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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses masculinity as a socially constructed gender (Bristor & Fischer, 1993), examining images to ‘think gender’ or ‘do gender’. Specifically, it explores the narrative content of representations of masculinity as choreographed within a series of photographic print images that seek to position the market appeal of a contemporary lifestyle cookery book. In this way we set out to render more concrete discussions of the transformative potential of images of gender relations. We consider how images of men ‘doing masculinity’ in gendered spaces are not only channeled into reproducing existing gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality in the service of commercial ends, but also, simultaneously, into disrupting such enduring stereotyping through inciting subtle reframing.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we seek to interrogate the dynamic relationship between visual culture and cultural notions of gender as performance (Butler, 1990). The study of masculinity has been achieved within a broad range of recent cultural forms, from films like Fight Club (Trotta, 2004), to TV crime shows like The Bill (O’Sullivan and Sheridan, 2005) to studying sport celebrities like David Beckham as potential sources of cultural change (Cashmore and Parker, 2003). Within consumer research, studies of mountain men (Belk and Costa, 1998), star trek fans (Kozinets, 2001) and bikers (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) have all foregrounded the activities and antics of men doing manly things, often in male environments (Caru, Cova & Tissier-Desbordes, 2004) while an emergent stream of consumer research considers the social construction of masculinity, specifically, images of the male body within advertising (Ostberg & Borgerson, 2004; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004; Patterson and Elliott, 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998).

Our modest study draws inspiration from this body of work to illustrate a visual approach to gender analysis, focusing on the case of one cultural artifact, the ‘Jamie Oliver’ brand1, under the conditions of the rapid expansion of its audience over the last 5 years. Through a close examination of the visual narrative content of print images employed in one of the ‘Jamie Oliver’ cookbooks, The Return of the Naked Chef (Oliver, 2001), the paper opens up questions about the cultural and commercial basis for the generation and use of ideas about gender identity. Those images are understood as thoroughly composed cultural texts that generate information about the way gender is invoked in support of market appeal, drawing their imagery, as Schroeder and Zwick (2004:22) suggest, “primarily from the stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity”. At one level it is clear that not

1 At the time of writing, the range of merchandise branded under the Jamie Oliver Ltd. label includes nine authored cookbooks, a biography, numerous introductions to cookbooks authored by others, posters, calendars, DVDs, CDs of music to cook by, pan sets, flavour shakers, pot roasts, pressure cookers, pot roasts, slow cookers, panini & fajita grill pans, toss & turn tongs, woks, frying pans, lasagne dishes, ragout pans, risotto pots, pasta pots, omelette pans and milk pans.

The study discussed in this paper is based on an analysis of visual images contained in the Jamie Oliver cookery book ‘The Return of the Naked Chef’ (Oliver, 2001).
only have skillful representational practices been employed in choreographing the photographs, they are also at work in manipulating ideas of gender identity that constitute the content of the images. We argue that the photographs themselves represent particular investments in writing particular forms of masculinity into the visual narrations of the images.

We offer an exploratory visual reading of a series of photographs that decorate and punctuate the text and in which images of the celebrity chef and his friends and associates are provided. We ask what those images have to say about notions of men and masculinity and how they contest or confirm social stereotypes about gender roles and relations of power. After Schroeder and Borgerson (1998) and Schroeder and Zwick (2004) we understand those representations as visual narrations of masculinity capable of educating the viewer about conventional modes of gender interaction and sex roles. Our contribution to debates around changing notions of masculinities focuses on representations of male desire framed as men shopping for food, men preparing food, men cooking it, eating it and enjoying sharing the products of their cooking in a variety of social contexts with other men. The images tap into circulating resources of culinary culture, especially ideas of culinary practices as taken for granted arenas for the performance of gender roles and identities. A close reading of those images seems especially salient since much culinary practice typically originates or revolves around that most gendered of domestic spaces, the kitchen (Freeman, 2004).

EXPLORING MASCULINITIES

Rutherford (1992) discusses the dialectical nature of masculinity, whereby it is “given meaning through its culturally constructed difference from femininity.” (1992: 76). This point is discussed by Brittan (1989) when he argues that “Gender is never simply an arrangement in which the roles of men and women are decided in a contingent and haphazard way. At any given moment, gender will reflect the material interests of those who have power and those who do not. Masculinity, therefore, does not exist in isolation from femininity – it will always be an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women.” (1989: 3). One quality which masculinity has previously sought to appropriate is that of rationality. This can be traced to Weber’s seminal ‘Protestant Work’ ethic (1976), whereby the sphere of production over consumption is valorized, but also in the work of Seidler, who argues: “In Western Europe since the period of the Enlightenment in the Seventeenth Century, men have assumed a strong connection between their rationality and their sense of masculine identity. They have learned to appropriate rationality as if it were an exclusive male quality denied to others, especially women.” (1987: 82).

However, much has changed in recent years, especially with men’s increasing participation in the sphere of consumption, for as Bocock (1993) writes: “Men have become as much a part of modern consumerism as women. Their construction of a sense of who they are is accomplished as much through style, clothing, body image and the right looks as is women’s.” (1993: 102). This is echoed in the work of Mort (1996), who, in an early article entitled ‘Boy’s Own? Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture’ (1988) suggests: “Young men are being sold images which rupture traditional icons of masculinity. They are stimulated to look at themselves – and other men – as objects of consumer desire. They are getting pleasures previously branded as taboo or feminine.” (1988: 194). This reconfiguring of masculinities is partly achieved through style magazines such as Arena and Face which sought to construct a space free of the trappings of femininity and domesticity, a space in which women appeared but in a limited fashion as mere ‘talent’ to the male gaze. The suggestion that masculinity is being refashioned and re-presented is continued in the work of Crewe (2003), who focuses upon the shift from the ‘new man’ to the ‘new lad’ and the significant role played by the editors of men’s lifestyle magazines such as loaded and FHM in placing in the popular imagination that it’s OK to desire other men, or at least
what they ‘have’. In a similar vein, Patterson and Elliott (2002) map out the significance of such men’s lifestyle magazines and how they manage to invert the male gaze.

From this viewpoint gender is something that is accomplished; it becomes in other words performed. In our view then, that is why it is so interesting to foreground an everyday practice like cooking, sharing a snack, having friends round for drink, or shopping for food, to focus upon the performative space of representations of such activities and how they provide images to ‘do gender with’, or to think gender with. Here we draw inspiration from the work of Cronin (1997), who appears to recast Goffman’s initial ideas, when she considers advertising images as exploring “how seeing something can be doing something, in terms of a performative process constituting the self and the other through discourses of transparency and their relation to legibility.” (1997: 1). Exposure to images is therefore not a passive relationship, rather the visual is retheorized as production, an embodied process of “reflexively imagining the self and performatively producing the self in those visual moments of exposure”. Cronin charts this process within advertising images by drawing on the work of Judith Butler (1993). Or as Buchbinder explains her contribution: “For Butler, then, it is not so much that, as subjects we ‘have’ gender, as that as subjects we ‘do’ gender, through an array of signs and signs systems.” (1998: 121-122). Our own contribution is to explore a turn to cookery books and their representations for insight and understanding on men and masculinity.

**COOKBOOKS AS GENDER ARTEFACTS**

The argument that there may be more to cookery books than simply food recipes has been made by many authors: Appadurai, for example, argues that “we need to view cookbooks in the contemporary world as revealing artifacts of culture in the making” (1988: 22). While Tobias considers that “Cookbooks contain not only recipes, but hidden clues and cultural assumptions about class, race, gender and ethnicity. They reflect many of the dramatic transformations that have come to define the boundaries of the modern public sphere.” (1998: 3). In this paper, we foreground the ‘hidden clues’ and ‘cultural assumptions’ around gender as a form of performance which emerge from an exploratory reading of contemporary cookbooks.

To achieve this, we draw upon the work of Appadurai’s (1988), for whom the idea of framing culture as ‘text’ offers one way forward for an adequate empirical study of culinary culture and its naturalized forms of representation in cuisine and commodity cookbooks. After Miller we argue that “goods [cookbooks] represent culture because they are an integral part of that process of objectification by which we create ourselves as an industrial society, our identities, our social affiliations, our lived everyday practices. The authenticity of artefacts as culture...derives from their active participation in a process of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others” (1987: 215). Like others (cf. Cook and Crang 1996: 132) we follow Miller (1987) in understanding culture as “involving processes in which cultural life is objectified, in which objects are constructed as social forms, and hence in which cultural artefacts have to be understood in relation to their social and spatial contexts” (1987: 215).

Such theorizations establishes our central point that, from an analytical perspective, commodity cookbooks must be understood, not merely as instrumental texts, conveying, by means of recipes, information about ingredients, their assembly, processing and presentation. Instead as this paper will explore, they also offer access to what Appadurai terms “unusual cultural tales” (1988: 3) suggestive of whom we are, where we have been and where we may be going. The next question therefore becomes how this may be achieved; our own perspective suggests that such tales are often conveyed primarily through the photographic image. In this sense contemporary cookbooks are noted for their aesthetic and visual quality, it is
therefore through an analysis of the images within such texts that our analysis unfolds.

Understood as a form of cultural artefact or text, we can conclude that commodity cookery books can then be studied for what they reveal about the constitutive effects of time and space (Neuhaus 1999), which can be expressed in terms of the reproduction of dominant culinary values (Curtin 1992), but also for what they reveal about notions of identity (Zafar 1999), and most importantly what they highlight in terms of shifting gender norms (Tobias 1998; Neuhaus 1999), but also for our own study in terms of what they say about changing masculinities.

**GENDER AND CULINARY CULTURES**

To say that cookbooks have always been about gender, may be overstating the case. However, it at least foregrounds the important link between notions of gender and its expression in the culturally situated artefact that is the cookbook. For example, Tobias (1998) analysed cookery books published in eighteenth-century America, concluding that they served to position women and define their role in society. This line of argument is continued through the work of Pilchner (1995) who analyses Mexican cookbooks. She argues that they served as sources of ‘cultural capital’ for women in Latin American society, not only through circulating information about native ingredients and recipes, but through providing instructions regarding how to do gender roles and identity. In this way the texts were seen to distribute discipline regarding gender conduct and relations, in other words to generate resources to think about the conduct of conduct.

Likewise, in her analysis of two black women’s cookbooks, Zafar (1999) notes that cookbooks represent a space through which gendered cultural identity is ‘recreated’. In this way she likens her analysis to that of an ethnographic journal, providing a “reading of what we eat, to understand how we construct a self around the axes of food” (1999: 463). Zafar sums up the revelations of her analysis as placing “…African-American cuisine in a political context, record[ing] a social history that must not be forgotten, and relat[ing] the lived experience of the writer and/or her family. Much more than grits and greens, the signifying dishes of the Dardens and Smart-Grosvenor provide us with a taste of where we’ve been, who we are, and where we should be going.” (Zafar 1999: p. 464). Zafar thus suggests that cookbooks represent, or function as ‘recoveries’, or ‘recastings’ of the culture of African-American consumption, as signs of refusal and resistance and of forbidden identity.

This use of cookbooks as cultural artefacts can also be traced in the work of Novero (2000). Her analysis of cookbooks published in Weimar Germany, between the First and Second World Wars, reveals how they function to “reconcile nutritional and economic precepts with an ideology of taste and a modern lifestyle” (2000: 163). This is most evident where she reveals how the representations situate cooking as a technical skill, mediated by the rhetoric of instrumental rationality and efficiency. For instance, in her analysis of a cookbook by Kopp, entitled Bache nach Grundrezepten (Bake with Basic Recipes, 1933), Novero shows how its content, that is the recipes, are rendered as if they were “…formulas that have been tested and perfected and that women can theoretically reproduce. Following the instructions should lead to the same results each time.” (2000: 167). Cooking is thus framed as a form of rationalized work, a form of domestic labour in which pleasure is derived from “the satisfaction in accomplishing the tasks efficiently and in saving time and money. Even then, women are encouraged to make good use of the freedom they gain. The extra time and money should be used purposefully, not simply for pleasure.” (2000: 164-165). The primary means through which this curtailing of cooking is achieved, we are told is through the visual representation of the act itself. That is to say, over five hundred black and white photographs illustrating the ‘precise’ stages of food preparation are provided for the reader to emulate.
Warde (1994) provides a study of the changing contents of food columns in popular UK women’s magazines between 1967 and 1992. Despite the disparity in decades studied he arrives at similar conclusions to those of Novero (1990), insomuch as he observes what he terms ‘a discourse of compliance’, noting that: “Information is now given fairly routinely, not only about precise quantities of ingredients and cooking times, but also about preparation time, nutrient contents, sometimes shopping instructions too…science, measurement, the use of information derived from experiment, rather than trial and error and ad hoc judgement, appear more frequently in the food columns.” (1994: 24).

In this section we have outlined a range of insightful studies which have demonstrated the value of an approach which takes cookbooks seriously. Many studies foreground notions of femininity over masculinity, revealing such cultural texts as forms of ‘cultural capital’ for women, but also as cultural landscapes where struggles over the meaning and performance of gender identities are played out. The early work of Miller (1988) on council estate kitchens revealed how this social space tends to be perceived as a gendered space, a feminine domain, with men more reluctant to initiate changes to the look and appearance of this room, rather it is women who take on the role of creative appropriators (1988: 360). A finding echoed in the later work of Freeman (2004), who presents a cultural history of the making of the modern kitchen highlighting the significant part that women play in shaping the design of the kitchen space. Or, as Bachelard tellingly suggests: “To keep a child out of the kitchen is to condemn him to an exile that distances him from dreams he will never know. The dreamlike qualities of foods are activated by observing their preparation…Happy is the man who, as a young child, ‘hung around’ the woman of the house.” (Cited by Luce Giard, in de Certeau et al, 1998).

When it comes to cooking itself then, many studies have highlighted the gendered nature of this everyday act. Early feminist work was the first to highlight the fact that cooking tends to be perceived as ‘women’s work’ (Oakley, 1974; Charles and Kerr, 1987), where women have historically been judged by their performance in the kitchen. While early work within the sociology of food illustrated the gendered nature of this act, best summed up in the words of one of Murcott’s respondents (1983) ‘It’s a pleasure to cook for him’. In this way, cookbooks are about more than simply food preparation, presentation and consumption, rather cookbooks can also be seen to function as coded instructions.
regarding acceptable forms of performing gender role and identity through culinary practice. Cookbooks are thus revealing on the conduct of conduct, expressing ways of conducting an activity which on casual inspection has little to do with gender, but is in fact ridden with the expression of changing notions of gender. It is toward an understanding of the imagery of masculinity within contemporary cookbooks that the analysis now turns.

**GENDER AND VISUAL ANALYSIS**

In terms of methods our paper is inspired by those studies which have foregrounded visual analysis as a valuable tool for consumer researchers. Here we draw attention to the especially insightful work of Scott (1994), Stern and Schroeder (1994), Schroeder and Borgerson (1998), Ostberg and Borgerson (2004) and Schroeder and Zwick (2004) which provide an in-depth analysis of a limited (typically three to four) range of photographic images. The seminal work of Goffman Gender Advertisements (1979) is also used for inspiration. Schroeder and Borgerson (1998) outline the various forms of analysis available to the consumer researcher when faced with visual data. These range from formal content analysis to studies which prioritize interpretation and understanding. Our analysis seeks to unpack photographic images of culinary culture as a way of generating insights, not only about representational practices surrounding visual culture, but also about the visuality of contemporary consumption and masculinity (Schroeder, 2000). After Wright (2004), we understand the photographic image as a medium and a site of material culture with the ability to achieve in its immanence an intense presence. The photographic image thereby becomes a site of representational practice, a site of signifying activity; where photographs can themselves be seen as social agents doing the work of larger cultural forces, where images are required to be that which they are used to signify. For as Scott explains: “we must learn to understand cameras not as machines that record the word as it is (or even as we see it) but as machines designed to represent the world in the manner we have learned to show it.” (1994: 261). In this sense signification can be seen as a constitutive feature of the context of the communication that is taking place around the discursive subject of cooking, eating and sociability. From this analysis, several core themes have emerged, the main one being the notion of cooking and sociability as gendered spaces; the second, focusing upon the performance of masculinities, framed within the context of culinary culture.

**MASculINITY WITH A TWIST**

Buchbinder (1998) argues that it is the job of representation to “make what is represented seem, to the viewer, reader or onlooker, ‘as large as life, and twice as natural.” (1998: 1). We might add that it is also the task of representation to appear as if beyond explanation and critique. Representations in this sense appear all too natural, as if capturing the real rather than framing possibilities and expectancies. Many of the compositions within the book work hard to convey the pleasures to be had from the sociability that surrounds consuming and preparing food, or as he prefers ‘tucking in’ (see Figure 1). Within the text it is interesting that this is one of only two images which contain women, and in this case it is of a headless woman whose body is literally sliced up, a photographic device which Schroeder and Borgerson (1998:178) describe as committing acts of “symbolic violence [against women] by erasure of identity and intelligence”. The visual content of the remainder of the representations is male-dominated, providing images of Jamie shopping (see Figures 8, 9 &10) or preparing food alone (see Figures 5 and 6); or of anticipating the fun to be had sharing good food with others (see Figure 7); or eating and drinking with his mates (see Figures 2 and 3); or of Jamie with Genaro, the master chef, working (see Figure 4). (See Figure 1 “Tucking in” here.)

Central to most of these images is the notion of food as a facilitator of sociability and communication between men (see Figures 2 & 3). In this respect several images are presented of Jamie eating in the company of
other men. We argue that such images reveal something of the way conventions work in representations of male sociality. They appear to hark back to traditional workplace-related notions of masculine interaction, dependency and intimacy. For example, the section titled ‘morning glory’, about breakfasts, is preceded by an image of Jamie and buddy Ben literally ‘tucking into’ what Jamie calls his ‘bacon sarnie my styyle’.

The casually dressed figures are pictured in monochrome close-up against the backdrop of kitchen units, eating with their hands. They are sitting side by side on the kitchen floor, elbows touching, backs resting against the doors of rather jaded and elderly kitchen units, consuming what can only be described as an over-sized bacon sandwich. A bottle of spicy HP sauce stands erect and uncapped between their legs. Plates rest on their legs, decorated with a dark clot of congealing sauce. In another context this could easily be a pair of scruffily dressed plumbers, electricians or joiners enjoying a well-earned break from the physical labor of typical manly work within a kitchen - decorating, plumbing, construction, wiring, joinery etc. In such a scene, or enclave of masculinity as Caru, Cova and Tissier-Desbordes (2004) have it, gender would typically be written into the image in ways that played on traditional productivist notions of male work and working relations in the workplace. But, the image of Ben and Jamie remains ambiguous in that the visual narrative is silent on what brings them to be sitting side by side on the kitchen floor eating a spiced-up bacon sarnie wrapped in toasted slices of an outsized French loaf. In leaving those circumstances up to the viewer’s imagination to insert, the image is prone to destabilization. For instance, if the men are not in the kitchen working as tradesmen, but as friends, or even partners, enjoying a shared moment of ‘morning glory’ together on the kitchen floor, then the boundaries of the repertoire of interaction, dependency and intimacy between men are being expanded and recast. This is the effect of drawing on shifting discourses of work as a defining feature of gender identity. For as the boundaries between work and leisure are dissolved and recast, then new forms of gender relations are being made imaginable, with womens’ work occurring in the workplace and mens’ work in the kitchen. In other words the gendered nature of work and the workplace is unstable. In this way the gendered nature of the kitchen as a domestic living space is disrupted and opened up to negotiation once again. And indeed the image is perhaps easily read within the text as womens’ invitation to men to come and share the kitchen, for maybe this is how some women like to think that men would think and act. (See Figure 2 ‘Men at workplay’ here.)

In this way the content of Figure 2 is said not simply to be about two men eating breakfast with their hands while sitting on the kitchen floor. It is an image about embodied male informality in terms of the figures striking manly poses and postures. It is also about two dependent men being men interacting on the kitchen floor, and doing so without the protection or assistance of napkins, cutlery, table or chairs. It is an image which seeks to make possible and presentable the rhetorical claim that the kitchen is indeed a gendered domain – or at least that men feel excluded from it, unless they’re chefs - in order that it can also be said that it may be necessary to reclaim this space, to render it inclusive, for the performance of new forms of masculine communion, dependency and intimacy. In this manner the kitchen and its traditional associations with domesticity, sociability, nurturing, nourishment and motherhood is visualized as somewhere masculine men can be at ease, in much the same way as they might be on, say, a building site tucking into the contents of their lunch box or take-away from the local cafe. The image which appears to jettison notions of the kitchen sink as being something that men and women only ever get chained to. For some women the kitchen is a lonely place and they may feel there to be plenty of space in it for a male of their choice to learn about how to do TLC. The image is then about men finding space to occupy this territory, forging from it, to paraphrase Virginia Wolf, a room of their own, essentially through the performance of a male style of intimacy involving eating with a mate on the kitchen floor. Tensions emerge here depending
on how you choose to fill in the blanks regarding the wider circumstances of the image. Invoking the framing stereotype of ‘blokes at work’ plays off traditional characterizations of masculine identity through physical work and acceptable intimacy as camaraderie in the workplace. And this is helped by the focal point of the image being found at the depth of field where the subjects’ hands are carefully wrapped around the sandwich, as if it were a fragile wind instrument. This effectively reduces the clarity of the faces, bodies, floor tiles and kitchen units which make up the backdrop of the image.

Competing versions of masculinity are revealed through framing the kitchen as a space which disrupts conventions regarding the characterization of gender identity through work activity. By employing the kitchen as a landscape against which to frame versions of male intimacy we can see how blurring the boundaries between the characterization of work and leisure also destabilizes gender stereotypes. Acceptable though some forms of male dependency and intimacy in the workplace may be, when work becomes leisure and the workplace becomes the kitchen, new and potentially disruptive versions of male intimacy emerge within the arena of culinary culture. As orchestrated dramas, the prints may draw on clear cultural categories to depict gendered selves. But, the unfinished nature of the visual narrative leaves room for the viewer to insert and improvise competing versions of gender identity. Styles of being male and doing intimacy and the stylistics of masculinity therefore become important components of the performance of masculine identities. (See Figure 3 ‘Riding bareback’ here.)

The critical importance of “styles of being” (Butler, 1990: 139) is similarly visualised in the section of the text entitled ‘bevvies’. This is preceded by an image of Jamie and two friends, Peter and Ben, vigorously consuming slices of watermelon flesh that have been marinated in vodka over a few days, hence the laddish signifier ‘bevvies’. The lads are pictured jauntily riding bareback on the shoulder of a well-worn leather sofa (see Figure 3).

Once again the key message is one of simultaneously widening and perpetuating the repertoire of stages and plots for the performance of male dependency and intimacy. In the previous case we examined the kitchen as a framing device which has the potential not only to exploit but to disrupt gender stereotypes. In figure 3 we are presented with a colorful image of three boisterous and virile young men at play within the constrained space of a leather sofa which effectively frames the print. In one way the image can be read as a story about mates having a lark, a bit of a laugh, perhaps while watching the football or a film, while the wife or partner is out shopping or away with the baby at her mothers. It conveys the unsettling idea that it can be fun to put a bit more effort or thought into your relationships – well, in this case, enough thought to be able to prepare an unusual cocktail to entertain your mates with. So this can be seen as an image of blokes living out a particular version of masculinity, of doing laddish things; of men performing their laddishness with some bravado in an mildly energetic way. And maybe some women like to think of men as being able and willing to put more effort and thought into their relationships; that they are able and willing to think and act on the idea of the point of food being, not merely to satisfy physiological appetites, but to enrich social relations.

Note the homoerotic choreography of the image: Jamie perched in the middle; bodies draped in casual clothing; knees and elbows touching; focal distance around the turn-ups of the trousers and trainers at the edge of the sofa; backdrop starts at the knees; upper body and faces slightly out of focus; sleeves rolled up; Jamie and Ben smiling at each other and making eye contact; Peter looking at the gaze of the viewer; postures relaxed and open; posing on the shoulder of the sofa. Those components are manipulated to give the image a sense of movement and fun, hedonism and informality conveyed through the figures’ demeanor, pose and appearance. The men
with their sleeves rolled up, their legs splayed and outstretched, with their jeans rolled up, and doing that most taboo of acts in every (working class) parlor, resting your shoes on the furniture (albeit a torn and worn sofa). There is a fundamental symmetry to the image, conveyed through the mirroring of their space-consuming sitting positions, arms and knees swinging and dancing in unison, and eye contact which speaks of social affiliation. A sense of connection and communion is conveyed through the eye contact between Jamie and Ben, while Peter’s direct gaze at the camera (the watch-wearer) seems to speak of distrust and intrusion, - perhaps when the producer intends him to look as if he’s watching TV. On male eye-contact, a quote from Henley’s Body Politics (1986) appears apt here:

“Eye engagement is like touch in its mystic and magnetic qualities. As in touch, a spark seems to pass between two persons whose eyes meet – sometimes a spark of recognition, sometimes one of love, sometimes one of conflict…We look to the eyes for meaning.” (1986: 151).

What we take from such dynamic images is a sense of the potential links to be forged between food shopping, preparation, sharing and consumption and masculine identity. In other words, although our representations of those activities may be exploiting circulating ideas about new arenas for the performance of new forms of male identity, the images are not in themselves tools for rewriting ways of doing dependency and intimacy between men. Rather they put to work contemporary notions of masculinity already circulating among the popular imagination and settle them, or unsettle them within the context of intersections with the iconography and symbolic structuring of culinary culture. We argue that the images may be seen to be sites of identity formation, but that they work to simultaneously reinforce and conceal traditional limited notions of masculine sociability. The crudely traditional plot of this image and its easy tendency to perpetuate powerful gender stereotypes reveals to us that in working this way, the visual narrative also invites disruptive readings of the gender codes circulating in commercial culture. In this case we can understand the image of male sociability as a carefully contained display of playful homoeroticism, framed by positioning the guys as riding the tail of the sofa bareback – and reading the dress code and gestures as a sort of ‘guying-up’ of the image. The visual narrative of figure 3 suggests that blokes can still be blokes and have ‘normal’ manly fun eating cocktails in privacy, even if they won’t be seen buying them to drink in the pub when out with their mates. And to this extent the image reproduces the excesses of the banal social stereotype that is lad or bloke culture. It represses suggestions of competing versions of male intimacy and sociability that would make possible a more diverse set of masculinities.

COOKING MASCULINITY

The central argument of this paper is that notions of gender and masculinity are performed through everyday practices such as shopping, cooking, eating and socializing. In this respect, our interest lies in analyzing those instances within the text where glimpses into the how of cooking are revealed. One such image frames cooking in a very specific way (see Figure 4). Here we are presented with a scene that is meaningful, which as Goffman discusses, ‘can be read in a flash’ (1979: 27). In the image the two male chefs are shown in the act of preparing food, in this case fresh pasta. The composition presents an image of professional affiliation, where pose, posture, dress and gesture work to suggest movement, understanding and display. The content of this image is not about men consuming food, as in the earlier pictures discussed. Rather it is an image of male intimacy in the context of a master-apprentice relationship, where pose, posture, dress and gesture work to suggest movement, understanding and display. The content of this image is not about men consuming food, as in the earlier pictures discussed. Rather it is an image of the representation of cooking as production and reproduction through embodied cultural transmission. In an image of professional affiliation, the two men’s elbows, shoulders, butts and backs are seen touching as Genaro (the master) makes a particularly fine and powerful gesture of emphasis to Jamie (the apprentice), who looks fondly at Genaro smiling. The two men are pictured making pasta in the workplace, their kitchen. This is an image in which the spatial
proximity of the two men is significant. Their communion is reinforced by Jamie being shown gazing over his shoulder at the master, while Genaro’s eyes are shown looking off. Finally Genaro is captured making a flamboyant aesthetic gesture with his right forefinger, which is arresting the attention of Jamie. There is a subtle symmetry at work in the image as the two chefs appear to be joined at the hip and comfortable in each others’ company. (See Figure 4 ‘Man and Boy’ here.)

A number of other images of culinary culture frame masculinity in a different style. One such revealing image pictures Jamie tending his garden. He is seen tenderly kneading some dough (see Figure 5). What is striking about the image is the sense of power and control conveyed through his shaping and moulding of the dough. One disembodied hand is pictured cradling the object, while the other hand is shown sculpting it, his fingers literally massaging the dough. His hands are thus captured in motion (note the blurring of the image of his right thumb), a visual representation of everyday agency which takes on the appearance of a crafted performance. Like the previous photographs (see Figures 3 and 4) there is a dynamism here, expressing the ability of photography to capture the momentary and ephemeral performance of cooking. Meanwhile his eyes, semi-shut in deep concentration or even religious ecstasy, are fixed on the object at hand. (See Figure 5 ‘Tenderly’ here.)

This is an image of the cook as a man-of-action, an image where the bond is not a social one, with other men, but with one’s own labour. The link to Marx on estranged labour is all-too-tempting to avoid, so a quote from the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 seems apt:

“(I)t is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself...The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the worker lacks objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself.” (1981: 63).

Cooking in this sense is very serious stuff, a counter to the alienation of the world of work. But it is also man’s work, and there is a definite style and character to this man’s way of doing cooking, in this case gently kneading the dough with care and control. A style of activity where the emphasis is placed upon reiterating those most masculine of appropriations: strength, power, and control.

CONCLUSIONS

Our task in this paper was a modest one: to analyse images in a contemporary cookbook which frame masculinity through the lens of culinary culture. From this starting point we argued that such textural material offers consumer researchers a rich set of data to pose the question of what they may be saying about gender relations. To conclude, it is useful to draw together the main insights to stem from an analysis of such representations. Firstly, the images suggest a story about men in the domestic space of the kitchen, a story of how such a space can be negotiated to suggest a feminized masculine style. In addition to this gender-blending, the images speak of homosociability and notions of male bonding and intimacy. They also affirm a very masculine style of cooking, where the emphasis is upon safeguarding and protecting those most cherished of masculine traits. By way of an ending we leave you with the following image to chew upon, which to us seems a very good way to end (but open up debate) a paper on representations of men and cooking, with some grub: That is an image of a man serving up an over-sized tray of roasted chicken with an all-too-cheeky laddish smile on his face, which is itself suggestive of the assumed tolerance of male frivolity and bravado in the kitchen, in complete contrast to the images of female resistance and protest drawn from the literature.

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