the objective and the subjective components of 'class' (Seymour, 2004, p. 2). Habitus therefore encompasses socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions. It refers to how individuals perceive and react to the world around them and react to it. Bourdieu goes on to suggest that taste is not formed by aesthetic preferences but from the availability of capital; both economic and cultural, as well as by the conditioning effect of habitus (Harvey et al., 2011). Hence Bourdieu implies that taste is socially rather than individually constructed, learned through education and intrinsically linked to social class.

## **3.2 Capital**

### **3.2.1 Economic Capital**

Economic capital is what is gained from employment, investment and property. There are mechanisms that allow economic capital to be converted from one form to another (property to money for example) as there are mechanisms that allow economic capital to be converted into cultural capital. Thus, it is an important differentiator as it can be

transformed into other forms of capital. However, increasing amounts of economic capital cannot make up for not having the 'correct' cultural or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 376). Bourdieu's argument goes further than stating that the construction of taste is simply a product of economic criteria (Seymour, 2004). For example, even if an individual acquires economic capital through a high salary, that does not mean that they are able to navigate the intricacies of the higher social classes as they will lack the supposed finesse linked to the habitus of that class. These individuals may often display the behaviours associated with the 'nouveau riche' or new money, in contrast with 'old' and often inherited money and often be shunned by the 'establishment'. Mennell (1996) suggests that individuals are assigned to certain class positions defined by the amount of economic (and social) capital they possess. 'Only to a very limited extent can this inheritance be modified by strategies of social mobility (Mennell 1996, p. 12)'. As such, people that 'move up' on the social ladder will lack an innate understanding of the correct patterns of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 16).

### **3.2.2 Cultural Capital**

Of all the forms of capital, cultural capital is at the core of the construction of taste. Cultural capital can be manifested in distinctive forms of knowledge and ability that are acquired through education and informal assimilation. Cultural capital is a non-financial form of capital which goes beyond other forms of capital such as economic capital. This can include education, intellect, style of speech, dress, or physical appearance for example. Cultural capital is manifested in choices of music, art,

literature or food. It is also used to classify social classes (Savage, 2015). Bourdieu (1984) coined the term to describe how tastes, usually thought of as distinctive personal preferences, together with manners and social skills, mark membership in particular social classes.

(Cultural capital) opposes...those who acquired their cultural capital by early daily contact with rare 'distinguished' things, people, places and shows, to those who owe their capital to an acquisitive effort directed by the educational system...whose relationship to it is more serious, more severe, often more tense (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 127).

Within cultural capital, three tastes are distinguished: highbrow, middlebrow and popular taste which, in Bourdieu's formulation, map onto upper-, middle- and working-class preferences. Hence, different classes possess different amounts of capital, some with high cultural capital but low economic capital or vice-versa. In his study, Bourdieu (1984) breaks French society down into several categories, what he describes as 'class fractions', ranging from farm workers on the lower end of the spectrum, to craftsmen and shop keepers in the middle, to engineers, teachers and professionals in the higher echelon. He then contends that the classes will have characteristic behaviours and tastes inherent to their position and will seek to maintain their place through distinction of taste and the display of the various forms of cultural capital, notably through a rigid and elitist educational system (Bourdieu, 1984).

Cultural capital also refers to the choices we make in the goods we consume. Warde links consumption to cultural capital in the sense that '...consumption behaviour, broadly conceived, is a means whereby social classes display their 'cultural capital' and their place in a hierarchical system of social distinction' (1996, p. 10).

Consumption behaviour is not only an expression of class but also an integral part of the struggle for domination between the social classes (Seymour, 2004). Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory, Seymour (2004, p. 4) suggests that 'circulation of cultural products and the reproduction of cultural relations....acquired through immersion in habitus...can be accumulated and passed on from generation to generation'. Holt (1997) further describes cultural capital as an abstract set of dispositions, skills, knowledge of aesthetics of the body and the mind, that are transmitted through upbringing, high levels of formal education and interaction with peers with similar levels of cultural capital. This is then shared in occupations 'that emphasize symbolic production. In this form, cultural capital exists as a universal, fungible and transportable resource' (Holt, p. 96).

It can be suggested that our cultural capital is largely inherited and, as such, we learn to discriminate, classify and make choices through the habitus (Seymour, 2004). A process of circulation and accumulation also exists (Bennett et al., 2009) which serves as an instrument to maintain class differences. Sharing forms of capital, such as education in prestigious universities or similar tastes in literature, mark one's position in society. Whilst it is possible to acquire cultural capital through effort or education, such capital will not be seen as being as legitimate by those that acquired said cultural capital through their upbringing (Seymour, 2004).

There is evidence to suggest that cultural capital is particularly legitimised through the education system with certain qualifications giving access to the correct cultural capital. In France this was particularly prevalent in the educational system of the

1960s, 70s and 1980s and to a certain degree, still exists today with institutions such as 'grandes écoles'. The 'grandes écoles' are elite higher education institutions which admit students through highly selective and competitive processes. A large part of the French elite, including the government, hail from these institutions. Cultural capital is passed from the parents to the children who in turn use their knowledge to perform well in school and acquire higher positions (Bennett et al., 2009). The upper echelons frequent the same schools, generation after generation, with little possibility for the lower classes to enter into the system. This ensures that the upper classes maintain an elitist approach to education and to the transmission of cultural capital (Bennett et al.). In effect, they exercise the exclusion of lower classes from this system. Social uprising in France in 2019 by the 'Gilet Jaunes' shows how the French still perceive this as unfair and unacceptable and led the French president, Macron, to promise to dismantle the elitist École Nationale d'Administration (one of the grandes écoles) to pacify his electorate and break the incestuous 'old boys networks.'

Cultural capital is also the sum of knowledge possessed by the elite social classes. It refers to a set of values possessed by the upper classes which confers power and social status. How cultural capital is transferred from other forms of capital provides a means for class distinction through taste. As such, cultural capital plays a central role in societal power relations. The acquisition of cultural capital is 'inscribed, as an objective demand, in membership of the bourgeoisie and in the qualifications giving access to its rights and duties' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 23). Holt refers to cultural capital as an 'abstracted virtual form, cultural capital is a set of generic transposable characteristics – dispositions, skills, sensibilities, embodied knowledges...that together compose the habitus of the cultural elite' (Holt, 1997, p. 96).

### **3.2.3 Symbolic and Social Capital**

Symbolic capital refers to the resources available through honour or recognition, for example holders of medals or civil honours. It is closely linked to social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Seymour, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) describes social capital as the ownership of formal relationships and networks that operate within defined rules and allow resources to be maintained within that network. This could be illustrated by the 'old boys' networks' that dominate certain aspects of politics and business both in the UK and in France. Social capital can be used to produce or reproduce inequality, effectively giving access to certain positions only to people that possess the required capital. Symbolic and social capital are linked to cultural and economic capital as they give an individual access to a network, whether formal or informal, linked to the amount of capital possessed. It is argued that those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are hindered from attaining higher social status due to a lack of access to social capital.

### **3.3. Habitus**

As previously mentioned, habitus can be described as actions and choices made according to a person's position in the social world. Although invisible, the habitus is learned through upbringing and ways of doing things that lead to specific patterns of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1984).

Individuals sharing a particular habitus will make similar decisions and share similar judgements of taste (Seymour, 2004). Habitus also refers to the link between the objective and the subjective components of class. Habitus generates meaningful practices and perceptions. It is conceptualised as the taken for granted codes we possess such as accent, gestures and preferences in food, clothing or music (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde, 2016). Habitus allows us to distinguish between 'what is and what isn't our kind of thing'. It further refers to the everyday, to the choices made as a reference to an individual's position in the social world. It equips people with an innate sense of how to act in society. Hence, people from a similar social class will recognise common symbols and ways of behaving. Habitus incorporates a set of dispositions, tendencies to do things in a certain way that are determined by social milieu (Seymour, 2004). For Bourdieu (1984), many of the processes of taste formation lie within the habitus. He suggests that taste is the basis of people and things and the way by which one 'classifies oneself and is classified by others'.

Drawing upon the work of Bourdieu, Seymour (2004, p. 18) contends that: 'habitus and the possession of differing amounts of economic capital continues to determine the construction of taste.' She goes on to say that culinary taste is also fashioned through the habitus. This can be illustrated in the culinary world by the purchasing patterns of different social classes. For example, anyone with the economic means can purchase caviar but not everyone knows how to appreciate it or the way in which convention dictates it should be served and eaten. It is perhaps the role of the celebrity chef to remove these barriers by making products accessible to a wider audience and by removing the highbrow veneer and social obstacles that may be associated with their consumption.



Bourdieu (1984) also gives weight to the notion of field which can be described as the arena in which different actors compete for influence. The dominant players in the field seek to maintain the status-quo as any changes in the power balance would challenge their dominant position. Fantasia (2018) constructs a social map of the field of French gastronomy and contends that there are a number of players that allow the movement of capital through the field. As can be seen in the figure below, three-star Michelin chefs both work with, and compete against, various aspects of the field that range from supermarkets to the Michelin Guide and allow economic and symbolic capital to be exchanged. Economic capital is seen to be moving from the industrial food industry to the chefs in exchange for the chef's symbolic capital.

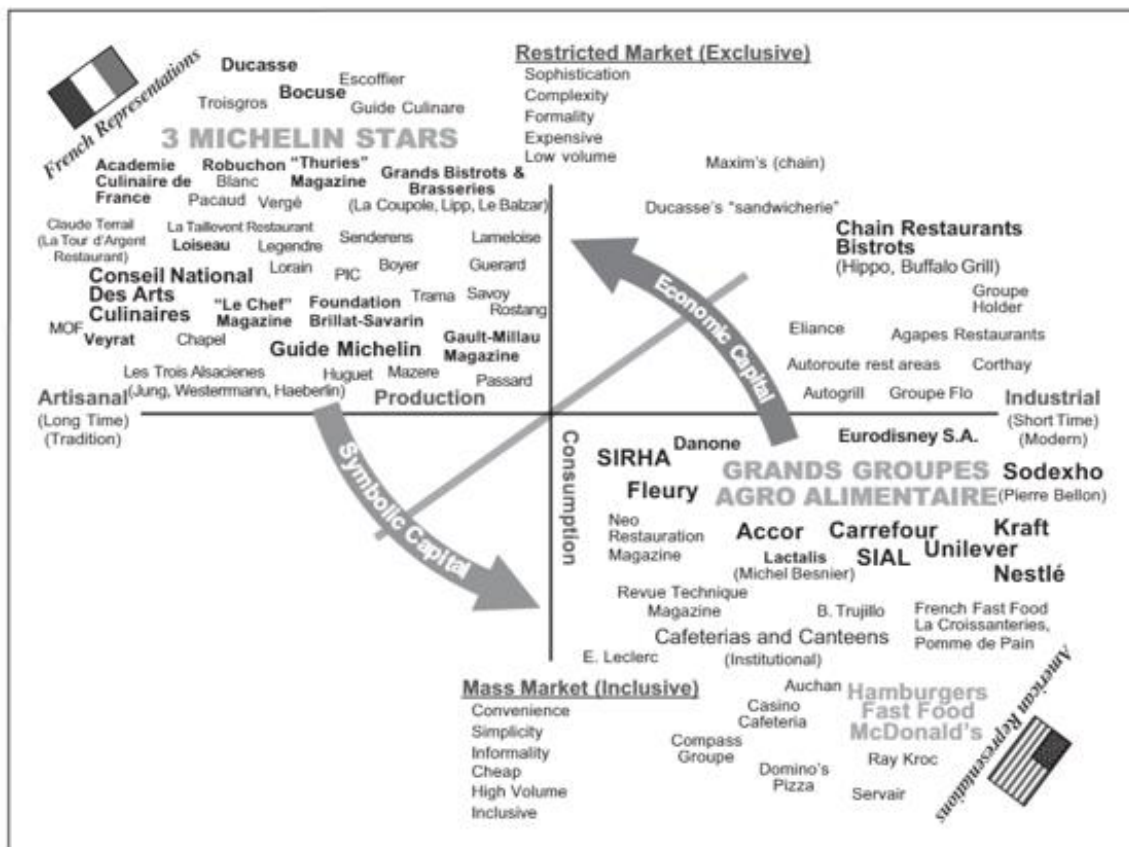


Figure 5 – Direction of Capital Flows in the Principal Regions of the French Gastronomic Field (Fantasia 2018, p. 186)

### 3.4 Taste, Class and Distinction

Bourdieu (1984) sees class as determined by the varying amounts of different forms of capital rather than a more materialistic Marxist approach that opposes possession versus non-possession of the means of production. Social classes are defined by the different amounts of each type of capital possessed. These are determined by subtle combinations of economic and cultural capital that lead to certain lifestyles (Seymour, 2004). In his analysis, Bourdieu gives teachers, for example, high cultural capital but relatively low economic capital. These teachers may display signs of cultural capital through their upbringing or education and display this capital in their choices and tastes for food; however, they are not necessarily able to purchase expensive products due to limited availability of economic capital. Conversely, lawyers possess both the economic capital and cultural capital as well as the know-how to display a 'legitimate' culture. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that changes in the combinations of capital may lead to changes in lifestyles and to social mobility. For example, a family with a thriving small business may seek to improve the cultural capital of its children through education. However, the codes of the upper classes may not be fully understood by those evolving through the social classes due to accumulation of one or the other form of capital. Hence shifts in taste maintain social competition (Harvey et al., 2011).

Bourdieu asserts that:

In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick making') of the tastes of others (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 49).

He goes on to say that: 'Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes; class endogamy is evidence of this.' In this respect, taste can serve as a form of exclusion. It is still very relevant in a 21st century context where, despite differences in behaviour by social class becoming less visible, exclusion mechanisms remain existent, albeit in a more subtle way. Despite the widespread use of social media, the ways in which different platforms are accessed by different social categories and ages vary.

An equally significant analysis of the importance of class suggests that the social classes are in a constant struggle for domination, exercised through the use of the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, the upper classes will seek to maintain their domination through cultural capital, which cannot be easily acquired by lower classes. The classes that possess the highest cultural capital will seek to retain their position. If a product loses its role as a taste marker, the upper classes will in turn change the signs, symbols and signifying objects to continue to mark their distance from other classes (Seymour, 2004). Strong (2006) links the consumption of offal to modern food cultures where it is: 'the preserve of an affluent culinary cognoscenti whose cooking and eating habits are significantly determined by what they see and read' (Strong, 2006, p. 30). Likewise, symbolic capital will serve as a distinctive sign of belonging. Bourdieu suggests that the lower classes may not take

part in this struggle but play a role for the classes above them. Therefore, the ability to display certain patterns of behaviour and make certain choices will serve to identify a person within a social class. Many of these patterns are sub-conscious and are influenced by upbringing.

In the class struggle, the 'petit bourgeois', or new taste makers, reject the rigidity of the bourgeoisie 'in favour of a hedonistic morality of consumption, based on credit, spending and enjoyment' where people are judged by their lifestyle. Hence the new middle class reject the values of the working class and attempt to position their own tastes as legitimate, positioning themselves and marking a new class distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 310). Once the lower and middle classes reproduce the behaviours of higher social classes, the latter will invent new things and ways of consumption to continue to mark their distance from the lower social strata (Øygaard, 2000). For example, the consumption of salmon, once reserved for the elite, is now widespread. The fish is farmed in order to meet the growing demand, partly in response to government (and celebrity chef) messages promoting the health aspects of consuming fish. This illustrates how expensive food trickles down and gains a wider appeal whilst also becoming more accessible and cheaper.

Holt (1997) delivers another interesting analysis by suggesting that it is not what is consumed, but the cultural implications of consumption and taste practices that matter. He applies this to two groups in the United States; one with high cultural capital who seek to 'negate connotations of waste, ostentation and extravagance by constructing their tastes for fine goods in terms of the experiential value of the object' (Holt, 1997,

p. 110). This group are removed from the material world in the sense of Bourdieu's 'tastes of necessity'. They shun the material aspects of consumption. In contrast, the group with lower cultural capital, give less value to 'experiential uses' and prefer luxury for the distance it gives them from material needs. This is linked to the idea of the form consumption as a marker of class, not just the consumption of the product or object (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Making the 'right' choices presupposes knowledge of the 'right' kind of taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Lindblom and Mustonen, 2015).

Bourdieu (1984) closely links taste and its social implications.

Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs, of continuous distribution into discontinuous oppositions; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions.

Taste is thus the source of the system of distinctive features which cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic expression of a particular class of conditions of existence ie. as a distinctive life-style, by anyone who possesses the practical knowledge of the relationships between distinctive signs and positions in the distributions (1984, p. 170).

Central to Bourdieu's argument is the idea that taste is inherently bourgeois as it presupposes a freedom of choice and distance from economic necessity (Wright et al., 2000; Seymour, 2004; Stringfellow et al., 2013). The dominant principle in defining the differences in tastes in food is the opposition between 'tastes of luxury' and 'tastes of necessity'. On the one hand, tastes of luxury are the tastes of those born into a habitus that is far removed from necessity and from economic constraints. On the other hand, the tastes of necessity apply to the lower classes. These may be linked to a true lack of food as we are currently seeing with the cost-of-living crisis and the increase in the reliance on foodbanks. It may also be associated with access to supermarkets, poor choices in food or other socio-economic conditions. 'Distinction

therefore depends on the basic opposition between tastes of luxury and tastes of necessity' (Stringfellow et al., 2013, p. 79). People who are far removed from the material needs of necessity are therefore those able to set the standards of taste and distinguish themselves through the consumption of food (Stringfellow et al.). Cultural dominance is thereby exercised by the elite over the lower classes through setting standards that lower classes strive to attain or emulate. In all cases, the high class are the ultimate arbiters of taste.

In his study (based on data collected in the 1960s), Bourdieu (1984) points out that the food tastes of the working class are driven by a need for sustenance, and this is manifested by a preference for filling and heavy foods. The working-class table is abundant; taking a second helping of food is seen as acceptable, if not encouraged. There is a refusal of constraint and pretensions in opposition to the bourgeois. By contrast, the bourgeois display refinement both in the choice of foods and in the manner and quantity in which food is eaten (Warde, 2016). In the 1960s, bourgeois eating habits were characterised by restraint. Small quantities are preferred and the meal is very formal. There is a concern for style, presentation, and the aesthetic qualities of food (Bourdieu, 1984). This attitude was epitomised by 'nouvelle cuisine' in the 1980s where food portions were minute and extreme attention was paid to the presentation of the food on the plate (Ashley et al., 2004). Hence, food consumption patterns reflect class differences and act as a marker of status and belonging.

Similar views are expressed by Atkins and Bowler (2001) who also argued that tastes in food act as a marker of class difference. Adema (2000) further advocates that one's

knowledge of food separates those with the cultural capital from those without, therefore marking distinction. However, as more people acquire knowledge, the value of gourmet food and cooking as a marker of cultural capital decreases, forcing new knowledge to be found to continue to maintain distinction. Taste acts not only as a sign of social distinction but also as a barrier for those hoping to move up the socio-economic ladder (Carolan, 2012). Eating habits can be seen to express class differences (Warde, 1997; Warde, 2016). For example, consumption of food, exposure to ingredients and new cooking techniques 'can be as alienating as it can be empowering' (Abbots, 2015, p. 237). Warde suggests that: 'food was just one domain among many where tastes confirmed social position' (2016, p. 57). Likewise, Mennell suggests that 'taste in food, as in other domains of culture, implies discrimination, standards of good and bad, the acceptance of some things and the rejection of others' (1985, p. 20). It could therefore be suggested that taste in food, as in other cultural artefacts (art, cinema, literature), will act as a barrier to entry. When lower and middle classes have assimilated new food tastes, the higher classes will make new rules in order to continue to exercise elitism.

However, in contemporary society, there is also contradictory evidence to suggest that modern-day tastes in food have moved away from 'haute cuisine' to a more democratic approach to food (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). It may be argued that in this context, diversity rather than exclusivity acts as a means of distinction (Milne, 2013). Johnston and Baumann's study (2007) uses cultural capital as a basis to interpret how contemporary food culture serves as a form of distinction. In their study of American gourmet magazines, Johnston and Baumann noted that French cuisine is no longer the only marker of 'good' food as it was in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today the 'foodie' will

show knowledge of a much wide range of cuisines, perhaps again exercising capital through that very knowledge.

### 3.5 The food space map

The usefulness of the Food Space Map (figure 6) resides in the fact that it incorporates the notions of foods, tastes and amounts of capital. It illustrates how the consumption of specific foods is linked to combinations of cultural and economic capital as well as time and the woman's role in the household. In this approach towards the food practices (created in the 1980s), there is an opposition between the refinement of the food of the dominant classes and the more substantial and informal consumption of the working class. As such, this map opposes the social classes by representing their food consumption and preferences (Seymour, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) referred to tastes of necessity as opposed to tastes of luxury and this is now applied to food preferences as seen in the Food Space Map.



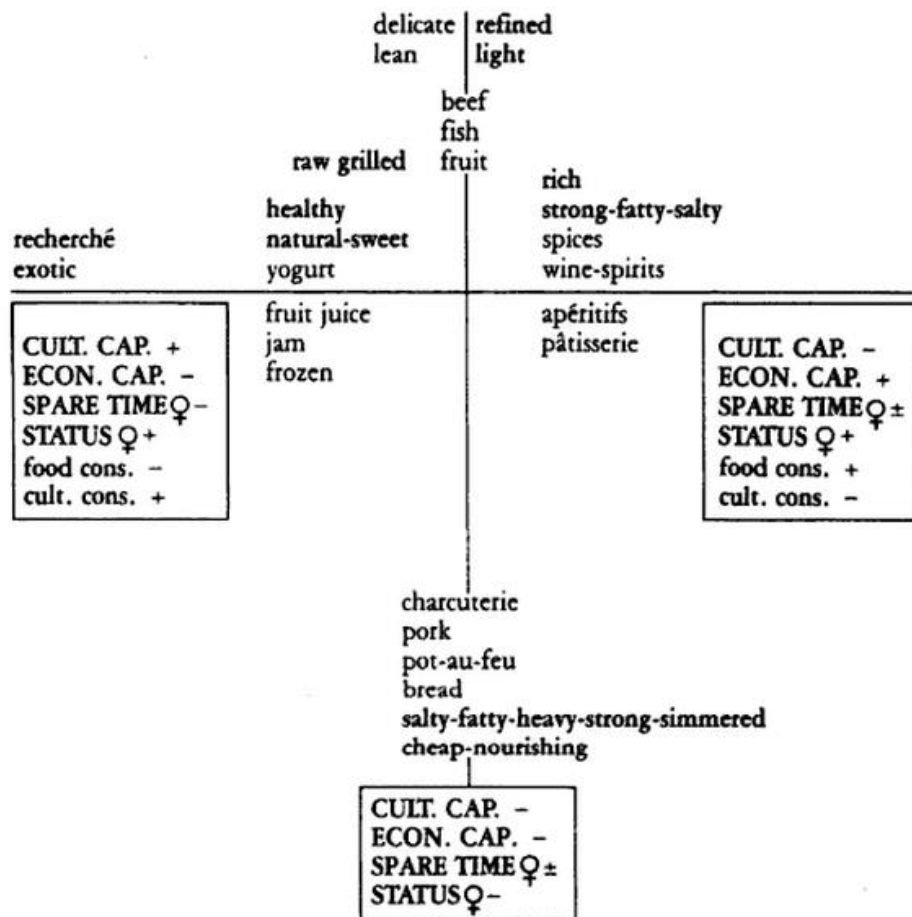


Figure 6 - The Food Space Map (Bourdieu 1984, p. 182)

The Food Space Map can be analysed by considering each quadrant separately. Cultural and economic capitals are linked to women's spare time, status, food and cultural consumption. The top left-hand section of the map shows us the upper classes that are free from economic constraints and possess higher levels of cultural capital. They are therefore able to favour lighter foods and have more formalised meals that involve strict rules. A preference for rare and expensive foods is seen here. The top right-hand quadrant leans more towards the middle class and the 'nouveaux riche' who have the economic capital but may lack cultural capital. Although they have a preference for salty, rich and fatty foods, finer wines and spirits are also appreciated

in an effort to emulate the tastes of the 'bourgeois'. They are therefore able to 'buy' themselves into some of the habits of the world of the bourgeois as they have the economic means to do so but they still retain some of the habits and lifestyle of the working class. The 'nouveaux riche' are perceived as vulgar by the elite classes (Bourdieu, 1984; Seymour, 2004). Moving down to the lower right-hand quadrant, the foods become fattier, heavier and stronger. Here we see high levels of consumption of pork in the form of sausages and other delicatessen foods. Food here is cheap, plentiful and nourishing, to feed a working-class man. The bottom left-hand quadrant moves towards those with high cultural capital but low economic capital such as teachers. Here, time is of the essence and therefore frozen and convenience foods tend to be preferred. One can also see likes for the exotic and foods linked to the possession of a certain cultural capital. However, these figures should be considered in their context of data collected in the 1960s and would therefore not necessarily reflect today's socio-economic situation. For example, having the time to prepare a stew today may be seen to be assimilated to the upper echelons of society rather than to the working class that Bourdieu linked his 'pot au feu' (type of French stew, author's note) to above. As suggested by Strong (2006) the types of foods that Bourdieu associates with the working classes are those that today are trendy and enjoyed by those 'in the know.' Bourdieu also observed that as one rises in the social hierarchy, the proportion of income spent on food diminishes. Specifically, what is spent on fatty foods declines. The food budget in itself changes with more attention given to fresh vegetables and fruit and less to cheap processed foods. In terms of annual household expenditure on food as a proportion of total expenditure, it is the working classes that have the highest amount, 37.4%, compared to 25.2% for senior executives, 24.4% for teachers and professionals and 25.4% for engineers (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 184).

The Food Space Map also illustrates that it is not only the choice of food but also the method of preparation that is important. The working classes will make stews and boil food which is both rich and time consuming. As the women tended not to work outside of the home, they had spare time to devote to the provision of food and make heavier 'peasant' dishes that necessitate longer preparation. Moving up the social ladder, there is a preference for grilled or raw food which is more refined as well as healthier and lighter. It could be suggested that this links to the traditional division of labour and the role of women within the different social classes. In the middle classes, women work outside the household and spare time may be limited. There is therefore a willingness to seek more convenient and quicker ways to prepare food whilst staying healthy as there is less time to dedicate to the preparation of food. Cuisine is a medium by which a society establishes its identity (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). Consumers approach their food choices and practices in accordance with the practices and habits dictated by their social belonging (Warde, 2016).

It is important however, to note that there are limitations to this map. Firstly, it must be placed in the historical and cultural context of the time. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s the association of time and the lengthy preparation of food were linked to the working classes and to the fact that women were more likely to stay at home. Today, where women work much more outside of the home, this has changed. Having the time and knowledge to prepare something like a stew may now be associated with the upper classes when in Bourdieu's analysis, it was not. For example, 'cucina povera', or poor/peasant cooking, has become very fashionable. Secondly, the availability and

knowledge of food in the UK has changed dramatically since the 1980s with the wider public having access to previously unknown and unused products. Hence, bread, which Bourdieu attributes to the working classes, has taken on a plethora of more 'upmarket' forms, with one needing to know the difference between California sourdough and Parisian baguette. Lastly, the distribution of capital as expressed by Bourdieu has also changed, with economic and social capital perhaps playing a more important role in Britain today than it did in the France of the 1970s.

### 3.6 Bourdieu and Celebrity Chefs

To link Bourdieu and celebrity chefs, Jackson suggests that: 'The celebrity chef emerges as a kind of knowledge broker between people, food and the practice of eating' (2017, p.240). Figure 6 below, Changing Dynamics of Culinary Taste (Stringfellow et al., 2012), may be useful as a conceptual map that incorporates both the aspects of taste and capital, as well as the role of the celebrity chef. It also adds the extra layer of the consumer who moves on a continuum from 'elite' to 'mass'. The usefulness of this model may reside in the fact that it not only covers the theories developed by Bourdieu by bringing in notions of social and cultural capital, but also integrates the celebrity chef within the same framework. In this model, the chefs must position themselves either as *celebrity* chefs (celebrities) or as *celebrity chefs* (elite chefs), possibly as moving between both. On the one hand, they must maintain legitimacy and social capital which is key to any influence on taste that they may exercise. On the other hand, notions of economic capital are equally important. Furthermore, it is important for the chefs to retain a cultural and culinary identity that

is not overtaken by a desire for economic profit (Ashley et al., 2004). Stringfellow et al.'s. model also illustrates the tensions that are at play with the celebrity chefs oscillating between their professional acumen and legitimacy and the pressures to be commercially viable as well.

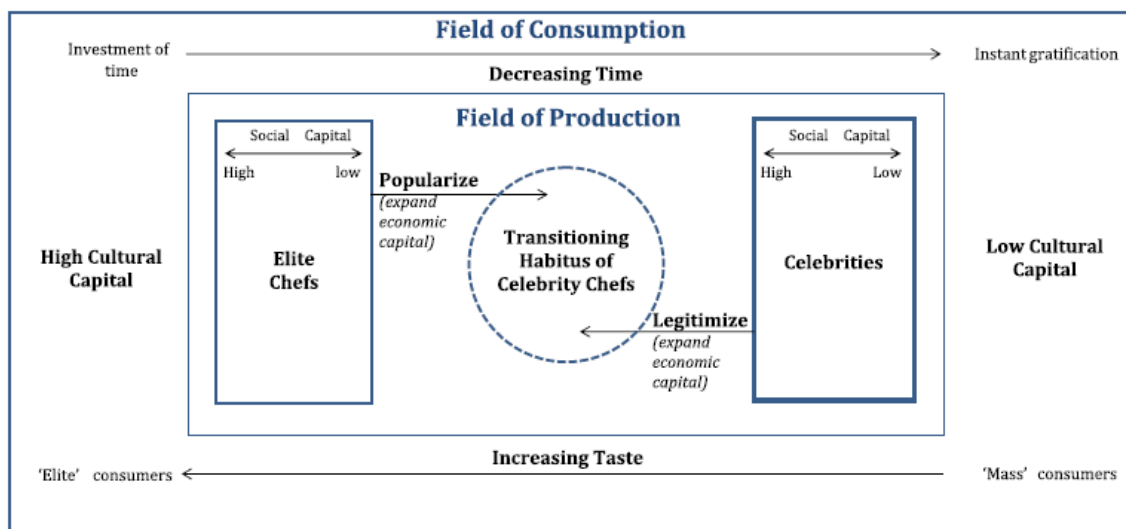


Figure 7 - Changing Dynamics of culinary taste (Stringfellow et al., 2012, p. 82)

The celebrity chefs have a number of functions in the accumulation and dissemination of Bourdieu's forms of capital. Firstly, economic capital, the form of capital with the most currency. This is articulated, for example, with chefs such as Ramsay in his three-star Michelin restaurant background. Some chefs will recommend the use of special ingredients which are more expensive, again displaying their access to economic capital. The chefs themselves are representative of cultural capital or, what is sometimes referred to more specifically in this context, as culinary capital. Their knowledge and skills are forms of cultural capital. For the chef's followers, the possession of cookbooks or cooking utensils are a way for them to show 'objectivised

and incorporated cultural capital' (Kamphuis, 2015, p. 3), a tangible form of cultural capital. Social capital is displayed by the chef's followers being part of a select network or group, recognisable from their shared forms of economic or cultural references. Symbolic capital refers to the method by which the chef's knowledge can be perceived as prestigious and recognisable, thereby differentiating those who possess it from those who do not. These forms of capital can be used as a currency to be exchanged amongst the followers of the chefs.

Central to Bourdieu's discussions is the role of the cultural intermediary which he refers to as agents of the new middle-class ('petite bourgeoisie') with the appropriate knowledge who make and disseminate what is to be regarded as 'good taste'. In this context, the celebrity chefs can effectively be defined as cultural intermediaries as they propagate and influence people's perceptions of food. 'Cultural intermediaries impact upon notions of *what*, and thereby *who*, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not' (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012, p. 552). Culture intermediaries must also be considered as experts in their fields in order to fulfil this role, which is the case of the celebrity chefs. 'Cultural intermediaries are differentiated by their explicit claims to professional expertise in taste and value within specific cultural field' (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012, p. 552). The chefs are recognised as 'culinary lifestyle experts' (Piper, 2015) by consumers, proposing not only recipes to be followed, but suggestions for domestic practices from dinner parties to self-indulgence.

### 3.7 Critique of Bourdieu and Limitations of *Distinction*

Bourdieu himself is his fiercest critic. In the opening pages of *Distinction* (1984, p. xiii), he warns the reader that his study is 'very French'. He continues by stating that 'it can be read as a sort of ethnography of France...which should help to renew the rather stereotyped image of French society that is presented by the American tradition' (p. xiii). This suffices to locate his study within the socio—cultural dynamics of France in the 60s and 70s. This was a period referred to as the 'trente glorieuses', the glorious thirty years from 1945 to 1975 where the French economy and consumption grew. This period was also characterised by a rather rigid social order where class systems were very present in education and culture. One must therefore be cautious when seeking to apply Bourdieu's findings to other countries. It does however seem possible to use his concepts of capital in isolation (Lamont, 2012) although some of Bourdieu's observations and conclusions may no longer be applicable, certainly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Bennett et al. (2009) challenged Bourdieu on the grounds that there is no mention of ethnicity nor of the role of women in the transmission of cultural capital in Bourdieu's analysis. Mennell (1996) suggests that because Bourdieu's theory is based on empirical research carried out in the 1960s, it does not take into account subsequent historical and social changes and can therefore only be a snapshot of the practices of the times whilst Milne contends that Bourdieu's work is 'deeply rooted in the world of 1960s France that it describes' (Milne, 2013, p. 217). Furthermore, Warde (1997) suggests that class-based assumptions of consumption are criticised. Whilst

considerable consideration must be given to the relevance of Bourdieu's theories, one could argue that shortcomings lie in the fact that changes in patterns of consumption are not taken into account (Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997). For example, changes in forms of capital that demonstrate taste are in constant flux. The proliferation of choices offered to consumers means that those with similar economic means are able to choose from a range of products and lifestyles as the boundaries between the classes become more and more blurred (Southerton, 2001).

It can also be argued that contemporary Western food cultures are characterised by an increase in novelty and choice that may bring about erosion in the relationship between class and taste (Mennell, 1996; Warde, 1997; Holt, 1998; Warde, 1997; Ashley et al., 2004,). Similarly, Naccarato and LeBesco (2012) developed this idea and draw upon dynamic changes in 'culinary capital' and infer that capital no longer moves in the fixed and pre-determined way suggested by Bourdieu.

Seymour (2004) develops a similar argument when she suggests that the notion that social class as the primary influence on the construction of taste has come under criticism. Class analysis has become outdated in modern society as the class boundaries become muted through consumption (Savage, 2015). While some tastes have become standardised through processes of industrialisation and globalisation (Seymour, Ritzer, 2013), other patterns of behaviour seek to mark taste through niche consumption.



Another critique may come from the fact that no other such empirical research was conducted outside France; thus it may be debatable whether Bourdieu's research and findings are transferrable to other cultures and countries. In addition, food has considerably more cultural significance in France than it does in Britain, for example (Warde, 1997; Gatley et al., 2014). Notwithstanding these limitations, Bourdieu's work is still central to the sociological analysis of taste. Numerous contemporary academics (Seymour, 2004; Bennett et al., 2009; Silva and Warde, 2010; Andrews, 2012; Stringfellow et al., 2012; Gatley et al., 2014; Abbotts, 2015; Warde, 2016) continue to deliberate Bourdieu's theories and his work remains recognised as seminal in any study of taste.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focuses on Bourdieu's work on the construction of taste. It explores the notions of class and capital which are key to the study. Capital is accrued and exchanged in the habitus to form a construct that is used by individuals to form their tastes. Bourdieu contends that tastes are fixed in a set class system that determines actions and behaviours, where individual tastes are subordinated to the larger system. The celebrity chefs emerge as actors, or 'agents' in the exchange of capital. They act as the cultural intermediaries that allow the flow of capital. Bourdieu's theories have been challenged as no other similar study has been undertaken outside of France hence it can be questioned whether the findings can be transferred to other countries or cultures. Despite this, Bourdieu's theories remain pertinent in any study of taste.

# CHAPTER 4 – CELEBRITY CHEFS, LIFESTYLE AND MEDIA

## 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the more contemporary roles of celebrity chefs. A deeper insight into how chefs influence modern lifestyles through the use of cookbooks, television, and social media is necessary in order to understand their broader influence on the construction of taste. The chefs biographies lend an appreciation of their gender roles and the personas that they portray. The chapter then covers how the chefs' impact upon education and fundraising. Further aspects of their roles are then considered. The chapter concludes with a table that identifies the themes extracted from the literature that will guide the thematic analysis of the data.

## 4.2 Lifestyle and culture

Changes in British society have elevated the chefs to the status of media superstars, and, undeniably, the celebrity chefs have entered UK households and may have become an influence on lifestyle choices (Chiaro, 2008). As our culinary experience has become highly mediated, food media such as cookbooks, television cooking shows and celebrity chef shows continue to grow (Rousseau, 2012; Jackson, 2013; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2020). Lewis contends that the celebrity chefs are of particular interest as:

...cultural figures today, to the extent that they have come to exemplify and embody a variety of contemporary shifts and tensions around work and leisure; branded, performative modes of selfhood; gendered regimes and hierarchies of cooking; questions of ethics and

consumption; and cosmopolitan forms of culinary taste and cultural capital (Lewis, 2014, p. 135).

This discourse puts forward a number of questions that arise with regards to the influence that celebrity chefs may have in contemporary society and the role that they play in mediating cultural images and messages. Research confirms that 'Food celebrities...communicate cultural values through mediated performances on television and through their cookbooks (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 4).'

The chef is viewed as a performer who seeks and attracts media attention. The chef is a writer, offering not only food recipes, but also a glimpse into the culture of the professional kitchen. The chef is an entrepreneur whose celebrity confers a brand that offers a competitive edge. The chef is a role model for future chefs, an inspiration to join the industry. Paradoxically, the chef is also a rebel, resisting the sham of celebrity, in a bid to preserve integrity (Giousmpasoglou et al. 2020, p. 1).

The argument can be made that celebrity chefs alienate as well as democratise their followers. On the one hand they open new avenues of knowledge, but, on the other hand, they may propose complicated recipes that their viewers can never really hope to emulate or suggest ingredients that are out-of-reach (Abbots, 2015). Nevertheless, they continue to sell books and draw audiences to their TV show. Celebrity chefs therefore act as cultural intermediaries (Hollows and Jones, 2010b; Lewis, 2014; Piper, 2015) as well as 'cultural guides' (Rousseau, 2012; Abbots, 2015).

Chefs are alchemists who transform the everyday acts of eating into something greater, more transcendent, at once imbued with and productive of taste and class (Hyman, 2008, p. 47).

### 4.3 Chefs and the media

Celebrity chefs exist largely through media attention both on and offline. With award winning (and losing) restaurant empires, hundreds of hours of gladiator inspired TV shows such as Hell's Kitchen, umpired by Gordon Ramsay, or thousands of words in the pages of cookbooks, the chefs inspire, educate, entertain and, on occasion, annoy. The BBC was one of the first broadcasters to use cooking to 'inform, educate and entertain', starting after the Second World War and continuing with early shows portraying Fanny Cradock in the 1950s. 'These popular personalities foster an intimate relationship with consumers, strengthened by presenting styles, sharing their personal lives and using emerging mass media, including social media' (Clarke et al., 2016, p. 84). Celebrity chefs are able to exercise influence over their audience with regards to cooking, purchasing, eating, leisure, gender roles as well as health and moral issues (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Hansen, 2008; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Henderson, 2011; Rousseau, 2012; Abbotts, 2013; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2020). Ashley et al. suggest that

the role of TV chefs within contemporary British television needs to be understood in terms of increased media synergy, a term which refers to the way in which, through diversification, media industries can increase the exposure of a celebrity or star (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 175).

Of particular significance is Rousseau's (2012) work, *Food Media – Celebrity Chefs and the Politics of Everyday Interference*. She addresses how the various actors in the field of food such as TV hosts and chefs influence our exposure to food. She suggests that, due to the proliferation of influencers, it has become necessary for us to become critical consumers and analyse the highly fragmented information that we are presented with.

Food media as they exist today cater to everyone from complete beginners in the kitchen to accomplished cooks; from 'foodies' or self-confessed 'food porn' addicts to those who enjoy watching humiliations and victories in competitive settings' (Rousseau, 2012, p. x).

Former academic and now food journalist, Smith (2020), suggests that TV, and namely the producers of the television shows, have been instrumental in turning the chefs into celebrities. She notably discusses how Jamie Oliver who was working as a young chef, was 'found' at the River Café restaurant in and turned into a TV phenomenon.

Celebrity chefs appear to have some impact over consumers as well as influencing certain government decisions (Rousseau, 2012; Smith, 2020). In her work, Rousseau points out that a transformation has taken place in food media, taking it from 'the educational and informative to the entertaining and vicarious' (Rousseau, 2012, p. 13). It is however important to highlight that, despite the huge growth of food television and access to information, people are cooking less and less, and cooking skills are being lost from one generation to the other (Lang and Caraher, 2001; Mintel, 2002; Rousseau, 2012; Gatley et al., 2014). It has also been suggested that although the celebrity chefs may play a fundamental role in contemporary British society through their media presence, they have limited influence on actual culinary behaviour (Caraher et al., 2000; Mintel, 2002). We are therefore seeing a disconnect between the messages the chefs are pushing out and the way in which they are received. This has been referred to as 'food porn' where people watch TV and look at recipes without engaging with them (Mcbride, 2010; Rousseau, 2012). This term has often been linked to Nigella Lawson for example.

Undeniably, celebrity chefs try to communicate cultural values through their TV shows and cookbooks (Johnston et al., 2014). However, Fantasia (2010) warns against the risks of over commodification of the chefs. Marco-Pierre White for example sold the merits of Knorr whilst Jamie Oliver sold frying pans and endorsed numerous other products. In a Bourdieusian approach, whilst the appeal of gaining economic capital is tempting, the chefs risk losing their cultural and symbolic capital in the process and hence damaging their legitimacy as professionals. This can be correlated to Stringfellow et al's (2013) 'Changing Dynamics of Culinary Taste' model, discussed in chapter 3, that links the chefs to levels of capital.

In the post-modernist society, individuals construct their identity through consumption and the construction of lifestyles (Sloan, 2004). Here the celebrity chefs can be seen to legitimise the lifestyles that they portray. The chefs 'mark distinction while also democratizing tastes' (Hollows, 2003, p. 240). These identities can form a new class distinction in a Bourdieusian sense. We receive 'an education in the 'art of lifestyle', on how to perform distinction by gaining pleasure and fun from all aspects of daily life' (Ashley et al., 2004, p. 184). Hence, the 'consumption' of one or another celebrity chef forges bonds across members of a social group and culinary capital becomes a currency to be exchanged. One can see a distinction formed through preference. The chefs also transmit taste cultures whilst legitimizing the cultural status of those that 'consume' them (Powell and Prasad, 2011). This echoes Bourdieu's notion of habitus, where certain behaviour is recognised and emulated by those that come from the same social class.

Arguably, there are several interpretations of the role of the celebrity chef in the wider socio-cultural context (De Solier, 2005; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Hollows and Jones, 2010b; Piper, 2013; Barnes, 2014; Lewis and Huber, 2015; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2020). It can be disputed that the influence of the celebrity chefs has led to the broader public perhaps becoming better ‘food citizens’, not only by becoming aware of ethical and health issues, but also by actively making changes to their consumption choices (Barnes, 2014). However, despite these messages we are still seeing high rates of obesity in the UK as well as an erosion of cooking skills and an increase in the sales of processed food. While the celebrity chefs still deliver a mixed message of education and entertainment, the public is free to choose one and ignore the other. The chefs seem to move from being superstars, to nutritionists, to purveyors of messages of public health (Rousseau, 2012; Hollows and Jones, 2010 a and b).

#### 4.4 Cookbooks

The study of cookbooks is important in order to understand the influence celebrity chefs may exercise on lifestyle and taste (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Johnston et al., 2014). Not only a collection of recipes, cookbooks answer questions that are not directly related to cooking such as gender, class and issues of ethnicity and cultural belonging. The analysis of cookbooks as social and cultural texts is recognised (Claflin, 2016). In her analysis, Claflin posits the view that:

Cookbooks and domestic manuals are useful as primary sources because they serve as representations of practices (real or imagined) – and also of social and cultural meaning of food – in the society that produced them (Claflin, 2016, p. 109).

Johnston et al. (2014) supported this view as they contended that cookbooks communicate recipes and instruction but also serve as a lens into the symbolic and cultural aspects of cooking. There is a growing literature on the use of cookbooks as a way to study social behaviour. Johnston et al. further suggested that:

while cookbooks have an obvious instrumental purpose – to teach people to cook food – they have other, non-instrumental dimensions, like escapism, or aspirational consumption. As such, examining cookbooks as culinary texts provides a window into the symbolic, cultural and discursive dimensions of cooking and eating (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 5).

However, Finn (2011) warns that recipes may make ‘bad cooks...and bad citizens’ as they develop a relationship of subservience between the chef and the cook as the recipes go beyond instruction and create anxiety and dependence. Another use of cookbooks is put forward by Gronow and Zhuravlev (2011) who claimed that they were used in Russia to teach the new cultural norms to the urban classes of the socialist Soviet Union. The authors also questioned the effect of cookbooks on eating habits and cooking skills both in Soviet Union and in the West which has also been debated by Lang et al. (2001) in their discussion of culinary skills.

Cookbooks have been recognised as purveyors of ‘cultural tales’ (Appadurai, 1988) and reflect notions of class and hierarchy (Goody, 1982). One of the first truly popular cookbooks was Isabella Beeton’s 1861 bestseller *Book of Household Management*, a guide to running a household in Victorian Britain. Beeton was a media creation as she published in her husband’s publications. Despite the fact that Beeton was criticised for having plagiarised or borrowed all the recipes, the book remains an insight into the culinary practices of the times. Across the ages, cookbooks have come to reflect



changes in society and domestic ideologies (Lang and Caraher, 2001; Humble, 2005). They offer a lens into cooking and eating set within their cultural and social contexts. From a celebrity point of view, Mitchell (2010, p. 527) questions whether cookbooks are helpful in teaching the reader to cook or whether they remain the 'vehicles that promote the stars'. As well as shining a critical lens on culture (Appadurai, 1988) and education, cookbooks also play a part in highlighting gender, race and class norms (Bagelman et al., 2017).

Cookbooks clearly play a pedagogical role in instructing readers but also in transmitting notions of identity and models of gender (Matwick and Matwick, 2017a). Traditionally the role of the carer for the home and the family was the woman and there are inequalities in the roles men and women play in the household. Gender will specifically be discussed further in the chapter. Another view offered by Rousseau suggests that 'celebrity cookbook titles do little to hide their trade in the commodification of ignorance' (2012, p. 34). She contends that cookbooks are oversimplified and promise to make cooking easy, if not outrightly written for 'dummies'. This is perhaps indicative of modern society where things must be easy, quick and convenient; the cookbooks 'look impressive on a shelf' (Rousseau, 2012, p. 37). It is however important to note that the chefs do not write the books alone (Rodney and Johnston, 2015). 'Cookbooks are a collective production, reflecting the labours of a celebrity chef as well as marketing experts, designers, management and possibly a ghost writer to create a culinary persona' (Johnston et al. 2014, p. 4). It should be remembered that although we 'buy' into the chef through their books, they may not be written by the chefs themselves.

In their study on cookbooks, Johnston et al. (2014) linked the personas and language of the chefs and their cookbooks to Bourdieu's tastes of necessity and tastes of distinction. This is analysed through the classification of the chefs into categories such as 'homebody, home stylist or gastrosexual' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 7). Through their discourse, homebodies, for example, speak the language of necessity with cookbooks geared to the busy working woman, offering quick and simple recipes. Conversely, home stylists will focus on more complicated recipes that necessitate more culinary knowledge and offer a vision of upper-class life and high cultural capital. Celebrity chefs such as Nigella Lawson come under the category of 'the pin up' and focus on 'tastes of indulgence' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 11).

Through their cookbooks, the chefs display aspirational elements of life, further enhancing their image as purveyors of an ideal lifestyle, one of '...leisure, delicious foods, and a time to cook them' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 5). Johnston et al. indicated that:

The cooking personalities of today thus offer lessons on idealized lives, where cooking is more about a stylish identity and delicious lifestyle than hard work...As such, examining cookbooks as culinary texts provides a window into the symbolic, cultural and discursive dimensions of cooking and eating (Johnston et al, 2014, p. 5).

For example, Nigella Lawson portrays herself juggling careers and family whilst still delivering the perfect meal (Wilson, 2018). She also clearly positions herself as a cook, and not a chef. Unashamedly Lawson projects herself as being 'posh' and does not try to hide it, quite the contrary. Professionally trained chefs such as Gordon Ramsay

or Heston Blumenthal produce cookbooks that are far more daunting with long lists of ingredients and necessitating intricate skills and equipment. Clearly these two different types of celebrity chefs are pitching to different audiences although readers will most likely have copies of books by several chefs.

#### 4.5 Television (TV)

The genre of food related television started in the UK in 1936 and served to educate post-war Britain. The first TV chefs used the narratives of their time with shows that had obvious limited reach and were aimed mainly at housewives. The shows were largely educational, with the chefs executing recipes in an instructional and one dimensional manner (Zopiatis and Melanthiou, 2018). The genre has since moved to fully fledged Hollywood style shows, complete with lights and costumes, from Fanny Craddock to Gordon Ramsay. The current interest in food media suggests that viewers are not only interested in the content but also in acquiring or copying a certain lifestyle. Philipov (2017) suggests that there has been an increase in the 'lifesylisation' of food TV where viewers seek to emulate the celebrity chefs and, by extension, gain access to the 'culinary capital' (Naccarato and LeBesco 2012) that the chefs are transmitting as well as mark culinary distinction (de Solier, 2005; Johnston and Baumann, 2015).

In another approach, Hansen (2008) suggests that celebrity chefs are media creations and that there is no longer a direct link between cooking skills and celebrity. Piper (2012) demonstrates that the celebrity chefs have a role to play, as entertainers, in

mediating the notion of good and bad food. As suggested by Ruhlmann (in Guptil, 2006, p. 237), in a pre-social media landscape:

Television is arguably the most powerful force shaping the culinary landscape today. More people are reached through television – entertained, educated, changed in some little or large food related way – than through any other medium by far.

Today social media has become a key medium for sharing all things food with the celebrity chefs having thousands of Twitter followers and their own You Tube channels. More attention is given to social media further in the chapter.

Another view is offered by Ketchum who is concerned with the way in which TV creates stories that ‘invite the viewer into a world of fantasy’ (2005, p. 217) She contends that the narratives developed by cooking shows put the consumer into a position to pursue their dreams of material acquisition of goods and consumption. Ketchum identifies four categories of food programming that are firstly, traditional domestic instructional cooking, where UK celebrity chefs such as Delia Smith or Mary Berry and Nigella Lawson could be categorised. The second is personality-driven domestic cooking, Jamie Oliver or Gordon Ramsay for example. Food travel programmes are the next category. Again Jamie Oliver in his Italian series, Rick Stein or the Hairy Bikers could fit this category. Lastly, the ‘avant-garde’ genre where Heston Blumenthal would fit. Nevertheless it should be noted that these typologies are fluid. Different types of set designs and decors are naturally used for each in order to convey the pertinent message. Although her discussion focuses on the American Food Network, the UK TV shows use the same ‘life-style’ programming. While one may not be able to interact with the chefs face to face, one can use their products and recipes to connect with

them in a tangible way. A relationship between the viewer and the chef is created (Bell and Hollows, 2011). Chan describes TV shows as pornography and asserts that: 'They seduce us to desire the virtual, while complicating our relationship to what is real (or desired)' (Chan, 2003, p. 47).

It is important to discern between the chefs that are 'TV personalities' and the ones that are 'celebrities'. For example, very public displays of family feuds in popular newspapers such as *The Sun* put Gordon Ramsay in the public gaze, helping to forge his image as a celebrity (Wilcock, 2017; Clarke, 2019). Oliver tried to hide from the paparazzi and keep his family out of the celebrity press when he rose to fame. Other chefs, such as Fearnley-Whittingstall, adopt a very different attitude to their TV persona. He mediates an image of normality and authenticity. As such, he distances himself from the unattainable perfection of Gordon Ramsay or Heston Blumenthal with their three Michelin star restaurants. However, in order to maintain their professional image in the eyes of the public, celebrity chefs must be willing to give up some of their personal life in order to maintain their TV image (Bonner, 2005).

Regardless of their perceived status, the chefs must maintain their legitimacy through their expertise (Bell and Hollows, 2011). Ashley et al. (2004) observed that some TV chefs have tried to distance themselves from the medium in which they have achieved celebrity in an effort to assert their cultural legitimacy in the culinary field. Some of the chefs have been criticised for not being in their restaurants and losing the essence of who they really are, thus selling out to the media and to the commercial aspects of their successes as can be seen by the demise of the Jamie Oliver restaurant empire

in 2019. As a result, Oliver turned his focuses from cookbooks and restaurant operations to TV to maintain his celebrity status and stay relevant with his public. It appears that the public have accepted this new image with Oliver featuring on more TV shows every year. Bonner further argues that TV personalities must distance themselves from the elite and remain ordinary in order to appeal to the wider public. Chefs must also maintain their position and not 'sell-out' to gain economic wealth. By selling-out, they are losing the very (culinary) cultural capital that sets them apart (Ashley et al.).

Furthermore, celebrity chefs act as 'cultural intermediaries' (Phillipov and Gale, 2018) that not only give food knowledge but also give the viewers the opportunity to acquire 'culinary cultural capital'. In this way, food may act as a marker of class distinction in Bourdieu's sense. Celebrity chefs possess their own form of capital which can be expressed as 'celebrity capital'. This term refers to the chef's representation in and through the media:

Celebrities are not simply living, breathing brands, but icons that communicate social norms, stereotypes, and aspirations for the viewing public. Food celebrities are no exception; they communicate cultural values through mediated performances on television and through their cookbooks (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 4).

The chefs are able to exert, from their position within the cultural institutions, a certain amount of cultural authority as shapers of taste and 'the inculcators of new consumerist dispositions'.

Bell and Hollows (2011, p. 185) suggested that lifestyle programming plays into portraying the celebrity chefs as not only 'experts who offer advice on how to consume properly' but also as 'cultural intermediaries who deal in questions of how to distinguish oneself through the art of living' (2011, p. 185). Furthermore, De Solier (2005) suggests that TV cooking shows show class distinction based on culinary taste. Hollows and Jones (2010a, p. 307), in their analysis of Jamie Oliver's *Ministry of Food*, pointed to social problems such as unemployment and single parenthood to explain the interaction between the chef and the working class where Oliver is referred to as moving from 'lifestyle expert to moral entrepreneur'. When referring to the same series, Leer notes that 'the series is constructed through a strongly middle-class gaze at the culinary underclass' (2016, p. 80). Oliver received a strong backlash from some viewers who stated that he should not be interfering in people's lives and that he had no understanding of the difficulties faced by the interviewees. Nevertheless, he was somewhat successful in changing some of the bad food habits of the people on the show and he moved on to do the same thing in the United States in *Jamie's American Food Revolution*.

It is therefore important for celebrity chefs to develop a style of communication that their audiences can relate to (Sloan, 2004). Through their portrayal on TV, the chefs must ensure that they are maintaining a link to their audience. In her discussion of Jamie Oliver's *School Dinners* show, Talbot (2007, p. 110) describes it as: 'a combination of docu-soap, celebrity biopic and makeover.' She goes on to comment that it is essential for Oliver to put forward his persona as a 'celebrity chef' to ensure credibility. Hence, celebrity chefs enter public consciousness not only as 'keepers of culinary culture, but as charismatic and compelling leaders in terms of changing

lifestyles' (Brownlie et al., 2005, p. 14). Rousseau (2012) suggests that the chefs' voices are heard precisely because of their celebrity status, not necessarily because they are experts in the field of nutrition or health.

It could be suggested that by watching TV shows and buying cookbooks, the public are seeking to emulate some of the lifestyles of the chefs (Scholes, 2011). The celebrity chefs offer an idealised life where one can have 'a life of leisure, delicious food and the time to cook them.' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 5). Some celebrity chefs, such as Jamie Oliver, make it seem very easy to develop a blissful domestic life around cooking while others, such as Heston Blumenthal, are characterised by a more unattainable ideal (Euromonitor, 2008). Of note, the TV shows have shown that cooking is no longer a chore and an arduous task and can be 'fun and sexy' (Hansen, 2008). Hansen (p. 58) argues that these new cooking shows 'have eliminated cooking as labour' by 'presenting [it] as 'easy' and 'fun,' despite the fact that 'cooking as a professional chef is the antithesis of easy and fun.' Hansen further notes that programmes also 'disavow the relationship between time and labour' by showing cooking in real time only when it is against the clock. The celebrity chefs portray cooking as a form of identity and lifestyle rather than hard work (Johnston et al., 2014). Chefs such as Nigella Lawson epitomise this approach.

#### **4.6 Social Media**

The development of social media and the digital world have also led to changes in how people engage with food and celebrity chefs. With the advent of social media,



chefs now have another platform from which to operate. The concept of 'digital food culture' has emerged as a new genre (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; Feldman and Goodman 2021). The evident visual aspect of food allows the celebrity chefs to engage directly with the audience, with live feeds and comments on Facebook (Tonner, 2008; Rousseau, 2012; Zopiatis and Melanthiou, 2018) and other platforms. Hollows (2022, chapter 2) notes that 'most celebrity chefs maintain high-profile social media accounts as part of the labour of modern celebrity, even if that labour is performed by media professionals on their behalf. Adapting to the world of social media has required celebrity chefs to modify the way in which they communicate. Gordon Ramsay appears to have embraced TikTok, a platform mainly aimed at a younger users. Ramsay is popular with TikTok viewers for his mocking videos. Although often filmed in his kitchen, these videos are carefully curated to fit the Ramsay 'brand' complete with expletives. This is an opportunity for Ramsay to use another media outlet and for TikTok to attract an older demographic and diversify their audience base (Staples, 2021).

The use of photos in a world of Instagram and Snapchat has also changed the relationship between the chefs and their public (Clarke et al., 2016) as well as the levels of interaction. Restaurants now regularly market themselves by being 'Instagramable' in order to attract a specific clientele that will not only eat in their restaurant but also serve as a free marketing asset. An entire food culture has been developed on the internet. Content creation is the perfect medium for chefs and foodies alike to broadcast themselves to a world-wide public and expand opportunities for new forms of expression (Lupton, 2020).

The digital world has been transformed in a profound manner post-Covid, becoming a significant vehicle for the organisation of everyday life in a more meaningful way. Cooking, eating, and providing hospitality were changed by Covid with an emphasis on digital food media such as recipe databases, cooking blogs, and YouTube and Instagram instructional videos (Feldman and Goodman, 2021) . Post-Covid we can see the need for people to re-connect yet the habits acquired during lockdown periods in the UK have led to the development of new forms of behaviour which endure. Social media provides the public with an opportunity to experience the chef's intimacy, and YouTube videos are frequently edited in a conversational and relaxed manner in order to recreate authentic recordings of the chef's lives. As a result, a 'relationship' is established between the producer and the viewers. Nevertheless, social media may obscure our perception of the celebrity chef, since chefs strive to become influencers and some influencers are now referred to as celebrity chefs (Hollows, 2022). Celebrity chefs now compete for attention with YouTube stars and influencers.

#### **4.7 Gender roles and persona**

Food and cooking have often been associated with female roles in the household. The woman is seen as the purveyor of food to the family while men cook as a hobby, occasionally helping out in the kitchen (Cairns, 2010). This may be true historically, but with changes to contemporary British society, these stereotypes are largely

challenged. Both men and women now contribute to the cooking although gender roles are still set within cultural meaning and serve to form identity (Holm et al. 2015).

Traditionally women have been the 'home makers' while men have been the 'bread winners'. Women cook to care for others while men cook professionally and for pleasure and seduction (Parsecoli, 2005; Szabo, 2014). Women continue to dominate in the realm of home cooking and traditional gender roles associate food in the household with women. Cairns et al. posited that 'This disproportionate division of labour is rationalized through implicit gendered assumptions, such as women's apparently natural proclivity for maintaining family health' (2010, p. 593). As more and more women work, the role of both men and women within the household has changed. However, the majority of domestic work still falls under the responsibility of women who are juggling full time jobs with domestic responsibilities, where cooking becomes a repetitive chore (Szabo, 2012; Holm et al., 2015). In the world of female celebrity chefs, Nigella Lawson stands as an example of a sexy, hedonistic self-appointed 'domestic goddess'. She rejects the perfect female body that is achieved through toils of dieting and Photoshop, and prefers the pursuit of food pleasure and indulgence (Carins et al.). She was however criticised for glorifying domesticity which was perhaps linked to her privileged socio-economic position.

Academic interest in celebrity chefs has focused on contemporary gender roles in and out of the home (Hollows, 2003 a and b; Lewis, 2008; Swenson, 2009; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Hollows and Jones, 2010b; Piper, 2012; Piper, 2013; Lewis, 2014; Lewis and Huber, 2015). Undeniably, male chefs are over-represented in the

professional world of cooking as well as in the elite club of celebrity chefs. Celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver have become standard as 'recognizably manly' through their portrayal of cooking as a leisure activity (Hollows, 2003a). Leer further supports this in his discussion of Oliver in *The Naked Chef* and talks about a 'revision of masculine identity in contemporary culture' (Leer, 2016, p. 114). Ramsay and Oliver made food interesting to men, in a move away from the domesticity portrayed by the likes of Lawson, or earlier by Fanny Cradock or Delia Smith. To a certain extent they normalised the role of men in the household. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, Hollows goes on to suggest that 'the ability to experience cooking as leisure is dependent on a distance from both economic and temporal constraints, a position that is both classed and gendered' (Hollows, 2003a, p. 229). Like Hollows, Johnston et al. (2014) considered gender in their classification and analysis of chef personas. They argued that the personas of the chefs may contribute to indirectly perpetuating gender inequalities. This is further re-enforced by the personas and typologies that have been attributed to the chefs (Bell and Hollows, 2010; Scholes, 2011; Piper, 2012; Johnston et al.). Gordon Ramsay maintains a voluntary image of professionalism and masculinity and seems to thrive in a constant state of aggressivity, hence portraying a traditional muscular and masculine role within the world of professional cooking (Leer, 2018).

In a further study on gender and roles, Scholes (2011) developed a typology of chefs in which the chefs are placed into several categories. Nigella Lawson and Delia Smith are classified as 'Instructional Matriarchs' whilst Gordon Ramsay un-surprisingly comes under the banner of the 'Uber-Macho' and Jamie Oliver is seen as a 'lad' (Hollows, 2003a; Hollows and Jones, 2010; Leer, 2016). Nigella Lawson also

embodies the post-feminist, upper class feminine figure (Scholes, 2011; Stringfellow et al., 2012; Piper, 2012).

Johnston et al. (2014) contributed further to the gender argument in their establishment of a typology of culinary personalities to support their study of cookbooks as seen below:

Culinary persona typology.

Gender patterns	Source of culinary authority	Culinary personas (N)	Key attributes	Demographics	Exemplar
Traditional Femininity	Home cooking experience	Homebody (9)	Pragmatic, utilitarian concerns – <i>tastes of necessity</i>	All women (7 white; 1 Asian; 1 Latina)	Rachael Ray
		Home stylist (3)	Esthetics and style – <i>tastes of distinction</i>	All women (2 white; 1 Asian)	Martha Stewart
		Pin-up (4)	Self-gratification – <i>tastes of indulgence</i>	All women (3 white; 1 South Asian)	Nigella Lawson
Hegemonic masculinities	Professional skills	Chef artisan (12)	Spectrum from artistic genius to artistic craftsman	Mainly men (9 white; 1 Latino; 1 Asian; 1 white woman)	Marco Pierre White, Michael Symon
		Maverick (5)	Unconventional sharing of (unique) food knowledge	All white men	Alton Brown
		Gastrosexual (4)	Pragmatic, utilitarian esthetic and affective concerns; home-cooking with professional knowledge	All white men	Jamie Oliver
		Self-made man (7)	*Gender boundary crossing Work ethic, status accumulation, love of Americana	Mainly men (3 white; 3 black; 1 black woman)	Jeff Henderson

\*Class boundary crossing

Table 1 - Culinary Persona Typology (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 7)

This framework is of interest in two ways. Firstly, it links the chefs to Bourdieusian notions of tastes of necessity and tastes of distinction. Secondly, it shows that the culinary personas and their key attributes are not dissimilar to Scholes' (2011)

previous analysis. There appears to be a consensus in the attributes of the chefs and their gender, not least in the words used in the gender patterns: 'traditional' and 'hegemonic' are loaded words that perpetrate gender stereotypes. Ethnicity is also factored in the framework which further highlights issues of bias and inequality.

A further study of cookbooks and women's language (Matwick and Matwick, 2017a and Matwick, 2017) proposes that the use of 'weak women's language' (Matwick and Matwick, 2017, p. 1) emphasises the chef's appeal and builds trust between the chef and the readers. The language also serves to build the power of the female chefs and their 'models of womanhood'. 'Weak language' can be seen in the hesitancy and lack of confidence that is present in some of the texts, principally in those of female celebrity chefs. Lawson is open about some of her weaknesses such as not being able to use chopsticks (2015, p. 70) but it is more in the personal narrative that precedes the chapters and recipes that she shows this kind of language which is a way to create intimacy with the reader.

#### **4.8 Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine lifestyle, media, cookbooks, and gender roles in order to demonstrate how these are used and conveyed by chefs. Cookbooks and television remain the media of choice for the chefs although more attention must now be given to the use social media as a medium of choice. Cookbooks clearly play a pedagogical role in instructing readers but also in transmitting notions of identity and models of gender. Television is a popular medium for the chefs where the shows both

entertain and educate viewers. As far as their perception and interpretation of normative gender roles is concerned, celebrity chefs both confirm and challenge them through their personas. As a consequence, how they are received by the public will be affected.

## CHAPTER 5 – THE CELEBRITY CHEF IN SOCIETY

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the celebrity chef and their role in society. Whether it is education and fundraising or civic and moral discourse, the chefs are involved in UK society in a number of ways. This chapter also discusses the voyeuristic side to the way people engage with the chefs and concludes with the outline of the themes extracted from the overall literature review.

### 5.2 Education and fundraising

Chefs with celebrity status can leverage their power to deliver messages and capture the attention of the public. Jamie Oliver has endeavoured to educate governments and the wider public to change food habits and tackle obesity in the UK and abroad. In 2005, in *Jamie's School Dinners*, he attempted to lobby the government to give more money for food to prepare school meals. He also pressed for the education of the dinner ladies and the parents in order to produce more nutritional meals for children both in and out of the school setting. In 2009, his *Ministry of Food* TV show was an (failed) attempt to educate the locals of Rotherham to cook what he deemed 'good' food (Jackson, 2015). This led to a backlash from the residents who accused Oliver of being out of touch with their realities. He then reproduced this in the USA with more or less the same results. These all helped to brand him a 'culinary crusader' (Smith 2008) and a 'campaigning culinary revolutionary' (Scholes 2011). Oliver is one of the only chefs to have formally tried to help unemployed and under-privileged young people with his restaurant *Fifteen*. He has also been active in lobbying government to



reduce sugar levels in soft drinks as discussed in the section on civic and moral discourse. There is no doubt that celebrity chefs are able to utilise their fame to assist in fundraising and other charitable activities. For example, celebrity chefs including Tom Kerridge and Angela Hartnett, have been involved in fund raising to help people in Ukraine (Lloyd 2022).

### **5.3 Ethnicity, national culture and globalisation**

There are two issues related to ethnicity. In the first instance, there is the ethnicity of the majority of chefs and celebrity chefs. Secondly, there is the issue of the ethnicity of the food that they cook. Celebrity chefs from white British backgrounds dominate the current UK media landscape. This is certainly the case for the four chefs that are studied in this research. Chefs such as Madhur Jaffrey or Ken Holmes should be recognised but they appear as the exception rather than the rule. It is also surprising, for example, that there are very few black chefs that hold Michelin stars in the UK. However, this trend can be seen to be shifting given as it is only more recently that figures such as Andi Oliver or Nadiya Hussain have become more prominent in UK media.

The second issue revolves around national culture and cultural appropriation. The four chefs studied in this research all claim to be giving their audiences 'real' and 'authentic' recipes for Indian or Italian food. Celebrity chefs have been criticised for cooking food of an ethnicity other than their own (Milani, 2022) and Leer and Meldgaard Kjær (2015) highlight how white celebrity chefs cook ethnic foods for their travelogue shows. Oliver is keen to appear authentic in the recipes that he brings back from Italy and Lawson

and Berry signpost when they stray from the classics. Oliver has even hired 'cultural appropriation specialists' to advise on cookbooks (Ravindran, 2022) which highlights that there is an issue at hand. In doing so, Oliver wants to ensure he is culturally sensitive and inclusive. Ramsay was heavily criticised for opening an 'authentic' Asian restaurant that had no Asian chefs. Through the lens of their white British heritage, the chefs are interpreting different cuisines.

A study Ray (2016) conducted of ethnic restaurants in New York suggests that the global trend of excluding non-white chefs and cuisines from haute cuisine is a global phenomenon. Chefs, traditions, and cuisines associated with European or white cultures, are regarded as being of great importance and reverence in the culinary community. Fantasia (2018, p. 8) comments that 'gastronomy is the primary source of cultural power for the French'. There is no doubt that French gastronomy continues to be praised, as it has been the benchmark for excellence for generations. However, it has been challenged by the advent of Scandinavian cuisine with many of the world's best restaurants no longer located in France.

Ethnicity is not only depicted through the chefs but also through those that follow the chefs and may consider themselves as 'foodies'. These people tend to be disproportionality rich, white, urban middle-class, educated and liberal (Finn, 2019). As discussed by Bourdieu (1984) what constitutes 'good taste' will remain influenced by the dominant social classes who share these same characteristics. Thus, ethnicity plays a significant role in highlighting class distinctions, both among chefs and among their followers.

Ramsay poses a further question of post-colonial identity. During his travels through India, he implicitly touches upon issues of ethnicity and postcolonial identity when interacting with locals. Most of these encounters position him as a 'colonial white man', with hints of the memories of the British Empire. In some of his encounters he appears to try and reduce the authority of the locals to position himself as THE expert. This is further discussed further in chapter seven.

Food has always been an expression of national culture. Ferguson (2004) discusses how French cuisine serves to form national identity, something that could be considered a national normative influence. She refers to 'le culinaire' and seeks to 'explore how food structures and expresses the world's in which it is found' (p.2). The use of food by diasporas around the world is a method of expressing their identities and preserving their way of life. More specifically, food is used as a means to retain cultural identity. Appadurai (1988) notes that cookbooks serve as a way to analyse how national cuisines are constructed with interpretations of gender roles and domesticity evolving over the years. Certain dishes are recognised as a national staple, be it pasta and pizza in Italy or curry in India. Religious and cultural festivals also serve as a way to mark national culture with certain foods associated with these events. The choices of ethnic foods that are covered by the chefs are linked to phenomenon such as South Asian migration to the UK, the expansion of travel to countries such as Italy and Thailand and the access to the ingredients needed for these cuisines.

Despite this, globalisation has put pressures on national culture and identity. France and Italy have tried to resist the globalisation of food by implementing 'terroirs', Appellation d'Origine Controlée (AOC) and PDO (short for 'Protected Designation of Origin' (or DOP in Italian). These are designations given by the European Union to those foods that must be produced in a precise geographical area such as champagne, Puy lentils or parmigiano. In France, a great deal of pride and protection is attached to culinary heritage at both national and regional level, from the 'moules-frites' in Lille to the 'farcis' of Nice. This led to the 'Gastronomic Meal of the French' to be inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. In spite of this, McDonald's considers France to be one of its primary strategic focuses for development. This is despite the seemingly strong French food culture. The demands of modern life, coupled with speed, ease of access and a homogenisation of taste, have led to the growing popularity of fast food (Fantasia, 2018). Although Fantasia suggests that the infatuation for fast food is receding in France, local 'copies' of US fast-food outlets such as Quick are proliferating on the high streets on French cities. Ritzer (2013) refers to this as the 'The McDonaldization of Society'.

#### 5.4 Civic and moral discourse

Over the past 20 years, some celebrity chefs have sought to enter into the UK's dinner plate and food has become linked with a civic and moral discourse. This has been principally illustrated by Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in TV shows such as *Jamie's Ministry of Food* and *River Cottage* (Hollows, 2003a; Hollows and Jones, 2010a; Bell and Hollows, 2011; Scholes, 2011). Like Jamie Oliver, Fearnley-

Whittingstall attempts to lobby the public (and by extension the government) into sustainable and ethical foods and his commitment to the environment. He has also earned the label of being a 'moral entrepreneur' as has Oliver (Hollows). Fearnley-Whittingstall uses lifestyle television to promote a wider engagement with ethical consumption. In a similar use of lifestyle TV, the *Ministry of Food* series, set in the working-class town of Rotherham, sees Oliver engage with a woman who is feeding her children junk food that is eaten straight from the box, while sitting on the floor and watching TV (Oliver, 2008). More recently, Oliver's involvement in the implementation of the sugar tax illustrates the strength that the chefs can have on both the general public and on swaying government policies (Jamie's Food Revolution, 2017). These examples may suggest that there is evidence that some popular celebrity chefs, through their exposure in media, may have changed attitudes towards civic and environmental responsibility and perhaps have developed a relationship between media, culture and governmental concerns (Talbot, 2004; Lewis, 2008; Warin, 2011; Leer, 2016).

## 5.5 Foodporn

The connection between food and sex is not a new one. Just as with sex, food is a complex set of links to the permissible and the forbidden; to excess and dearth; to pleasure and desire. Certain foods have always been given (obvious) aphrodisiac qualities, such as asparagus or bananas, and food has often been used as a metaphor for sex. The terms foodporn and gastroporn tend to be used interchangeably. There is a tendency for gastroporn to be associated more with visual aspects of food and

cooking and the notion of pleasure (Menitis, 2017). Originally, gastro porn was coined by Alexander Cockburn (1977) in a New York Review of Books article when he discussed the insatiable desires engendered by unattainable and picture perfect dishes. Similarly, McBride (2013) asserts that food porn is both unrealistic and unattainable. She describes the term as follows:

Food porn generally evokes the unattainable: cooks will never achieve the results shown in certain cookbooks, magazines, or television shows, nor will they ever master the techniques. In fact, portrayals of food have been so transformed by food styling, lighting, and the actions of comely media stars that food does seem increasingly out of reach to the average cook or consumer. As with sex porn, we enjoy watching what we ourselves presumably cannot do (Mcbride, 2013, p. 38).

Magee's approach is also particularly useful when considering the performative aspects of 'porn': ...'both food pornography and sexual pornography are primarily focused on food or sex as a performance, and, like all performance, are designed as a voyeuristic exercise' (Magee, 2007, p. 2). Television and glossy pictures in cookbooks provide viewers with a glimpse of unattainable dishes without the necessity of actually cooking themselves. When food is removed from the kitchen, it can enter the realm of the performative (Ibrahim, 2015).

In the digital world, food porn also refers to the proliferation of images of food that are shared on social media, where food is fetishized and invites vicarious consumption (Ibrahim, 2015). In this sense, food is intended to be consumed through senses other than taste, where sight is seen as the primary means of enjoyment. It evokes our hidden desires while also highlighting the sheer unattainability associated

with porn. In effect, the images transform food into a performance that is consumed in a distanced, idealised space.

## 5.6 The social construction of the celebrity

The Cambridge dictionary defines a celebrity as 'someone who is famous, especially in the entertainment business' (2022). Turner comments that

We can map the precise moment a public figure becomes a celebrity. It occurs at the point at which media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role...to investigate the detail of their private life (2004, p. 8).

Although some of the celebrity chefs shun away from certain aspects of celebrity, their impact on wide ranging issues from food provenance to food practices, show that they have an impact that reaches far beyond the kitchen. Celebrity chefs are a key source of information on all things food. Celebrity is also linked to an exchange of Bourdieusian forms of capital where celebrity capital can be transformed into economic or social capital (Driessens, 2013). Celebrities have an undeniable impact upon their fans and followers. Hollows (2022) outlines how the celebrity chefs played a key role during the Covid pandemic in offering advice on how and what to cook and even in tackling vaccine hesitancy in certain communities in the UK. The celebrity chefs are an integral part of contemporary UK life in the UK and abroad. Television shows such as MasterChef, have been copied and exported around the world.

A whole generation has become reliant on celebrities as sources of information and as a means of entertainment. They have become ordinary experts and have been

brought to the forefront through social media (Powell and Prasad 2010, Rousseau, 2012). Lewis (2010) explains that celebrities have become the undisputed lifestyle experts and major cultural authorities. However, the younger generations will rely on the number of likes and no longer on the established 'pedigree' of the celebrity which leads to a blurring of the distinction between the expert and the celebrity. While the chefs combine celebrity and expertise and are therefore accepted as such by the wider public, new 'food celebrities' are emerging that do not have the same background yet are accepted as experts.

It has become increasingly important for young people to have access to the intimate world of celebrity chefs. Celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver become real by sharing personal anecdotes, concerns and family stories. Both Oliver and Ramsay now include their families (mainly their children) in their TV and social media appearances. The construction of celebrity involves constantly adapting one's image and message, something that the chefs have become very astute at, with the help of an army of PR and other executives. However, celebrity chefs must ensure that they do not lose their appeal due to over-exposure, or what Rojek (2012, p.79) refers to as 'celebrity vamping'. This is the new form of authenticity that is required to garner the attention of this demographic. However, for more mature followers, perhaps from the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) generations, this is not necessarily the case, where proven authenticity and professionalism will be demanded from the celebrity. It is interesting to note that despite these two apparently conflicting approaches, the celebrity chefs continue to appeal to a very wide demographic.



Television executives and publishers have been quick to latch onto the popularity of these chefs to develop the products that will be purchased by the public. This had led to the growing appeal of lifestyle television. Smith (2020) discusses the impact of lifestyle television on the way in which people perceive food and eating and the impact it has on their choices. Heston Blumenthal's longstanding links with Waitrose (which will cease after 15 years), or Ramsay's endorsement of frying pans are examples of this.

### **5.7 Themes from the literature**

There are a number of themes that can be found in the literature review that pertain to the construction of taste. In addition to the three paradigms, it is also essential to consider Bourdieu's theories and constructs. Also included in the literature review is the interaction between chefs and the construction of taste as shown in their cookbooks and other media. As purveyors and arbiters of taste, the chefs exemplify notions of authenticity, legitimacy, and professionalism. Other topics such as gender roles, lifestyle and education contribute to painting a picture of the complexity of the construction of taste and the role of the chefs. A review of the literature has revealed the following themes in Table 2 below.

<b>Themes from the literature</b>
1.Paradigms of the construction of taste 1.1Structuralist approach 1.1.1 Food as a symbol 1.1.2 Food as a language of communication 1.2 Materialist Approach 1.2.1 The individual 1.2.2 Micro and macro changes 1.3 Post modernist approach 1.3.1 Consumption 1.3.2 Standardisation
2. Class 2.1 Social class 2.2 Distinction 2.3 Conspicuous consumption 2.4 Choice
3.Capital 3.1 Economic capital 3.2 Cultural capital 3.3 Symbolic and social capital 3.4 Culinary capital
4.Habitus
5.Food as identity 5.1 Foodies
6.Lifestyle
7.Chefs and the media 7.1 Television 7.2 Books, 7.3 Online 7.3.1 Social Media 7.3.2 Gen Z
8. Gender roles and persona
9.Education
10.Civic and moral discourse
11. Foodporn
12. Authenticity
13. Legitimacy and expertise
14. Professionalism
15. Ethnicity
16. Culture

Table 2 – Themes extracted from the review of literature (author's own)

## 5.8 Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter is on the role that celebrity chefs play in society. They have an impact on matters such as education, civic and moral discourse as well as on national culture. This impact has a direct influence on decisions made by the public in response to the chefs. Additionally, celebrity chefs and the concept of food porn are both influential aspects of contemporary food culture. Celebrity chefs bring culinary expertise and entertainment to the forefront, while food porn focuses on the visual allure and indulgence of food through captivating imagery. Both contribute to our fascination with food and its role in our lives. To conclude the chapter, the themes emerging from the literature review in chapters two to five are presented.

# CHAPTER 6 - THE RESEARCH PROCESS

## 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research design for this thesis and the rationale for the choices that were made. An interpretivist paradigm is applied to the research, which is considered to be one of the relevant research philosophies in qualitative research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the philosophical approaches to the research. This is followed by an analysis of the methodological choices made. After presenting details of the case study approach, the chapter then discusses the data collection methods, ethical considerations and the data analysis. Finally issues of trustworthiness of qualitative research are addressed.

## 6.2 Research Philosophy and Approach to Research Design

Any research must be conducted taking into account certain assumptions and parameters. A research philosophy is the basis of any study since it describes the set of beliefs that the research is based upon. The first choice is to consider a paradigm, then to consider the ontology, the epistemology, the methodology and finally the design and instruments of the research. Ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of reality (Brotherton, 2015); epistemology is concerned with the nature of the knowledge and how it can be obtained and the methodology refers to the how the research is conducted (Sarantakos, 2005). The nature of the choice of research paradigm is

influenced by the proposed direction of the research as well as by the beliefs and experiences of the researcher.

The research is conducted within an interpretivist paradigm. From an epistemological perspective, interpretivism allows the researcher to focus on meaning. Interpretivism is concerned with social and cultural factors and how they impact upon individuals. Its roots are in the work of Max Weber who referred to the term '*verstehen*' (understanding) and the meaning that individuals attach to their actions and interpretations. (Sarantakos, 2005). For the purposes of this research, interpretivism was chosen as it supposes a subjective interpretation of reality; it is a method of understanding how individuals interpret the world around them (Mckee, 2003). Interpretivism lends itself to understanding what is meant and contends that 'the world is socially constructed and subjective; that it contributes to the evolution of new theories; the researcher gets involved with the phenomena being researched and is the research instrument' (Altinay et al., 2016, p.89). The interpretivist approach assumes that the researcher is part of the research process, interprets data, and as such cannot be fully objective and removed from the research process, which was the case in the present study. Furthermore, an interpretivist approach best suited the research as it was concerned with the interpretation that is made of the way in which celebrity chefs may influence the construction of taste where taste itself is an interpretable concept. The conclusions of this study were constructed and 'interpreted'.

A constructionist perspective has also been integrated into the research. Meanings are not fixed but are open to interpretation. We can only understand someone's reality through their experience of that reality, which may be different from another person's. Realities are shaped by the individuals' historical or social perspective. The meaning is 'constructed' by the people who live in it (Sarantakos, 2005). Sarantakos gives the example of 'two people walked through a rose garden. One saw the roses, the other the thorns' (p. 38). As such, this philosophical approach is useful for this research as it specifically sought to establish the relationships between the celebrity chefs and the construction of taste, a relationship not previously researched in this format.

In his discussion of mass communication, McQuail (2010, p. 341) suggests that media studies are useful to understand how the media compares with 'social reality'. As this study was concerned with the way in which the chefs may influence the construction of taste, which could be conceived as a dimension of reality, it is appropriate to consider media studies in the design of the research. The content of media is reflective of social and cultural beliefs, beliefs which the literature has shown to be integral to the construction of taste. McQuail goes on to advocate that 'the text itself is the object of study, with a view to understanding how it 'works' to produce effects desired by authors and readers' (p. 341).

### **6.3 Methodological choices**

The researcher choose a qualitative methodology for this study. Qualitative research is interested in human behaviour and experience. Miles et al. (2014) suggested that

there are a number of ways to conduct qualitative research which include ethnography, grounded theory and content analysis. Social sciences lend themselves well to qualitative research as the 'person' is at the centre of the research (Silverman, 2013). Other aspects of qualitative research that were relevant were that the research is focused on meaning; there are multiple truths; the subjectivity of the researcher is valued and contributions to knowledge are 'part of a rich tapestry of knowledge' (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 6).

Graebner et al. (2012) suggested that qualitative research is especially appropriate in order to 'generate' theory where the phenomenon being studied is new which is the case in respect to the link between the chefs and the construction of taste.

Graebner et al. also considered that 'qualitative data may also be used to bring an abstract idea to life, making it more persuasive and credible to illustrate an abstract framework' (p. 279). In this context, since taste itself is an abstract notion, this is relevant.

Sarantakos (2005, p. 45), posits that there are a number of features that apply to qualitative research. The author sought to understand how these features apply to her research. First, qualitative research is dynamic, it focuses on capturing reality. In the case of this research, the reality explored was intense and dynamic through the repeated reading and viewing of the cookbooks and TV shows. Second, qualitative research is informative and detailed. This was applied through thick description. Thick description helped to overcome issues of validity and reliability. Furthermore, the research is context-sensitive. Specifically, the context was contemporary UK society taste and how celebrity chefs may affect the construction of taste within this context.

Next, the data analysis relied on the self-awareness of the researcher and her ability to reflect which makes it reflexive. In order to make the research open, no pre-conceived models existed. Following the literature review, a number of themes were identified which served as a template to analyse the data. Finally, the aim was to understand the phenomenon, not to 'measure' it, making it empathetic. The communicative nature was present throughout the research and more particularly in the choice of data sources which are communicative by nature. The findings of the research were subjective and hence subject to the interpretation of the researcher and guided by the themes considered in the literature.

Therefore, because of the exploratory nature of the research, a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate to pursuing the main research question:

How do celebrity chefs influence the social construction of taste in contemporary British society?

As well as the sub-research questions:

1. What are the key theories that frame the construction of taste?
2. What role do celebrity chefs play as a wider social phenomenon in contemporary British society?
3. What themes can be derived regarding the construction of taste when analysing celebrity chef cookbooks and television shows?



### 6.3.1 Approach

An approach to research may be deductive or inductive, or a combination of both. The research employed a deductive approach insofar as the data analysis was approached using the predetermined themes extracted from the literature review and the researcher specifically looked for these themes in the data analysis. As qualitative research aims to understand the social, cultural, and contextual factors that influence individuals' experiences and behaviours, this approach seemed appropriate. A deductive approach allowed the researcher to immerse themselves in the data. It enabled the exploration of rich, nuanced details. The research involved moving from theoretical considerations to the development of a theoretical framework in the form of a template that was tested and confirmed using the data analysis. In this case, the theory, or more specifically the thematic framework, was extracted from the review of literature. The data collected sought to confirm the framework. However, inductive reasoning was also used in the development of the additional themes extracted from the data analysis which allowed the researcher to explore and discover new phenomena, meanings, and patterns in the data and develop a final template. Qualitative research typically involves a flexible and iterative research design. A mixed approach aligns well with this iterative nature, allowing researchers to modify their research questions, data collection methods, or analytical frameworks as new insights emerge. It enables researchers to be responsive to the data and to pursue unexpected avenues of inquiry that may lead to novel findings.

### 6.3.2 Textual analysis

At this stage it is relevant to mention textual analysis (McKee, 2003) and its applicability to this research. Textual analysis is a methodology that is particularly appropriate for this study. Textual analysis has been widely used in the context of the body of theoretical and critical writing on food, taste and consumption; a body of work that is referred to as 'Food Studies'. Riley suggests that:

textual analysis precludes any attempt to arrive at a single all-purpose meaning, acknowledging instead the multiplicity of possible readings. That is, analysts necessarily go after not only the intentional goal of the author, but also the fluctuating impact on a given audience in various contexts. In other words, the goal of textual analysis is to interpret the ways in which texts are understood by and influence those who are exposed to them (2019, p. 173).

Riley goes on to discuss 'decontextualizing and recontextualizing' the text's meaning that it is constructed as it is collected. This is especially applicable to this study given its nature and aim, noting the 'intentional goal' of the author and the way the data were interpreted by the researcher.

Furthermore, McKee posits that textual analysis is used :

for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live...We interpret texts (films, television programmes, magazines, advertisements, clothes, graffiti, and so on) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them. And, importantly, by seeing the variety of ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, we also understand our own cultures better because we can start to see the limitations and advantages of our own sense-making practices (2003, p. 1).

This is relevant and applicable to this research since it is situated within a specific cultural and historical context. The results of this research are likely to differ significantly if it were conducted in a different cultural setting. This research sits within contemporary UK culture which is unique and hence impacts upon the sense-making context. Based on the literature review, foodies are characterized by a lifestyle associated with food and taste, and hence can be classified as a subculture

Textual analysis seeks to understand how people make sense of their world through the interpretation of written, visual and spoken messages (McKee, 2003). 'Textual analysis is about making educated guesses about how audiences interpret texts' (McKee, p. 27). The use of the words 'educated guess' and 'interpret' were particularly applicable to this research as this is precisely what the researcher has done: made subjective and educated guesses. The researcher was attempting to determine and interpret how notions of taste are disseminated by the celebrity chefs. The researcher did not claim that the interpretation of the information could be generalised as the judgements made are particular to the intersection of objects studied and to the individual researcher. However, the researcher did strive for a 'reasonable' approach guided by the cues in the texts themselves.

## 6.4 Choice of Case Studies and chef biographies

Case studies were selected as the strategy for the research. Case studies are not only a methodological choice, but also a choice of what is to be studied. The use of case studies enables researchers to conduct in-depth research, they provide first-hand information, and they facilitate familiarity and close contact with the data. By examining a single case or a small number of cases, researchers can gather comprehensive data and explore various factors and relationships associated with the subject. Case studies are particularly useful when it is necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon in its natural environment.

They are commonly used in fields such as psychology and sociology. These characteristics fit the research design and the pragmatic approach of the researcher. However, case studies have inherent disadvantages in that they do not allow any generalisation; the research cannot be replicated and the findings are subjective (Sarantakos, 2005). These disadvantages are characteristic to qualitative research and were acknowledged as such. Moreover, it is important to be cautious when interpreting results which need to take into account potential biases or limitations associated with small sample sizes.

The study considered what Thomas (2011) defines as retrospective case studies, which involve the collection of data relating to an event that occurred in the past, such as a phenomenon, a situation, or a person. Each chef was considered individually,

with some topics shared between the chefs, while others were applicable only to one of them.

Four celebrity chefs: Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay, Mary Berry and Nigella Lawson were chosen as data sets. Reasons for selecting the specific celebrity chefs were first made on the basis of the popularity of the chef and, by extension, their potential influence. The second criterion was the co-existence of a cookbook and an associated TV show. Thirdly, the sample was chosen as it targets well-known celebrity chefs with multiple media presences (Johnston et al., 2014; Lane and Fisher, 2015). Table 7 in the appendices shows an indicative content of all the chosen chefs' TV shows and books.

Furthermore, these chefs were chosen as they conform to the initial definition that was used for the study:

Celebrity chefs can be understood as a diverse collection of individuals who are famous for cooking or talking about and presenting cookery via various kinds of media. Perhaps the most important of these has been television, which is almost always accompanied by supporting cookbooks and, in many cases, websites and other branded goods (Piper, 2013, p. 40).

Additionally, the chefs were selected based on their popularity in the UK, an important criterion for this UK based research. In 2010, Jamie Oliver's *30-Minute Meals* became the fastest selling non-fiction title of all time in the UK (BBC 2010). Apen-Sadler (2018) suggests that Jamie Oliver is the UK's favourite chef based on cookbook sales in the past 20 years. Further data from the Publishers Association 2018 yearbook confirms

that one of the most popular genres of books purchased was food and drink/cookery with 25% of total book sales in this category.

Further rationale to the choice of the chefs came from already circulated typologies and personas (see table 3 below). Heuristically, this was another useful framework to classify the chefs. Several chefs that were not included in the study have been added to the table as they are worthy of mention. It should be mentioned that these personas are not fixed, as the chefs migrate across the categories which can be seen by the changes in the themes and focus of their shows and books in the past 10 years. Therefore, this classification should be understood as fluid and subject to evaluation.

Persona	Jamie Oliver	Gordon Ramsay	Nigella Lawson	Mary Berry	(Marco-Pierre White)	(Delia Smith)	(Heston Blumenthal)
Moral entrepreneur (Bell and Hollows, 2010)	X						
Culinary Crusader (Scholes, 2011)	X						
Public Pedagogue (Rich, 2011)	X	X					
Gastrosexual (Johnston et al., 2014)	X	X			X		
Instructional Matriarch (Scholes, 2011)				X		X	
Pin Up (Johnston et al., 2014)			X				
Vocational expert (Bell and Hollows, 2010)	X	X			X		X
Uber-Macho (Scholes, 2011)		X					
Aspirational Wizard (Scholes, 2011)							X
Adventurer (Scholes, 2011)	X	X					
Real Food (Scholes, 2011)	X						

Table 3: Culinary Persona Typology (author's own) (chefs in parentheses are not discussed in this thesis)

In addition to revealing additional insight into the chefs' professional and personal backgrounds, a review of their biographies provides further support for their inclusion in this investigation.

### Jamie Oliver

Jamie Oliver was born and raised in Essex and trained as a chef at Westminster Kingsway College. He worked with Antonio Carluccio at his Neal Street Restaurant in the 1990s as a pastry chef before shooting to celebrity in '*The Naked Chef*' TV show (1999, 2000 and 2001) while working at the famous *River Café* in Hammersmith. He is currently estimated to be worth £400 million and has had several restaurants including the now defunct *Jamie's Italian* chain (Bergman, 2018). Although Oliver clearly has a 'chef pedigree', he gives us recipes that are fast, fun and accessible to everyday home cooks; making him one of the most loved celebrity chefs in the UK and beyond.

### Gordon Ramsay

Gordon Ramsay was born in Scotland and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. After injury put a premature end to his aspirations as a footballer, he gained a degree in hotel management and worked in a number of positions in restaurants before joining the kitchens of famous chefs such as Albert Roux, Marco Pierre White and Joël Robuchon, where he was exposed to classic French cooking. He went on to open his own restaurant and achieved two Michelin stars within two years. He now heads up a global empire of restaurants and was estimated to be worth \$220 million in 2022 (Waring and Michael, 2022). He is also a well-known celebrity TV chef (Garfield, 2010; Gordon Ramsay, 2020). Ramsay merits investigation as he is one of the world's most



recognised (celebrity) chefs although at the beginning of his career he did refute celebrity. In a 1999 interview he stated: 'I am not a celebrity chef...I am a cook. I enjoy cooking and I am not interested in signing a multimillion-pound deal that I would conduct the kitchen from an office' (Boiling Point 1999 in Zopiatis and Melanthiou 2019). It seems his focus has changed considerably since then.

### Mary Berry

Professionally known as Mary Berry, Dame Mary Rachael Hunnings was born in 1935 in Somerset. She moved to Paris at the age of 22 to study culinary arts at The Cordon Bleu. In 1966 she became the food editor of *Housewife* magazine, followed by the same position with the *Ideal Home* magazine from 1970 to 1973. The publication of her first cookbook took place in 1970. She continued to write books and film television shows while raising her three children at home in Buckinghamshire. Berry is a long-standing host of TV cooking shows and was a judge on the very popular *Great British Bake Off* from 2010 to 2016. She was one of the judges for the 'Platinum Pudding', a competition in honour of the Queens' platinum jubilee celebrated in 2022 (Mary Berry, b, nd.). She has had her own TV shows since 2014 (Mary Berry, a and b nd.). Berry has written over 80 cookbooks and continues to write each year to accompany her BBC television series. Her latest series, entitled *Love to Cook* (and associated cookbook), was aired on BBC2 in the second half of 2021.

## Nigella Lawson

Nigella Lawson is a popular UK celebrity chef. After studying at public school and at Oxford University, Lawson began her career writing book reviews and as a restaurant critic. As a freelance journalist, she covered a wide range of publications, ranging from *The Evening Standard* and *Vogue* in the United Kingdom to *Gourmet* and *Bon Appetit* in the United States. She is the host of a number of very successful TV shows and her cookbooks have sold millions of copies ('Nigella Lawson,' nd). Her first cookbook was published in 1998. Lawson has been the subject of substantial academic attention. Topics covered include her *Domestic Goddess* persona (Hollows, 2003), femininity (Stevens et al., 2015; Rodney et al., 2017), food porn (Chan, 2003; McBride, 2010), branding and domesticity (Hewer and Brownlie, 2009). Chan highlights how 'the beautiful and curvy Lawson seems to have it all...– she appears able to juggle career, kids, a husband, and three-course meals including dessert and still look fabulous' (p. 50). She sadly suffered the loss of her first husband, mother and sister to cancer as well as a very public and acrimonious divorce from her second husband Charles Saatchi, events which have shaped her as a person.

Other celebrity chefs could have been considered, but for a variety of reasons, they were not. A few of these individuals are Marco-Pierre White, Delia Smith, Heston Blumenthal, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Madhur Jaffrey or Ken Holmes. The sample selected for this study was based on the sustained popularity of the chefs as well as the sale of their cookbooks and the number of viewers of their TV programs, which provided a measure of their notoriety. Another important criterion was the

simultaneous release of both a cookbook and a television show. Although Marco Pierre-White can be considered as the ‘godfather’ of celebrity chefs, he was not chosen for several reasons. While he did have one cookbook and concurrent TV show, *Hell’s Kitchen* in 2007, he was not chosen as this was his only instance of a simultaneous TV show and cookbook whereas the selected chefs have frequent iterations of both. It is also worth noting that White does not currently have the same level of enduring popularity as the four chefs selected.

### 6.5 Data Collection

Given that celebrity chefs owe much of their existence to the media, it was decided to use television shows and their accompanying cookbooks as sources of pre-existing data. Using the very medium through which the chefs communicate with the wider public seemed appropriate as the books and TV shows convey messages from the chefs to their public, messages which this research sought to explore. In order to gain access to these sources, the relevant books were purchased and the TV shows were viewed on DVDs or online.

The books were read five times while each episode of the TV shows was viewed five times. The association of the book and the TV show nuanced the understanding of each chef’s persona using two very different and distinct mediums (Johnston et al., 2014). The total viewing time of the TV shows was 3210 minutes (53.5 hours).

Celebrity Chef	Cookbook	Television Show	Number of episodes	Viewing Method	Total Time	Viewing
<b>Jamie Oliver</b>	<i>Jamie's Italy</i>	Jamie's Great Italian Escape	6	DVD	720 (each show was 24 minutes x 5 viewings)	
<b>Gordon Ramsay</b>	<i>Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape</i>	Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape India	3	IMDb online	750 (each show was 50 minutes x 5 viewings)	
<b>Mary Berry</b>	<i>Classic Mary Berry</i>	Classic Mary Berry	6	BBC online	870 minutes (each show was 29 minutes x 5 viewings)	
<b>Nigella Lawson</b>	<i>Simply Nigella</i>	Simply Nigella	6	BBC iPlayer	870 minutes (each show was 29 minutes x 5 viewings)	

Table 4 - Books and TV shows used to collect data (author's own)

The data collection process started with the repeated reading of the cookbooks. An initial reading took into consideration the overall layout of the books, noting the overlay of technical and personal narratives that were found in the introductions to the books, at the beginning of each chapter and in the introduction to the recipes as well as the choice of images. Oliver, Ramsay and Berry's books followed the tried and tested format of chapters going from starters, to mains to desserts. Lawson adopted a different format and gave headings such as 'Quick and Calm' and 'Breathe' to her chapters in which the recipes were a mix of dishes and, putatively, reflected her state of mind rather than a more logical organisation of the recipes. This was followed by an initial process of noting words and phrases of interest which were based on the a-priori themes extracted from the review of literature. Further themes appeared as the data analysis progressed. Although not per se a process of coding, the overall approach was similar insofar as it attempted to classify the data into overarching

themes. A similar approach was used in the scrutiny of the associated TV shows. Here, particular attention was paid to how personal account was combined with instruction as well as the images and sounds.

## **6.6 Ethical Considerations**

Any research design must include adherence to ethical standards. The researcher must take responsibility for the research and notably for the knowledge that will be produced from the research. Due consideration must be given to the collection, storage and use of the data (Sarantakos, 2005; Silverman, 2013). The research project was submitted for approval to the University of West London's ethics research panel and approval was received in June 2015. The research design is therefore compliant with the research ethics of the University.

As no data (personal or otherwise) were collected from humans, the ethical considerations were minimal. Any changes in the research orientation would have been submitted to the ethics panel of the University for further consideration and approval.

## **6.7 Data analysis**

In the interpretivist paradigm and within qualitative research, thematic analysis is one of the most popular methods for analysing data. Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) as: 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting

patterns (themes) within data.’ This definition is very similar to that of Maguire and Delahunt (2017, p. 3352) who suggested that ‘thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data.’. This form of analysis is particularly suited to investigate phenomena that have not been previously researched (Allan, 2017) which was the case of this research as the specific link between the construction of taste and celebrity chefs has, to the knowledge of the author, not been previously considered. As a result, thematic analysis was considered appropriate to answer the following main research question:

How do celebrity chefs influence the social construction of taste in contemporary British society?

Thematic analysis is also particularly pertinent to the field of Food Studies and has been used by numerous academic authors in their consideration of cookbooks and TV shows (Ketchum, 2005; Johnston et al., 2014; Lane and Fisher, 2015; Matwick, 2017; Matwick and Matwick, 2017a). Braun and Clarke (2006) contended that thematic analysis is consistent with an interpretivist approach in that it is anticipated that there will be some fit between the outcome of the data analysis and external references.

In their discussion of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) distinguished between semantic and latent themes. Semantic themes emerge from the meaning of the data with the researcher only looking for what has been said or written. Latent analysis involves going beyond what has been said and ‘starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data’ (2006, p. 84). Thyme et al. suggested that ‘in each text or picture, there are manifest messages to be described

and latent meaning to be interpreted' (2013, p. 102). This is further emphasised by Wright and Sandlin (2009) who described 'readings' as a methodology used to explore the cultural meaning of TV shows. Both latent and manifest themes were identified in the data analysis as the researcher extracted verbatim from the data sources (cookbooks and TV shows) but also attempted to interpret the underlying and implicit meanings from the words and images. The constructs that were taken from the literature were refined further in the data analysis process. In other words, the research moved from a theoretical design to a hands-on stage. Some themes that emerged from the reading and viewing were added even if they did not fit the initial framework derived from the literature as they added another layer of analysis.

### Template analysis

Template analysis (TA) is a particular form of thematic analysis used to analyse textual material which Tabari et al. define as :

a focusing technique that analyses data to identify tight generic themes originating from within the data, whilst simultaneously allowing for problem solving and theory building (2020, p.198).

It involves defining and organising themes into a structure that facilitates the interpretation of the data. The advantage of template analysis lies in the flexibility of the approach as well as in the fact that it allows the coding structure to emerge from 'a mixture of *a priori* interests and initial engagement with the data and then applied to the full data set' (Brookes et al. 2015, p. 206). TA was also considered appropriate for this research as it is suited to novice researchers (Brookes et al., Tabari et al. 2020).

As well as its flexibility, it does not impose a set level of coding on the analysis, which was particularly appealing to the author.

The analysis was guided by the 'a priori' themes extracted from the review of literature, what King and Brookes (2017) refer to as themes that have been identified in advance of the main analysis. It is what can be termed a contextual constructivist approach, in which it is acknowledged that any phenomenon can be interpreted in more than one way. Furthermore, the analysis allows for the researcher to be integral to the research and for her 'inability to truly stand outside one own's position in the social world, but nonetheless retains a belief in phenomenon that are independent of the researcher and knowable through the research process.' (Brookes et al., 2015, p. 205). As a result, the early analysis of the data was largely based on a deductive approach. However, during the course of the analysis, other themes emerged from the data that warranted investigation and were added to the initial template. (see table 5 below). Some researchers draw theoretical frameworks from existing literature before gathering data while others have no theories but realise that during data analysis frameworks can be drawn from the literature (Graebner et al., 2012). Of particular interest was the way in which the texts and shows contributed to the construction of the celebrity chef's persona, refining the initial classifications. Attention was given to the way in which the chefs expressed their association with cooking as well as more personal reflections on their lives and the world around them. The TV shows served a double purpose: to see the chefs 'in action' and to confirm that the reading of the chef's persona aligned with the books (Johnston et al., 2014).



The analysis also followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework using the following steps:

Step 1: Become familiar with the data – this was achieved through repeated reading and viewing of the data sets

Step 2: Generate initial codes – in this case these were the 'a priori' themes from the literature,

Step 3: Search for themes – in this case this guided the initial analysis of the data

Step 4: Review themes - in this case additional themes emerged and were overlaid

Step 5: Define themes,

Step 6: Write-up.

The table below shows how the initial themes extracted from the literature have been overlaid with additional themes identified from the analysis of the data.

<b>Initial themes from the literature (initial template)</b>	<b>Additional themes overlaid after analysis of the primary data</b>
1.Paradigms of the construction of taste 1.1Structuralist approach 1.1.1 Food as a symbol 1.1.2 Food as a language of communication 1.2 Materialist Approach 1.2.1 The individual 1.2.2 Micro and macro changes 1.3 Post modernist approach 1.3.1 Consumption 1.3.2 Standardisation	
2. Class 2.1 Social class 2.2 Distinction 2.3 Conspicuous consumption 2.4 Choice	Middle class Taste of necessity Taste of distinction Poverty
3.Capital 3.1 Economic capital 3.2 Cultural capital 3.3 Symbolic and social capital 3.4 Culinary capital	
4.Habitus	
5.Food as identity 5.1 Foodies	Culinary capital
6.Lifestyle	
7.Chefs and the media 7.1 Television 7.2 Books, 7.3 Online 7.3.1 Social Media 7.3.2 Gen Z	
8. Gender roles and persona	Personal narrative and family Feminism Seduction Empowerment Domesticity Entertaining Hedonism
9.Education	
10.Civic and moral discourse	
11. Foodporn	
12. Authenticity	Going local Rejection by locals Interpretation if authentic recipes Adaptation to UK tastes Tradition
13. Legitimacy and expertise	
14. Professionalism	
15. Ethnicity	
16. Culture	Travel Cultural intermediary Colonialism

Table 5 – Thematic Analysis (author’s own)

## 6.8 Reliability and Validity of the Research Process

Part of the research assessment is to ensure that the process is robust and that the findings are reliable. When assessing the quality of the research, there are two different approaches according to the chosen methodology. Quantitative research is typically discussed in terms of reliability, validity and generalisability. This terminology lacks appropriateness for qualitative research where the trustworthiness of the research is established by considering the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Sarantakos, 2005; Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

### 6.8.1 Credibility

In any research, the concept of validity refers to the ability of an instrument to measure what it is supposed to measure and if it ensures accuracy and precision (Sarantakos, 2005). When applied to qualitative research, and in order to be an accurate tool, the concept of validity uses terms such as “credibility and authenticity” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989 and 1994). The author chose to ensure credibility by using data from different chefs, different media and at different times. Jamie Oliver’s book and TV show were written and produced in 2005 while Mary Berry’s book and TV show date to 2018. Credibility can also be ensured through the sustained, prolonged and repeated nature of the engagement with the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Morse, 2015). This was the case for this research as the data sources were readily and constantly available to be reviewed.

### 6.8.2 Transferability

By nature, qualitative research is problematic if not impossible to generalise. Guba and Lincoln (1989) referred to 'transferability' as a more appropriate term with qualitative research insofar as it considers how the findings can be applicable in another context. This was carried out by using 'thick description' of the chefs as well as in terms of the findings and analysis. By describing the phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can assess if the findings are transferable to other times and contexts. In the analysis and findings, explicit connections were made to social and cultural contexts of the data as well as in the links to the themes in the literature. The chefs were placed within their particular context, by using the personas identified above, for example.

### 6.8.3 Dependability

The design and description of the instrument should allow the research to be dependable, consistent and ensure that it can be replicated. This was established by transparency in all stages of the research project (audit trail), from the start of the research to the reporting of the findings. Dependability was also ensured as textual analysis has been used in previous research involving both TV shows and cookbooks. Matwick and Matwick (2017a and b) and Johnston et al. (2014) make use of textual analysis, the former in their studies of gender and language and the latter to analyse cookbooks, culinary personas and equality.

#### 6.8.4 Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser define confirmability as:

The degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (2018, p. 121).

This was achieved as the analysis and findings were linked to the themes extracted from the data and linked to pre-existing literature.

#### 6.9 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research process used in this thesis. This study has adopted an interpretivist approach using a qualitative methodology. Textual analysis was used as a data collection method and template analysis to scrutinise the data. Based on the 'a priori' themes extracted from the review of literature, additional themes were overlaid from the data analysis to form a final template. The rationale behind the selection of the chefs included in the study is discussed and their biographies provide additional context. The reliability and credibility of the research process is ensured through a consideration of transferability and dependability which acknowledges the limitations of qualitative research.

## CHAPTER 7 - JAMIE'S ITALY AND JAMIE'S GREAT ITALIAN ESCAPE

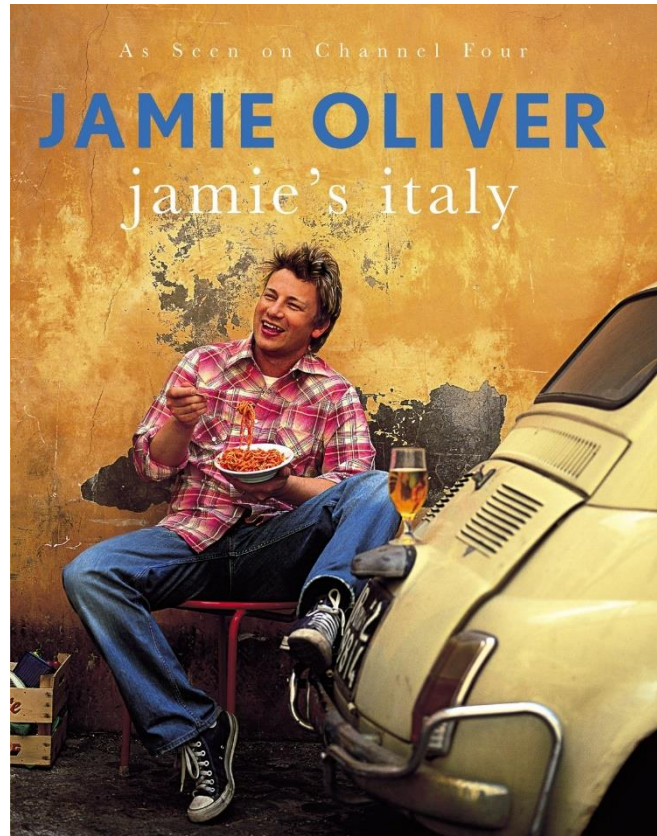


Image 1 – Cover of *Jamie's Italy*  
(Oliver, 2005a)

### 7.1 Introduction

Jamie Oliver's, *Jamie's Italy* (2005a), and its associated television show, *Jamie's Great Italian Escape* (2005b) will be discussed in this chapter. On the eve of his 30th birthday, Oliver escapes from his London life and to re-discover his love of cooking. He travels to Italy and collects traditional recipes from locals as well as developing some new ideas and twists on classics. In both the book and TV show, Oliver tells us about his culinary tour and how Italian food has always inspired him as a chef. Readers

and viewers will learn about his philosophies and principles of life, ranging from family values to health and wellness.

## **7.2 Background on the book and the TV show**

The recipes are preceded by introductions, and the chapters are introduced by longer texts. This provides Oliver with an opportunity to speak directly to readers. There is considerable use of the Italian language throughout, perhaps to give an added layer of authenticity (Oliver does not speak Italian fluently). The recipe titles in the book are all in Italian and Italian is used extensively in the TV series. Many of the people with whom Oliver interacts have little or no English. Oliver tries to translate 'live' directly to the camera or, in rarer cases, subtitles are provided.

Oliver's encounters on the show are chosen to reflect the various facets of Italian life. Working-class Italians seem to be represented in these figures as authentic, real and representative of their own community. In episode one he tries to impress locals in a Palermo market. The second episode involves his time spent with a local fisherman turned chef-restaurateur on an island off the coast of Sicily. Oliver engages with the chef and follows his way of life. There is an apparent friendship between them, and they share laughs and drinks. The third episode shows him spending time with Benedictine monks in Lazio and taking them on a roadside adventure to sell food and rekindle their love of good eating and cooking.



Image 2 - Oliver cooking with the monks by the roadside in episode 3  
(Oliver, 2005b)

In episode four, he connects with a small community in the remote province of Le Marche and he reveals the real aspects of living on a farm. He also enters a local pasta making competition. Oliver cooks dinner with the local dinner ladies in episode five, which takes place in Puglia. In the final episode, Oliver hosts a birthday dinner on the Amalfi coast for all of those he has met during his journey.

His aim throughout the series appears to be to establish an intimate relationship with the viewer by directly addressing the viewer or speaking to the cameraman as if addressing a friend. He appears to prefer a more casual filming style. In one shot, Oliver is seen in bed in the monastery talking directly to the camera as if he were



speaking to a friend he was sharing the room with. There appears to be little 'staging' of some of the sequences. It must nevertheless be remembered that, despite the casual appearance of the images, a team is behind every shot and that it has been professionally edited. Although Oliver is trying to give the viewer a sense of simplicity and accessibility in the TV series, one can clearly estimate the amount of work that has gone into the production process. At the beginning of episode 1, Oliver is in a presumably 'unreliable' restored 1950s camper van, giving the impression of a solo trip but it is evident that the enterprise is underpinned by a crew, support vehicles and local mechanics.

*Jamie's Italy* (2005a) is written in a relatively simple, instructional manner. The recipes are easily accessible to novice cooks since they do not require a large number of ingredients or sophisticated culinary experience. The cookbook takes pictures from the TV series and most of the pictures are purposefully 'simple' and casual. There are no overly complicated cooking techniques involved. This may indicate that the book is intended to be appealing to a broad range of readers, from beginners to more confident cooks. The style of writing in the book tries to put the reader at ease, as well as to encourage them to be adventurous, enticing them to "dive" into Oliver's world.

### **7.3 Discourses of legitimacy and expertise**

Oliver, as a celebrity chef, must earn the faith and confidence of his followers, as well as maintain his status as a professional. Maintaining his legitimacy and remaining approachable while exercising his culinary capital is of considerable importance.

Stringfellow et al. (2012) suggested that the celebrity chefs must maintain legitimacy and social capital which is key to any influence on taste. He does so by drawing on his knowledge of Italian food and sharing that with the readers and viewers in a way that is both user-friendly and informative. As such, he appears as the authority on all things Italian. Tominc (2014, p. 312) refers to 'conversationalisation' as being 'part of the celebrity chef's brand image of ordinariness because they 'speak our language', they are 'on our wavelength' and, therefore, become like a friend who happens to be an expert. With the reader drawn into his world through his tone and stories, he alternates between insights into his culinary knowledge and instructions on how to prepare meals. By conveying his expertise, Oliver is seeking to establish a relationship of trust with his audience that would further affirm his status as a celebrity (Matwick and Matwick, 2017a). The TV series contains very little instruction; one never sees Oliver execute a recipe from start to finish. Maybe it is intended that the incomplete nature of the recipes will encourage viewers to purchase the cookbook. Another aspect is that Jamie's persona is not commensurate with formal pedagogy and instruction, in contrast to other celebrity chefs.

'Every Italian I've met seems to be a food expert' (episode 5). This is the task that Oliver has set himself up against. To prove that he too is an expert. He must strike the right balance between expertise, instruction and usefulness in order for the reader to become his brand advocate. It is essential that this is done in order to confirm Oliver as credible to his readers and viewers and to encourage them to build a relationship of trust with him. He urges the reader to 'try something new' and tells us that 'there's nothing I don't think you can achieve, so give them all a go' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 177), encouraging the reader to be bold.

When he deviates from classical Italian recipes for risotto, Oliver justifies himself by saying: 'If a local Italian turns his nose up, well I don't care, because in this chapter I consider myself a know-it-all!!' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 129). It is in this manner that Oliver asserts his culinary expertise and credibility. Although in the show he deals with rejection of his food by the locals, this pushes him to further affirm his legitimacy to his (UK) audience. Traditionally, Italians are wary of foreign food and fiercely defend their local recipes and ways of cooking, which is a subject of Oliver's commentaries on several occasions in the series. In episode two, he tries to cook with the locals at the night market in Palermo but they are totally unimpressed with his efforts to cook fish with sauces and snub him. In the streets of the Sicily he says: 'Trying to get them to try something new is like trying to get a new mortgage, do you know what I mean' (Oliver, 2005b). He is told that his ingredients could ruin the taste of the fish. After much cajoling, they are eventually convinced to try his food, and even then they acknowledge that his food is good although not necessarily to their liking. Oliver appears to be very relieved, almost in a childlike manner.

In another episode, the locals do not take to his recipe for pasta sauce as it deviates from the classics. In episode two, they find his flavours too complicated. 'Not many English chefs would have the bollocks to do this' (Oliver, 2005b, episode 2) he tells us on the island of Marettimo. He cooks fish pie for the locals who watch, amused, as he builds a make-shift smoker to smoke his fish to make a 'real English pie' which they do not enjoy, saying that everything is 'mixed' and that you cannot taste the 'simple

flavours'. Oliver must make a concerted effort to get them to like his food, looking for acceptance from the locals which is not an easy task.

Johnston et al. (2014) noted that producers play an important role in ensuring that the celebrity chef resonates with the public and that they display cultural legitimacy through their cookbooks. The TV show uses speech direct to camera to engage the audience and creates an atmosphere of fun and holidays. Throughout the book, carefully orchestrated and staged pictures attempt to draw the reader into a sense of understanding and belonging with the author. One could falsely assume that these 'amateurish' pictures could have been taken by anyone on holiday in Italy. The cover of the cookbook shows Oliver 'relaxing' next to a Fiat 500, a car which is stereotypically Italian. Other images show him with Italian nonnas (grandmothers) in the back streets of Italian villages.

#### **7.4 Persona and Gender**

A celebrity's persona can be understood as a 'fabricated' identity that draws upon shared conventions of "biography, style, and attitude" to emotionally engage others and facilitate evaluation and may or may not be synonymous with the lived reality of the producer' (Donze, 2011, p. 48, cited in Johnston et al., 2014). Chefs will vary in the consideration they give to instruction, presentation, sourcing, gender etc. by building up a persona. It should be noted that often this persona is variously fabricated and propagated by the production companies. Oliver has gone through a number of phases in his career: from the very young 'Naked Chef' being discovered at the River

Café in 1998, to a very successful business-man, father and husband today. Johnston et al. suggested that celebrity chefs do not create their persona through their cookbooks alone but are essentially media co-creations. Producers, ghost writers, marketing experts, photographers and designers all contribute to the moulding of the persona. 'As trusted, credible, well-liked public figures, chefs step into our private home spaces through our televisions to convey food information in a charismatic, entertaining and accessible way' (Barnes, 2014, p. 1).

Oliver has attracted quite considerable academic interest and has been construed in terms of numerous personas, from gastro-sexual (defined later in this chapter) to political activist. Johnston et al. (2014, p. 7) called him a 'chef artisan' whose identities cover a 'spectrum from artistic genius to artistic craftsman' as well as a 'self-made man' displaying evidence of strong work ethics. Oliver ponders this theme on the island of Marettimo when he is shown 'chilling out' and reflecting that he never has time to think about life as he is caught between his work and his family: 'generally I'm either at work or at home with Jules and that's basically it...my business is me' (Oliver, 2005, episode 2). The chef artisan is also a professional chef who displays characteristics of 'attention to hard-earned skills, credentials, expertise, knowledge, education professional experience and devotion to high quality food' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 13). These descriptions match Oliver and his persona.

Scholes (2011) refers to Oliver as a 'culinary crusader' and Oliver calls himself a 'revolutionary' which is seen in his very public battles against sugar and obesity (2018). Other definitions that have been attributed to him include 'moral entrepreneur' (Bell

and Hollows, 2010) and 'public pedagogue' (Piper, 2012). Oliver uses his celebrity and cultural power to push forward his 'health agenda' and becomes an arbiter of good food and lifestyle. He negotiates a shift 'from modern life distractor to cultural and even political intermediary' (Matta, 2018, p. 3). These personas come through in several ways, for example in Oliver's tone and language. He uses slang and makes a point of keeping his tone informal with the use of expressions such as 'Bob's your uncle', 'bloody good' or 'a genius combo'. Keeping in line with his image of an Essex lad allows him to maintain an air of accessibility, while connecting with his audience. The language he uses is one example. When discussing the size of red onions he says that they should be chopped finely, 'a ruddy great chunk is about as classy as a dodgy doner-kebab' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 156). He also tells us not to be a 'cowboy chef'. These phrases are typically used in casual conversations.

Oliver has also been characterised as a 'gastrosexual' by Johnston et al. (2014). Gastrosexuals are defined as professional chefs that 'fully embrace cooking at home' and share attributes such as masculinity tinged with a feminine side of caring and nurturing' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 16). Moreover, they impart their professional knowledge to the home cook as well. Oliver does not shy away from showing a form of heterosexual masculinity, making him appealing to both men and women and hence growing his fan base. He has also been classed as a 'chunk', defined as the contraction of chef and hunk (Johnston et al., 2014). Leer (2016) suggests that he brings healthy home cooking into the everyday life of his devotees, providing them with assurances that cooking is more convenient and that it will make their lives easier. More importantly, he does so without sacrificing his masculinity. As evidenced in his

style and manner, whether on his TV show or in his cookbooks, where he strives to maintain a friendly and casual tone while imparting his professional knowledge.

Oliver's persona as a moral crusader (Scholes, 2011) is shown in episode five (2005) where he cooks a school meal in Puglia with the local dinner ladies. He expresses amazement at the quality of the ingredients that are used and that deep fried foods are not allowed in schools, a very different world to that of UK school dinners. In the same year as the series (2005), Oliver subsequently went on to be very vocal about the quality of school meals in UK schools and tried to change the standards through lobbying government. In 2012 he went on to other activities such as his intervention in Rotherham in the first episode of *Jamie's Ministry of Food* TV show where he tries to change eating habits and get people cooking. His challenge was raising awareness about food in the United Kingdom as food is seen as a 'posh, middle-class' matter. This is in stark contrast to the Italian way of life where food and cooking are integral to everyday life among all communities. In 2015, Oliver admitted that his school meal campaign failed because 'eating is still viewed as an indulgence of the middle-class' as reported by Furness (2015).

Mitchell (2010) suggests that a different discourse operates according to whether men or women have authored cookbooks. She states that:

The significance lies in the fact that those books written by the women concentrate on teaching readers about cooking as a practice that they can develop and continue. The women do not see themselves as stars, but as cooks and teachers. In contrast, the men's cookbooks are much more about the authors themselves—their likes, dislikes, and restaurants. Men's books do indeed promote them as celebrities (Mitchell, 2010, p. 527).

Mitchell moves on to speculate that women tend to focus on the instructional aspects while men's cookbooks are more about the authors themselves and their lifestyle. This theme is present throughout the *Jamie's Italy* cookbook where the focus is on him, on the way he sees and interprets Italian food. A major theme in men's culinary discourse is the negation of domestic cooking as a chore. In the home, cooking has mainly been the remit of women and has been seen as a laborious task. Male chefs disengage from domesticity and its negative connotations by cooking away from home. Hollows (2003) contends that Oliver displays his masculinity in a way that takes away the toils of domestic cooking and turns it into fun. The language used throughout Oliver's book reinforces this aspect of entertainment. This is evidenced in the texts that precede some of the recipes. Oliver tries to make everything look easy and fun: 'pasta is fun, and it should be made with love (Oliver 2005a, p. 84)'; 'OK tigers – this could be your next favourite pasta (Oliver 2005a, p. 121).'

In the TV show he is even more familiar and colloquial, swearing and laughing along and using laddish and derogatory language such as 'Italians are the biggest poofs I've ever met' (Oliver, 2005b). It should be noted that this is a carefully fabricated image that has been built by his army of press and public relations (PR) teams. This has only re-enforced his popularity. He continues to reach out to his fans and this can be seen by his impressive number of followers on social media with over 470,000 daily views on YouTube in November 2018 (Socialblade, 2018) and over seven million followers on Twitter (Socialbakers, 2018).



## 7.5 Authenticity

Throughout both the book and the TV series, there is a persistent and underlying theme of authenticity. This can be seen in the use of Italian, the references to cultural aspects of Italian life and the general knowledge that Oliver displays of Italian culinary arts. There is an overlay of cooking instruction with personal narrative, anecdotes and biographical information, which draws the reader in and allows them to feel as though they are being talked to directly and therefore part of Oliver's world (Johnston et al., 2014). Talking directly to the camera, as is common for most cooking shows, further cements this connection with the audience. Through the extensive use of Italian both the book and show convey an authentic feel. This is despite the fact that in episode one Oliver says: 'even though I've cooked Italian food for 12 years, I've never lived there and I don't even speak the language' (Oliver, 2005b). In the TV series, Oliver does attempt to speak Italian and learns a few swear words along the way, keeping in line with his laddish persona. A true sense of authenticity is conveyed as the viewer is immersed into the heart of the country.

It could be suggested that Oliver is displaying his 'culinary and cultural capital' in a pure Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1984; Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012; Johnston and Baumann, 2015). He does this by constantly but subtly reminding his viewers and readers that he is the expert and that he knows how things should be done. The readers and viewers almost become dependent on his guidance. Johnston et al. (2014, p. 4) borrow from Driessens (2013) and refer to the notion of 'celebrity capital'

where celebrity and expertise are defined as a form of capital. In displaying these forms of capital, Oliver maintains his aura as a professional chef and therefore propagates and shares his expertise and credibility (Hollows, 2003a; Hollows, 2010a). By doing so, he retains his professional image in the eyes of his followers.



Image 3 - Oliver rolling picci pasta  
(Oliver 2005a, p.104)

## 7.6 Oliver and the Nonnas

In both the book and the TV series, Oliver (2005a and b) constantly brings ordinary Italian people to the forefront. In the series he interacts with night-market stall holders in Palermo, fishermen in Marettimo and monks near Rome. In Italy, the notion of family and tradition remains very strong and food is an important part of regular family gatherings (Oliver, 2005a and b). There is a consistent use of the family as a marker of the Italian way of life, with shots of large family gatherings with four generations around the table, and the ever important 'nonna' (granny). Oliver interacts with the nonnas who are the pillars of a matriarchal, yet macho society, and guardians of traditions. The nonnas are representative of Italian culture, passing recipes down from generation to generation and perpetuating the family traditions. For example, each nonna has her own recipe for pasta. Nonnas are an integral part of Italian families and respected for their knowledge and role in the family. Oliver is often sweetly chastised by the nonnas for his lack of dexterity or for being slow. On several occasions, the nonnas gently tell Oliver off, almost as though he was a member of their family. The nonna becomes Oliver's own 'nan'. It could be suggested that this is a way to illustrate Oliver's authenticity, by blending in with the families and people he meets, although one should remember such vignettes will have been arranged with a view to eliciting precisely such exchanges. This plays into his recurring theme of "mucking in" and learning from others.



Image 4 - Four generations of pasta makers  
(Oliver, 2005a, p. 85)

One could argue that there is a disjuncture between Oliver and his audience. On the one hand he is 're-packaging' the nonnas for a UK middle-class audience through his books and (now defunct) restaurants. On the other hand, he is trying to get working class Britain to eat better and has been rejected by UK working-class mothers in doing so. Following the demise of his restaurant chain *Jamie's Italian*, he seems to have put his energies into TV shows with a broad appeal, perhaps in order to draw in a wider ranging audience. His more recent forays during and after the Covid pandemic have been focused very much on his family.

### **7.7 Back to the basics**

Food media encourage us to become better citizens. Barnes (2007) suggests that it:

promises to make us better in multiple ways: better cooks, better socially, better at caring for friends and family, better lifestyles and wellbeing,

better homes, better connected to food and those producing it (Barnes, 2007, p. 170).

Oliver plays into all of these themes throughout the book and series. He tells us that the Italian attitude towards food is better, more traditional and respectful of the land and much less disconnected than the British attitude to food. He wants us to experience this way of life and says:

I love the fact that they think their own regional way of cooking is the best, and how they are so proud of their local produce, and how every Italian loves to talk about food (Oliver 2005a, p. ix)

He berates the UK when discussing meat and accuses the big food corporations of creating a warped image of meat as the British public are not, he contends, really interested in knowing where their food comes from:

Because the majority of people don't want to see the dead animal that their cut of meat is coming from, big corporations have jumped in to solve the problem – out of sight, out of mind....And of course they can then offer you a mass produced leg or breast of chicken, or they'll try to help you feed your kids by processing, reformulating, reshaping and re-packaging meat so it's unrecognisable (Oliver 2005a, p. 210).

An example of Italian connection to food is clearly seen in the meat section of the book and in episode four of the TV show, with very 'graphic and gruesome pictures' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 210) of slaughtered animals. The pictures in the book are taken from the TV series. Pictures in the book show a freshly slaughtered lamb (Oliver, 2005a, p. 211) and, further in the chapter, a young girl in a picture standing next to a paddling pool that contains the insides of a skinned and gutted boar. In the TV series (Oliver, 2005b), the same little girl is now prodding the carcass of the boar that was killed in a hunt.

Oliver and his production team are deploying these images to evidence the fact that Italians are very 'close' to their food, as opposed to the UK.

There seems to be a real understanding, even from kids, that some animals are for food and are certainly not kept as pets. I love the fact that their concept of humane does not just relate to the slaughter but goes all the way back through the whole life of the animal and its welfare (Oliver, 2005a, p. 210).

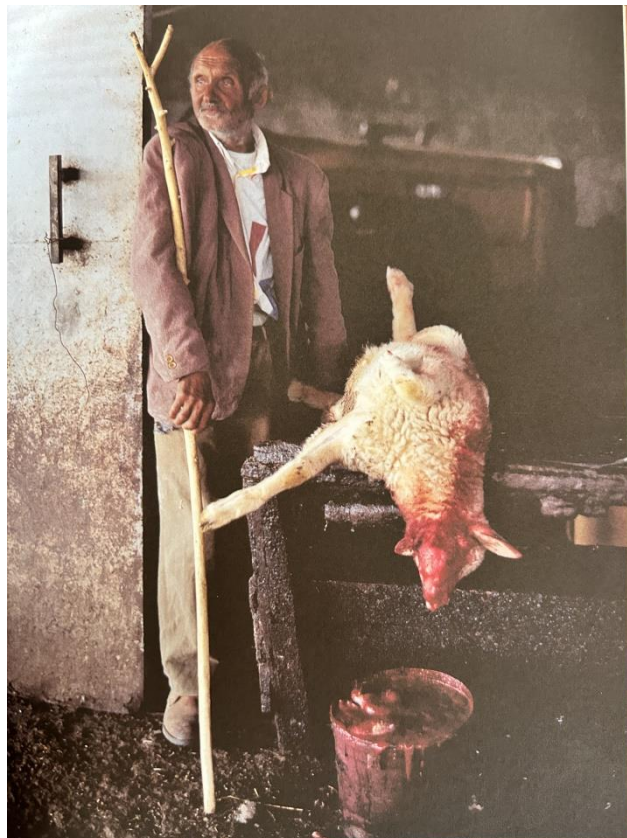


Image 5- Dead lamb  
(Oliver, 2005a, p. 211)

In episode four (2005), Oliver goes to a remote part of the Le Marche region to connect with the land and 'get to grips with the whole hunting, wild food, sustainable, living, living off the land...something that in England, in a normal sense, has disappeared' (Oliver, 2005b). In this particularly graphic episode, it could be suggested that Oliver displays authenticity when he participates in the slaughter of a lamb, something with

which he clearly struggles. Oliver comments that 'to do that today was pretty emotional and pretty hard core (Oliver, 2005b)'. In this situation, the opposition and potential disconnect between the England that Oliver comes from and the reality he faces in Italy become clear. He tells the viewer that he is a fraud if he negates this aspect of being a chef, as difficult as it may be. He talks about the importance to the locals of how food is sourced, that it's 'not about teletubbies' and that it is 'all bloody normal' and that 'not all things in life are pretty' (Oliver, 2005b). He seems to be trying to justify the killing to himself and to his viewers by saying that as he has cooked '2000 sheep... it is only fair to kill one' (Oliver, 2005b). However, once again he is faced with the disapproval from the locals; this time the nonna takes a sniff of the lamb that he has cooked and says 'he's used all the wrong ingredients...it stinks'. Here Oliver (2005b) is quick to justify himself and says that he cooks 'basically because I love it; I cook because it's the only thing I'm good at; I cook basically because I love the feeling of making other people really happy.. of watching their faces when they eat...and if I do a good job, I could basically cry.'

### **7.8 Oliver as a moral entrepreneur**

In episode five (2005), Oliver travels to Puglia and cooks school meals in a state school with the local dinner ladies. Oliver has always been an advocate of healthy meals as seen in his numerous campaigns (Oliver, 2005; Hollows and Jones, 2010a) to change UK school dinners (Pike and Kelly, 2014). In the TV show, he comments: 'In England, I was shocked by the crap we feed our kids. I wouldn't feed that to my dog' (Oliver, 2005b). He is amazed by how healthy the school food is compared to the UK despite

Puglia being one the poorest regions of Italy. By law, pasta and olive oil have to be organic and no deep-fried food is allowed and fruit is on the menu every day. 'No burgers allowed in Italian schools, that's for McDonalds' (Oliver, 2005b). In the UK Oliver was barely able to get schools to offer deep-fried food only two days a week, rather than five (Oliver, 2018b). The standards of the kitchen are 'non comparable to anything I've seen in England.' The dinner ladies are appalled when Oliver shows them examples of what is served in UK schools, and it all goes in the rubbish bin.

Further indication of the knowledge of food displayed in Italy is manifest when Oliver quizzes the three- and four-year-old school children in episode five. They are all able to easily recognise all the names of vegetables he shows them which amazes Oliver and, he contends, is in stark contrast to the UK. 'Back in England most of the 15-year-olds that I have met couldn't recognise a leek' (Oliver, 2005b). Food is as equally important in the school curriculum as an academic subject alongside languages and maths. In his evaluation, the children are 'being set up for life' (Oliver, 2005b). We know that Oliver feels very strongly about issues of diet. He discusses how animals are kept and fed in the UK versus Italy and is surprised by the disconnect between farm and fork as well as by the way big corporations are feeding the UK population food that is full of additives and antibiotics. He states that '...it's not hard to realise why Britain is one of the unhealthiest countries in Europe and why my kid's generation is the first to be expected to die before their parents' (Oliver 2005a, p. 210).

However, in series five he discloses that the spend on ingredients in the Italian school is almost 90 pence per student whereas in the UK it is 37 pence per student (Oliver,



2005b). This may explain in part the disparity in quality that he perceives. Oliver ascertains that in Europe some of the best and healthiest food comes from the poorest communities. There is no such heritage or equivalent to the “cucina della povera” in the UK. Oliver continues to fight this battle and advice for schools continues to be available on his website (Oliver, 2018b). One of his comments in the series: ‘If my kids were eating this at school every day I’d be so pleased’ (Oliver, 2005b), may be indicative of the extent to which there should be change in UK school dinners. Recent campaigning has seen this issue being brought to the forefront of electoral campaigns by political parties on all sides of the spectrum.

Throughout the book and on the TV show, Oliver claims that British people are too far removed from their food, and that the food industry is responsible for fostering children who are unhealthy, including his own. In their article ‘*At least he’s doing something*’: *Moral entrepreneurship and individual responsibility in Jamie’s Ministry of Food*’, Hollows and Jones refer to Oliver as ‘able to give focus and leadership to debate around the place of cuisine within national life’ (2010a, p. 308). The article goes on to discuss David Cameron’s 2007 political slogans around a ‘broken Britain’ and suggests that Oliver worked on this aspect in his Ministry of Food (JMoF) series. They contend that:

JMoF went to work on precisely this embattled terrain. While the linear narrative is one of triumph over adversity, the iconography of the series returns insistently to the metonyms of broken Britain: fast food from cartons on the floor, bingeing on crisps, grotesque working-class bodies and the hospital hoist. As we have shown, Jamie’s role as social explorer is both to uncover these shocking findings and to provide a way out of broken Britain (Hollows and Jones, 2010, p. 318).

Here again Oliver can be seen to emerge as a ‘moral entrepreneur’ (Scholes, 2011), as he attempts to ‘heal’ modern Britain. We have seen other endeavours by Oliver to do so throughout his career, and more recently with the implementation of the sugar tax in 2018, largely supported and lobbied for by Oliver.

## 7.9 Travel

Oliver travels around Italy with the stated aim of trying to ‘uncover the secrets of authentic Italian cookery’ (episode 4, 2005). Travel plays an important part in connecting Oliver with his readers. The introduction to *Jamie’s Italy* (2005) serves as a guidebook that includes recommendations of places to visit, hotels to stay in, restaurants to eat in, shops in which to buy the best meat as well as how best to travel around Italy. Bell and Hollows (2008) referred to Oliver showing his ‘Italianicity’ and state that he is giving his audience a form of virtual travel where they can experience true culinary culture. The public can travel to Italy through the book and TV show but they must rely on Oliver’s experience and buy into his world (Johnston et al. 2014). Oliver talks about how ‘Italy has now become incredibly easy and cheap to get to’. He goes on to say that ‘my best advice is to get out of the touristy places and go into the real Italy. If you go to tourist spots you may well get ripped off’ (Oliver 2005a, p. xv). This is where the book turns into a quasi-travel guide, delivering historical and cultural information to the reader. Oliver wants the reader to experience what he has experienced during his travels.

I want you to walk past the wall of footballing posters in Palermo and chuckle because you’ve seen it here. I want you to go and find the old woman making polenta in the town in Puglia.’ (Oliver, 2005a, p. xiii)

This may be relevant to the construction of taste as it suggests that the reader is not only buying Oliver's culinary expertise, but also vicariously experiencing his cultural knowledge and capital. By extension, the reader is accumulating 'cultural capital' themselves in a Bourdieusian sense, albeit second hand. This is an important aspect of the way in which the celebrity chef will share his/her forms of capital with readers and viewers who in turn will engage in different ways with the chef. It may be in a superficial manner by just watching the show or buying the book. It could also be much more in-depth by engaging with the recipes. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that cultural capital can be acquired unconsciously, which may be the case here.

### **7.10 Tradition, Culture and Italian Lifestyle**

Throughout the book, Oliver (2005a) refers repeatedly to Italian culture and lifestyle. This is illustrated in different ways. For example, each chapter starts with an introduction that seeks to give the reader an insight into the 'Italian way'. In the preface to the 'Antipasti' chapter, he says: 'Like pasta and bread, antipasti are a real signpost for regionality in Italy' (Oliver, 2005a, p.2). He further observes of the Italians that '...they've managed to retain a unique sense of tradition and village spirit.' (Oliver, 2005a, p. ix). This can be linked to notions of terroir (Strong, 2011) where the terroir is central to cultural and social identity. A corollary of this is that Oliver has to come to terms with the lack of flexibility that Italians show towards food. This theme of regionality and tradition runs throughout the book and the TV series. Because regionality plays such an important part in their lifestyle, the Italians are very attached

to their traditional recipes, to the way things have been done for centuries, by their mothers and grandmothers (nonnas). Hibberd opens his essay on '*National Tastes: Italy and Food Culture*' by contending that 'Few would doubt the importance of food to Italian national and cultural identity. Food is widely recognised to be a fundamental part of what it means to be Italian' (Hibbard, 2011, p. 81).

In episode four, Oliver cooks a recipe from Rome in Le Marche, of which the locals strongly disapprove : 'he hasn't cooked in the traditional Marche way' they comment...that's because he doesn't understand our cuisine' (episode 4 2005). They further make a very interesting comment on Oliver's approach to cooking: 'he sees Italian cooking as a whole'. This is in contrast to the Italian attitude. A little later in the episode, Oliver comments that: 'you take vignole (a traditional Roman vegetable dish – author's note) from Rome and you put it in Le Marche, and not one of them had seen it ever before and they felt it was really peculiar...Italians, they say it's regional, I think it's even more than that...Italians like it like in their village.. but also, I think secretly they want it just like their mum's' (Oliver, 2005b). In episode five (2005), the family he is visiting comments that 'Your food is good but mama's is better.' To which Oliver responds that 'no matter what you do in life, it's never quite as good as mama's, mum's always the best' (Oliver, 2005b).

In episode four (2005) Oliver takes on the nonnas at a local ragu sauce and pasta rolling competition in front of the entire village in the town square. In order to cook the ragu, he will need to go hunting to find the main ingredient, wild boar. 'Just a little bit more involved than going down the local supermarket' he comments as he is handed

a loaded rifle (Oliver, 2005b). Before the competition, Oliver takes advice from the family nonna on her ragu recipe but then reluctantly accepts to use the recipe from another nonna because he is told she is the best cook in town. Although he loses the competition due to a technicality, he is very keen for the locals to like his pasta sauce and to impress his nonna, which he does. Oliver also comments that the Italian way of life revolves around food. 'Every mama does a version of the classic ragu sauce and after 12 years of cooking Italian, I've finally mastered mine' he concludes (Oliver, 2005b). This is echoed by Hibberd (2011, p. 81) who suggests that 'National signature dishes – which actually originated in the Italian cities, regions or localities – provide many proud Italians with a cause for national celebration'. This is further illustrated in episode five where the Pugliese do not like his recipe for panzanella (bread salad, author's note), for which they have a different name and a different recipe. They find it 'too rich in ingredients' and argue that peppers and anchovies should not be in the salad (episode 5 2005). Here the protagonists can be seen to be displaying issues of identity and 'terroir' which Strong suggests is important as '...cultures that lose this connection between taste and place are eroded in terms of their identity' (Strong, 2011, p. xvii).

In episode five (2005) set in Puglia, Oliver is seen cooking for a birthday party. Before the party, he lies in bed and speaks directly to the camera, saying that he will not try to cook any other versions of other region's food as 'it's not working really on the whole' (Oliver, 2005b). He will do what is traditional in Puglia. He goes on to shop in the local shops and asks how things are cooked. He is cooking very simple food, the way the Italians have been telling him it's done. He is very pleased to receive the best feedback from the family at the end of the meal. 'The baked pasta is just like ours' they

say (episode 5 2005). The lesson of the episode is that Oliver has finally figured out how to keep Italians happy: 'just give them what they're used to' (Oliver, 2005b). He states that he has now finally learned the 'heart and soul of Italian cooking' and will take this back to England.

Another significant aspect of Italian lifestyle that Oliver discusses in episode five is work-life balance and family. In this episode Oliver moves in with a local family that run a bakery to experience their lifestyle. He is pleased to see that it is possible for the lady of the house to cook a healthy meal from scratch 30 minutes after coming home from work. He contrasts this with what he posits as the UK way of life and comments:

That's what I love...everyone always says we don't have any time in England.. and she's like only finished work half an hour ago, she's knocked up a wild asparagus frittata, a salmon risotto, the kids around the table, who said they didn't have time, do you know what I mean (Oliver, 2005b).

In both the book and the TV show, Oliver goes to great lengths to describe the Italian lifestyle and some of its advantages over his take on the UK way of life. Oliver does however contend that:

there's a lot of good things happening in England with regards to food, farmers markets and traditions. So much has happened in 10 years but it is something that is purely driven by passion. It's not normal, it's not every day. If you come through Sicily or Italy, these artisan things, they're every day, it's normal. Everyone is bloody doing it. 'I'm quite shocked. Every Italian I've met is a food expert or at least has an opinion about food but they're much less open minded than I thought they would be (Oliver, 2005b).

Oliver does bemoan that Italians 'can be stubborn, stubborn people sometimes.' Whereas,

In England we should be damned ashamed of ourselves in quite a few things to do with food but...English people they're reasonably open-minded. They'll have a go at a bit of Moroccan, and a bit of Thai, and a bit of Chinese and I really appreciate that about the British people (Oliver, 2005b).

This is one of the first times in the series that he has praised any aspect of the British way of life. In the final episodes, Oliver ostensibly starts to lose his fascination with Italian cooking and sees that Italians can be narrow-minded and obstinate. He slowly starts to move back to England, both figuratively and physically. Leer and Meldgaard Kjær (2015) referred to Oliver as reaffirming his social and cultural identity and returning home with a renewed sense of national pride, ready to face his UK life, and its challenges, again. As Oliver returns to 'reality', he adopts a less vitriolic attitude towards UK culinary culture. Perhaps this allows him to re-connect with his UK followers whom he may have alienated with some of his observations.

### **7.11 Markers of distinction and class**

References to distinction and class are present throughout the book and series. There are references usually associated with 'middle-class' activities such as dinner parties and shopping at Waitrose. Oliver's analysis of the Italian way of life and the Italian food culture delves into a discussion of class:

But I think the main reason (Italy has retained its food culture) comes down to a lack of choice. In the countryside, especially, the working class definitely don't have the same kind of choices that people in many other parts of the world have....There is also a massive working class population and a very small proportion of wealthy people (Oliver, 2005a, pp. xii and xiii).

The first sentence in the book sets the scene :

Since I was a teenager I've been totally besotted by the love, passion and verve for food, family and life itself that just about all Italian people have, no matter where they're from or how rich or poor they may be (Oliver, 2005a, p. iix).

Oliver makes another allusion to class with references to designer labels:

Most of the people eating at the stall while I was there looked reasonably working class and poor, but there was also the odd guy in a tweed jacket and cashmere roll neck wearing huge Prada goggles who would get off his scooter and have some of this old-school Italian street food (Oliver, 2005a, p. 32)

One could say that Oliver is directing viewers towards an interpretation of food that transcends class as people from all walks of life come together around the simple and cheap Neapolitan street food. There seems to be a concerted effort to show images of 'working class' people throughout the book and TV series, through the carefully chosen pictures, or the scenes of working-class families enjoying a meal. These pictures often show very abundant tables, laden with large and varied amounts of food. Bourdieu characterises the working-class meal as being plentiful, mainly in order to sustain the physical work of the men. In opposition, the bourgeois table is refined and delicate with small portions and an overall sense of restraint. Another reference to class is made in episode one, set in Sicily. Oliver says that he has no idea what a



'contessa' (countess) is until he meets one. 'I've never met a countess. What does it mean? Is it like a lord or a lady?' However, he contends that 'I'm going to be learning from people that count: the working class, builders and ...the poor man's cooking' (Oliver, 2005b). This may be indicative of Oliver trying to remain grounded in his working-class background which aligns with the personas that he is pushing towards his public. A special emphasis should also be placed on the fact that real and authentic Italian cooking has its roots in the land and the people who work it.

In episode one, Oliver (2005b) refers to Italian cooking and says: 'Poor people, rich people, they all eat well you know. This is why in England when people say, aw, we can't afford to eat well...poor people's cooking in Spain and Italy is some of the best cooking in Spain and in Italy...the toasted breadcrumbs on the pasta because they couldn't afford the parmesan.' 'Cucina della povera' is often heralded as the most authentic and best, using simple and high-quality ingredients with an emphasis on tradition and frugality. A number of cookbooks have been written around this topic, making it an important aspect of traditional Italian lifestyle. Other chefs have also co-opted 'cucina della povera' such as Gordon Ramsay and Angela Hartnett in the UK or Mario Batali in the USA.

This can be linked to Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of the types of foods that are favoured by certain classes with the working class typically preferring heavy and hearty food whilst the more bourgeois approach favours light and refined foods. Interestingly, and in contrast, Oliver (2005a, p. 63) tells us a good bottle of olive oil should cost between £10-15 and is available at Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Harvey Nicks and Harrods. Clearly Waitrose and Harvey Nichols are not where the UK working class

are likely to shop for food. This may be an indication that Oliver knows his audience and recognises that he is talking to a distinctly upper middle-class readership through his choice of ingredients (Matwick and Matwick, 2017a). This again points towards the possible disjuncture between Oliver's working-class persona and his actual audience. Brownlie et al. (2005, p.11) suggested that cookbooks are a reflection of social structure and that they hold 'hidden clues' about class and this might be seen here. Further references to class come later in the chapter (p. 95). Oliver suggests we can 'blow people's socks off' (p.78) in a recipe for lobster soup and tells us that a recipe for spaghetti with squid is 'luxurious and posh.' Again, these ingredients will not be easily affordable to some of his readers.

Although not openly referring to class, Oliver (2005a) does move in the direction of making further assumptions of affordability and choice. He recommends a barbecue supplier whose cheapest product is £755 (p. 190). This may indicate that, again, he clearly understands the target market that he is pitching to; a decidedly middle/upper class slice of the population, with the means and the will to purchase such an item. This contrasts with the picture illustrating this section which shows Oliver using a very basic barrel as a barbecue near the sea. There seems to be ambivalence in Oliver's pitch. On the one hand, he tries to be everyone's 'mate' while on the other hand he is recommending very expensive items and ingredients. By buying into his recommendations and his recipes, his public are displaying 'culinary cultural capital'. They are making judgements and justifications on their food choices and habits by 'consuming' his books and TV shows. Oliver may be creating an elitist gap through his recommendations of expensive products and his public's ability and desire to purchase said products. Yet, it should be noted that Oliver's audience will also be on a spectrum

in terms of their 'class' belonging and financial means. Can Oliver still be seen to be the 'lad' and the 'rich boy' that he has become through his empire?

Rousseau suggests that:

Oliver's popularity does not overwhelmingly reflect a commitment to his food because most of his fans do not have access to his food. What the millions of consumers responsible for his celebrity status do have access to are representations of his food, and of his life, through television, kitchen commodities, and the like (Rousseau, 2012, p. 51).

This is significant as it demonstrates how the wider public may engage with Oliver and other chefs. It may be useful to use the concept of 'food porn' here, where the public watches the TV shows and reads the cookbooks without engaging with any other aspects of cooking. It could be suggested that these connections suffice to influence the chef's followers. It is also interesting to note that where Rousseau (2012) implies that Oliver's fans do not have access to his food, the customers frequenting *Jamie's Italian* restaurants were met with a display of his cookbooks and high-priced kitchen utensils, perhaps a way to 'connect' with the chef. Maybe customers were expecting Oliver to walk out of the kitchen. With regards to *Jamie's Italian*, Oliver's own words with regards to the restaurants were: 'the intention of positively disrupting mid-market dining in the high street in the UK, with great value and much higher quality ingredients, best in class animal welfare standards and an amazing team' (Miller, 2019) which at the time sounded laudable. After the restaurant chain went bankrupt, Oliver turned his attention back towards his TV shows and cookbooks, which seem to be the driving force behind his fame and success.

Distinction and choices are marked by being removed from 'urgency' and 'necessity'. This places us in a Bourdieusian world of 'capital' where the celebrity's power has a material basis as well as important cultural implications (Bourdieu, 1984; Johnston et al., 2014). Johnston et al. suggested that:

Celebrities are not simply living, breathing brands, but icons that communicate social norms, stereotypes, and aspirations for the viewing public. Food celebrities are no exception; they communicate cultural values through mediated performances on television and through their cookbooks (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 4).

This is important as it suggests that the chefs do have a definitive role in shaping choices, cultural values and aspirations. Consequently, audiences are engaged in an idealised lifestyle as exemplified by the chefs, in which they, in effect, will move into a world that is far removed from their own.

### **7.12 Personal Narrative and Oliver's Lifestyle**

Oliver's book and television series provide a glimpse into his personal life through photographs and anecdotes. In a very personal statement he says '...you can lose sight of the things that really matter – your family, your kids and your health' (Oliver, 2005a, p. xiv). There is a sense of blending of his real life with his persona to such an extent that it is difficult for the viewer and reader to differentiate the two. Several episodes of the show feature his wife Juliette (Jools) and a number of his 'secrets' are revealed to the viewers. Hence, cooking shows have been transformed into a form of reality TV, where this type of interaction has become increasingly normal and the public fully expects celebrity confessions.

Personal aspects of Oliver's life can be seen in the opening scenes of episode one which show Oliver first with his staff, then with his wife and young children. With regards to his cookbook, Oliver gives some indications of what is important to him such as family values. Matwick and Matwick suggest that '...cookbooks play a critical role in communicating the celebrities' values demonstrated in their own lifestyle' (2017, p. 2). Most recipes start with a short paragraph that introduces the dish, giving background on its origin, recommendations on what to buy and adding his personal comments. Oliver (2005a, p.8) prefers his Caponata 'less oily', and buys his ricotta from a deli not the 'crappy' one from the supermarket (p. 12 and 145), and tells the reader not to buy 'any old rubbish' (p. 15) in a recipe calling for raw meat. These little introductory sequences at the start of the recipes are deliberately crafted insights into Oliver's lifestyle, personal preferences, family, experience and knowledge of Italian cooking. He says: 'To be honest, I'm a bit fussy about my frittata' (p. 44). Here Oliver can conceivably be seen to be giving titbits to his readers so perhaps they can replicate his recipes in a more authentic manner. To avoid alienating his readers, he does steer clear of being too directive and instructive.

This does cause one to question the impact Oliver has on his so-called fans. Do they interact with him through TV only and has he becomes the unattainable object of their desire? Possibly the book has made him more approachable. Oliver's strength lies in his appeal as a 'real' person, whether he is talking to the government on issues of obesity or interacting with fishermen in Palermo. The result is our acceptance of him as a professional, and we are therefore willing to endorse him by purchasing his books and frying pans in order to demonstrate our affection and adoration. We are touched by 'a little of 'Jamie's fairy dust' (Rousseau, 2012, p. 59). In her discussion of

interactions with chefs, Abbotts also suggests that the chefs nurture a 'relationship of intimacy with consumers' (2015, p. 2231) which is expressed by allowing access to their private lives. This is certainly the case with Oliver who repeatedly talks about his private life throughout this and other books and TV shows. In contrast, other celebrity chefs such as Heston Blumenthal are not as open and sharing of their private lives, perhaps because they do not feel the need to do so. Gordon Ramsay does not delve into personal anecdotes in his books or shows although his private life has been largely shared through the media (Wilcock, 2017; Clark, 2019).

Oliver does seem to be telling the reader about himself and his likes and dislikes. He advances his beliefs on certain topics. Celebrity chefs sell themselves as examples and guardians of a certain lifestyle (Rousseau, 2012; Johnston et al., 2014): 'a life of leisure, delicious foods, and time to cook them' according to Johnston et al. (p. 5). For the chefs, cooking is portrayed as a lovely hobby in an idealised life (Ketchum, 2005; Powell and Prasad, 2010; Rousseau, 2012, de Solier, 2013; Johnston et al., 2014), far removed from the true grind and toil that it can be for many. In the introduction to the book, written in the first person, Oliver (2005a, p. x) shares his love of Italian lifestyle and even goes as far to say that he should have been 'been bloody Italian'. He says that 'like all Italians, I love my family for better or for worse and because food has been something I've grown up around' - he feels Italian. Most of Oliver's viewers and readers trust and like him, thus allowing him to enter their household through his books and television show. 'As they enter the private spaces of the home through our televisions they encourage the audience to work on themselves, connect us to the food we eat to become 'better' food citizens in multiple ways' (Barnes, 2017, p. 176) As an authority in the field of food, he is responsible for imparting food knowledge to

those who consume his products (books, TV programmes, and other products endorsed by him). Barnes refers to the chefs as 'knowledge intermediaries' and acknowledges that there is a complex and ambiguous relationship that 'the different ways that audiences 'talk back' to chefs both positively and negatively to create moments of simultaneous possibility' (p. 169)' For some Jamie Oliver is seen as an 'inspirational' hero who wants to show us a better, cheaper, faster ways to eat and cook. For others his political discourse is irritating and has attracted negative feedback and criticism (Hollows and Jones, 2010). Still others admire him as a businessman and father. Regardless of the reasons, the public may obtain knowledge and forms of "culinary and cultural capital" as a result of their interactions with Oliver. In 'consuming' Oliver, it is possible to suggest that his followers are in fact gaining a foothold into a new habitus.

Throughout the book Oliver talks directly with his reader and asks that them to join his battles. At times he pleads with us to use seasonal and organic food, or asks that we reconsider our thoughts on animal welfare and the food industry:

we're at the top of the food chain after all. But for goodness' sake, please stop supporting these w\*\*\*\*\* s that produce cheap, tasteless food, which is more unnatural than you would ever believe (Oliver, 2005a, p. 210).

With regards to fish he asks that we 'stop putting up with sub-standard products' in order to try and push up the quality by putting pressure on the retailers. 'Let's make it happen!' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 177). He encourages his readers to join him in his personal battles. It is another way of connecting with his public and reflects his image as a moral crusader and entrepreneur (Hollows and Jones, 2010; Scholes, 2011). Oliver serves

as a 'new cultural intermediary', a term used by Bourdieu (1984) to describe the influencers of middle-brow culture. Nixon and du Gay (2002) suggested that 'these groups of workers are able to exert, from their position within the cultural institutions, a certain amount of cultural authority as shapers of taste and the inculcators of new consumerist dispositions' (Nixon and du Gay, 2002, p. 497). Bourdieu gives a lengthy list of who these influencers are, ranging from journalists to those employed in marketing and PR, to sex therapists. Taking this forward into the 21st century, we may now imagine that celebrity chefs are included on the list of influencers. They are indeed the modern incarnation of the cultural intermediaries.

The TV show also provides an opportunity for Oliver to 'talk' directly to his audience, perhaps even more so than the book. His use of rhetorical questions allows him to relate to the viewer and draws them into his reality. He points out paparazzi to us as he prepares to leave for Italy (episode 1 2005), sharing his 'life' and aggravations with us. The more Oliver relates to his readers and viewers, the more he seeks to gain in influence and power and asks for trust. He is the narrator throughout and he 'talks' directly to the camera. This gives us a feeling of connecting with Oliver and being part of his journey. We buy into his personas and perhaps even feel we are acting as a friend and confidant. He shares his moods and feelings, from doubting his career as a chef, to missing his wife and family. It is almost as though Oliver is trying to conjure an impression of friendship between himself and his viewers and readers by giving them access to very personal parts of his family life. For the viewer, this pulls on emotional strings that bring Oliver closer into our world. The audience will therefore 'buy into' him, literally and figuratively and allow him to become an influence on our lifestyle and tastes, perhaps by attempting to emulate his life through the execution of



his recipes, the purchase of his books or the viewing of his TV shows and by becoming loyal to brand Oliver (Abbotts, 2015).

### 7.13 The foodie discourse

Being a foodie is part of a complex link between behaviour, self-identity and social identity (Getz et al. 2014, p. 6). Identity and social identity theories (Benckendorff and Pearce, 2012 in Getz et al., 2014) suggest that food has become a marker and that foodies build their identity through their knowledge of culinary trends and experiences (Johnston and Baumann, 2007, 2009, 2015). Foodies have a strong sense of being the keepers of what is good and what is not. This can be expressed through conspicuous consumption and through their overarching knowledge of all things food. In a discussion around what antipasti (translated as starters, author's note) are, and how they fit into an Italian meal, Oliver refers to elements of seasonality stating: '...antipasti can change and adapt to whatever is in season' and 'Real cooks only champion local, seasonal, fresh produce' (Oliver, 2005a, p. 2). As highlighted in the literature (Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012), seasonality is widely regarded as one of the important characteristics in the foodie world. One could therefore conceive that Oliver is 'speaking' to those who love food and have developed an identity around food (Getz et al., 2014). It could be assumed that these are the very ones who would be buying his books and watching his TV shows as a matter of course. The foodies acquire culinary capital to shape their identities and reflect a certain set of values (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012) and will seek to use the celebrity chef to do so. The ability to name drop or display mastery of a recipe will enable the foodie to showcase their expertise. However, there appears to be

competing and contradictory discourses at work here. On one hand, the discourse on foodies reflects notions of democracy by championing inclusiveness of both high-brow and low-brow tastes and progressive values. On the other hand, it also points towards snobbery and exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984; Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Getz et al., 2014). The fact remains that foodies value food and related activities very highly and that they are at the centre of their identity and lifestyle. One should therefore question where Oliver, and other celebrity chefs, lie in these seemingly contradictory discourses. The celebrity chefs can attract the foodies and perhaps use them to act as their 'ambassadors'.

#### **7.14 Chapter Summary**

Previous analysis of Oliver has centred on his role as a public pedagogue and moral entrepreneur and characterised him in terms as a metro-sexual. This chapter reveals a more complex persona that brings together different facets of his personality as a chef, lifestyle guru, father and contributor to public discourse around healthy eating. In the book and TV series, he strives to maintain the authenticity of Italian cuisine and takes readers and viewers on a trip through Italian culture and lifestyle. He gives access to representations of his food, and of his life, through personal narratives and contributes to the foodie discourse by speaking to those that frame their identity around food.

## CHAPTER 8 – GORDON’S GREAT ESCAPE (INDIA)

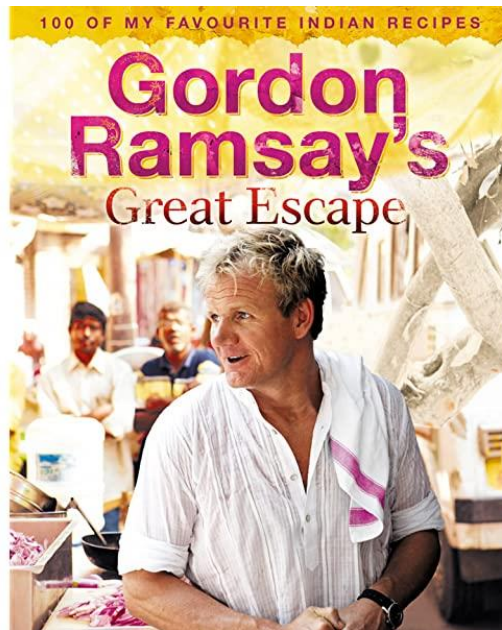


Image 6 – Cover of Gordon Ramsay’s Great Escape (Ramsay 2010a)

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter will be based upon the first series of the *Gordon’s Great Escape* TV show and associated cookbook and the three episodes of the show filmed in India. These were part of a two-element show with seven episodes in total (series 2, with four episodes and its associated cookbook, was filmed in South-East Asia and will not be discussed in this chapter as they are a separate show and book in their own right). The Indian part of the show was aired on Channel 4 on 18, 19 and 20 January 2010.

## 8.2 Background on the book and the TV show

The premise of the TV show was that it gave Ramsay the opportunity to escape from his everyday life and to try and reconnect with his love for cooking after having had a few bad times in his personal and professional lives. This is Ramsay's first trip to India and he sets the scene by proclaiming his love for curry, albeit a UK version of it, as he seeks to find "the real recipes" through his travels across India (Mangala Express (Ep.1), Northeast India (Ep.2), Kerala (Ep.3) 2010). The TV programme falls under the tried and tested 'tour-educative' genre where the celebrity chef travels to an (exotic) location, meets and cooks with the locals and goes back home with lessons learned (Strange, 1998 in Phillipov, 2017). Jamie Oliver and Rick Stein, amongst others, have also used this genre to develop their outreach and commercial operations and expand the type of programme with which they are associated. In addition to catering to a larger audience, they gain recognition for different aspects of food and cooking, thus enhancing their professional credibility.

Ramsay crosses India from North to South looking for the authentic versions of his UK favourites and discovers new ingredients and techniques on the way. In the first episode he arrives in Delhi and meets with a local food writer and critic, Seema Chandra. She 'educates' a novice Ramsay in the ways in which he can discover the intricacies of Indian food by travelling into the more remote areas and interacting with people in their homes. He starts quite submissively and tentatively, happily taking advice and tips, and sets off to cook with the catering team onboard the Mangala Express train to Lucknow. In Lucknow, he is introduced to a local 'celebrity chef' and cooks a biryani for a wedding of over 500 people. He then travels to the remote tribal

area of Bastar where he discovers the cuisine of the Deruba tribe and their very special ant chutney. His next leg takes him to the desert of Rajasthan where he meets a local maharajah, Prince Bozo, before heading back to Delhi to cook for Seema's influential friends.

Episode 2 begins in Kolkata where he meets local foodie, Nondon Bagchi, who prepares Ramsay for the next part of his trip into India's remote north-east territories where he stays with a local tribe, once renowned for head-hunting. He is welcomed into the tribe and participates in their traditional deer hunt as the guest of honour. He then travels to Assam; first to Majuli Island where he is astonished to learn that the local food is cooked without the ubiquitous spices and powders widely used in India but rather with fresh local ingredients. Following that, he takes part in a local cooking competition to determine the best homemade Assamese dishes. Finally he heads back to Kolkata where he brings the recipes he has learned from the Northeast to the streets of Kolkata.

The final episode opens with Ramsay beginning his southern travels in Mumbai with the assistance of a local food critic and restaurant guide. He starts in Tamil Nadu where he visits the famous Guru, Jaggi Vasudev (known publicly as Sadhguru), in his ashram, and discovers the prominence and importance of vegetarian food. Here he attempts, and fails rather comically, to engage with more spiritual activities. He then heads to the southern state of Kerala to eat fish curry and drink todi, a local speciality. He finishes his trip in Mumbai where he applies what he has learned when cooking for the rich and glamorous at the famous Taj Mahal Palace Hotel.

Although this series is very different to his other shows such as *Hell's Kitchen* or *Kitchen Nightmare*, there remain underlying references to the ambitious and competitive image that has been constructed in previous programmes. This is evidenced through Ramsay's bantering comments throughout the series where he refers to his own spirited streak and makes a few snide comments aimed at UK food critics. Throughout the series he behaves 'badly', that is, in a way that is sometimes aggressive, bellicose and belittling, in the performative ways we have come to expect of him as an audience. One senses that the producers have wanted to keep up his 'bad boy' image. Higgins et al. (2011, p.502) referred to this as 'belligerent broadcasting' where one sees 'a move in recent years to stage increasingly aggressive, and sometimes violent, forms of verbal confrontation'. As a result, although the viewers can be tempted to believe that they are having privileged access to the chef, one must remember that his performance is most likely highly staged and scripted to ensure that the expectations of the TV audience are met.

The associated cookbook, published in 2010, follows a standard format with an introduction, glossary and recipes organised in seven chapters. The introduction describes his travels around India and includes references to the TV show. The book is illustrated with a number of professional pictures, both of the dishes as well as shots from his travels and from the TV show. The recipes are very much adapted to the British palate as well as to the availability of ingredients in the UK. For example, the amount of spice and spicy ingredients is measured and toned down to meet UK domestic tastes. Ramsay suggests that some spices are optional to dishes as they

give a taste that is not common such as the use of asafoetida, a bitter powder used to 'fight off indigestion and flatulence' (Ramsay, 2010, p.25). Some Indian ingredients have been replaced as it is not possible to source them in UK (Karimeen fish from Kerala for example). Most of the recipes are relatively simple to execute. Each recipe has a short introductory paragraph setting the scene, followed by the ingredients and the detailed method of execution. The style is straightforward and instructional, and the book is clear and concise.

### 8.3 Persona and reputation

Gordon Ramsay is one of the most renowned UK celebrity chefs and certainly one of the most international, with business interests around the world. He is particularly notable for his explosive and fiery personality as well as his foul language, both of which are heavily exploited by production companies keen to give viewers the 'Ramsay Experience', effectively promising potential viewers that they can expect more of Ramsay's four-letter outbursts. He adopts a completely different persona in his home-cooking shows, where he takes a much gentler approach. In a 2010 interview Ramsay describes himself as 'a crazy fucking psycho' and goes on to say that:

There has come a time when, at the age of 43, I'm getting a bit tired of the foul-mouthed bully chef. But I've never tried to get the Great British blue-rinse nation to start falling in love with me. I don't want a radical change where I have to put a woolly hat and scarf on and go round every Women's Institute and improve their Victoria sponge or show them a much better recipe for spotted dick (Garfield, 2010).

Garfield suggests that Ramsay's swearing 'has limited and expanded his audience in equal measure'. The episodes of the TV show all come with a warning of 'strong

language from the start – not suitable for young children’. There are a number of sequences where his explosive personality can be seen: when he is given a lesson about vegetarianism and healthy eating by Sadhguru and comments: ‘Eating meat makes you bad tempered? What a load of bollocks!’ (Ep.3) or when he stomps off into the desert and sulks when given a menial task to complete by his local host, Prince Bozo, and then demands to be begged to come back: ‘say please’ he repeats (Ep.1). In another sequence in Kerala, Sadhguru makes fun of him as he leaves the ashram and says, ‘he’s gesticulating much less than yesterday’. Equally, Ramsay is often self-deprecating which may hint at a more self-aware identity existing alongside the explosive screen persona.

Giousmpasoglou et al. (2020) suggest that violence and aggression are part and parcel of the professional kitchen and Ramsay often displays this type of behaviour, perhaps in line with his classical training. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Auguste Escoffier, the influential French chef of The Savoy Hotel and former army chef, developed the modern kitchen brigade system, based upon his observations of the military. There is a strict hierarchy in the kitchen, especially the classic ones where Ramsay was trained. The top position is the *chef*, followed by the *sous-chefs*, the *chef de partie* and finally the *commis*. Each *chef de partie* is responsible for their section of the kitchen and a specific task. It is very much a command-and-control organisation where bullying and humiliation are rife. These kitchens are places where the individual is stripped of his/her previous behaviour patterns to assimilate and conform to those of the brigade. This is where Ramsay received his training and may be the source of some of his behavioural traits.



Cooper et al. described the 'occupational culture' of kitchens as places where:

Chefs in the early stages of their career would tolerate mistreatment and abuse, as the opposite would imply weakness. The process of occupational socialisation and induction to the occupational culture is long and painful, but this is considered by many well-established chefs as the only way to advance in the culinary profession as a Michelin-starred chef (2017,p. 1371).

Yet he was not always this aggressive person and has eaten humble pie. In his autobiography he talks about his first day working in Paris at Guy Savoy (a two Michelin star restaurant) where 'I'd never felt so remote, so far removed from anywhere in my entire life. Everyone was ignoring me. Even the kitchen porters had no respect for me. On my first day, somebody nicked my socks.' (Ramsay, 2007, p.99). Despite this, he has parlayed his now recognisable behaviour into a distinctive screen persona and performance. Ramsay himself says: 'As it is in Ramsay's world, the knives are out' (Ep.3) perhaps in reference to some of his other more bellicose television shows as well as to the general conduct we have come to expect of him.

However, Ramsay does fight back with regards to his television persona and in his autobiography says:

There's a big percentage of people out there who've seen me on the TV and who think I'm an arsehole. I was once ranked alongside Chris Evans and Mohamed Al Fayed in a shitty, downmarket ITV show called *Britain's Unbearable Bosses*. That's fine: the people who come up with this crap have never worked for me, and obviously haven't bothered talking to anyone who has. I don't give a damn if some dental hygienist comes up to me and tells me that she would never tolerate my behaviour from her boss – or behave in a similar way to someone in her employ. Kitchens are not like other workplaces. People who've worked with me, and who have survived, love it. I'm not speaking on their behalf – but ask them, and you'll see that I'm right. What they get from me is brutal honesty, and that's paramount (Ramsay, 2007, p. 195).

Off screen, Ramsay has been categorised into other 'personas'. According to Johnston et al. (2014), he falls into the 'chef artisan' category described as follows:

The chef-artisan persona firmly occupies the world of professional cooking and fine dining. Chef artisans are exemplars of culinary success. They are formally trained and associated with one or more successful high-end restaurants (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 13).

Bell and Hollows give him the title of 'vocational expert' (2014) whilst Scholes describes him as 'uber-macho' (2011). Certainly, Ramsay's professional and personal credentials fit these categorisations and his television and other appearances strive to maintain these images. These different aspects of his personality allow him to connect with diverse types of audiences. He does attempt to maintain his 'bad boy' image as a matter of course, which could be construed as a commercial strategy. Whatever the image, it is clear that his professional background is always at the forefront of his books and shows, which indicates that this is perhaps the first and foremost aspect of his 'real' personality.

Traditionally, the kitchens (and front of house) in the fine dining sector have been male dominated. Ramsay is most certainly the epitome of the masculine chef who displays stereotypical gendered, and possibly problematic, behaviour as seen in some of his famous television shows such as *Hell's Kitchen* where gladiatorial spats and insults are the highlight of the shows and ensure audience numbers. In her description of Ramsay, Scholes agrees that he has a masculine attitude to cooking. She suggests that 'the persona that he (and his team) have created is further evidence of the negotiation between macho masculinity and the constant threat of symbolic castration

that assaults a modern man in the kitchen' (Scholes, 2011, p. 51). While professional kitchens are male dominated, domestic kitchens continue to be predominantly run by women. Consequently, it is vital that men working in kitchens continue to demonstrate their masculinity in order to distinguish themselves from traditional roles of women who cook at home (Leer, 2018). Examples of Ramsay's, and his producer's wish to foreground his masculinity, are displayed in the TV series where he engages in a hunt with a local tribe or attempts to dangerously copy a local tradition and 'water-ski' behind buffalo in a paddy field (Ep.3). In this later scene, he very much enjoys being cheered on by the locals and appears to be totally in his element. The on-screen evidence suggests that Ramsay likes acclaim and does not like to be 'made small'. He does not hesitate to belittle others when put in a situation of inferiority. In the TV series he lashes out when he is made to look like a fool for not being able to climb up a tree or being given a rickety bicycle to ride.

Swearing is present through the TV show, another signature Ramsay trait. Ramsay displays his usual explosive self in a number of sequences. When he is with Sadhguru in episode 3 discussing vegetarian food he says 'I am not f\*\*\*ing Amy Winehouse's husband! I am not checking into rehab!' In another sequence he characterises doner kebabs in the UK as 'pieces of shit on a stick' (Ep.1). The swearing accords with the image that we have of Ramsay (and that the producers want to maintain) and perpetuates the aggressive and 'laddish' culture that is present in some professional kitchens where physical and psychological bullying is rife.

## 8.4 Gender

Although there are no explicit references to gender in the TV series, there appears to be an imbalance between the men and women that Ramsay meets. Most of the local people Ramsay interacts with are men. All the chefs are men whereas the women he meets are either food critics or associated with domestic rather than professional cooking. For example, in the second episode in Assam, he enters a cooking competition with local housewives. This sequence plays upon a rather stereotypical and gendered image of the domestic aspects of cooking versus the professional ones. Scenes with men are far more prevalent - from the very first encounter with the catering team on the Mangala Express, to the closing scene with the executive chef of the Taj Mahal Hotel. Herkes and Redden (2017, p. 126) noted that 'Women feature heavily in traditional instructional cooking television, while men are more prominent in entertainment/leisure-based cooking shows, avant-garde cooking and gastronomic tourism that combines adventure and food discovery.' This gender association does, however, reflect the reality of the sector in India, and in numerous other countries, where women predominantly cook in the home while men cook in restaurants.

Competition and confrontation have been central to the image and culinary modus operandi of Gordon Ramsay, from his earliest media appearances. Whether in the achieving of plaudits such as Michelin stars, stoking antagonisms in TV food competitions, or in the many carefully chosen story segments where he 'takes on' a local expert or other challenge, the prevailing assumption is always that Ramsay is

striving to be the best, or, more pointedly, 'to best others'. This is expressed in different ways such as when he is bullock racing in Tamil Nadu or when he joins a local home cooking competition in Assam, where he appears rather surprised not to win (he comes second), as through this was a given. Ramsay's reputation precedes him all the way to the ashram in Tamil Nadu where Sadhguru piques him about his reputation and suggests that if Ramsay stopped eating meat he would be 'calmer and more at ease' to which Ramsay retorts that 'I am calm'. The guru responds: 'I don't think the world thinks so, about your calmness' (Ep.3). Ramsay himself also acknowledges his own fiery personality and reputation. When he is cooking biryani for a wedding in Lucknow with a famous local chef he says that 'he's like me, he's a control freak...Imtiaz has a bigger head than me' (see picture below). In the closing sequence of the third and last episode, when he is cooking in the kitchens of the Taj Mahal hotel with the executive chef, he comments that there is 'No place for second best...when you get two big egos in one kitchen there is bound to be a bit of rivalry' (Ep.1).



Image 7 - Chef Imtiaz instructs Gordon Ramsay (Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape India, 2010b)

At times, Ramsay is arrogant and derogatory in his dealings with local people. At the wedding in Lucknow, in his first week in the country, he argues with one of the guests who dares to say that his food lacks spice and taste. This comes across as patronising and arrogant and the woman is visibly surprised by his response to her comment (Ep.1). Seen through the prism of 'class', she may also be surprised that the 'help' dare answer back although we can assume that the sequence was prepared and staged. In Kerala, he clearly insults a local man who is half his size and weight who thankfully does not understand a word of English. In this scene, after not being able to climb a tree to get coconuts, Ramsay says: 'I hate failure'. He shakes the man's hand saying: 'you little fucker, making me look like a twat' then puts his arm around him and continues to chat (Ep.3). This image is very contemptuous and, of course, redolent of problematic assumptions about the 'other' and of non-British people's facility with English.

Ramsay presents other personality traits as well. At times, although very rarely, he shows signs of weakness. We enjoy seeing this in an almost voyeuristic way – the man is human after all and he can be likeably self-deprecating. Examples of this are found in the first episode when cooking on the train, he suffers from motion sickness and again in one of the car journeys in the second episode. In Kerala, he is overwhelmed by the spice levels of a local beef dish which have him retching. These moments of vulnerability may make him more believable and human for his aficionados. It could also be argued that Ramsay reveals signs of narcissism, as is often the case with celebrities but is also true of a number of professional chefs (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2020). Narcissism is often intrinsic to people who seek public attention and exposure (Zopiatis and Melanthiou, 2019). He is both engaging and

admired but also has negative traits such as arrogance, being self-centred, violent and overconfident (Leer and Meldgaard Kjær, 2015; Zopiatis and Melanthiou). However, it is precisely this combination that makes him who he is and the (on screen) image that he continuously maintains.

### **8.5 Ramsay's personal narrative**

Ramsay is quite aloof with regards to his personal life in the TV programme and cookbook. Where other chefs such as Oliver are keen to include family anecdotes, he divulges very little though some later-career programmes are home and family centred. Little morsels of insights into his life may serve to attract his followers. There are only a few references to his family in London. From a professional perspective, he does mention that he has gone through some difficult times. As with Oliver, Ramsay says: 'I'm escaping, escaping because the last 12 months have been pretty shitty' (Ep.1). In 2010, while he was filming the TV show, it was reported that Ramsay was close to bankruptcy and was accused of using pre-prepared food in some of his restaurants which drew fierce criticism (Garfield, 2010). Perhaps in reaction to this, he makes some sarcastic and derogatory comments towards UK food critics and one can see that there is a love-hate relationship with the British press. In the first episode, he makes side remarks about UK restaurant critics Michael Winner and AA Gill (which are totally lost on the locals). He also mentions his wife several times but more in tongue-in-cheek comments rather than giving any information about his personal life. This is also true in the cookbook which does not give away much more than a few of his personal preferences in the introductions to the recipes and in some of the narrative at the beginning of the book.

Whilst her study focuses on celebrity chefs' websites, Cesiri (2019) puts forward an interesting analysis of the introductory paragraphs that precede recipes and suggests that, despite the fact that these may not be written by the chefs themselves, they must nevertheless be taken as an expression of what the chefs represent and the messages they wish to convey around their personal and professional lives. These little paragraphs give astute morsels into the chef's likes and dislikes and offer advice on different aspects of the recipe itself. Although largely instructional, these are some examples from the book:

- Tandoori food....are best cooked in the traditional hot, domed tandoor oven to create a smoky flavour, but for domestic cooking a griddle pan, barbecue or a searing hot grill can be used to create similar results (p. 35).
- (Prawn koftas) I like them as a substantial snack (p. 44).
- For a less greasy finish I'm using fresh tuna, which tastes fantastic in the hot and spicy sauce (p. 84).
- (Chicken biryani) This dish is fantastic for a weekend lunch, and any leftovers taste just as good the next day (p. 188).
- Naans are traditionally cooked in an authentic tandoor, although you can achieve a good result in a domestic oven (p. 192).
- These stuffed naans are one of my favourite Indian breads (p. 193).
- For a lighter and healthier version, I've reduced the amount of butter and cream in this recipe, but do try not to leave them out completely as they help to blend the flavours of the dal and give it a creamy texture (p. 207). (Ramsay, 2010)

Here the chef can be seen to be sharing his tips and likes. Perhaps this makes the reading of the book and the execution of his recipes extensions of his knowledge and allows the reader to display 'good taste'. If Ramsay says this is the way to do it then we should believe him and attempt to emulate his cooking and therefore, perhaps, touch a bit of his magic. The choices that the readers make to follow his tips may allow



them to display their own culinary skills and know-how. Perhaps, by extension, these readers also assimilate some of Ramsay's 'culinary capital'.

## 8.6 Class

There are both explicit and implicit references to class, wealth and poverty in the TV show, less so in the cookbook. In the opening sequence of the first episode, when he first arrives in India and looks out of the window of the taxi from the airport, Ramsay is surprised by the levels of poverty he sees in the streets of New Delhi. It is interesting to note that in the TV series, he interacts much more with everyday people but cooks for the well-to-do. In the introductory chapter to the book, Ramsay says 'I knew the real Indian food was not to be found in fancy restaurants and hotel eateries; instead I had to travel the country and eat as ordinary Indians do, regardless of caste, class or religious differences' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 11). These all point to issues of class and caste, and although laudable, one must remember that Ramsay is accompanied by a film crew at all times and that his 'encounters' have been carefully staged and edited for the purposes of the show. In the first episode, when he arrives in Lucknow after having cooked with the catering team onboard the Mangala Express train, he mentions that: 'Everything was cooked freshly – cheap, cheerful – even the poor eat like kings because it's delicious' (Ep.1). Perhaps he is giving a little credit to the Indian way of life.

He goes on to comment on the 'sheer contrast of wealth and poverty' in the streets of Delhi as well as on the 'beaming smiles' and learns that 'even the very poor will find a way to eat well with cheap but delicious meals' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 11). Ramsay praises the skills of the staff working on the train 'for an equivalent of £110 a month,

the chefs work 10 hours a day, 6 days a week in the most challenging of work environments' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 16). There are also references to what can be understood as middle-class activities such as hosting dinner parties as shown in the Rajasthani desert sequence where Ramsay cooks for local royal Prince Bozo's dinner guests. He says: 'After cooking with some of India's poorest people, I am now off to learn a desert recipe with some of its richest' (Ep.1).

Putting things into context, Ramsay comments that 'Many homes have servants or mothers and grandmothers who prepare fresh, delicious meals for the entire family three times a day' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 14). It should be noted that even modest middle-class families commonly employ staff in India. In another reference in episode 3, Ramsay discovers 'toddy shops' which he describes as 'Kerala's version of the working man's boozier'. He also refers to these same shops in the book: 'a toddy shop is a scaled-down Indian equivalent of our local pub' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 101). For the purposes of his audience, he is always bringing things back to UK examples and references.

Explicitly, there are several sequences where he is interacting with the upper class. Class and caste systems remain very rigid in India and the habits of the upper-class people he interacts with are those of the privileged. In the first episode, when he meets food critic, Seema Chandra, who sets him off on his first week of travels, this culminates in Ramsay cooking for her discerning friends when he returns to New Delhi.

The maharajah Prince Bozo is also an example of his encounters with the upper echelons of Indian society.



Image 8- Ramsay cooking for Prince Bozo  
(Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape India, 2010b)

Amusingly, he is rather humiliated by Bozo who considers him 'good below stairs material' (Ep.1). It is perhaps not a coincidence that Ramsay describes cooking 'an Indian feast for the 25 high-society guests' (Ramsay, 2010, p. 23) in the kitchens of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel as the culmination of the trip. Conceivably Ramsay feels more at ease in this environment, with this type of high society where he can display his classic French culinary skills whilst showing off his newly found Indian skills and blend the two to please his patrons and gain praise. He is within his comfort zone of haute cuisine. These patrons will also have the 'cultural capital' to enjoy his food fittingly. It could be suggested that his meetings throughout his travels may have only served to give him this final prestige and recognition in a context that is, perhaps, more 'international jet set' than vernacular Indian.

Logically the cookbook and the TV series overlap as they are planned to do so from a commercial perspective. In the recipe presented in the book for spiced pan-fried chicken (which he cooks for Chandra's friends), he comments that:

I wanted to cook her and her friends something special but there was no point in cooking an authentic Indian meal since she can easily get that every day. This dish is a result of what I learned from that epic trip, with one or two European cooking tricks thrown in for good measure (Ramsay, 2010, p. 109).

In the TV series, he discusses this same recipe and comments that: 'I passionately believe that food is an international language and I'm going to use it as my passport to discover India's gastronomic delights' (Ep.1). Leer and Meldgaard Kjaer comment that:

he maintains an authoritative position for himself through his hierarchical distinction between Indian cooking and Western cooking, where the untouched Indian cuisine needs to be touched by Gordon to achieve a quasi-equal status (Leer and Meldgaard Kjaer, 2015, p. 324).

This may suggest that, despite his exposure to several weeks of 'the real India', he retains his pretentious and elitist attitude to Indian food, requiring him to put his touch on it to make it palatable. Again, Ramsay emerges as the consummate professional, rather than the 'rookie' he started out as at the beginning of his travels

This sentiment is also expressed when Ramsay appears to denigrate the locals and considers that his expertise is far superior to the practices he has learned from them and that he has nothing more to be taught (Piper, 2015). Scenes with the executive chef of the Taj Mahal hotel for example, are clearly intended for a certain type of public as some of the references will be lost on anyone not familiar with haute cuisine. There

are several instances when Ramsay has attempted to teach the local chefs a lesson. By wielding his 'culinary capital' Ramsay could be seen to not only re-affirm his superiority as a professional chef, but also, perhaps, suggest that his food is best enjoyed by a certain elite that is able to appreciate the finesse of his cooking. Piper refers to the 'cultural interpretation of cooking' (2013, p. 42). Ramsay belongs to the culinary elite and therefore should be accepted as a recognised tastemaker by his diners. However, there is some balance in these views as, in another episode, Ramsay is very modest and cooks for, and with, the poor in the streets of Mumbai and Delhi. The book shows him beaming in pictures with the locals. In these scenes he is very keen to cook food that pleases the locals, using the spices and ingredients he has gleaned during his travels. He seeks their approval, watching them closely as they taste his food. Nonetheless, the obvious questions of caste and wealth are not addressed in any depth in the TV show.

### **8.7 Tradition and Authenticity**

Johnston and Goodman suggested that 'food celebrities are paradoxically authentic and aspirational' (2015, p. 212). Food celebrities want to show themselves as "real" people. 'They work to make ordinary the extraordinary food cultures they construct in the mass mediated foodscape' (Johnston and Goodman, 2015, p. 212). From the onset, Ramsay (2010) sets out to find 'real Indian food'; to find the 'real' versions of UK favourites; how things 'should be made'. He uses these terms repeatedly.

This may be the first time Ramsay has approached Indian food from the perspective of a novice. He describes his understanding of Indian food from the perspective of the

British versions of Indian dishes that he has been exposed to since childhood. At the beginning of the TV series, Ramsay appears humble in saying that he knows nothing about Indian food:

I love Britain's favourite food but I'm no expert in cooking it...visiting India for the very first time on my own culinary adventure.

I'm going to discover how curry house classics should be made.

In a way, I'm looking for sort of, the unheard of, authentic Indian food and something that's never been seen on any menu, Indian menu anywhere in the UK. Food and dishes that we have never even read about.

I want to find out how the curries we enjoy at home should be made.

My issue is that we are doing it wrong.

(Ep.1)

In the book he says that:

I thought that I knew quite a bit about Indian cuisine. How wrong I was! I had never been to India before this trip, and what little I knew about the country and its food was based on general stereotypes and preconceptions (Ramsay, 2010, p. 11).

Ramsay promises to 'roll up my sleeves and get my hands dirty' in order to understand what Indian food and cooking is all about (Ramsay, 2010, p. 14).



Images 9 and 10- Ramsay cooking in the streets of Mumbai  
(Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape India, 2010b)

In the introduction to the cookbook, Seema Chandra says that:

Real Indian cooking is found on the streets and in family homes...This emphasis on traditional home cooking means that recipes have been passed from generation to generation and have seldom been well recorded (2010, p. 14).

Chandra acts as the imprimatur of authenticity and serves as a guide to introduce the novice Ramsay to his first Indian adventure. She frames things so that he can navigate the complexities of Indian culture as it is embodied through its foods. In the show,

before heading off on the first leg of his trip, she warns him that 'real food is not in fancy restaurants' and tells him to 'stay away from touristy traps...go into people's homes, go into the desert'. Ramsay acknowledges: 'I need to go native if I'm truly going to discover how our UK favourites should be cooked' (Ep.1).

One way to show the authenticity of the food he discovers is to compare it (mostly unfavourably) to what exists in the UK. This will show his public what they should consider as the '*real McCoy*' and act as a benchmark to gauge the authenticity of what is eaten back in the UK. Through Ramsay we are seeing how 'real' Indians eat and we are 'in the know'. Readers and viewers can display their foodie inner self and culinary *savoir-faire*. This is where the celebrity chef also plays a role as a 'public pedagogue' and educator (Gray et al., 2017). For the benefit of his viewers, Ramsay compares the food he is discovering to the UK versions of the dishes which, he acknowledges, are far from authentic. 'Each week we Brits eat 3.5 million curries, but they're nothing like the real thing' (Ep.1). This unflattering comparison of UK Indian food with his new-found knowledge of authentic Indian food is referred to several times in the TV series where he berates the UK versions which he now understands to be sub-standard and adapted to the UK palate.

India is a revelation to Ramsay. On the Mangala Express train, when he tastes the curry served onboard, he comments: 'If I take you on a train from London to Manchester I'd give you a burger cooked in a microwave that tastes like dogshit' (Ep.1). He praises the skills and the quality of the food cooked by the catering team. In Lucknow he notes that: 'The original korma is a totally different dish from the British



version' (Ramsay 2010, p. 19). Zopiatis and Melanthiou highlight that 'the consumption of celebrities' is reliant on their followers to find similarities with them (the chefs) and that they then may be open to 'observe, learn and emulate them' (2019, p. 544). UK readers and viewers will recognise the 'Friday night curry' that Ramsay refers to (Ramsay, 2010, p. 11). This may suggest that if individuals 'buy into' the celebrity chef then they may be open to receiving the messages he/she is transmitting and therefore recognize the role of the chef as an accepted expert and synonym of 'good taste' (Cousins et al., 2010; Abbotts, 2015).

The discourse around 'real and authentic' engagement with food is well recognised. Movements such as 'slow food' and the search for food from the 'terroir' are not new (Gunders, 2008). Clearly, socioeconomic standing and prior knowledge of food, or being a self-proclaimed foodie, will have an influence on the perception of authenticity. Kennedy et al. argue that: 'The taste preferences of the highest status consumers are associated with culinary sophistication and moral considerations and are obviously linked to cultural capital' (Kennedy et al., 2018, p. 1). This is applicable to Ramsay's Indian adventures insofar as he presents, and perhaps compares, the food of the poor, what in Italy is aptly known as 'la cucina povera', with the culinary sophistication of his Taj Mahal guests. This and other references are representative of the dichotomies of rich/poor, professional chef/home cook, authentic/un-ersatz, that are presented throughout the book and the TV show. The ways in which Ramsay navigates these contradictions may be indicative of a post-modern shift, using the books and shows as both education and entertainment (Tominc, 2014), where the celebrity chef delivers 'food porn' in various forms for the consumption and pleasure of the public. Bagelman et al. suggest:

that although cookbooks might promote pleasure, they are not simply happy-go-lucky reference guides. Rather, they are complex texts that play a dynamic role in shaping and contesting norms about gender, belonging, class, race, and sexuality (Bagelman et al., 2017, p. 1).

In a post-modern society, food is taken out of the kitchen and away from its association with the (mainly female) daily toil, into a world populated with celebrity chefs that deliver a venerated message of food as fun and entertainment and, in Gordon Ramsay's case, macho and competitive. As Herkes and Redden comment, 'Food preparation is also represented on TV as entertainment, leisure, adventure, and a professional pursuit' (2017, p. 126).

One expression of authenticity in India is linked to vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is an integral way of life and a widespread practice which is largely connected to religion, especially Hinduism, as well as to the caste system. Despite Ramsay's obvious dislike and distrust of vegetarianism, it is given a prominent place both in the TV show as well as in the cookbook, precisely because of the pseudo-conflict with the Gordon Ramsay persona it promises. In Kerala, there is a sequence that stages the encounter between Ramsay and Sadhguru. Initially, Ramsay has a very wary, if not outright hostile attitude towards vegetarian food. He is totally taken aback at the possibility of spending two days without eating meat as he heads to the ashram. He is fairly unpleasant when he meets the guru and makes a few sardonic comments. In the first minutes of their discussion, the guru says that eating 'vegetarian makes you a joyful, calmer person', an obvious pun on Ramsay's character. Ramsay struggles to understand the spiritual side and 'argues' with him about the morality of not eating meat. The guru maintains that 'a vegetable is as alive as a chicken' to which Ramsay answers: 'are you saying

that a carrot has the same feelings as a chicken?’ The guru responds that ‘feelings does not mean emotions. They are sensitive to life around them’ (Ep.3). As they part, Sadhguru asks Ramsay to eat vegetarian once a week as he recommends that it is good for the soul and that ‘food is not a morality, food is a question of wellbeing’.

In another rather comical sequence at the same ashram, Ramsay is swimming and flailing around in a pool that is meant for relaxation and meditation, much to the consternation of other visitors. He further displays his evident lack of knowledge of how to behave in these surroundings. Ramsay understands that, despite his reservations, there is no way around the vegetarian aspect of Indian food if he wants to maintain authenticity. After the encounter, Ramsay ‘calls a ceasefire with vegetarians’ and accepts that ‘South India is a hotbed of vegetarians’ (Ep.3). In the cookbook, when commenting on tasting sambar (a popular vegetable stew) in the slums of Mumbai, Ramsay concedes that Indian vegetarian food is ‘far superior to any vegetarian food we have in Britain’ (Ramsay, 2010, p. 23). These sequences show that Ramsay has seemingly acknowledged that vegetarian food comprises a richer and more diverse cuisine than he previously thought. In the cookbook, an entire chapter is dedicated to vegetarian recipes, giving further weight to this important aspect of Indian cuisine and way of life.

Another expression of authenticity comes at the end of the Kerala episode where Ramsay concludes his visit with the modest Deruba tribe and realises that the food is ‘All far more tantalising than the curries we eat back at home’ and ‘I realise that the curry we love and know in the UK is really only a narrow selection of the amazing

dishes India has to offer.’ Talking to camera, he concludes that ‘They (the Deruba tribe) have nothing yet they develop these ingenious techniques on how to cook delicious food; quite touching, amazing stuff’. He is seemingly humbled by these people and their way of life (Ep.1), perhaps showing a more human and empathetic side to his persona.

### 8.8 Ramsay in a post-colonial world

History shows us that Britain has had a complicated relationship with India. It could be argued that Ramsay’s quest for what is ‘true’, for the ‘authentic’ experience and cuisine that he seeks, is linked to what has been brought back from the ‘colonies.’ As highlighted by Lawson Welsh, there is an ‘emerging strand of postcolonial Food Studies’ (Lawson Welsh, 2018, p. 439) which covers issues such as how a diaspora ‘can negotiate their identities through their relationships with food’ as well as issues of ‘cultural erasure’. These themes can be gleaned from the TV show as well as the cookbook where the ‘authentic’ Indian food that Ramsay brings back is then toned down to meet the tastes of the mainstream British palate, perhaps losing some of its authenticity in the process or what Mannur refers to as a ‘palatable rendering of difference’ (2010, p. 224).

One could suggest that Ramsay, through his exotic and ‘strange’ encounters, serves to bring authentic Indian cuisine to the UK public’s front door. Where Leer and Meldgaard Kjær identify the specific ‘encounter with the *strange location* and the encounter with the *strange local*’ (2015, p. 312), they further contend that the show raises the debate around ‘Western appropriation of “other” (non-white and more

“primitive”) culinary cultures.’ They suggest that despite Ramsay’s ‘noble’ intentions, the show in fact endorses inequalities and does nothing to close the social gap between the visited and the visitor or address the fact that food and culture are appropriated to serve the purpose of the Western chef (also seen in Jamie Oliver’s foray into Italy). The same contradiction is expressed by Johnston and Baumann who argue that exoticism in foodie discourses ‘builds on and reproduces certain neo-colonial inequalities, at the same time it represents a cosmopolitan interest in broadening the culinary canon and forming intercultural connections’ (Johnston and Baumann, 2015, p. 98). Certainly, this pertains to Ramsay’s bullish behaviour during the show and his attitude towards the locals. It could be suggested that he almost forcefully appropriates their knowledge and turns it into a commercial offering, giving nothing back to the locals. Such programmes commodify the cultural patrimony of other cultures.

In her article on Indian food and culture, Narayan (1995) critiques the eating of curries by non-Indians and suggests that it may serve to replicate Western colonialist relations of power. Westerners can become ‘anti-colonialist’ by educating themselves on the complex origins of the food they are consuming and linking it to the vast cultural, religious and linguistic differences of India. This is preferable to unconscious consumption although she suggests that: ‘mainstream eaters would remain privileged consumers, benefitting from the structural inequalities and unpleasant material realities that often form the contexts in which ‘ethnic food’ is produced and consumed’ (Narayan, 1995, p. 78).

Other illustrations of this 'post-colonial' approach are shown in the obvious social and cultural divide between Ramsay (and his invisible crew) and the people he meets. As Ramsay marks his status, he further reinforces the power distance that separates him from the locals. This is shown in his choice of clothing for example. At no point does he make any effort to bridge the inevitable imbalance between himself and the peoples he encounters. On the contrary, he is not straying from his usual behaviour and language despite the locals not grasping either his humour or his mannerisms, both obviously mainly intended for the pleasure of the viewers. He is not attempting to tone down his comportment. As such, his habitual image as an arrogant Western chef comes through. This can be compared to the more sensitive approach that Oliver takes when he is on a similar journey in Italy.

Close to 90% of 'Indian' restaurants in the UK are owned and run by second or third generation Bangladeshi Muslims, reminiscent of the past when the Indian sub-continent did not have the national borders it has today and where the culinary influences were regional rather than national (Buettner, 2008).

Buettner suggests that:

South Asian restaurants and the cuisine they serve illuminate a persistent yet evolving dialectic between the rejection, and embrace, of the "other." At the same time, they call into question just what kind of "other"—or even how "other"—the cuisine is. Not only are restaurants in Britain labelled as "Indian" mainly run and staffed by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis; their dishes normally differ markedly from what is consumed in the subcontinent and, for that matter, by most people of South Asian origin in Britain. (Buettner, 2008, p. 869)

Collingham describes the advent of chicken tikka masala as the new national dish of Great Britain in 2001 as a 'heinous crime...not so much that it tastes horrid but it is not

authentic' (Collingham, 2006, p. 3). The growth in popularity of Indian food in contemporary British culture can also be linked to the growth of the Indian ethnic minority, the boom in the Indian restaurants sector and trends such as convenience eating, vegetarianism and healthy eating. These have all contributed to the increased demand for Indian food from all social classes (White and Kokotsaki, 2004). More recently tastes in Indian cuisine have moved from heavy curries to lighter more authentic dishes, almost emulating French 'cuisine nouvelle' in its refinement (Shackle, 2019). One should remember that the term 'curry' does not exist as such in India but was brought back from the days of the Raj when it was used to refer to all sauce-based dishes. We now see authentic Indian restaurants trying to distance themselves from the 'curry house' stereotype of the 1980s and their patrons showing their 'culinary capital' through their cultural awareness of India and its regional foods. This is relevant to Ramsay as he can be seen to be imparting his newfound knowledge.

### **8.9 Professionalism and legitimacy**

Leer maintains that professionalism is a core component of the Ramsay persona, noting his 'tough masculinity as part of the professional chef persona' (2016, p. 77). The role of the celebrity chef as a professional and as an expert is key to maintaining their status as tastemakers. Readers and viewers 'may not be able to eat at one of Gordon Ramsay's restaurants, or live in one of his amazing houses, but you can enjoy it vicariously on television or purchase one of his cookbooks' (Johnston and Goodman 2015, p. 8). To be able to influence readers and viewers, celebrity chefs must maintain their status of legitimacy and be seen as the ultimate proprietors of culinary capital (Stringfellow et al., 2012; Tominc, 2014). As expressed by Bourdieu (1984), the

holders of capital are the ones who set the conventions and make the rules about taste. Displaying professionalism is key to the public accepting the chef as a legitimate purveyor of knowledge and then, more broadly, as an arbiter of taste. Mentinis suggests that:

Generally speaking, chefs, both as figures of authority and experts, are discussed in terms of their importance for shaping and expressing the tastes, desires and fantasies of the middle classes, alongside acting as gatekeepers to high social status and symbolic ascension through their promotion of the consumption of particular food and food-related commodities (Mentinis, 2017, p. 128).

The link to Boudieusian theories is clearly laid out here using concepts of capital and the role of the middleclass in forming taste.

At times, the Indian adventure is to some extent in contradiction with Ramsay's usual arrogant self and shows a certain vulnerability with regards to his (lack of) knowledge of Indian cuisine. Equally, however, despite this soft side, his professionalism and expertise are never questioned. Throughout the TV show and the book, he relates what he learns back into **his** cooking and incorporates and assimilates this new knowledge into his dishes. Although at times he appears out of his comfort zone, working with ingredients and methods that he has never encountered before, he quickly integrates these new techniques into his repertoire and puts the 'Ramsay stamp of approval' on them. From the opening scenes he establishes his expertise: 'get back to what I'm good at doing – I want to cook' and he is going to show us how to do so. Examples of how he integrates what he has learned into his cooking are shown in the episodes when he returns to cook for the locals and friends of his guides and gains praise and acceptance.



Tominic contends that cookbooks are 'written recontextualisations of the TV cooking shows that reflect the content and lifestyle presented in the TV shows' (Tominic, 2014, p. 311). This can be applied to the book and series under consideration. The book reflects the TV show, notably in the introduction and in the texts preceding the recipes, where references are made to the show. TV shows are invariably and deliberately broadcast when the books are made available in the shops as they cross-promote each other and ensure commercial success. An example of the link between the show and the book is in the glossary of the book which has a long list of ingredients (although a number are substituted due to the lack of availability in the UK) and utensils that are recommended for the execution of the recipes, many of which were seen and used in the TV show.

Asafoetida....because it is not widely sold in super-markets and you would only use a pinch, I have made it optional (p. 25).

Atta/Chapatti flour...if you can't find it, use equal quantities of wholemeal and plain flours (p. 25).

Jaggery...you can substitute it with palm sugar or light brown sugar (p. 26).

Mustard oil...an acquired taste...if you can't find it, substitute it with vegetable or groundnut oil (p. 29).

(Ramsay, 2010)

### **8.10 Foodies and going local**

Foodies are those who consider food to be a central part of their identity and lifestyle. Through their knowledge of food, foodies place themselves as cutting-edge food connoisseurs (Johnston and Baumann, 2009; Getz et al., 2014). They are not only concerned with the provenance and quality of their food but also with the expertise that they display in different ethnic and local cuisines (Kaplan, 2013). Foodies

generally have high purchasing power as well as a will to display social status, making them sought-after followers of the chefs (Johnston and Baumann, 2007; Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012). However, foodies will also be critical and judgemental of the celebrity chefs and will not tolerate errors and omissions. According to Getz et al. foodies come in two categories. The first category advocates that:

...foodies are democratic, enjoying all kinds of food, and not snobbish. This is associated with the movement towards healthy eating, favouring local produce, fair trade programmes, and a preference for ecological or organic foods (Getz et al., 2014, p. 53).

The second category suggests that foodies are 'privileged, spoiled, up-market gourmets who engage in conspicuous consumption' (Getz et al., 2015, p. 53). This is supported by Naccarato and LeBesco who noted that 'certain food and food-related practices connote, and by extension, confer status on those who know about and enjoy them' (Naccareto and Lebesco, 2012, p. 3). This is pertinent to Ramsay as he, and other chefs, are most likely to try to tailor towards both categories. The foodie will be a great supporter (or not) of the chef and serve to disseminate them through word-of-mouth and social media. They will also serve to validate the chef as a consummate professional, a legitimate purveyor of foodie knowledge.

For a number of years, foodies and chefs alike have turned to using local and seasonal products in an effort to drive down food miles but also to show their support of local producers. This goes alongside a drive to eat healthily and sustainably. Ramsay develops the theme of 'local' throughout the series and book. His travels take him to rural and remote parts of India where he discovers local ingredients, cooking techniques and specialities. He learns to use the myriad of spices that Indian food has

to offer and comments while leaving Lucknow that: 'India is a country of foodies, they are very choosy about what they eat.' In his book, he comments 'every single ingredient is sourced locally, and with the lack of refrigeration there is a strong emphasis on fresh produce' (Ramsay 2010, p. 19). Ramsay is immersed into the depths of India, very much off the tourist track, and learns to use extraordinary ingredients that he has never used before, such as insects. A rather amusing scene shows Ramsay playing with the ants' nest that has been knocked down from a tree to make a local chutney, and suffering from an attack of the insects that bite him and go all over his clothes and body. He comments that he has: 'never been through so much to get one ingredient... I want to do it justice...ant chutney is rich in protein in a place where meat is hard to come by'. When he tastes the chutney he says: 'Jesus Christ it's hot, but it is absolutely delicious...I'm never going to touch mango chutney for the rest of my life'. He even refers to it as 'ant caviar' (Ep.2). This shows Ramsay as not only learning, but also as accepting and recognising these local foods as something he may be able to appreciate and understand.



Image 11 - Chakra ant chutney served by the Dhuruva tribe  
(Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape India, 2010c)

### 8.11 Cultural intermediary

Ramsay acts as a surrogate 'tour guide', taking his viewers and readers on a virtual tour of India (Piper, 2015). By extension his viewers and readers are drawn into the journey. This allows him to reinforce his credibility and spread his cultural knowledge and act as a lifestyle expert, to be admired and emulated. Although specifically focusing on Jamie Oliver, Lewis suggests that: 'Lifestyle experts continue to act as mediators of manners, morals and markets and shapers of taste as they have through much of modernity' (Lewis, 2014, p. 143). These two perceptions of the role of the celebrity chefs are similar in so far as they acknowledge the role of chef not only as a legitimate holder of knowledge but also as a transmitter of expertise, suggesting that they do in fact have an impact upon the construction of taste.

In their article on Gordon Ramsay, Soneji et al. (2015) discuss several concepts that are relevant to Ramsay's appeal as a professional. The first is self-concept clarity (SCC). SCC is defined as 'a personality variable that can make people more or less susceptible to the social environment to help clarify who they are as a person which is useful for marketers to consider when promoting their brands and products.' (Soneji et al., 2015, p. 458). People with high SCC have a clear sense of who they are while those with low SCC will be more susceptible to the influence of the celebrity in determining their choices. The authors go on to discuss that credibility and trust are key to the acceptance of the celebrity and that 'the perception from the audience that an endorser possesses knowledge, experience and skills leads to a strong sense of expertise' (Soneji et al., 2015, p. 459). This applies to Ramsay insofar as he does not appear to change his core behaviour or attitude as he moves through the relative

unknown of India. Hence, he takes the reader/viewer with him on his travels and builds up a sense of expertise and trust. By the end of his trip he has become an expert and can even write a credible cookbook that is authentic. He is demonstrating his expertise. He has become the brand that can be sold to his followers.

### **8.12 Culinary and cultural capital**

Different forms of capital, as defined by Bourdieu, are transmitted by the chefs. The most obvious form will be cultural capital, or more specifically in this context, 'culinary cultural capital'. In their discussion of TV cooking shows, Naccarato and Lebsco suggested that cooking shows 'invite viewers to acquire culinary capital by embracing the kitchen as the space in which they can create and affirm their identities' (2012, p. 42). They also acknowledge that these shows operate in a world of gender and class assumptions and ideologies. At the beginning of the TV series, Ramsay plainly says that he has no knowledge of real Indian food. As he travels the country, he realises that Indian cooking is far more complex than he imagined and it could be suggested that he acquires 'Indian culinary capital' himself which he then seeks to commodify and transmit to the viewers and readers. The TV show becomes a space where it can 'sustain its promise of access to the transformative power of culinary capital to its viewers' (Naccarato and Lebsco, 2012, p. 44).

Marked oppositions of rich and poor are a fact of life in India and can be seen in the final sequence of episode three. Ramsay first cooks in the slums of Mumbai before moving onto the finery of the Taj Mahal hotel. This short sequence shows the huge differences in class and caste that exist in India. It is also interesting to note that

Ramsay's 'guides' in all three episodes (food critics in Delhi and Mumbai and foodie in Kolkata) are all clearly upper-class as seen in their clothes and overall demeanour. One could interpret this using Bourdieu's discussions of capital. The 'guides' are displaying their own culinary capital which is expressed in the way they describe the foods of India to the novice Ramsay. Ramsay, through his own adventures, then acquires and integrates this capital himself. We know that food choices are a way to express identity, class and culture (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde, 1997; DeSoucey, 2010; Johnston and Baumann, 2015). These themes run throughout the book and TV show. One could, however, question the way in which Ramsay travels across India, and interacts mainly with 'real' (and poor) people, whilst he then goes on to display what he has learned to a very upper-class audience in New Delhi and Mumbai. There appears to be a dichotomy between rich and poor in what he is doing 'in the field' versus what he is then attempting to transmit.

Thinking of celebrity as a form of Bourdieusian capital makes clear that the celebrity's power has a material basis as well as important cultural implications. Celebrities are not simply living, breathing brands, but icons that communicate social norms, stereotypes, and aspirations for the viewing public. Food celebrities are no exception; they communicate cultural values through mediated performances on television and through their cookbooks (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 4).

This is illustrated in several ways in the Ramsay show and book. For a start, he is recognised as a celebrity and therefore has a certain degree of power and legitimacy from the outset. In terms of social norms, the TV show does not venture from the accepted gender and social norms of Indian society. Women remain largely in a domestic setting whereas men dominate in the professional kitchens. This is most likely the image that the producers are seeking to convey. Ramsay does 'his show', complete with foul language and bullying. He sticks to his persona. The cookbook has

appeal because it has the Ramsay signature on it which will suffice to give it legitimacy in terms of cultural references and authenticity. Ramsay is giving us Indian food ‘on a platter’, from the comfort of our living rooms. After everything that we have seen him go through in the (staged and edited) show, we can now be sure that he can be trusted as an authority. By accepting him as such, we are, by extension, becoming experts ourselves and accumulating culinary capital.

In terms of food choices, Bourdieu’s work provides the basis for understanding the link between consumption choices and how those choices reflect social standing and class (1984). There is undoubtedly a notion of prestige and elitism of culinary knowledge among celebrity chef followers (Baumann et al., 2019). Lamont (1992) proposes that cultural capital establishes symbolic boundaries. This is pertinent for Ramsay as it could be suggested that when his followers make choices in terms of cooking his recipes and viewing his TV shows, they are in fact making choices that display their very own tastes and culinary capital.

### **8.13 Tastes of necessity and tastes of distinction**

One of the key concepts of Bourdieu’s work on of taste (1984) is the dichotomy between ‘tastes of necessity’ (working class) versus ‘tastes of distinction’ (bourgeois). Recent evidence suggests that this continues to be the case in the UK where working-class families, from lack of access to economic and cultural capital, struggle to gain social capital. Ramsay plays with these theories in the way in which he learns from the poor and performs for the rich. He brings his credentials and culinary capital to the

forefront of his meetings with the locals in India. Although he starts his travels in a relative state of submission, he quickly regains his composure and his authority is never challenged. Perhaps purposefully, the majority of his cooking encounters in the show are with people from modest backgrounds. This is sometimes over-emphasised, for example when he cooks in the slums of Mumbai. This contrasts with the experience of cooking for the privileged at the Taj Mahal hotel, which, in his own words, he considers to be the culmination of his trip. The fact that he, as someone who is removed from necessity, interacts with those that are not, may serve to further assert his superiority. He is both an imposter in the habitus of the poor he meets as well as an established member of the elite. He takes the tastes of necessity of the poor and reimagines them into tastes of luxury for the rich. He is in effect taking modest peasant food and re-purposing it into gastro-French fare. Despite his 'noble intentions' (Leer and Meldgaard Kjær, 2015, p. 309) these encounters serve to re-affirm his power-distance and 'social hierarchy' in his favour. Arguably these encounters do also provide an opportunity to broaden Ramsay's repertoire and bring authentic Indian food to UK households. There is never any question of Ramsay making any changes to the order of things. He passes through, interacts with different people, and leaves. He does not give anything to the people he meets but he does take some of their culture and knowledge with him, adding to his own cultural capital.

It is telling that this takes place in India, a country where the gap between rich and poor is very important and the past colonial history is still present. It is easier for Ramsay to play out this dichotomy in India rather than in other countries. Only the rich in India are able to afford tastes of distinction and have the capital to express them.



## 8.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an opportunity to examine Gordon Ramsay's persona in greater detail. He is positioned a chef-artisan, recognising his professionalism and links to fine dining, as well as his stereotypical behaviour as illustrated in the displays of testosterone in some of the TV show sequences. Ramsay is more than just an uber-macho and a vocational expert. Despite his reputation and use of expletive language, he garners the respect of his peers and the public. He uses his professional credentials to ensure that his legitimacy and authority are not questioned. His derogatory and sometimes insulting attitude add to his already recognised persona, persona that has become his trademark and a large part of his popularity. The fact that he is unfamiliar with Indian cooking allows him to play with themes of class and authenticity, illustrating how he is able to incorporate this new repertoire into his existing skills, further enhancing his expert authority. There are, however, overtones of colonialism and classicism in his attitudes and interpretations of classic Indian food.

## CHAPTER 9 – CLASSIC MARY BERRY



Image 12 - Cover of *Classic Mary Berry* (Berry 2018)

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at the *Classic Mary Berry* TV show and associated cookbook. The six episodes of the show were aired between February and April 2018 on the BBC. As reflected in the title, throughout the show there is a strong focus on traditional food and recipes. Entertaining is also a central theme. Each episode lasts 30 minutes and follows the same tour-educative format (also used by Oliver and Ramsay) in which Berry showcases chosen recipes punctuated with trips through the UK and conversations with chosen guests. Berry cooks in her own kitchen and her instructions

are very clear and simple. She talks 'direct to camera' and both presents and narrates the entire show. Her modus operandi seems to be to share secrets, tips, and ideas of how to simplify life for her viewers. The recipes that are presented in the show, all of which are included in the cookbook, are filmed almost in their entirety.

## 9.2 Background on the book and TV show

Berry's image is synonymous with the classic British home cook. She is known as one of the 'mothers' of modern British TV food personalities and female celebrity chefs along with others such as Delia Smith. Berry is often associated with the middle-class milieu from which she hails. Her love of cooking is undeniable, and she has been writing cookbooks for over 50 years. The image below shows her as a young woman as well as more recently. She is one of the UK's most beloved and recognised food writers. The style of her writing suggests that she is eager to provide simple, good food to readers and viewers. Many of her recipes are straightforward and family-friendly, requiring little to no cooking experience or sophisticated equipment.



Image 13 – Berry then and now  
(Pinterest, nd)

The first episode (Ep.1) focuses on the ultimate comfort foods and classic home cooking. It starts with the list of recipes that Berry is going to showcase which include very traditional dishes such as lamb shanks; wild mushroom galette, a take on vol-au-vent, and mashed potatoes. The first recipe that is presented is eggs Benedict Florentine, another classic. We are then introduced to Swedish open-fire chef Niklas Ekstedt who only cooks using wood. The Michelin-starred chef explains how he cooks 'hot and fast, not slow and low'. While Ekstedt cuts wood, Berry builds a fire and tell us of her love for outside cooking (a theme which comes back several times in the TV show) while they discuss the joys of 'caveman cooking'. Berry is quite flirtatious with Ekstedt who is much younger than she and they share some banter. Meanwhile, Ekstedt prepares some of his specialities which Berry is initially very dubious about but ends up finding 'delicious'. Ekstedt's methods are 'totally new' to Berry yet she is seemingly open to learning new things. The episode ends with a recipe for chocolate pots.



Image 14 - Berry and (a much younger) Ekstedt  
(Classic Mary Berry, 2018a)

In the second episode (Ep.2) Berry goes 'back to school' and gets involved with Charlton Manor primary school in South London where food is grown on the premises and pupils are taught to cook as part of the curriculum. 'Children are encouraged to muck in and cook their food from scratch.' Here she interacts with two students as they choose vegetables from the school garden and cook a stir-fry for the school lunch together. The children have been cooking for years and Berry comments that 'their confidence is a joy to see.' The recipes in this episode are 'light and easy'. The show starts with the demonstration of the drop scones and kedgeree recipes, followed by chicken, avocado and bacon salad, beef burger and, to finish, lemon syllabub. The final scenes of the episode show the school lunch service with an emphasis on healthy food and variety. The children seem to be enjoying Berry's stir-fry and Berry leaves 'with a spring in my step.'

The English countryside and tradition are at the backdrop for the third episode (Ep.3). The origin of British food and a celebration of UK produce are the highlights of this episode as Berry 'travels back in time to explore our foodie past and celebrate the best of this green and pleasant land.' The episode starts with bucolic scenes of the countryside where Berry explains that 'Britain is blessed with a wonderful array of fresh produce and it's nice to know exactly where our food comes from.' The first recipe is for pistou linguine. Watercress takes centre stage next when Berry visits a watercress farm and sees how the greens are harvested. Berry tries hand-picking the cress herself which is quite a physical task. She then goes back to her kitchen and demonstrates her recipe for watercress soup. Baked salmon is the next recipe, using another very British ingredient, asparagus. Berry then joins the crew of the 'Watercress Line', a 19th-century steam train in Hampshire. She enjoys riding in the locomotive

and delivers a short history lesson to the audience. Then follows a recipe for lamb, 'a staple of the countryside.' For the first time we get an insight into Berry's private life when she tells us about her love of horses as an adolescent and describes her childhood memories of classic mint and lamb. Berry then shows us around her garden before moving on to the recipe for roasted vegetables. The episode finishes with a recipe for tarte tatin to celebrate British orchards. Berry blends typical British ingredients and European recipes, showing her 'omnivore' approach to cooking and keeping with trends.

Episode 4 (Ep.4) focuses on 'timeless' entertaining and flowers. The episode opens with Berry's version of the classic recipe for salmon gravadlax where she replaces dill with beetroot. Her guest in this episode is the award-winning celebrity florist, Simon Lycett, who is preparing arrangements for a sumptuous banquet at Leeds Castle as part of the annual festival of flowers. Simon gives Mary tips on how to compose a bouquet and Berry delights in learning as she is an 'amateur flower arranger'. Her Dover sole recipe brings back memories of when she first met her husband, 'Once you've tasted heaven you may as well stick with it' Berry says of the recipe. The episode continues with a sticky chicken recipe that she 'can rustle up from store cupboard ingredients.' The episode then moves back to Leeds Castle where a lavish banquet table is being set up. A roast duck recipe with cherry sauce follows before one of Berry's favourite puddings, Raspberry Mousse. The final shots close on the stunning medieval banquet.

Episode 5 (Ep.5) is set in Cornwall where Berry works alongside local two-Michelin star chef Nathan Outlaw and celebrates the great outdoors 'no matter what the weather'. The episode starts in North Cornwall where Berry has spent numerous holidays. The first recipe, classic French Bouillabaisse, celebrates seafood and is served with a not-so-classic rouille, 'a breath of French air'. Port Isaac is the scene for the meeting with Outlaw where they cook mackerel together by the beach and speak of their love for British ingredients. She teases Outlaw and tells him 'what best than having a Michelin starred chef to man the barbecue'. Berry heads back to her kitchen where she demonstrates her 'controversial' tortilla recipe followed by a spatchcock poussin recipe that she cooks for Outlaw to enjoy. The episode plays on an exchange of tips and recipes between the Berry and Outlaw.

Finally, episode 6 (Ep.6) concludes the series with Berry meeting traditional farmer Robert Sampson and helping him plough his field with his horse-drawn plough before sitting down to enjoy a 'ploughman's lunch'. This episode focuses again on tradition and delivers classic recipes such as prawn cocktail and banoffee pie. Berry tells us 'I want to show you some recipes that have fallen from favour but are now making a comeback.' Her prawn cocktail recipe 'was the fashion in 1966 when I first made it.' Berry acknowledges a more modern theme of sustainability when she gives ploughing a try (and she clearly knows how to handle a horse) and tells us that: 'farming like this may seem old fashioned but it can have a lower impact on the environment than using machinery.'

The cookbook follows a tried and tested format with recipes organised in seven chapters from canapés and first courses to teatime. The recipes are relatively easy to execute even for the novice cook. Each recipe closes with 'Mary's Classic Tips', a selection of practical tips from the chef herself. These tips reflect her personal preferences – for example she says: 'Even though I prefer large prawns, on this occasion tiny prawns are perfect for the recipe' (Berry, 2018, p. 32) and gives suggestions on cooking techniques 'Take care not to overcook. It's best to rest the chicken thighs after they come out of the oven to keep them moist' (p. 73). The pictures range from completed dishes to Berry demonstrating cooking techniques and plating food. Some recipes are accompanied by detailed step-by-step images. The images are of course visually appealing, yet they are simple and fuss-free. There is a general feeling of ease and almost Scandinavian minimalism throughout the book.

### **9.3 Lifestyle, entertaining and the dinner party**

A celebrity chef gives us the opportunity to observe, take part in, and aspire to their lifestyle, whether it is literal or metaphorical. In doing so, they gain credibility and commitment. One way to do this is through the TV series using all the advantages of the audio-visual format. Berry provides a glimpse of her own home as part of the series is filmed in her kitchen and garden, allowing us to gain a carefully curated insight into her lifestyle. Here we have the instructional matriarch, cooking from her kitchen and giving us lessons on how to run our family and social life and follow her exemplary savoir-faire.



Berry possesses a very middle-class perception of how guests should be entertained, dinner parties should be held, and fine tableware should be used. This image is reinforced by pictures of her serving dishes, twin sets, and pearl necklaces. As she states in episode 4, the recipes are intended as 'ideas for timeless entertaining.' Her assumption appears to be that her audience and readers are interested in entertaining and that they will use her recipes as a guarantee of success; to showcase their own cooking skills and culinary capital. Berry reminds us that 'Of course entertaining isn't just about romantic suppers. Sometimes it's a big jolly meal with lots of friends but I still like to make every effort' (ep. 4)

As we share her lifestyle, we buy into her expertise and cultural authority. On the one hand she is marked by privilege but on the other she is giving us access to a more approachable and public representation of her lifestyle, one that is presumably accessible to all her readers and viewers. She will not want to alienate any parts of her public. After all, her TV shows are aired on prime-time television. Lewis describes this as 'a good example of this growing intersection between celebrity, expertise and the ordinary' (Lewis, 2010, p. 585). The 'ordinary' in this context assures her viewers and readers that everything will stay relatable and that she is trustworthy. This is linked to her life experience and perception as a celebrity chef. She is 'one of us' in so far as we share her values. Berry explores all of these aspects in the show; guiding us through her travels, introducing us to her guests and her recipes, and ensuring our comfort throughout. She acts as a guide to her lifestyle. She wants to assure herself of our consensus with her ideas and opinions but in a gentle and motherly manner. She combines an aura of expertise and celebrity yet remains accessible and familiar.

As Stringfellow et al. (2012, p. 81) suggested, as we aspire to Berry's lifestyle, we consume the chef. 'The consumption of celebrity relies on a feeling of identification and perceived similarities, as well as making imagined connections with celebrity that forges bonds across members of a social group who share a common consumption.'

On a similar note, Mitchell suggests that:

women chefs use a rhetoric that is intended to inspire confidence in their readers, to expose them to techniques and ingredients through which the readers, too, can become poised and successful cooks, if only in their own home kitchens. Even when the authors use unusual ingredients or suggest specialized equipment, the idea is always that if the home cook follows the recipe and practices making the dish, he or she can have the same results (Mitchell, 2007, p. 529).

They both acknowledge the influence celebrity chefs have on their followers, encouraging them to emulate them. When they do so, they also identify with them and enter into their world. This is relevant to Berry as she showcases her own home and places viewers and readers in a familiar environment, namely the kitchen. She shares her favourite recipes and uses her own cooking equipment. The relative simplicity of her recipes also adds to their appeal and makes them seem less daunting. She comments:

cooking doesn't have to be complicated even when you're cooking from scratch. I have simple light ideas that are easy to make and delicious to eat.

if that's not light, easy and delicious I don't know what is (after presenting the chicken salad recipe) (Ep.2)

Throughout the series and in the book, Berry discusses her love of entertaining. Berry describes this in a variety of ways. She promises us at the beginning of each episode that she will provide us with 'Timeless ideas perfect for entertaining.' For example, in

episode 3, she says that her salmon recipe is 'something special when you're having a crowd, and you really want to take things to the next level' and the tarte tatin is 'something I would do if I were hosting friends for Sunday lunch or to use as a special occasion dessert'. In episode 4 she comments that 'I absolutely love entertaining, from planning the menu to laying the table'. A duck recipe she notes is 'such a sumptuous way to feed your guests and that spectacular tables need dishes that make a statement in themselves and this one is just the ticket'. She claims that 'the joy of entertaining is in making people happy' while her recipe for salmon gravadlax 'never fails to impress my guests.'

Dinner parties are a feature of British middle-class social life, with all their formalities and protocols. They are generally designed to impress guests although they have become more informal in recent years. Nonetheless, they remain a signifier of class status and a way of showing off social, economic and cultural capital. Dinner parties pre-suppose that hosts have the physical domestic space and resources to entertain. They remain alien and alienating for some parts of society. It could be suggested that Berry is displaying and sharing these clearly middle-class forms of capital with her repeated references to entertaining. In episode six Berry remembers her early days and tells us about her first dinner parties

..the very first dinner parties we had when we were first married. An awful lot of thought and effort went into what you were going to serve and if it was a really special occasion, without doubt it would be a prawn cocktail.

In many ways, dinner parties serve to extend and maintain social networks and to expand social and cultural capital. The dinner party provides both the host and the guests with opportunities to display their capital (Mellor et al., 2010). Due to their

inherent closed nature, they serve as conduits for the transformation of social and economic capital into cultural capital as well as vice versa. Berry's food choices are reminders of class privilege and knowing about food requires high-level knowledge. As such, cooking and the kitchen serves as a means of conveying social status.

#### **9.4 (Middle) class and capital**

Berry has often been seen as a symbol of the middle-class. Berry is an influential figure in defining middle-class norms. From the clothes and jewellery (see image below) she wears, to the references she makes, her on- and off-screen persona reflects this. Her cookbook displays her middle-class culinary capital and assumes a lot about her readers' knowledge. For instance, she presumes that her readers know the difference between a vol-au-vent and a canapé, and that they are well aware of Dauphinoise potatoes (Berry, 2018, p. 10). 'Name-dropping' facilitates differentiation between those in the know and those who are not. In the series, the food is often served on silver platters and her lemon syllabub 'deserves nothing less than my favourite Champagne glasses' (ep. 2). Depending on the viewer's and reader's culinary and foodie knowledge, these references will undoubtedly be understood differently. Despite not explicitly referring to taste at any point, she explores possibilities of an interpretation of what constitutes "good taste".



Image 15 - Berry in her kitchen (note the way she is dressed and her jewellery)  
(Berry, 2018)

There is cultural capital and economic capital at play in all episodes of the TV show but more specifically in episodes 1 and 5 of the show by the choice of Michelin-starred chefs. They both run restaurants with average meals exceeding £100 per person. Berry's choice of these chefs indicates her confidence in displaying her social capital, the capital acquired through membership in networks and associations (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital expressions like these allow Berry to be a 'tastemaker.' Only some of her audience will be able to triangulate this with any personal experience of their own but just knowing of them is a species of cultural capital.



Image 16 - Berry cooking  
(Classic Mary Berry, 2018b)

As Bourdieu demonstrates in *Distinction* (1984), 'taste' is one of the primary ways in which class is conceived, learned and shared. Various forms of capital add to this construct. Berry's mannerisms, accent, dress, choice of jewellery and very expensive Cartier watch clearly convey her cultural capital. The process of constructing 'middle classness' is one of the ways to transform cultural capital into symbolic capital. Berry achieves this through her image for example, one that has been perfectly crafted over time and that is instantly recognisable by her fans. Bourdieu further argued that only 'legitimate' cultural capital can be converted into 'symbolic capital', which is based on recognition, authority, and prestige. The legitimacy of Berry's position is unquestionable since she possesses these characteristics and more. The commercial success she has achieved also demonstrates the authority she has in her industry. Additionally, the segments with the younger and foreign chef illustrate adaptability and a willingness to encounter and learn from the new and the different, irrespective of her class position. Although Outlaw's class position is different from her own, both benefit from the collaboration.

What the middle-class sees as 'good taste' is the ultimate benchmark which remains coded and 'inherently tasteful' (Lawler, 2014). Referring to Bourdieu, Lawler argues that:

one way in which class is configured is through 'taste' – that is 'good taste' is taken to indicate an innate 'classness' (read middle-class)...What gets counted as tasteful is simply that which is claimed as their own by the middle-class people.' (Lawler, 2014, p. 142)  
what gets to count as 'tasteful'...is what the group with the power to name things **as** tasteful decide **is** tasteful (Lawler, 2014, p.146 – italicized emphasis in original, bold emphasis added).

Social class tastes are determined and reproduced by class-based habitus, according to Bourdieu. Berry displays all the correct attitudes and behaviours in both the book and the series, easily navigating through the habitus of a middle-class lifestyle. Bourdieu's analysis is useful here since it demonstrates that habitus reveals an essential aspect of one's identity, of how one behaves and portrays it. It could therefore be argued that Berry and other celebrity chefs are agents in acquiring, or aspiring to acquire, these types of behaviours. Berry's followers are ushered into a middle-class world of fine bone china and silver platters.

Even today there are still class distinctions in British society. Although class influences society in a more subtle and restrained manner, the effects of class remain embedded. Berry's TV series oscillates between various cross-sections of society in the guests she invites and the locations she chooses. It is clear that some are upper class, like the florist at the banquet in episode 4, while others are more blue collar. In this case, Berry is demonstrating both her capital and her ability to navigate a complex maze of societal norms. As Bourdieu argues, bourgeois tastes conflict with working-class tastes, where working-class tastes are characterized by 'tastes of necessity' and

middle-class tastes by refined 'tastes of luxury.' To determine what is considered "good" and "bad", the middle class uses its dominant socio-economic position as well as its capital currency.

Berry has been quoted as demonizing working-class taste in some of her comments in *Good Housekeeping* magazine regarding deep fat fryers and fizzy drinks for children (Slawson, 2016). By defining working-class practices as 'bad taste' and 'unhealthy,' Berry, and by extension the middle classes, assert and maintain their superiority through unconscious (or perhaps conscious) bias and criticism. Thus, the preservation of middle-class standards requires exclusion of the working class. Berry's guests and locations tend to cater to middle-class rather than working-class audiences. Berry serves the purpose of a Bourdieusian 'taste-maker' and social commentator in her capacity as an authority that is able to set the rules.

The omnivore theory is another concept that contributes to structure of the middle class. Flammen et al. (2017) noted that the breadth and eclectic nature of taste preferences among recent generations of upper- and middle-class individuals indicate a blurring of class-structured cultural differences. Berry's television series shows her to have omnivorous tastes as well as a wide-ranging variety of knowledge. The lavish banquet hall at Leeds Castle contrasts with more traditional settings, such as the watercress farm, the steam engine, and a traditional horse plough. Through these selections, she gives an interpretation of both past and contemporary British food influences and society, moving from the extravagant to the more mundane.



It is undeniable that the impact of social transformations of the 21st century has resulted in the levelling of class divides and boundaries in the UK. With the advent of celebrity chef shows and access to, and appreciation of, highbrow and lowbrow foods, a greater number of people now can enjoy the same popular entertainment and references. It is nevertheless true that people of different socioeconomic levels will understand, appreciate, and utilise these shows differently based on their level of capital. Low and highbrow foods are no longer exclusive to the middle and upper classes but their use continues to remain distinct based on a standardised class framework (Johnston and Baumann, 2015).

### **9.5 Empowerment, feminism and freedom - Cooking, caring and feeding**

Recipes and cookery books have emerged as crucial forms of self-expression and emancipation from men over time (McLean, 2013). Isabella Beeton published one of the first books on cooking and housekeeping in 1861. *'Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management'* is a handbook for Victorian women on how to manage household affairs. Akin to today's cookbooks, this book offered user-friendly recipes containing both ingredients and instructions. Even though Beeton hints at modernity for the times, she remains very traditional and moral and quotes from The Book of Proverbs to emphasize the fact that women must make their husbands and children happy. Although middle-class women at the time were not expected to cook, the book offered suggestions on how to manage a household and staff. In doing so, it could be suggested that Beeton empowers women by equipping them with management skills

allowing them to have a degree of control over their homes and lives. In the preface to the book she tells her readers:

I have attempted to give, under the chapters devoted to cookery, an intelligible arrangement to every recipe, a list of the ingredients, a plain statement of the mode of preparing each dish, and a careful estimate of its cost, the number of people for whom it is sufficient, and the time when it is seasonable (Beeton, 1888).

Fanny Cradock, who appeared on the cultural and culinary scene in the 1950s and 1960s, was another pioneering woman in the world of cooking. She introduced her flamboyant cooking style and Escoffier based recipes into British homes. In those days, this was quite a novelty. The appeal of the new method of food preparation she promoted was that it was inexpensive 'won't break you... is perfectly economical and won't stretch your purse'. As one of the first women at the time to delve into this new media genre, she was viewed as a strong woman who did not hide her ideas and opinions (which later led to her fall from grace). Similarities can be found between Cradock and Berry. Berry has a very clear, almost bossy presence on television. Her Michelin starred chefs get lessons from her. In the introduction to the book she stresses that she will provide advice for her readers to make her recipes approachable and that 'making one's life easier by preparing as much as possible in advance has been a long-time mantra of mine (Berry, 2018, p. 13).' This easiness could be seen to be symbolic of emancipation, giving particularly female readers some time to spend on themselves.

It has been speculated that providing food for one's family can be a form of empowerment for women (Mclean, 2003). For Berry, empowerment is expressed in

many ways. Firstly, she has a strong career that has spanned decades. She has witnessed a shift in the role of women, a change to which she has successfully adapted, reinventing herself as the times change.

By providing viewers with 'tips and tricks' Berry helps free women from the mundane daily task of food preparation and working in the kitchen. In the introduction to each episode of the TV series she tells the viewers that they will be 'saving on washing up' and that 'these dishes can sometimes seem daunting but I'm going to show you tips and techniques that make them quick, easy and simply delicious and most importantly with almost no fuss'. The recipes take 'no time at all.' She tell us that 'life is too short to make your own puff pastry' (ep.1). Episode two features a recipe for lemon syllabub that 'couldn't be easier than this and when you're short of time and you want something special, this is the one for you.'

The kitchen, food provision, and cooking have long been battlefields for feminism. According to Food Studies scholars, women's food work can constitute either power or re-enactment of subordination in the family. The kitchen can be a site of oppression for women as well as one of freedom (Allen and Sachs, 2007). The preparation of food involves mental, physical, and caring work, from planning and shopping to cooking and cleaning up. DeVault (1991) argues that women often deny that this labour does, in fact, constitute work *per se*, work for which they are not paid. This was highlighted in the 'Wages for Housework' movement that was launched in 1972. Berry takes the unpaid labour out of the kitchen and makes a living out of it. As Berry cooks from her own kitchen, one can see how she blends the material characteristics of food

with the socio-cultural aspects of providing food for the family and others. Her often-stated concern to care and nurture is evident whether she is cooking for her family or guests. In the introduction to the book she says that:

The recipes in this new collection lie at the very heart of my cooking....With their winning combination of delicious ingredients, it's a pleasure to cook and serve them as I know that they will always go down well, guaranteed to put a smile on the faces of family and friends (Berry, 2018, p. 7).

In this book you will find a recipe to suit every occasion – from classic family supper and recipes that can be made ahead and frozen to more extravagant meals for entertainingly (Berry, 2018,p. 296).

Her recipes are 'timeless recipes which will please all the family, young and old' (Berry, 2018, p. 297).

Thus, the identity of women becomes entwined with these roles both inside as well as outside of the home (Allen and Sachs, 2007). Anthropologist Carole Counihan explains: 'The predominant role of women in feeding is a major component of female identity, and an important source of female connection to, and influence over others' (1999, p. 46). She explains that:

patriarchal Western society not only restricts women's economic and political opportunities but also defines their role within the family as nurturer and food provider, a role compatible with the use of food as voice (Counihan, 1999, p. 107).

DeVault (1991) argues that food preparation is work that defines family. DeVault addresses issues of class by positing that the decision-making process to answer the question "what's for dinner?" is dealt with by working-class women through the traditions in their families, and by middle-class women by references to cookbooks

and new trends in food preparation. In this respect, women from different social backgrounds interpret their roles and influences within the household differently.

'Women are occupied in and preoccupied with food on a daily basis, irrespective of class, culture, or ethnicity (Allen and Sachs, 2007, p. 2)'. In the last 50 years, the role of women in the UK has changed significantly, with substantial adjustments made to how household tasks have been distributed, particularly in the kitchen. This is reflected in the fragmentation of work and family life where more and more women are working outside of the home. However, gender equality in the home is still far from being achieved and women continue to be the ones mainly responsible for cooking, cleaning and taking care of the family and household (Caraher et al., 2000; Bahr Bugge and Almas, 2006). With a shift in family structures, less time is dedicated to cooking as a result. The quest for convenience, which is apparent in convenience food and in technology (microwaves, freezers, kitchen gadgets, for example), has led to changes in British eating habits. The rise of female celebrity chefs like Delia Smith, Mary Berry, and Nigella Lawson may be emblematic of these changing roles. Berry often discusses convenience. She tells us that 'Classics have been updated a little to suit modern life and make them fuss-free' (Berry, 2018, p. 10).

Popular media including cookbooks and television shows clearly target women with their messages. For example, using data from *The Good Food Guide*, Warde (2009) examined representations of culinary identity. Another example is that of Matwick (2017) who studied female celebrity chef cookbooks to understand how language and gender are addressed. With her cookbook and TV show, Berry speaks directly to her audiences and gives explicit messages about the modern role of the woman in the

household. Not only is she an expert cook, but she manages everything gracefully. In a world where cooking has become almost effortless, one could argue that she is trying to set forth a new domestic role for women. Even though women traditionally do most of the work related to food in the home, they have little control over resources and little decision-making power. 'Contemporary women are in conflict: not content with their influence in the private realm, they want and need to work, yet they are still wedded to the notion that "good" women are defined by a clean house and abundant home-cooked meals' (Avakian and Haber, 2005, p. 8). Berry shows that women can be in control of their lives. Using her own language, she makes it clear how her (female) readers can fulfil all their roles. Despite this, it is evident that modern (Western) women are still subjected to conflicting messages and pressures regarding their roles both inside and outside of the home.

## 9.6 Gender

Over the years, the way in which female figures have been associated with food and cooking has changed. According to Szabo (2012), men and women cook differently, with women's cooking seen as more of an other-oriented responsibility. According to such a formulation, women cook to please other people and to provide for the health and wellbeing of their loved ones. The preparation of a 'proper meal' is another way to show care towards family members, according to De Solier (2005). Despite being under-represented in professional kitchens, women dominate domestic kitchens, and they become the principal cooks in their own homes irrespective of class, culture, or ethnic background (Allen and Sachs, 2007). In contrast, as a result of their distance

from domestic responsibilities, male celebrity chefs tend to cook for entertaining (Hollows, 2003; Swenson, 2009).

The way in which the series is filmed, with cooking sequences in her kitchen and shots of her garden in the background, draws us into a hyper-feminine and motherly world of caregiving. The overall pace of the shows is quite slow. This gives the audience the time to take in the scenes and move with Berry through what is constructed as her personal environment. Her gestures in the kitchen for example are filmed in close-up which gives the viewer a real 'cooking lesson', almost like a mother or grandmother teaching her children to cook.

Swenson looks at *The Food Network* in the USA and discusses gender roles, notably how the kitchen still remains a feminine space. She suggests that:

.. (women) with instructional programs position themselves as approachable, domestic cooks that prepare meals for friends and family members, rather than as professional chefs or artists. Despite some impressive credentials, female hosts rarely mention cooking professionally and dress in casual clothes, usually with an apron (Swenson, 2009, p. 42).

In the TV show, Berry articulates this well. She wears carefully chosen clothes (but no apron), and the show and book make frequent references to her friends and family. Both her style and her recipes are very straightforward and clear. She is a domestic cook (as opposed to a professional chef) and does not claim to be anything else. Although Berry has never claimed to be a feminist, she does challenge some more traditional gender roles, particularly those relating to stereotyped roles of older women.

Berry presents a woman who is extremely active and independent, far from the retired grandmother who cooks for her family. Despite the gender persona that Berry exemplifies, as aptly put by Gilly Smith (2020, p. 62), 'women cook for love (family) while men cook for money'. Berry and other female celebrity chefs are largely domestic cooks while their male counterparts are professional chefs. This distinction may unfortunately keep women in the shadows yet again.

Berry seamlessly steps into multiple roles, from the giver, to the carer, to the hostess, roles often associated with women. Additionally, she is not afraid to play more traditionally masculine roles, even going as far as challenging men at their own game. She challenges the heteronormative interpretation of women's roles in and out of the household. She has her 'cave man' moments with the younger chefs. Stagi fittingly refers to a 'private/public axis: whereas women who cook are tied to the role of homemaker, men are often depicted outdoors, in search of exotic and horrific tastes' (Stagi, 2013, p. 157).

It is interesting to observe how Berry interacts with the men in the show. In the series, she appears to be fearless. The third episode shows her climbing aboard a steam engine and trying to shovel coal into an open fire, and, in the final episode, she is ploughing a field with a horse. Berry shows an element of competition and one-upmanship in these shots. It is somewhat unusual not only for a woman, but also for a woman of her age, to be participating in such typically masculine and extremely physical activities. The fact that she chooses to participate on an equal basis reflects her personality. When she interacts with her two guest chefs, she clearly considers that she has much to learn from them but also that she has a lot to teach them. There



is one humorous scene where she flirts quite outrageously with her Swedish guest chef who is half her age. The innuendos are quite amusing: 'I like a little bit of sauce' she admits as they cook meatballs. As she watches the Swede build a fire, she says: 'It's a long time since I've had a man on his knees in front of me (Ep.1)'.

## 9.7 Persona

Berry's persona as an instructional matriarch has been packaged into a lifestyle brand with broad appeal (Lewis, 2010). Cooking is something she wants to teach us. A woman's cookery instruction and recipe writing serve as a means of preserving values and traditions. In her introduction to the book, Berry notes: 'While some of these recipes may seem intimidating at first glance, I have given as much guidance as possible both in the method and in any tips' (Berry, 2018, p. 13). From a pedagogical perspective, Berry teaches us not only how to cook, but how to host, as well. In episode 2, she reveals her teaching abilities while interacting with primary school students and explains that as she has spent her life teaching others to cook, she cannot think of a better place to do it than a school. Additionally, Berry's persona is heavily influenced by domesticity. She is presented as a meticulous wife, mother, and grandmother who wants to see her recipes executed perfectly. Her involvement in *The Great British Bake Off* also lends meaning to her on-screen and off-screen persona. Specifically, Casey argues that the show provides a hybrid of 'hyper domestic' and 'postfeminist' homemaking (Casey, 2019, p. 594) and that baking is an expression of 'a caring self' (Casey, 2019, p. 581). Berry plays on all of these roles and images which serves to maintain her persona. It is important for the celebrity chef not to stray too far from the persona that they have created.

It can also be argued that Berry is both a homebody and a home stylist, as described by Johnston et al. (2014, p. 7), where the 'home stylist' focuses on aesthetics and style, the 'homebody' is pragmatic and utilitarian in nature. One of Berry's concerns is getting dinner on the table quickly and efficiently. It is important to her that the daily food preparation process be easy, time-saving, and effortless. In terms of her cooking and recipes, she does not offer difficult or elaborate techniques; however, she does pay attention to the presentation and the visual appeal of her dishes. In a nod to making things easy, she tells us that: 'You'll find that many elements of even the most time-consuming dishes can be made ahead and stored in the fridge or freezer' (Berry, 2018, p. 13).

When discussing food programming, Ketchum (2006) identifies a category that she labels traditional domestic instructional cooking. This categorisation clearly applies to Berry's work. For example, some of the recipes in the cook are accompanied by step-by-step images. Her tips for lemon syllabub are very clear – 'choose an unwaxed lemon as the lemon peel is an integral part of this recipe. If you can't find one, make sure you give your lemon a good scrub under running water before use' (Berry, 2018, p.247). There is no ambiguity in these instructions and this is the case throughout the book. Celebrity chefs are not only 'experts who offer advice on how to consume properly' but also as 'cultural intermediaries who deal in questions of how to distinguish oneself through the art of living' (Bell and Hollows, 2011, p. 185).

## 9.8 Tradition

Tradition plays a crucial role in the construction of taste. For Berry, tradition is of the utmost importance. Her book and show are both titled accordingly. Often reminiscing about 'simpler' times, she recalls age-old dishes her family has passed down through generations (Berry, 2018). In her words 'simplicity is the key, reflected in our own national cuisine - some traditions are definitely worth saving whether it's recipes from the past or an old-fashioned way of farming the ingredients'. She makes a number of references to the sourcing of ingredients. When collecting herbs in her garden she tells us that 'growing your own whether in a garden or a herb box makes cooking all the more fun so in this programme I will be celebrating some of our finest produce' (ep.3). Also shown is a two-legged carrot from her garden that 'you don't see in the shops'.

In the introduction to each TV series, she states that 'So many recipes have come and gone but there are wonderful classics that are as popular as ever. Classic home comforts that will put a smile on your face.' Her tips and tricks in episode 2 show how to not have lumpy scone (pancake) batter and how to peel an avocado and cover it in lemon juice to stop it from going brown. In episode 3 we are shown how to make the perfect 'textbook' caramel. Her onion soup is a 'diehard classic I have been cooking for at least 60 years' (ep.6) that she learned to make in college, while Irish stew is one of her mother's recipes.

She will appeal to her readers with classic British recipes such as toad in the hole and leek and stilton tart. It is a clear indication of tradition that she has a chapter titled 'Teatime' in her book. While appealing to Gen Y and Millennials, she also appeals to Baby Boomers. Maintaining relevance is imperative in order to remain credible across generations. In reality, however, she is likely to be more popular with an older demographic that can identify with her references to the 1970s. She says that she is 'becoming reacquainted with old favourites from the past and discovering ways of rejuvenating them for a new generation' (Berry, 2018, p. 13). While tradition is a key theme throughout the book and show, Berry also adds a modern twist to classics, such as the vegetables she uses in a roasted vegetable recipe that are not traditionally British - courgettes, red peppers, butternut squash, aubergines, and feta. Possibly the author is trying to be of interest to a wider audience here by 'breathing new life into the old classics' (Berry, 2018, p. 10). She bemoans the passing of some recipes and welcomes 'neglected classics making a comeback' (Berry, 2018, p. 10), such as prawn cocktail, another throwback to the 1970s. Another classic is lamb - 'the go to Sunday lunch... of course, lamb is nothing without a delicious mint dressing.' Other classics like lemon syllabub and banoffee pie offer a nostalgic taste of the past. It can probably be assumed that Berry's view of cooking is very clearly influenced by her age, as it is evident from her cooking style.

Berry is happy to acknowledge the influence of food from different cultures around the world on her cooking. She assures us that 'Many of our modern British classics, some of which have been around for decades, originate in other parts of the world'. Lasagne, kedgeree, and curries are some of the examples she uses. In the TV show, she

acknowledges that: 'today we take it for granted that we can buy vegetables whenever we want from anywhere in the world. This wasn't always the case.' (Ep. 3).

One could reasonably question the authenticity of some of her recipes. Her adaptation of pistou linguine (Berry, 2018, p. 152), where she includes crème fraîche, is an example of the liberties Berry takes with traditional recipes. Berry also acknowledges that her tortilla recipe is not a traditional one: 'The red pepper is my twist on this classic, controversial but I love it and to be even cheekier I'm going to add some parsley' (ep.5). She provides a recipe for lasagne which contains ingredients such as mature cheddar cheese as well as Worcestershire sauce, both unheard of in Italy. Szechuan noodles have no Szechuan ingredients such as Szechuan pepper. There is some evidence that she has white-washed a few of the recipes to ensure that she does not alienate an audience that is perhaps less ambitious and adventurous or that might not be willing to accept anything too foreign or unfamiliar.

Berry is an adept storyteller – her books and TV shows are 'the promise of a better life in exchange for following your hero' (Smith 2020, p. 46). In the same way as other celebrity chefs, Berry has become an influencer. Influence is motivated by 'keeping up with the Joneses. There seems to be an implicit, if subtle, sense that this is a theme underlying her work. Who the 'Joneses' really are is a moveable target but by guiding us in the quest for the perfect meal or to be the picture-perfect hostess, Berry is telling us that we can in fact be that person. In accordance with Berry's gender persona, Gilly Smith (2020, p. 62) aptly expresses that 'women cook for love (family), while men cook for money'. While Berry and other female celebrity chefs are largely domestic cooks,

their male counterparts are professional chefs. Unfortunately, this distinction may be another barrier for women to break out of the shadows and fully assume their role as tastemakers.

## 9.9 Chapter summary

Mary Berry maintains her well-polished image as an authoritative, no-nonsense matriarch, providing reliable and dependable recipes and tips that are easy to follow. She is a cook who cares for, and cooks, for others. This is an important aspect of her persona. Her upper-middle class background is not hidden, but neither is it overtly emphasised. The subtle hints are there for the connoisseur to recognise. Her use of middle-class references such as dinner parties is balanced with classic and relatable family recipes. Her persona remains that of a domestically orientated cook that fulfils her gender role. She does however challenge stereotypical gender roles and seeks to empower women. This chapter shows that her persona is further defined by her embodiment of Britishness and her use of recipes from the 1970s to tell a national story. Therefore, she contributes to the preservation of British cultural heritage, identity, and tradition. A white-haired, well-dressed icon of British middle class, she is the embodiment of those values.

## CHAPTER 10 - SIMPLY NIGELLA



Image 17 - Cover of *Simply Nigella*  
(Lawson, 2015)

### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss Nigella Lawson and will focus on the analysis of her book and TV show, both entitled *Simply Nigella*. *Simply Nigella* was written in 2015, two years after her divorce from Charles Saatchi and subsequent messy accusations of having a cocaine addiction. In this, and previous cookbooks, she discusses the emotional, therapeutic, comforting, and spiritual aspects of cooking and food.

## 10.2 Background on the book and TV show

The book is in a very different style from Oliver or Berry. A greater level of refinement and development is evident in her writing (Wilson, 2018), and her background as a writer is readily apparent. Her writing style is both engaging and entertaining. She is very friendly and conversational, and she does not hesitate when it comes to sharing her personal opinions. She is very clear that she has no time for fads and diets and when asked for a sugar-free cake she says:

I'm often – though why, I do not know – asked for diet desserts, and my response is simply “then don't eat dessert. I am not going to apologize for keeping it sweet: it is a part of life, and, further, a part that is central to the way human society celebrates, and I am always more than happy to honour that. Those who disapprove should turn away now (Lawson, 2015, p. 272-273).



Image 18 – Lawson cooking in her kitchen  
(Lawson, 2015, p. xiv)



This is both a mix of her personal style as well as a carefully and deliberately crafted persona that she has perfected on and off-screen. This tone is also employed in the TV shows - informal and chatty, conversing directly with her viewers. Most celebrity chefs have adopted this tone as well, in an attempt to establish rapport with their audiences. In order to reach out, she endeavours to normalise, or make things look routine and unremarkable. 'She literally charms us with her performance, casting a spell, a wonderland where reality and image are blurred into a simulacrum of middle-class foodie lifestyle' (Smith, 2020, p. 58). The recipes are infused with humour, nostalgia, and her taste preferences. By using this approach, she is able to remain authentic and accessible while conveying her distinct authorial persona and ideas on food and femininity (Culver, 2013). Lawson therefore plays the role she has developed over the years. She does so in order to maintain or even enhance the persona she has created, or more importantly, the one that her publicists and agents have created for her.

The book is not structured in a traditional starter-main-dessert format. The chapters are titled 'Quick and Calm – Bowlfood – Dine – Breath – Sides – Sweet – Beginnings.' Each chapter starts with a short introduction that presents the recipes and gives an insight into Lawson's personal perspectives, opinions and ideas. In 'Quick and Calm' she describes the recipes as 'simple, they are quick and they are reassuringly undemanding' (Lawson, 2015, p. 3). The category of 'Bowlfood' is introduced and framed as being about both the recipient and the recipes. Lawson positions herself as a mother and host and both the themes of family and friends are recurrent in her work. She describes the spiritual side of the recipes: 'For me "Bowlfood" is a simple shorthand for food that is simultaneously soothing, bolstering, undemanding and

sustaining' (Lawson, 2015, p. 55). 'Dine' focuses on recipes she uses for entertaining – 'This chapter may sound a bit Silver Service, but relax – I don't throw dinner parties (although she does – author's note) and I don't suggest that you do' (Lawson, 2015, p. 110). She goes on to tell the reader that she often entertains wearing pyjamas and no make-up. 'I don't do smart, I do cosy. You know all those magazine "entertaining" articles, studded with their cook-to-impress checklists? This chapter is the antithesis of all that' (Lawson, 2015, p. 110). The following chapter, 'Breathe' 'sets a 'different slower pace and yet the recipes in it couldn't suit our modern, frenzied life better' (Lawson, 2015, p. 168). 'Sides' are next which focuses on vegetables and sauces. 'Sweet' brings her back to her love of baking – 'There is something about the ushering of a cake into being that creates in me a sense of cosiness and serenity, the combination of which is the very essence of this book' (Lawson, 2015, p. 272). The final chapter, 'Beginnings' are about breakfast recipes. 'I have chosen to finish the book with this appropriately named chapter, rather than start with it, because I feel that out of endings come new beginnings, and the recipes that follow are my kitchen *carpe diem*' (Lawson, 2015, p. 347), perhaps a final philosophical reference to changes in her life.

Lawson has chosen an unconventional order to her book as well as to the chapter headings. These headings, together with the way the recipes are presented, suggest she is establishing her 'Nigella' brand. This has been her brand signature style and one that her readers will recognise. By doing so, she can distance herself from other chefs and establish her own individual style. She shares friendly diaristic moments and both her verbal and non-verbal communication serve to emphasise this branding. This also provides an opportunity to 'enliven the mundane and the ordinary' (Hewer

and Brownlie, 2013, p. 52). The tips she offers and her acknowledgement that she makes mistakes is an additional way for her to gain empathy. Her quasi-autobiographical details also serve as a connection point for her readers. She shares her philosophy of life and her love of cooking in a very personal way.

The six episodes of the TV series were broadcast on BBC2 in November and December 2015. The 30-minute episodes begin with a brief introduction and continue with Lawson preparing recipes from the book in her own kitchen. Between recipes there are shots of London as well as scenes of Lawson shopping in her favourite small (expensive, author's note) independent retailers. The images are picturesque shots of blooming trees and pretty houses as well as more familiar shots of Black cabs and well-known London sites such as the London Eye. She is peddling a fantasy side of London where everything is quaint and perfect; where everyone's relationship to the city should be as easy as hers. She seems at ease with the city, far from feeling the stress that many people may endure in their daily lives from living in a metropolis such as London. As the episodes close, Lawson can often be seen enjoying her food with family and friends on a beautifully fairy-light-lit patio. Her address to camera is coy. Hollows commented on her presentational style in 2003 where she described it as 'peppered with quips' (Lawson, 2015, p. 182). It seems Lawson has remained consistent in her signature style, possibly because it is precisely this look and feel that appeals to her audience. She dresses very casually, wears no apron, has minimal makeup and wears one ring. Soft lighting, RnB and jazz contribute to setting the scene. Lawson presents the recipes in an autobiographical way. She writes and speaks in the first person and the recipes are clearly those that she actually enjoys cooking. The

introductions to the recipes in the book are quite lengthy and often delve into personal experiences such as holidays or birthdays.

### 10.3 Lifestyle and personal narrative

One of the ways in which celebrity chefs connect with their public is by giving insight into their 'personal' lives and seeming to connect with people on an individual level. In other words, as we acquire the chefs' skills and knowledge, they are transmitting their various forms of capital, which in turn we are then able to accumulate and utilise. It is as if we are sharing their (good) taste. Their recipes and shows provide a vicarious window onto their lives.

It is obvious from the book and the television series that Lawson's lifestyle is important to her. In the opening sequence to each episode of the TV series she says:

I don't believe it's possible to live well without eating well. *Simply Nigella* is about dishes that do just that – recipes that relax and restore; uplift and enrich. I believe with all my heart that what and how we cook can make us feel better and more alive. For me a meal, however simple, is a celebration of life and life is there to be celebrated.

She briefly mentions her 'new life'. In spite of the fact that she does not explicitly state it, she is most likely referring to her life following her acrimonious divorce from Charles Saatchi two years before the book and series were published. She structures her address to viewers with repeated, yet implicit, references to these events, an account of which was readily available in the media. The viewer/reader may be presumed to have some understanding of her personal life. It is almost as though she does not

need to go into detail, as though her viewers know about it all. It is redundant for her to go into further detailed explanations. She uses this as a technique to draw in her audience, making them a part of her life, almost as a friend. She does not believe in weight-loss diets which makes her all the more approachable (Smith, 2020). She has 'settled into my new kitchen and where I am in my life right now' (Ep.1 and 2 and book). She finds cooking therapeutic and says that she 'cooked herself strong' (Lawson, 2015, p.ix). The book is of course professionally edited and photographed, and is 'a style guide to a 'better life' (Smith, 2020, p. 45). On a personal note, she says that she uses cooking and writing about food to connect her family with her reader's family and that 'you're bringing your family food into [the reader's] family, into their life, and I think it a tremendously powerful and moving thing to do' (Smith, 2020, p. 59). She tells her readers that her recipes are based on family memories, including recipes from birthday parties and other family events.

The relative simplicity of her recipes echoes the title of the book and is presented as food that can be cooked quickly and easily for both friends and family. This meets the needs of a modern lifestyle. The programme fosters a sense of intimacy, complete with shots of her cooking in her (beautiful) kitchen. In this way, we are admitted into more of her life than just the cooking segments. She is seen socialising with friends, shopping for lamb ribs at her local butcher, having a cup of tea at the pastry shop, or writing on her computer (ep.2). These are set up to be unadorned scenes from her day-to-day life. Her cooking style is messy, with the familiar sounds of the kitchen complete with chopping and banging. Yet, you never see her clean up after pouring canned tomatoes into a dish and splattering them all over. This is pure fun. She openly and with humour acknowledges her own weaknesses. She can't use a mandolin to cut

cucumbers in episode two and her knife skills are clearly domestic rather than professional. She is messy and clumsy (Hollows, 2003). Her cooking is 'all about flavour, not finesse' (ep.3). It all makes her seem more likable and draws us deeper into her world and sphere of influence. In terms of influence, it is important to distinguish between celebrity chefs that are professionals, such as Ramsay, and those that are home cooks, such as Berry and Lawson. A celebrity chef can fall into either of the two categories, each possessing a unique set of skills and resources.

Lawson's cooking is set against her everyday life. She does 'not feel the need to apologize for using jars of chargrilled peppers' (Lawson, 2015, p. 244). Her Old Rag pie demonstration in episode 3 is presented as 'the relaxingly slapdash work of mere moments' while squid is proffered in seemingly casual terms as 'sensational and so easy to make.. joyously easy-going' – five spice powder is used 'lazily and easily'. If little shortcuts are permitted for her then they are more than acceptable for her readers. She invites the audience into her intimacy. In this way she remains accessible and therefore we buy into her persona. Her enthusiasm makes everything look easy.

'But part of the balance of life lies in the understanding that different days require different ways of eating. A life that banishes sweet things is not a balanced life but a constrained one...' she tells us in the introduction to the 'Sweet' chapter (Lawson, 2015, p. 272). Her slow-cooked recipes 'are the recipes I rely on when I have friends and family over midweek and no time to get anything together on the evening itself, and this is the food we eat together as a family' (Lawson, 2015, p. 168). It leaves the reader with the impression that with her recipes they can easily emulate her lifestyle

and entertain effortlessly (even midweek!). Lawson offers the promise that our lives can be as easy and picture-perfect as hers. Lawson has previously portrayed this image of effortlessness. It is a trademark of hers and a major component of her appeal. Her persona has been parodied many times and she does not stray from it and acknowledges that she is 'camp'. It is impossible to ignore Lawson's sexy, voluptuous appearance, and her distinctive use of language and body movement which is her 'signature' style.

As part of the first episode of the show, Lawson discusses how she finds inspiration. 'I relish how the ideas for my recipes are often the result of joyous encounters with people or places'. The introductions to the recipes provide an opportunity for her to share tricks and tips and delve even further into her personal anecdotes and nostalgic memories. 'I love soft roes on toast. My mother often used to make them on a Saturday night (Lawson, 2015, p. 40).' On chickpeas she reveals:

For choice, I'd always use home-cooked chickpeas...but otherwise I like the pre-cooked Spanish chickpeas in jars. Yes, they are more expensive than the canned variety, but the cheapest option is always to buy dried. Don't feel bad about using chickpeas out of a tin, though – I have been known to, myself. One can't always be so organised to have the freezer stashed with cooked chickpeas, and so I am always well stocked with canned chickpeas (Lawson, 2015, p. 92).

From a more personal perspective, she shares her children, Cosima and Bruno's favourite recipes. She makes Chicken Cosima (Lawson, 2015, p. 149) for her daughter's 21st birthday. She humorously says that:

Actually, I cooked huge vats of it, in a pan so big that both the children could fit into it together when they were little – and have the lid put on, too. Not that I was in the habit of squeezing them into saucepans'

Since this book contains a recipe for Chicken Cosima, inspired by my daughter, it seems only fair to include a recipe for my son as well' is the introduction to the Pasta alla Bruno recipe (Lawson, 2015, p. 82).

The book abounds with her personal recommendations: her soda bread buns should be eaten at breakfast 'with loads of unsalted butter' (Lawson, 2015, p. 388) while she prefers 'sweet Coquina butternut squash' for the Butternut and halloumi burgers (Lawson, 2015, p. 134). The author does allow her readers some freedom of choice with this recommendation: "If you want to use Greek yogurt rather than coconut-milk yogurt, which I adore, and extravagantly use whenever I can, please do (it's certainly less expensive)... '(Lawson, 2015, p. 27). Her travels to Thailand inspire a number of recipes and she reminisces about the Momofuku Noodle Bar in the East Village in New York City (Lawson, 2015, p. 191). These insights into her personal favourites and experiences allow her to share a little bit of her perfect world with viewers and readers. In turn, this gives her the authenticity and authority to recommend how and what food should be cooked, how they should be eaten and shared, all in good taste. There is also a certain amount of aspiration present in her work, albeit some of the references and displays of cultural capital are inaccessible for certain demographics. To avoid alienating different parts of her audience, she must strike a balance. However, despite this simulacrum of revealing her intimacy and building a rapport with her readers and viewers, she consistently plays the part that has been scripted and her public persona is essentially a façade that she keeps up.



## 10.4 Persona – Glamorous Nigella

In their classification of celebrity chefs, Johnston et al. (2014) categorise Lawson as a pin-up. The authors make a clear distinction between the individual and the persona where the persona is a

“fabricated” identity that draws upon shared conventions of “biography, style, and attitude” to emotionally engage others and facilitate evaluation and may or may not be synonymous with the lived reality of the producer. To construct a persona, cultural producers cannot simply create one from out of nowhere, but must draw from existing cultural norms and conventions’ (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 3).

Therefore, it is intended that consumers will perceive the persona as being a commodity that will resonate with them. Understandings of race, class and gender are all part of the construction of the persona. It is nevertheless necessary for the celebrity chef to maintain cultural and culinary legitimacy in the eyes of the public. The aspirational element of the person remains prominent and Lawson promises to offer a ‘life of leisure, delicious foods, and time for cooking’ (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 5). Similarly, Hewer and Brownlie refer to Lawson as a ‘commodified celebrity product’ (2009, p. 483). Hence the celebrity chefs are turned into brands and objects to be bought and sold.

Johnston et al. characterise Lawson in terms of a pin-up persona where the main attributes are ‘Self-gratification – *tastes of indulgence*’ (2014, p. 7).’ The pin-up persona embeds food and cooking in a lifestyle of leisure, entertainment, and sensual pleasures’ (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 11). Whether it is the book or the TV series, there is a great deal of emphasis on Lawson’s beauty and sensuality as a pin-up persona.

In a purely Bourdieusian sense, 'the pin-up persona moves beyond tastes of necessity to create tastes of distinction that are eminently pleasurable and relaxed – a taste profile that we think of as tastes of indulgence' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 11). In addition, there is an emphasis placed on the pin-up's pursuit of hedonism alongside her attention to others. Pin-ups evolve in a world of class privilege, pleasure and leisure in the sense that they have the time to be free of worldly worries and work on perfecting their image. This is relevant as it reinforces Bourdieu's analysis of the upper class being detached from the toils of the working class and therefore having the time to pursue and develop 'good taste'. Lawson lives in a world that appears detached from the daily reality of most of her readers and viewers; it is evident that her lifestyle is privileged and leisure-focused. In addition, pin-ups are also supposed to be imperfect and messy, just as their audience is, so they will have flaws that people can relate to. This can be used by Lawson to counterbalance how she may otherwise be perceived – too well-off, too privileged. She needs to maintain her image while remaining accessible and approachable and does so by admitting to her imperfections both in and out of the kitchen. There is a recurrent pink and green colour theme in both the cookbook (see below) and the TV show – pink is often associated with 'girly girls', perhaps another nod to the pin-up persona.



Image 19 - pink cake  
(Lawson, 2015, p. 296)

It is often said that Lawson is glamorous. Her style of glamour is quite retro, reminiscent of by-gone Hollywood movie stars. Stevens et al. suggested that she has a form of 'retro femininity' and that 'her persona (Nigellissima) consciously pays homage to the *maggiorate*, the voluptuous female film stars of 1950s Italian cinema' (Stevens et al. 2015, p. 578). It could even be suggested that she resembles Sophia Loren or Gina Lollobrigida as can be seen in the images below. Additionally, she evokes some of Pedro Almodóvar's actresses, such as Penelope Cruz. Johnston et al. suggest that 'the pin-up persona cookbooks feature the author's beauty and sensuality explicitly – in vivid photographs, luscious descriptions of food experiences, and through sexual innuendos in the text' (Johnston et al., 2014, p. 11). This is certainly relevant to Lawson.



Image 20 – Nigella Lawson, Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren  
(Nigella Lawson, 2009; Gina Lollobrigida (Life in Italy 2012); Sophia Loren on Sixty  
Years of Stardom, (Vanity Fair, 2017))

According to Smith (2006), Lawson's looks and screen persona were created by TV producers and agents, resulting in her transformation from frumpy to glamorous.

Lawson even acknowledges this herself in the preface to her book *How to be a Domestic Goddess Baking and the Art of Comfort Cooking*

Part of it too is about a fond, if iconic, dream: the unexpressed 'I' that is a cross between Sophia Loren and Debbie Reynolds in pink cashmere cardigan and fetching gingham pinny, a weekend alter-ego winning adoring glances and endless approbation from anyone who has the good fortune to eat in her kitchen. The good thing is, that we don't have to get ourselves up in Little Lady drag and we don't have to renounce the world and enter into a life of domestic drudgery (Lawson, 2000, p. )

Her tight-fitting t-shirts emphasize Lawson's décolleté and voluptuous form. Lawson is frequently framed from the waist upwards. She is 55 at the time of filming but still has a youthful figure. Lawson has a coquettish way with her audience, even though she denies it. She insists that her coy and seductive presentation style is a reflection of her true nature. 'It's not meant to be flirtatious. ... I don't have the talent to adopt a different persona. It's intimate, not flirtatious' (Williams, 2006). In 2015 she was voted the sexiest celebrity chef by a dating site for married people (Shaw, 2015). (In the same survey, *Saturday Kitchen* presenter James Martin, was voted the sexiest male chef, Gordon Ramsay came second and Jamie Oliver and Marco Pierre White were in joint third). In 2002, Hattenstone wrote in *The Guardian* that:

Men love her because they want to be with her. Women love her because they want to be her. Middle-aged, middle-class men love Nigella - so posh, so motherly, so wifely, so sluttish all in the one package. Many women like her too because she is such an inspiring role model - not only has she coped brilliantly with the tragedies in her life, she is bright and beautiful, of a mature age (42), with a grown-up body rather than the typical TV rake.

Chan gives a similar description of Lawson: 'Men are attracted to her like naughty schoolboys with a crush on their teacher; women love her because she is their virtual

girlfriend, their confidante' (Chan, 2003, p. 50). Certainly, Lawson plays on her persona and it has become her signature style and modus-operandi. These intersections of mother, wife and sexual fantasy are precisely what people want and this is what she delivers time after time. In more recent TV shows and books she continues to use the same style and approach.

### 10.5 Class and capital

As Hollows aptly puts it, (Nigella is) 'a cover girl for the new middle class...and... middle-class feminine identities' (Hollows, 2003, p. 181). She comes from a very privileged middle-class family and this is subtly reinforced throughout the book and series. Her (studio) 'kitchen' is obviously perfection and the Le Creuset pots she recommends cost over £100 each. She draws us into her everyday world with shots of her favourite shops and tell us that her butcher (with whom she is on a first-name basis) 'taught me that the only way to cook a bavette is to 'sear the hell out of it', and I quote, and then cook it really rare' (ep.6). Meanwhile, 'According to Rex, my excellent fishmonger, there is plenty of sustainable cod around Cornwall' (Lawson, 2015, p. 27). Does she assume that her audience all have butchers and fishmongers and the time to shop in small independent shops? Her recipe for apricot cake has the 'sweetness of a balmy night in Morocco' (ep.1), again surmising that we have all experienced this and understand the reference. Certainly, she and her producers are aware that only a small portion of her audience possesses the same financial means and background. The trick is to not acknowledge that her life is in any way extraordinary in order not to alienate her public.

Dinner parties, the popular and often-preferred pastime of the middle class, are not spared. It seems that she is always on the pretty patio or in the kitchen, enjoying her food with her friends and family who coo over her amazing cooking. 'Divine...like Nigella...absolutely divine Nigella' one exclaims as he closes his eyes in admiration and enjoyment (ep.6). We are served Nigella's perfect food enjoyed by her perfect friends. Only Nigella criticizes herself – 'you've all got to put up with my bad carving cause that's how it is' she laughs. Low lighting further adds to the perfect mood.

She displays her considerable cultural and culinary capital throughout the show and book. It allows her to demonstrate her competence and knowledge, two essentials in the arsenal of the celebrity chef. She 'name drops'; she calls a fish recipe 'Jackson Pollock' (Lawson, 2015, p. 30) and refers to 'Nobu black cod' (Lawson, 2015, p. 25) or to her exotic holidays. While marinating red onion for a simple feta and avocado salad, she refers to colours similar to those of a 'stained-glass window designed by Schiaparelli.' (Lawson, 2015, p.10). The references she uses are replete with every kind of capital. This kind of reference will only resonate with well-read or knowledgeable viewers. She also makes a number of assumptions with regards to the degree of understanding that her followers will have of expensive hotels (Chateau Marmont Los Angeles, ep.1) or 'trendy gastropubs' (Lawson, 2015, p. 179) that serve short ribs like the ones she had in America. The recipes will take the reader on a culinary journey (assuming they can locate all the ingredients). While her experience and capital allow her to make some interesting flavour combinations, she still adheres to classic cooking principles, another hint that she possesses culinary capital and uses it.



Image 21- Jackson Pollock fish recipe  
(Lawson, 2015, p.30)

When she does stray from the classics, she justifies herself by saying that:

There are those who hold the view that a classic recipe is just that: a dish that's earned its status because it, enduringly, works, and to fiddle with it is an act of desecration. It's not a dishonourable stance but I think essentially flawed. The classics, in food as in literature, are the very forms that can withstand and, indeed, spawn a plethora of interpretations' (Lawson, 2015, 2015, p. 4).

These same words are repeated as she demonstrates the Caesar salad recipe in episode 3 where she 'can't apologise for taking liberties with a Caesar salad, when the outcome is so pleasurable' (A riff on a Caesar Salad is the name of the recipe). But she also refers to more 'trashy food' such as cornflakes in a chicken recipe. Yet, as Hollows suggests, this only serves to display her omnivore tastes and 'In this way, Nigella's taste for trashy serves less to dissolve the relationship between class and



taste and more to reaffirm the distinction of the new middle class' (Hollows, 2003, p. 182).

One's accent is undoubtedly one of the many class markers. Bourdieu's theories on capital refer to how various amounts and currencies of capital are used to signify taste and belonging to social classes. Stringfellow et al. commented on how celebrity chefs' accents may impact upon their audiences:

There is a distinct class element to the choices that we make, and therefore presenters tend to exaggerate or play down their accent and backgrounds: Oliver plays down his middle-class roots putting on a 'mockney' (mock Cockney) accent; Nigella Lawson and The Two Fat Ladies display their cultural capital through their speech and behaviour, emanating the good taste they have acquired from their social circle and upbringing (Stringfellow et al., 2013, p. 82).

In the introduction to the cookbook, Lawson quotes one of her previous books, *How to Eat*:

What I hate about the new-age voodoo about eating, the notion that foods are either harmful or healing, that a good diet makes a good person and that that person is necessarily lean, limber, toned and fit...Such a view seems to me in danger of fusing Nazism (with its ideological cult of physical perfection) and Puritanism (with its horror of the flesh and belief in salvation through denial) (Lawson, 2015, p. ix).

Although she is referring to faddy diets and body image, this can be linked to perceptions of class, as she again displays cultural capital and shows her familiarity with history and associated philosophy. There are certain images and ways of behaving that one must adhere to as class is recreated in food choices and body image for example. It may be significant, however, that Lawson rejects stereotypical images

and her curvy body might not always be viewed as one associated with, and accepted by, the middle class, where stick-thin women are often considered ideal. Bourdieu notes that the ability to maintain a disciplined and controlled relationship with food distinguishes the new middle classes from both the restraint of the old middle classes and the lack of discipline that is seen to characterise working class taste. Here Lawson challenges these attitudes as she rejects the self-imposed restraint and control that the middle-class exercise over consumption (Hollows, 2003). It is important to note that, although Bourdieu's work was conducted more than fifty years ago, his theories of capital and habitus remain relevant, though they must be adjusted to account for the realities of Britain in the 21st century.

In the pre-recipe narrative for *Spiced and fried haddock with broccoli purée* Lawson writes:

This recipe could hardly be easier, and requires no complication, nor any effort to keep it simple. Good fish, lightly dredged in spiced flour then flash-fried, is an old-fashioned pleasure, and one to be savoured. Here I use gluten-free flour in preference to regular plain flour to coat the fish. I had wanted the slight grittiness of rice flour, but had none in the house, and gluten-free flour (which I did have) contains rice flour and worked fabulously. Obviously, you can use plain flour if you wish (Lawson, 2015, p. 35).

The implication of Lawson's statement is that we should know how these different flours differ in texture and may even keep them at home. This is yet another example of Lawson casually dropping references to culinary and cultural capital, reminding us that she has the choice and the time and is far removed from the 'tastes of necessity' of the working class. Therefore, as a result, Lawson distances herself from any issue involving economic capital. There is no mention of the price of any of the ingredients

she suggests, nor does she seem concerned about the ingredients she recommends being substantially more expensive than those in supermarkets. Choosing high-quality ingredients is a reflection of her affluent lifestyle. Bourdieu refers to this as ‘the suspension and removal of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies, which is the basis of objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms’ (1984, p. 54). Lawson mentions serving chicken shawarma ‘modestly, on a pile of shredded iceberg, with some (proper) pitta’ (Lawson, 2015, p.157), as though there is proper and less proper pitta. Her favourite radicchio is the ‘zeppelin-shaped Treviso Precoce (Lawson, 2015, p. 14) which she admits is more costly than the round radicchio. This is yet another example of the expectations she has of her reader’s knowledge of the finer details of ingredients such as radicchio. It is likely that Lawson knows that this will not be the case, but she uses this narrative to create an illusion of sameness and intimacy and draw people into her aspirational world. Despite the fact that she is clearly laying out what constitutes good taste, Lawson is dressing it up as a peer-to-peer interaction.

### **10.6 Post feminism and domesticity – cooking for pleasure rather than cooking to please**

Lawson’s style prompts critical discussion of domestic work as un-paid labour and issues of time. Her approach to cooking seems to make it appear like a leisure activity in which she finds great pleasure. She never mentions that she *has* to cook – there are no deadlines to meet. The tendency towards cooking as leisure has been attributed more to male chefs who have the ability to transcend the domestic realm (Hollows, 2003). Jamie Oliver, for example, makes this clear in his shows and books

where it is all about having fun with his mates. A hallmark of the middle and upper classes according to Bourdieu (1984) is a distinct approach to the enjoyment and preparation of food that has nothing to do with 'necessity'. Similarly, Rodney et al. argue that:

Domestic food work is frequently depicted in media sources as a straightforward postfeminist choice that has a decidedly middle-class bias because it requires having the time and financial resources to turn one's kitchen into a pleasure palace (Rodney et al., 2017, p. 7).

It is easy to see how Lawson embodies this by the way she appears very relaxed and unhurried as she prepares her meals. She is not only performing in a very heteronormative way, but she is also showing that it is very easy to take pleasure in cooking and not view it as a chore, at least not in her world.

The character of Lawson is one that combines traits of both progressive feminism and a more conservative femininity at the same time. On the one hand, she aligns with some dimensions of a feminist narrative in her capacity as a successful female TV personality and references to liberating women from the mundane everyday task of cooking. On the other hand she is hyper-feminine in her mannerisms and attitudes. Hollows suggests that Lawson is 'The representation of a mode of femininity that is based around cooking and eating as pleasure, rather than servitude and denial' (Hollows, 2003, p. 197). Lawson's cooking philosophy is that 'cooking should be pleasurable and should start from the desire to eat' (Lawson, 2015, p.,182), a concept far removed from the traditional construct of women as 'providers of food for others 'who have difficulty experiencing food as pleasurable themselves, particularly in a domestic context' (Hollows, 2003, p. 184).

On several occasions, Lawson attempts to distance herself from the judgemental arenas of cooking. In her world mistakes are to be expected, and an almost amateurish approach is permissible. She laughs off errors with a toss of her hair. She does not care that:

the hipster crowd feel that salted caramel is no longer cool and new. Food is either good or it isn't, and while fashion relies on quick-change, taste – if it is authentic, rather than faddish – endures' (Lawson, 2015, p. 342).

The presentation of the dishes is pretty but not overly complicated. She refuses to be judged by recognised culinary standards and does not hesitate to mix cinnamon with mustard in one of her chicken recipes for example. She takes liberties with classic recipes yet manages a careful balance of trash and the classics. The salad in her recipe for Caesar Salad is baked and she says: 'I suppose this riff, in a way, is like a little culinary joke but it is so seriously good' (ep.3). In the narrative preceding the 'Sweet chapter' she states:

You will see though, that I haven't constrained myself in any way with the recipes that follow. The joy I feel in baking translates to the joy to be had in eating. Whatever ingredients I use, the aim is always simple: to give pleasure, both to the cook and the eater, without which, life and the sum of human happiness, in this small but essential way, would be much diminished (Lawson, 2015, p. 273).

While she acknowledges the importance of sharing with others, she is in no way apologetic for the food she consumes or the enjoyment she gets from it. 'Cooking is about providing sustenance and giving pleasure' (Lawson, 2015, p. 272).

Lawson offers a dichotomy between the feminist and the housewife although she appears to move fluidly from one to the other. Brownlie and Hewer suggest that Lawson, (or Nigella - they refer to her by her first name):

In constructing her version of the celebrity chef, pleasures of cooking, eating and caring are linked in representations of domestic life which admit the importance of caring and hedonism to dealing with the conflicts and anxieties experienced by working women' (Brownlie and Hewer, 2009, p. 483).

They even refer to 'Nigellaland' where 'we are transported to a magical land of plenty' and a 'hegemonic land of taste and distinction' (Brownlie and Hewer, 2009, p. 485) in the Bourdieusian sense. Food media has adopted the term domestic goddess, a tribute to Lawson's influence (Rodney et al., 2017). Because Lawson emulates what we do, and vice-versa, she becomes a better friend to her audience: she puts her finger in the batter to test it, she closes the fridge with her foot, and she understands the demands of daily life. She is reassuring and self-indulgent and we buy into her persona.

Most of her recipes are simple, easy and quick to prepare. She gives us tips and shortcuts and does not hesitate to highlight her own shortcomings. She is notably impatient and mentions this several times. When demonstrating her pavlova recipe, she says that 'patience is not one of my outstanding qualities but it's necessary here'. In the same recipe she makes it using a 'jar of shop-bought lemon curd' (Lawson, 2015, p. 315) but she also gives detailed instructions to make your own curd should you have the time and inclination. She does not encourage perfection, on the contrary. She uses store-bought rice and pineapple for her fried rice recipe ((Lawson, 2015, p.95) and encourages readers to use leftovers; the tray of roast veg recipe 'came about

because I had half a butternut squash left over...'(Lawson, 2015, p. 237). These are the acts that keep her relatable.

In Lawson's world, the kitchen is far removed from the daily drudgery of food preparation and transformed into a place where recipes are 'embarrassingly easy' (ep.2) and 'the minute I smell Thai basil I'm back on holiday' (ep.6). This is a place where she prepares food for (her) the soul. It is a place for 'self-fulfilment, emancipation, calculated hedonism and premeditated fun' (Hewer and Brownlie, 2009, p. 484). Her perfect friends are carefully chosen and dutifully admire her efforts and ooh and ah over her food. According to her public relations firm, these are all people with whom she has real relationships (*Evening Standard*, 2007). Lawson's world exists bereft of any stress associated with cooking or washing up. The image is one of ease and perfection. As she describes her recipe for Thai clams using a very colourful and potentially staining curry paste, she comments that it is 'slightly foolhardy to be doing this with a white shirt but too late now' with a coy side glance to camera (ep.6). Of course, there is not a stain to be seen.

### 10.7 Seduction

Lawson certainly offers a performance in the television shows, albeit one she sees as natural. Lawson is subtle, and her version of 'food porn' is not totally unattainable. In sharing her recipes, she is showing her audience that, in fact, it is all very possible. Lawson became famous for cultivating this persona with her *Domestic Goddess* book. In her biography of Lawson, Smith confirms that TV directors were very clear that 'we were making gastroporn. I'd stop the tape, and ask her to take more time licking the

cream off the strawberry, or to whip eggs more sensually. I made no bones about it' (Smith, 2006, p. 132). Lawson has confirmed the obvious links between food and sex in interviews. She even is self-deprecating and describes herself as 'kitsch' or 'camp'. These images have probably served to earn her the patronage of a wide range of (male) supporters. As Stevens et al. acknowledged:

She achieves this intimate, emotional connection with her female audience whilst simultaneously appealing to a male audience with her playful and sexually suggestive manner and voluptuous appearance (Stevens, 2015, p. 594).

For men she is an attractive woman cooking attractive food. From a female perspective she is a friend, she's not perfect and she is there to support and encourage (Smith, 2020).

Lawson 'pleases herself' a lot. She does not hold back when it comes to expressing how much she enjoys her cooking. In some of the episodes, she fades into the background with a plate of her food to enjoy on her patio or in a comfortable chair. She is 'going to have to stop myself from eating it all now' (ep.3) and has no room to stop for control when describing her super-rich chocolate cake which is 'seductively easy to make' (ep.2). She wants 'sweet with her heat' in the halloumi recipe at the end of episode 6 and she goes 'hardcore' with seasoning in episode 3. She dares her viewer to 'come with me to the dark side. And I mean dark' when demonstrating her very rich salted chocolate tart recipe. Her whole persona exudes that of a woman who is seemingly powered by a sense of seduction although she remains voluntarily perilously close to parody most of the time.



Her descriptions and the noises in the kitchen are heavily sensual, sometimes exaggerated. The TV series either seems not to have been sound-edited, or to have been over-edited to amplify certain sounds. It is a continuous and familiar cascade of dishes clanging, fridges popping open, sizzling and bubbling, and spoons scraping. Obviously, cooking shows are designed to stir the senses, not just through the ingredients themselves, but also through how they are presented (Chan, 2003). A rich description and vivid images and sounds are used throughout the series to evoke the senses. A slow and seductive RnB track further entices the viewer.

Lawson plays with the audience as she takes obvious pleasure in caressing and fondling food (Chan, 2003), mixing with her hands which she finds 'so pleasurable' (ep 2). She loves 'the feel of soft dough under my hands' (Lawson, 2015, p. 200); she gets rid of her stress when she bashes a chicken breast into an escalope and finds this 'disturbingly gratifying' (ep.2). The image is vaguely sadistic. She brings to life smells, such as vanilla and rose water, through her descriptions. 'I rather like this dark heavily scented gloop' she says when referring to thick vanilla paste in episode 3. In the same episode, she slowly pours honey over raspberries and side glances to camera while gushing 'beautiful that amber ooze'. The viscosity of certain liquids seems to be exaggerated into slow motion as chocolate drizzles onto a cake or gloppy brown muffin batter falls slowly into white cases making her feel 'very decisive'. She cajoles and tempts her audience and seems to be doing the same to the food. Her squid recipe is 'low and slow' (ep.3). These are almost a prelude of better things to come.



Image 22 - Nigella Lawson on the cover of *The Stylist*  
(Lawson 2011)

When asked in a 2019 interview about gastro-porn and suggestive licking of the finger or the sensual separating of eggs, she says 'It's rather disgusting...It's such an odd reading to think it's alluring in any way' (Gilly, 2019, p. 58). She is not oblivious to how she is perceived which has even been the subject of some ridicule and parody on social media (Freeman, 2020). Her mispronunciation of microwave as 'microwaaveé' in a 2020 TV show has gone viral. Comments on the YouTube clip even suggest that she did it on purpose. This is part and parcel of her on-screen persona.

## 10.8 Hedonism

Lawson's relationship with food differs significantly from that of other UK female celebrity chefs such as Mary Berry. As opposed to Berry, who cooks first and foremost to please others, Lawson cooks primarily for her own pleasure and then for friends and family (Hollows, 2003). In both the book and TV series, images and language are hedonistic and self-indulgent. Frequently, Lawson seeks immediate gratification, as illustrated by the instances in which she cannot resist trying the food or fades into the background with a dish she has just cooked to enjoy on her own. Her rice bowl recipe (ep.3) is irresistible – 'I shall try not to rupture this mood of serenity by shovelling this down too rambunctiously, but it's hard not to'.

The food in this book is what I have been cooking for myself and, although the impetus was certainly to seek out food that made me feel physically strong, I have always believed that the food you cook for yourself is essentially good for you' (Lawson, 2015, p.x).

'I cook to give pleasure, to myself and others...(Lawson, 2015, p. ix)...the act of cooking for yourself is in itself a supremely positive act, an act of kindness (Lawson, 2015, p. x)'.

Lawson's philosophy starts with the premise that cooking should be enjoyable and in the introduction to each TV episode she says: I don't believe it's possible to live well without eating well...Simply Nigella is about dishes that do just that – recipes that relax and restore; uplift and enrich'.

It is first and foremost about the contentment of cooking and eating which is then extended to dinner parties and entertaining friends and family. 'I believe with all my heart that what we cook can make us feel better and more alive (ep.2)'. She has an almost spiritual approach to all things food. She manifests her pleasure by eating and

is clearly enjoying the food, its preparation and its planning. Lawson does not position herself as a 'slave to the stove'. She takes pleasure in cooking for herself first of all; or as Hollows puts it: 'the importance of satisfying and caring for the self rather than others' (Hollows, 2003, p. 184).

The TV series often depicts her as being very pleased with herself and the results of her cooking. She sets the scene in the first episode: 'As much as I derive pleasure from the taste and beauty of food, I want the entire process, from inspiration to empty plate to make me feel happy'.

In episode two she is delighted with her own food again and tells us that 'this whole recipe is a bit like being a three-year-old only better' referring to a recipe that contains cornflakes. Her Greek squid and orzo recipe is a 'rapturous combination – utterly glorious to eat but also so relaxing to make' (ep.3). In another sequence, she is making pancake batter and says that 'I've got enough mixture left for another batch but for now I'm pleasing myself' (ep.3). She just 'can't wait to sink into this lemony lusciousness' (of her lemon pavlova recipe, ep.4). She is going to 'give myself the pleasure of a few more pops' of her pumpkin seeds roasting in a pan (ep.5). 'It doesn't matter who I am cooking for, or what the occasion is, I always want my time in the kitchen to relax and inspire me and allow me to savour the moment' (ep.4). Such comments clearly convey Lawson's apparent delight and happiness when cooking. At times she is in a quasi-religious state of reverence in front of ingredients or a finished dish.

As Lawson says in the introduction to the cookbook:

(The book)..tells the broader story of how I live: how I feed my friends and family, the aesthetic pleasure I derive from food, and my belief that what and how we cook can make our lives easier, make us feel better and more alive and connect us to ourselves , to others and to the world (Lawson, 2015, p. x).

She goes on to shun the 'Clean-Eating brigade' and says that 'Food is not dirty, the pleasures of the flesh are essential to life' (Lawson, 2015, p. ix). (This has a mildly sexual connotation). Clearly, Lawson prioritizes enjoyment over duty (Culver, 2013), providing her readers and viewers with a space to embrace her philosophy and enjoy her recipes guilt-free.

### 10.9 Chapter summary

This research places Lawson in traditional heteronormative settings in terms of gender roles. She does not attempt to challenge the status-quo and stays close to her established persona. Analysis of Lawson centres on her image as a pin-up and how she promotes a care-free lifestyle of leisure and entertainment. However, Lawson has more nuance to her persona than a glamorous pin-up. She is now perceived as a mature woman, confident in her capabilities and able to impart lessons in life after having struggled herself. Hedonism is an important part of Lawson's attitude to food. She exaggerates the sensual aspects of food with her coyness and 'food porn' references and is clearly motivated by her own pleasure and enjoyment above all. It is evident that class is an important aspect of Lawson's character. She uses the full repertoire of Bourdieu's capital, sometimes subtly, at other times much more explicitly.

The shots of her strolling through gentrified and affluent streets of London, her references to exotic holidays or her recommendations of expensive ingredients all display her cultural and economic capital. Hence, she serves as a conduit for her audiences to buy into her social capital and emulate her middle-class activities.

# CHAPTER 11 – CONCLUSION

## 11.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter presents a summary of the key findings and contributions of this research study. Initially, this chapter outlines the key findings that address the major research questions on how celebrity chefs shape tastes and preferences. The contributions and implications of the study will then be discussed, both practically and theoretically. Finally, the limitations of the study will be acknowledged, and recommendations made for future research directions. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts on the evolving role and significance of celebrity chefs as influencers of taste.

## 11.2 Research Aim and Findings of this study

The main research question of this study was to examine the influence celebrity chefs have on social constructions of taste in contemporary British society. To achieve this, the study set out to answer three sub-research questions:

1. What are the key theories that frame the construction of taste?
2. What role do celebrity chefs play as a wider social phenomenon in contemporary British society?
3. What themes can be derived regarding the construction of taste when analysing celebrity chef cookbooks and television shows?

The primary purpose of this study was to determine how celebrity chefs influence the construction of taste. Celebrity chefs play a significant role in influencing the social construction of taste in contemporary British society. Their influence extends beyond just providing recipes and cooking techniques; they shape culinary trends, redefine cultural norms, and impact the perception of food and taste among the general public. By engaging with TV shows and cookbooks, the very media that the chefs utilise to communicate, this study has provided a unique in-depth analysis of the celebrity chefs. This study has shown that both the books and the television shows contain themes that, when interpreted (consciously or unconsciously) by the public, enable the chefs to act as cultural intermediaries by influencing beliefs about food, taste, class, and gender.

There has been significant previous academic study of celebrity chefs from the perspective of their gendered roles and from cultural, economic, and social angles. Whilst the chefs have been considered as cultural figures, the interpretation of the findings of this research has made advancements in terms of our understanding of how chefs act as tastemakers and, by extension, how they influence the construction of taste. Although the study is grounded in existing theory, notably Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of taste, the specific link between celebrity chefs and the construction of taste has not previously been explored. This research gives conceptual clarity on this link and the ways in which the celebrity chefs express the elements that constitute the formation of taste. It is significant since it sheds light on the importance of the chefs as influencers in the decision-making process related to food and culinary identity. This goes from the goods that are purchased to the decisions made with regards to



our daily lives. This research has further extended the understanding of the celebrity chefs as arbiters of taste and purveyors of social and culinary capital, both of which are key in the construction of taste. The celebrity chefs use their power of advocacy to influence attitudes towards food and consumption. By engaging with the chefs, the public accumulate forms of capital that can be used as currency to be exchanged in different fields and 'habitus'. It affects how people relate to food, which in turn has economic, social, and cultural ramifications.

In terms of the sub-research questions, these are answered as follows:

1. Three broad theoretical paradigms were found to frame the social construction of taste. The structuralist paradigm (represented by Bourdieu, 1984) emphasizes the role of social class and proposes that taste is socially and culturally constructed as a marker of class distinction. The materialist paradigm links taste to external factors like economic and political contexts. Postmodernist theories emphasize individual agency and personal choice in shaping taste preferences.

More specifically, this study ascertained that taste is socially and culturally constructed (structuralist paradigm). This idea that food serves as a code to structure society is discussed when explaining Levi-Strauss (1963 and 2008) and Barthes' (1973 and 2008) perspectives. In the structuralist paradigm taste indicates class distinctions. Bourdieu's (1984) theory that taste marks class differences through cultural capital is a key part of this paradigm.

Taste changes due to external factors (materialist paradigm) which is demonstrated in Mintz's (1996, 2002 and 2008) view that political and economic changes shape taste is outlined when covering the materialist paradigm. Taste relates to individual identity in the postmodernist paradigm. The document explains how Lupton (1996 and 2005) and Warde (2008 and 2009) link taste to personal identity in the postmodernist paradigm section. The omnivore theory, attributed to Petersen (2005) and developed by others, contends that taste is inclusive, not exclusive. This research presents the theory as a more recent view that crosses class boundaries.

Although social class retains its significance, contemporary viewpoints acknowledge that taste is influenced by a multitude of factors beyond class, including gender, ethnicity, subcultures and the impact of digital media. The comprehensive analysis of existing literature demonstrated that the formation of taste is an intricate interplay between societal and individual influences. This review of scholarly works enriched the broader study by bringing nuance to theories of taste through the recognition of contemporary elements, while still upholding the relevance of traditional frameworks, such as Bourdieu's emphasis on class.

2. Celebrity chefs have evolved into influential figures whose impact extends far beyond the realm of cooking, encompassing culture, identity, ethics and education. Their messages resonate with vast audiences and prompt transformations in individuals' attitudes toward food. Not only do they change dietary habits, but they also shape perceptions of food and foster engagement with the broader food ecosystem in manners that transcend the confines of the kitchen.

The thesis examines how celebrity chefs popularise cooking through their personas, publications, television shows and presence on social media platforms. It delves into discussions surrounding their personal narratives, lifestyles, gender roles and their ability to connect with their audiences. It also considers their role as both entertainers and educators. The analysis investigates how these chefs raise pertinent topics such as sustainability, ethics, and health. Their influence extends to shaping public opinion, guiding consumer behaviour, and propelling industry norms towards more ethical and socially responsible practices. Furthermore, the chefs are engaged in philanthropic and social initiatives, as exemplified by Jamie Oliver's advocacy for improved school meals and reduced sugar consumption.

The study demonstrates that the chefs embrace a variety of global cuisines and share these with their audiences, with Jamie Oliver highlighting Italian fare and Gordon Ramsay exploring Indian cuisine. Berry explores recipes that blend British and foreign elements while Lawson draws on her travels and reinterprets classic recipes. This exploration delves into the facets of multiculturalism and takes into consideration postcolonial perspectives. Other salient points point towards how the celebrity chefs bring their expertise and knowledge and how they influence the choices that we make as a result. The research suggests that the credibility and authenticity of the chefs are key to their reach with their audiences. The thesis discusses how these chefs provide accessible home cooking advice, empowering amateur cooks. Mary Berry's straightforward family-oriented recipes and Nigella Lawson's guidance for hosting dinner parties serve as prime examples. There is an analysis of how cooking is

glamorised and portrayed indulgently by some chefs like Nigella Lawson and Mary Berry. The chefs are positioned as tastemakers who catalyse food trends through their expertise and far-reaching influence. Finally, the study examines the evolving landscape of gender roles, such as the approaches male celebrity chefs take towards domestic cooking.

3. The study validated existing themes from literature while also developing new sub-themes related to class, identity, lifestyle and gender. The template analysis provided a systematic framework to identify and interpret themes concerning the construction of taste. The themes that emerged from this analysis to form a final template are outlined in table 6 below:

<p><b>1. Paradigms of the construction of taste</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Structuralist approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1.1 Food as a symbol</li> <li>1.1.2 Food as a language of communication</li> </ul> </li> <li>1.2 Materialist Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.2.1 The individual</li> <li>1.2.2 Micro and macro changes</li> </ul> </li> <li>1.3 Post modernist approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.3.1 Consumption</li> <li>1.3.2 Standardisation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>9. Education</b></p>
<p><b>2. Class</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Social class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1.1 Middle class</li> </ul> </li> <li>2.2 Distinction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.2.1 Taste of necessity</li> <li>2.2.2 Taste of distinction</li> </ul> </li> <li>2.3 Conspicuous consumption</li> <li>2.4 Choice</li> <li>2.5 Poverty</li> </ul>	<p><b>10. Civic and moral discourse</b></p>
<p><b>3. Capital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Economic capital</li> <li>3.2 Cultural capital</li> <li>3.3 Symbolic and social capital</li> <li>3.4 Culinary capital</li> </ul>	<p><b>11. Foodporn</b></p>
<p><b>4. Habitus</b></p>	<p><b>12. Authenticity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12.1 Going local <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12.1.1 Rejection by locals</li> </ul> </li> <li>12.2 Interpretations of authentic recipes</li> <li>12.3 Adaptation to UK tastes</li> <li>12.4 Tradition</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Food as identity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1 Foodies</li> <li>5.2 Culinary capital</li> </ul>	<p><b>13. Legitimacy and expertise</b></p>
<p><b>6. Lifestyle</b></p>	<p><b>14. Professionalism</b></p>
<p><b>7. Chefs and the media</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7.1 Television</li> <li>7.2 Books,</li> <li>7.3 Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7.3.1 Social Media</li> <li>7.3.2 Gen Z</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>15. Ethnicity</b></p>
<p><b>8. Gender roles and persona</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8.1 Personal narrative and family</li> <li>8.2 Feminism</li> <li>8.3 Seduction</li> <li>8.4 Empowerment</li> <li>8.5 Domesticity</li> <li>8.6 Entertaining</li> <li>8.7 Hedonism</li> </ul>	<p><b>16. Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16.1 Travel</li> <li>16.2 Cultural intermediary</li> <li>16.3 Colonialism</li> </ul>

Table 6 – Final template (author's own)

Particularly notable was the emergence of themes falling under the headings of class, the refinement of food as a means of identity expression and the added depth to discussions on gender, persona authenticity, and culture. This aligns with more contemporary interpretations of the construction of taste, where individual and external factors play an equally, if not more significant role than normative factors.

This analysis revealed the following key themes:

- **Class, Capital and Habitus:** The concepts of class, cultural capital, and distinction feature prominently, with celebrity chefs often promoting an aspirational middle-class lifestyle. However, their influence across classes is nuanced based on accessibility of resources. There is added nuance to the interpretation of the habitus in a modern context.
- **Lifestyle:** The concept of taste intersects with aspirational values linked to various lifestyle values, such as luxury, aesthetics, empowerment through cooking skills, the redefinition of domesticity, health, and ethical considerations. Cooking becomes an expression of consumer identity.
- **Indulgence and Restraint:** Hedonistic indulgence deviates from the restrained notions of appropriateness, although class-based self-discipline remains influential. Celebrity chefs showcase opulent recipes, extravagant ingredients, and refined dining experiences, advocating the idea that food can be both indulgent and a source of pleasure and luxury. Pleasure and duty both have valence. The chefs have contributed to a culture of culinary hedonism.
- **Persona and Identity:** Celebrity chefs, with the help of publicists and agents, adeptly shape intricate public personas that intertwine personal and fabricated

identities to emotionally engage audiences. The audiences can then use food and cooking as avenues for constructing their own identity and displaying status.

- **Gender Roles:** Despite a more egalitarian distribution of domestic roles and empowered self-expression, traces of traditional gender norms persist, although they are challenged by female celebrity chefs.
- **Authenticity:** Concepts of authenticity and cultural capital are used to shape tastes. Authenticity is conveyed through local encounters and ingredients, but sometimes exoticizes and appropriates other cultures where the foods from other cultures are termed as exotic, foreign, or strange. This can involve emphasizing the "otherness" of certain cuisines and portraying them as unfamiliar or mysterious to the dominant culture. Both Oliver and Ramsay face rejections from the locals and adapt their recipes to suit British tastes.
- **Tradition:** Recipes and ingredients signal heritage and nostalgia, preserving a sense of national tradition and taste memory amid cosmopolitan eclecticism. This is especially prominent in Berry's text and show where she emphasises the Britishness of her recipes.
- **Tastemaker and Intermediary:** Celebrity chefs function as tastemakers and cultural intermediaries, introducing trends, expanding culinary horizons and influencing the wider culinary landscape. Their cultural intermediation blends omnivorous tastes with distinction markers.
- **Culture:** The cookbooks and shows act as a window onto new cultures. Subtle colonial undertones emerge in how certain chefs portray cuisines from other cultures. For example, in the chapter discussing Gordon Ramsay's show in India, his quest for "exotic and horrific tastes" and encounters with unfamiliar ingredients

and techniques perpetuate a framing of Indian cuisine as exotic, reinforcing neo-colonial attitudes.

### **11.3 Contributions to the body of knowledge**

This research offers several notable contributions to the existing body of knowledge on celebrity chefs and the social construction of taste. While previous studies have scrutinised celebrity chefs from diverse theoretical standpoints, this study stands out due to its thorough exploration of the manner in which celebrity chefs impact and influence preferences in matters of taste.

The finding that chefs reveal personal details while also crafting personas, combined with expressions of identity through cuisine, provides new insights compared to existing literature on how celebrity chefs develop relatable yet distinctive public identities. The study shows celebrity chefs can reveal intimate personal details about their lives, families and when introducing recipes. For instance, Jamie Oliver exemplifies this by discussing his affinity for Italian culture and linking it to his family values, effectively merging identities to emotionally engage his audience. This supports the argument that chefs blend both manufactured and personal identities, utilising private details to construct relatable public personas and establish resonance, as proposed by Johnston et al. (2014).



Depicting food and cooking as identity expression avenues is an empirical extension of identity theories. The study shows the chefs expressing facets of identity through food and cooking. For example, Gordon Ramsay displays his well-known competitive nature when he seeks out authentic Indian cuisine. This provides empirical evidence that food and cooking can become avenues for identity construction by celebrities and their audiences, extending identity theory arguments that people express and affirm their identities by performing roles (e.g., being a parent) associated with a particular identity. Celebrity chefs are harnessing food and cooking to articulate facets of their own identities, similar to how Jamie Oliver uses cooking Italian dishes to convey his deep affinity for Italian culture.

According to the research, the chefs influence across classes while deploying cultural capital. This supports the claims that they nuance class boundaries but also transmit elite cultural knowledge to mainstream audiences via the exchange of culinary capital. On the one hand, the chefs are using elite cultural capital markers such as expensive ingredients and French cooking techniques. On the other hand, they also streamline recipes, with figures like Jamie Oliver offering accessible home-cooking solutions and incorporating mainstream references to signal their broad-based appeal across social classes. This nuances the view that celebrity chefs only resonate within a single class (Johnston and Baumann, 2015), instead showing their influence crosses class lines which is a totally new perspective. The findings also demonstrate the chefs are transmitting cultural capital by educating about distinction markers, illustrated by examples such as Gordon Ramsay discerning between authentic and inauthentic curries. This builds on Johnston and Baumann's notions of "celebrity capital" and provides empirical examples of how celebrity chefs disseminate cultural capital from

Bourdieu's conceptual arguments, where the chefs are assigned the role of agents in a Bourdieusian sense.

This thesis contributes to a further understanding of habitus and field in contemporary British society. While Bourdieu's theory suggests that habitus is rigid and fixed, the influence and authority of celebrity chefs challenges this approach. By granting access to their lifestyles and personas, they effectively broaden the scope of habitus. Viewers and readers can travel virtually to India and Italy; they can partake in dinner parties; buy their food in organic shops; understand the authenticity of ingredients and how to use them and emulate the domestic practices of the chefs. In doing so, they have the ability to transition from one habitus to another. Unlike Bourdieu, however, who believed the habitus to be a collective and social construct, the individual now assumes the role of defining the habitus. This amalgamation of post-modernism and traditional taste conventions empowers the individual to shape the habitus. This shift is significant as it reinforces the position of celebrity chefs as contemporary tastemakers within a modern habitus.

The evidence of traditional gender norms enduring alongside empowered domesticity, supports the claims that celebrity chefs only partially challenge conventions, while also depicting cooking as feminine identity affirmation. Male celebrity chefs like Gordon Ramsay emphasise masculinity while female chefs like Mary Berry embody femininity and nurturing showing a persistence of traditional gender norms amid other shifts in domestic roles, countering prior works' arguments that celebrity chefs fully challenge conventions.

The findings also depict cooking as a source of empowering self-expression for female chefs such as Nigella Lawson, moving away from notions of subservience. They provide new empirical examples of cooking acting as a site of feminine identity construction, extending Hollows' (2003) arguments. Hollows argued that Nigella Lawson signifies a departure from the traditional ideas of cooking being associated with servitude and constraint, instead embodying a shift towards feminine enjoyment and indulgence in culinary practices. This study provides additional empirical evidence of cooking serving as a platform for the development of feminine identity. It does so by examining instances such as Mary Berry deriving empowerment from domestic skills, thereby crafting a feminine image of household expertise. Additionally, Nigella Lawson demonstrates self-expression through her culinary creations and pleasurable indulgence. These instances expand upon Hollows' assertions, broadening their scope from Lawson to encompass a more widespread trend among female celebrity chefs. Furthermore, the study enhances these arguments by presenting further instances where cooking is harnessed to achieve feminine identity objectives, encompassing nurturing and self-indulgent self-care rather than obligations to others.#

The results of this study both critique and expand upon Hollows' (2003a and b) arguments about gendered indulgence (2003a and b) by providing an alternative perspective, while also offering more nuance to indulgence theories in general through the highlighted unresolved tensions. Hollows (2003) and others have correlated feminine domestic roles with self-control, while attributing indulgence primarily to masculinity. However, the study's portrayal of Nigella Lawson associating feminine

indulgence, hedonism, and pleasure with cooking challenges these gender-based presumptions, offering a valuable alternative viewpoint. Additionally, the findings illustrate lingering tensions between indulgence and self-control based on social class, which introduces a more nuanced perspective beyond the dichotomous framework proposed by theorists like Warde (1997), who discussed indulgence and restraint as opposing dynamics linked to class behaviours. It also challenges Bourdieu's (1984) notions of tastes of necessity and tastes of distinction.

The findings depict authenticity as relational, not intrinsic, thus confirming Johnston and Baumann's (2015) theoretical constructivist arguments where knowledge and beliefs are not solely determined by objective facts or external stimuli, but are constructed through individual and collective mental processes, cultural influences, and interactions with others. The study showed that chefs like Gordon Ramsay judge authenticity based on familiarity providing empirical evidence that supports this constructivist perspective. The authenticity of the ingredients and preparation of food is questioned and sometimes rejected by the locals, as illustrated by Oliver interacting on the night market in Naples or with the 'nonnas'.

The instances of exoticization support and build on the cases and critiques made by Narayan (1995) and Mannur (2010) who critically examined cases of cultural exoticisation and problematic appropriation of ethnic food by Westerners. The study for example revealed Jamie Oliver's encounters exoticising Italians as well as Ramsay 'appropriating' Indian recipes and offers new empirical cases of inappropriate appropriation mentioned by those authors.

Mankekar (2002) and Sutton (2010) argue nostalgia connects people to cultural heritage and tradition. The study's findings link personal nostalgic memories to broader heritage and tradition preservation through recipes, particularly evident in recipes such as Mary Berry's nostalgic British dishes such as Shrimp Cocktail and other throwbacks to the 70s. As a result of the findings, Manekar and Sutton's arguments can be extended empirically, proving that personal nostalgia is linked to broader cultural heritage.

While Bell and Hollows (2007) argue that celebrity chefs diffuse culinary knowledge as contemporary cultural intermediaries shaping taste, the study provides empirical evidence confirming this view by showing that the chefs introduce trends and educate audiences. For example, the study showed the chefs introducing new global ingredients to the British public British, acting as a tastemaker by bridging culinary traditions.

Johnston et al. (2014) propose that celebrity chefs portray desirable lifestyles that go beyond just food. The study showed that the celebrity chefs' work has granular links between taste, lifestyle and values such as ethics and luxury building. The findings depict taste intertwining with aspirational lifestyles, for example, in Jamie Oliver connecting Italian food with ideals of family life or Nigella Lawson entertaining friends and family in idyllic settings. Furthermore, Nigella Lawson associating ingredient choices with indulgence and hedonism and Gordon Ramsay distinguishing tastes based on class markers, provide further evidence of the entanglement between taste and aspirational values.

### 11.3 Implications for Research

Several avenues of research can be pursued in more detail. Audience reception and identity should be explored in further depth by an examination of how celebrity chef media and personas are received by diverse identity groups, investigating generational differences in engaging with nostalgia-based cooking and analysing social media identity performance through food.

In terms of empowerment and accessibility, potential research directions might include conducting ethnographic studies on empowering home cooks across classes and examining cookbook reception and usage across educational, socioeconomic and cultural lines. Values and attitudes could involve possible research surveying public attitudes toward indulgence, health, ethics and values as portrayed by chefs and documenting shifts in gender roles and kitchen culture within professional culinary environments. Research into authenticity and cultural appropriation could cover claims of authenticity in cross-cultural dishes through the lens of postcolonial theory and an assessment of the impact of chef-driven trends on culinary consumption and production.

In the context of influence and dissemination, potential areas of study might include the cultural intermediation role of chefs in shaping taste and research into how restaurants appropriate, resist or reconfigure celebrity chef ideas. For theoretical and

conceptual exploration, the focus could be on developing more nuanced theoretical categorisations of chef personas and analysing the language, power and meaning embedded in food media content.

#### 11.4 Implications for Practitioners

There are several implications that can be considered for practitioners based on this study. The study unveiled the tendency of celebrity chefs to often *endorse an aspirational middle-class way of life*. Nonetheless, their influence extends beyond class boundaries contingent on the accessibility of their offerings. Thus, restaurants must strike a balance between providing premium experiences and ensuring affordability. When marketing, it is prudent to avoid alienating lower socioeconomic classes by overtly showcasing opulence. Initiatives like cooking classes and beginner-friendly menus can render cuisine more approachable to a broader range of individuals.

Celebrity chefs adeptly *construct intricate public personas* that amalgamate aspects of both personal and fabricated identities. In this regard, hospitality establishments stand to gain from establishing associations and branding affiliations with well-known culinary personalities to effectively connect with specific target demographics. Menus themselves can be curated to allow guests to create a personalised identity experience through their food selections. The recruitment of chefs with compelling personas also presents marketing opportunities. Despite ongoing challenges to traditional *gender*

*roles*, remnants of conventional domestic roles persist. Restaurants should actively ensure equal opportunities for women within professional kitchen roles, an area that continues to be largely under-represented.

The notions of *authenticity and cultural capital* significantly shape taste, sometimes verging on the exoticisation and appropriation of other cultures. Practitioners must exercise caution to prevent unauthorised appropriation of recipes, emphasising the importance of context and sensitivity. New dishes should be marketed as "inspired by" rather than "authentic" with proper diligence. Thorough assessment of sourcing and supply chains is essential to ensure authenticity and ethical procurement. While indulgence departs from restrained notions of "good taste," class-based discipline remains prevalent. Restaurants can provide both indulgent and restrained experiences by adjusting portions, pricing, and overall experiences.

The findings show how *recipes and ingredients signal heritage* amid eclecticism. Curating menus to include classic national dishes can play upon food memories. Tradition can be reimagined through contemporary techniques and presentations. *As tastemakers, celebrity chefs introduce trends and shape preferences*. Hospitality businesses should hire innovative chefs to recreate hot trends early on. Utilising social media and influencers can generate excitement and buzz around new menu offerings. Finally, the analysis reveals how *taste intertwines with lifestyle values*. Culinary experiences should be connected with overarching aspirations concerning identity, ethics, health, and more, transcending mere sustenance.



## 11.5 Limitations

Like any research endeavour, this study is not without its limitations. Several factors necessitate careful consideration. The study has a small sample size. The study only analysed 4 celebrity chefs (Jamie Oliver, Gordon Ramsay, Mary Berry, Nigella Lawson) and their associated TV shows and cookbooks. This small sample makes it difficult to generalise findings. The findings from the in-depth analysis of a small set of texts cannot be statistically generalised to a broader population due to the non-random, purposeful sampling. This is a characteristic intrinsic to the qualitative approach undertaken in the study.

As a qualitative textual analysis, the findings rely heavily on the researcher's subjective interpretations and judgments in identifying themes. Researcher bias can therefore influence the analysis. Different researchers may come to disparate interpretations of the same data based on their perspectives. Relying solely on cookbooks and TV shows as data sources provides a limited window into the chefs' perspectives and influence. Other data sources such as interviews or surveys could reveal additional insights. The analysis is situated within a very specific cultural/historical context (contemporary British society), so the conclusions may not transfer outside this context. Starting the analysis from pre-existing literature themes and theories and using a deductive approach could preclude inductive insights emerging directly from the data. The study identifies mainly semantic or surface-level themes. Deeper latent theme analysis could uncover additional meanings. Finally, the highly conceptual and abstract notion of "taste" itself is challenging to concretely define and measure.

## 11.6 Closing thoughts

The celebrity chefs continue to morph and evolve. These individuals are still primarily the product of editors, producers, and television executives. Although celebrity chefs might represent culinary dreams as opposed to hands-on daily food experiences, they nevertheless have made changes to the perceptions that people have of food as social and cultural choices. They have introduced new ingredients and new ways of doing things into UK households. Nonetheless, they remain largely a symbol of aspirational middle-class lifestyles. It is likely that the new generation of celebrity chefs will be younger, more diverse, and more female. Furthermore, these chefs will be able to align themselves with the aspirations of the younger generation and continue to challenge prevailing perceptions as well as contribute to addressing some of the challenges facing society today and in the future.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Celebrity Chef Books and TV Shows

Table 7 - Celebrity Chef Books and TV Shows (indicative)

Chef	Book Title	Year	TV Shows	Year(s)
<b>Jamie Oliver</b>	The Naked Chef	1999	The Naked Chef	1999-2001
	The return of the Naked Chef	2000	Oliver's Twist	2002
	Happy Days with the Naked Chef	2001	Jamie's Kitchen	2002
	Jamie's Kitchen	2002	Return to Jamie's Kitchen	2003
	Funky Food for Comic Relief	2003	Jamie's School Dinners	2005
	Jamie's Dinners	2004	Jamie's Great Italian Escape	2005
	Jamie's Italy	2005	Jamie's Kitchen Australia	2006
	Something for the Weekend	2005	Jamie's Christmas	2006
	Cooking with Jamie; My Guide to Making You a Better Cook	2006	Jamie's Chef	2007
	Jamie's Little Book of Big Treats	2007	Jamie's Return to School Dinners	2007
	Jamie at Home: Cook Your Way to the Good Life	2007	Jamie at Home	2007
	Jamie's Ministry of Food: Anyone Can Learn to Cook in 24 Hours	2008	Jamie's Ministry of Food	2008
	Jamie's Red Nose Recipes	2009	Jamie's American Road Trip	2009
	Jamie's America	2009	Jamie's Family Christmas	2009
	Jamie does...Spain, Italy, Sweden,	2010	Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution	2010-11

	Morocco, Greece, France			
	Jamie's 30- Minute Meals	2010	Jamie's 30-Minute Meals	2010
	Jamie's Great Britain	2011	Jamie does...	2011
	Jamie's Monster Bake Sale	2011	Jamie's Dream School	2011
	Jamie's 15- Minute Meal	2012	Jamie's Great Britain	2011
	Save with Jamie	2013	Jamie's 15-Minute Meals	2012
	Jamie's Comfort Food	2014	Jamie and Jimmy's Food Fight Club	2012
	Everyday Super Food	2015	Jamie's Money Saving Meals	2013
	Super Food Family Classics	2016	Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast	2014
	Jamie Oliver's Christmas Cookbook	2016	Jamie's Comfort Food	2015
	5 Ingredients – Quick & Easy Food	2017	Jamie's Super Food Family Classics	2016
	Jamie Cooks Italy	2018	Jamie's Quick and Easy Food	2017-2020
	Jamie's Friday Night Feast Cookbook	2018	Jamie Cooks Italy	2018
	Veg: Easy & Delicious Meals for Everyone	2019	Jamie's Meat Free Meals	2019
	7 Ways	2020	Jamie: Keep Cooking and Carry On	2020
	Together	2021	Jamie Oliver: Together	2021
	One: Simple One-Pan Wonders	2022	The Great Cookbook Challenge with Jamie Oliver	2022
			Jamie's One-Pan Wonder	2022
<b>Gordon Ramsay</b>	Humble Pie (autobiography)	2006	Top Gear	2002-2006
	Playing with Fire (autobiography)	2007	Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares	2004-2009

	Gordon Ramsay's Passion for Flavour	1996	Hell's Kitchen UK	2004
	Gordon Ramsay's Passion for Seafood	1999	Hell's Kitchen US	2005-present
	Gordon Ramsay A Chef for All Seasons	2000	The F Word UK	2005-2010
	Gordon Ramsay's Just Desserts	2001	Kitchen Nightmares	2007-2014
	Gordon Ramsay's Secrets	2003	Gordon Ramsay: Cookalong Live	2008 and 2009
	Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen Heaven	2004	Gordon's Great Escape	2010
	Gordon Ramsay Makes it Easy	2005	MasterChef USA	2010-present
	Gordon Ramsay Easy All Year Round	2006	Ramsay's Best Restaurant	2010
	Gordon Ramsay's Sunday Lunch and other recipes from the F Word	2006	Gordon Behind Bars	2012
	Gordon Ramsay's Fast Food Recipes from The F Word	2007	Hotel Hell	2012-2016
	<i>Recipes From a 3 Star Chef</i>	2007	Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course	2012
	Gordon Ramsay's Three Star Chef	2008	Gordon Ramsay's Home Cooking	2013-2014
	Gordon Ramsay's Fast Food	2008	MasterChef Junior (US)	2013-present
	Gordon Ramsay's Healthy Appetite	2008	The F Word US	2017

	Cooking for Friends: Food from My Table	2008	Culinary Genius	2017
	Gordon Ramsay's World Kitchen: Recipes from the F Word	2009	Gordon Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back (USA)	2018-2020
	Ramsay's Best Menus	2010	MasterChef Australia	2018
	Gordon Ramsay's Great Escape: 100 of my Favourite Indian Recipes	2010	Gordon, Gino and Fred; Road Trip	2018-present
	Gordon Great Escape: 100 of my Favourite South-east Asia Recipes	2011	Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted	2019-present
	Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course	2012	Next Level Chef	2023
	Gordon Ramsay's Home Cooking: Everything You Need to Know to Make Fabulous Food	2013		
	Gordon Ramsay and the Bread Street Kitchen Team: Delicious Recipes for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner to Cook at Home	2016		
	Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Fit Food; Mouth-Watering Recipes to Fuel You for Life	2018		
	Gordon Ramsay's: Quick and Delicious – 100 Recipes to Cook in 30 Minutes or Less	2019		

	Ramsay in 10: Delicious recipes Made in a Flash	2021		
	Gordon Ramsay's Uncharted: A Culinary Adventure With 60 Recipes from Around the Globe	2023		
<b>Mary Berry</b>	Mary Berry's Cookbook	1970	The Great British Bakeoff	2010-2016
	Popular Freezer Cookery	1972	The Mary Berry Story	2013
	Beating the Cost of Cooking	1975	Mary Berry Cooks	2014
	Good Afternoon Cookbook	1976	Mary Berry's Absolute Favourites	2015
	Popular French Cookbook	1977	Mary Berry's Foolproof Cooking	2016
	Family Cooking	1978	Mary Berry's Country House Secrets	2017
	Mary Berry's Television Cookbook	1979	Mary Berry Everyday	2017
	Lea & Perrins Barbecue Cookbook	1979	Classic Mary Berry	2018
	Cooking with Cheese	1980	Britain's Best Home Cook	2018-present
	Cake Making with Magimix	1981	Mary Berry's Quick Cooking	2019
	The Perfect Sunday Lunch	1982	A Berry Royal Christmas	2019
	Cooking at Home	1983	Mary Berry's Simple Comforts	2020
	1000 Recipes	1984	Mary Berry Love to Cook	2021
	Chocolate Delights	1985	Mary Berry: Cook and Share	2022
	Buffets	1986		
	Mary Berry's Favourite Microwave Recipes	1987		

	Mary Berry's Favourite Recipes	1988		
	Mary Berry	1989		
	Mary Berry's Food Processor Cookbook	1990		
	Mary Berry's Cookery Course	1991		
	The Aga Book	1994		
	Classic Home Cooking	1995		
	Mary Berry at Home: Over 150 Recipes for Every Occasion	1996		
	Favourite Cakes	1997		
	Mary berry's Christmas Collection	1999		
	Cook Now, Eat Later	2002		
	Mary Berry's Foolproof Cakes	2004		
	Real Food-Fast	2005		
	Simple Cakes	2006		
	One Step Ahead Cookbook	2007		
	Mary Berry's Stress-Free Kitchen	2008		
	Mary Berry's Baking Bible	2009		
	Cook Up a Feast	2010		
	100 Sweet Treats and Puds	2011		
	Mary Berry Cooks	2014		
	Baking with Mary Berry	2015		
	Cooking with Mary Berry	2016		
	Mary Berry Everyday	2017		
	Classic	2018		
	Mary Berry's Quick Cooking	2019		
	Entertaining with Mary Berry	2020		
	Love to Cook	2021		

	Cook and Share	2022		
<b>Nigella Lawson</b>	How to Eat: Pleasures and Principles of Good Food	1998	Nigella Bites	1999-2001
	How to Be a Domestic Goddess: Baking and the Art of Comfort Cooking	2000	Forever Summer	2002
	Nigella Bites	2001	Nigella	2005
	Forever Summer with Nigella	2002	Nigella Feasts	2006
	Feast: Food that Celebrates Life	2004	Nigella's Christmas Kitchen	2006, 2008
	Nigella Express	2007	Nigella Express	2007
	Nigella Christmas	2008	Nigella Kitchen	2010
	Nigella Kitchen: Recipes from the Heart of the Home	2010	MasterChef Australia (guest judge)	2011, 2016, 2018-2021
	Nigellissima: Instant Italian Inspiration	2012	Nigellissima	2012
	How To Be A Domestic Goddess	2014	Simply Nigella	2015
	Simply Nigella	2015	Nigella: At My Table	2017
	At My Table: A Celebration of Home Cooking	2017	Nigella's Cook, East, Repeat	2020
	Nigella's Cook, Eat, Repeat	2020		



## Appendix 2: Examples of data collection and analysis

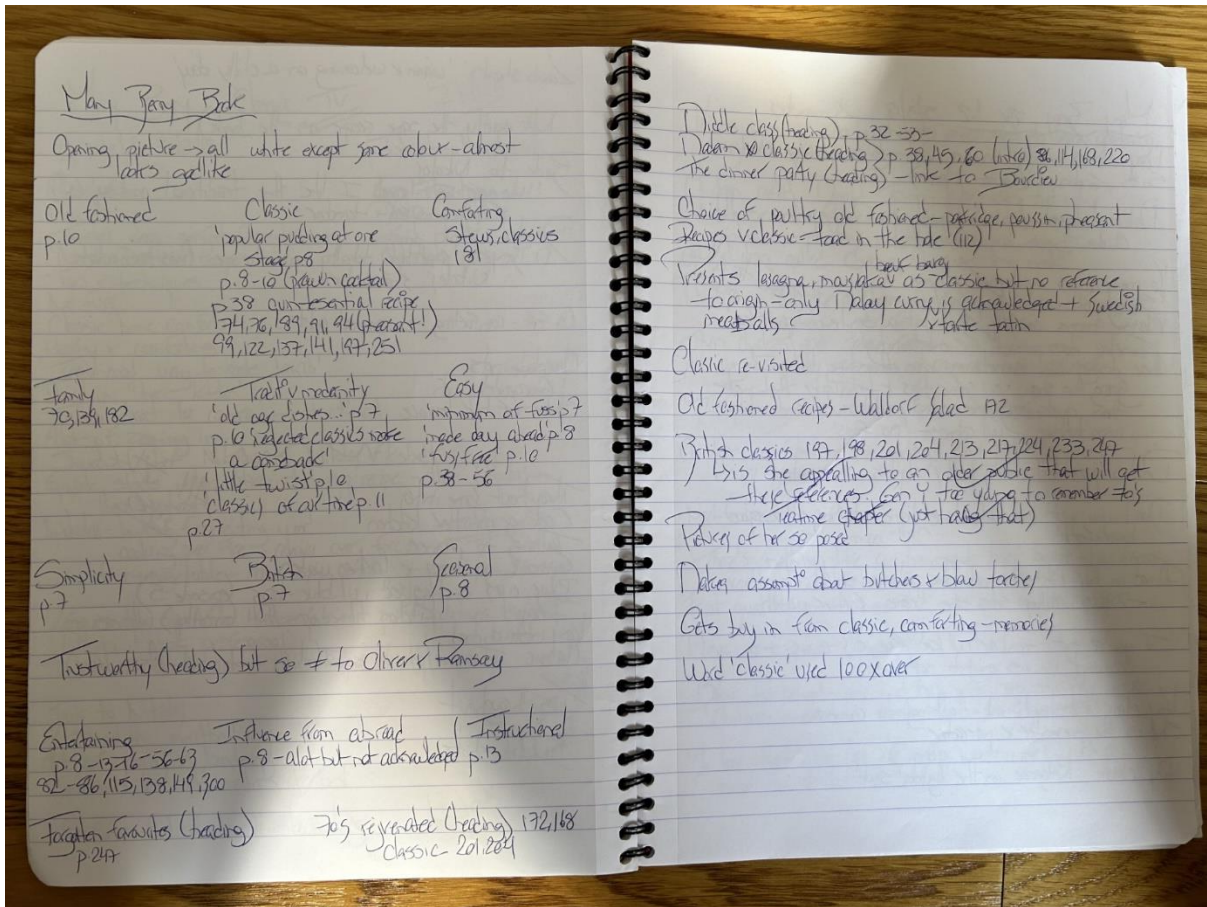


Image 23 – Example of data collection and analysis

### Part 3 - Day 11

Largest river island in the world - 150,000 islands

"Kachheral fish curry"

Interacts w/ local chef (Ahl)

30:20 "Ahl boat is not going to put up w/ a fat bastard like me" as approaches fisherman - boat sinks  
loses a local over his shoulder

31:00 "These flimsy boats can't take a culinary heavyweight like me" local

Durga - using local ingredients (Elephant apple)

First time use of sub-titles when local chef talking

32:50 "The curry we knew in the UK is only a narrow select<sup>o</sup> of the amazing dishes India has to offer"

No paucos - v. little spice - it's all fresh - vibrant - fascinating food

Guwahati - Competition w/ local women

"Locals held tight to tradition... in particular, home cooking"

Enters competit<sup>o</sup> to find best Assamese dish  
bins "local domestic goddess" -> ref to Nigella - Ahl's wife (v good English) is close to my heart

35:08 Banta award feather - GR says he looks like a feather "young & sexy"

Ahl's wife treats GR a chicken curry for the competit<sup>o</sup>

Dark green seed paste -> local

GR the only man in competit<sup>o</sup>

Has to prep garnish after "spying" on others

GR 1st runner up  
40:20 "I don't like coming second best" -> competitive knowledge for the streets of Kolkata

Gains

Person  
Person  
Competitive  
Person

Image 24 - Example of data collection and analysis

Image 25 - Example of data collection and analysis



GR Kolkata's  
Cafe

Nath's Assam food

"Food completely + to any of the other Indian classic)  
I have cooked before" 41.00

Back to Kolkata - to sell N. Assam curries that have never  
been seen on the streets of Kolkata

GR missing a local stall

Hoping people "won't win their nose up" because don't recognize  
Assamese flavours -> papaya + dried bamboo shoots Sar tang  
Not sure Assamese food will go down in Kolkata ↓  
local not used

Looks like a pig after cooking - gets changed

Saving his food - getting strange looks

Local like the food - "v. tasty"

Food writer comes back to give his verdict

46:50 "You have actually succeeded in doing something many  
people would have said is impossible."

47: "It feels like you're not in India... culture as interesting  
as the food... eye opener."

Simplicity - combination of great ingredients and not piling  
around with it"

"India has helped me because not just a paper, I was never out  
of that bracket, but it has helped me to confirm what I love doing more  
than anything"

Series 1 - Episode 3

Kerala - Tamil Nadu - Dombivli  
(guru)

Garcon disrespectful

Doesn't buy into vegetarian ways

Flippant / dismissive