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'Nigella', an Iconic Brand in the Baking: Culinary Culture, Gastrobrands and Identity Myths

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This paper investigates ways in which celebrity functions as a mode of economic production whereby cultural resources are celebritized in pursuit of marketplace appeals. We explore those issues through developing case material that consists of representations of a celebrity chef which are available for consumption through a collection of superior photographic print images situated within a contemporary 'lifestyle' cookery book to explore how an evolving iconic brand can be understood not merely as a way of structuring competition, but as a 'media object' which is the product of the logic of celebrity culture and the celebrity gastro brand of 'Nigella'.

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Culinary Culture, Gastrobrands and Identity Myths: ‘Nigella’, An Iconic Brand in the Baking

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INTRODUCTION

“They say that stars give you something to dream about...[the] screen idols are immanent in the unfolding of life as a series of images. They are a system of luxury prefabrication, brilliant syntheses of the stereotypes of life and love. They embody one single passion only: the passion for images, and the immanence of desire in the image. They are not something to dream about; they are the dream. And they have all the characteristics of dreams” (Baudrillard 1988, 56).

In his perceptive and persuasive rendering of the nature of consumer society and its obsession with fame and celebrity, McCracken (2005) states that “the celebrity world is one of the most potent sources of cultural meaning at the disposal of the marketing system and the individual consumer” (ibid, 113). Indeed, as Pringle (2004) so bluntly puts it, ‘celebrity sells’. While both authors transport us back to the 1960s and McLuhan’s powerful analysis of the “transforming power of media” (1964, 20), Pringle offers a managerial take on the growing complexity of the media environment, where media fragmentation, global reach and the explosion of celebrity culture go hand in hand. Olsen (1999) trenchantly observes that by virtue of the global distribution of its manufactured media product, the US Film and TV media industry is effectively assembling a “Hollywood Planet”. Pringle takes the view that “the celebrity phenomenon has largely been created by [US] movies and television [although] there is no doubt that other media have play[ed] a significant part” (ibid, 10).

To consumer researchers it will come as no surprise that, while generating enormous growth in the demand for media content, rapidly circulating flows of mass media product have bombarded us with stories and images of many manufactured celebrity figures. But, by adding to the growing media clutter, this has made it increasingly difficult for brands to gain and hold consumer attention. In what he terms the ‘era of consent’, where brands increasingly need consumers’ permission to communicate with them, Pringle (2004) concludes that commodity celebrities “who themselves have a high standing in the public eye, [provide] one of the more powerful tools for brand [building]” (ibid, 50). Hence, equally unsurprisingly, building brand visibility through harnessing the ‘cut through’ of celebrity iconography continues to make sound commercial sense.

Paradoxically, while celebrity ‘product’ feeds off fame, it is also embedded within the constitutive logic of promotional culture, for which exposure to the glare of media attention is a mode of economic production (Wernick, 1991). It recursively organises the conditions of possibility of celebrity, not merely as media product and content, but as a medium of communication. And if the message or meaning content is celebrity, while the medium is also celebrity, we then have an example of McLuhan’s pronouncement that “the medium is the message” (1964, 13). This is also an instance of what Baudrillard refers to as ‘the implosion of meaning’, where the message and “all the contents of meaning are absorbed in the dominant form of the medium. The medium alone makes the [communications] event-and does this whatever the contents” (1983, 100). In more prosaic words, commodified celebrities, whose fame derives from carefully calculated media activity and self-presentation, must also manipulate media attention to develop and sustain the visibility and viability of their own marketplace

visibility and viability. Celebrity may be commonly understood as a highly prized, if fleeting, condition that attaches itself to an object of media attention, but as Cashmore and Parker (2003) advise, “...it is [the] commodification of the human form [...] the process by which people are turned into “things”, things to be adored, respected, worshipped, idolized, but perhaps more importantly, things which are themselves produced and consumed” (ibid, 215). The celebrity of celebrity and its product, celebrity, function in fiercely contested cultural domains where competing celebrity brands nurture the visibility of their visibility, while leveraging it to penetrate the ambient noise of competing media products. Thus are the thematic features of the celebrity and the *celebritized*¹ brand not only the product of careful composition and premeditation, but of recursively organized modes of production built around everyday conventions that articulate celebrity, so giving a media object meaning within specific social relations. So, as the opening extract suggests, celebrity is not simply something to dream about; it is the dream.

Pringle (2004), like Rein, Kotler and Stoller (1987) before him, situates managerial interest in branding technology in the device of personalization by means of which commodities come to acquire extraordinary, figurative meanings. Brand identity is made intelligible through the symbolizing capacity of consumers. This feeds into and off iconic media content that promotes chains of associations between face, figure and personality. McCracken (1989) describes as ‘meaning transfer’ the personification by means of which product properties become associated with desirable qualities of the commodified celebrity character. A process of appropriation takes place. McCracken’s argues that celebrities are “key players in the meaning transfer process” (2005, 112) and that “celebrity endorsement and the marketing system are cultural undertakings in which meaning is constantly in circulation” (ibid, 113). He sets out a three-stage process through which “culture and consumption interact to create a system of meaning movement [whereby] some of the meanings of the celebrity [become] the meanings of the product” (1989, 314). Sternberg (1998) describes this transfer as ‘iconographic work’, where, through a combination of facial expression, costume, bearing, gesture, voice and word,

¹We use the terms *celebritized* and *celebritization* in this sense: that if we understand the brand as ‘media object’-the object or thing that is itself the product of media attention paid to it-an example of what Lury refers to as “the broadcast distribution of commodities” (2004,6); and the media object feeds off and into circulating cultural codes, unstable subject positions circulating around, eg, gender roles and identity, or in our case ‘domesticity’; and those subject positions are temporarily stabilized through the deliberate media manipulations of branding and personification; and where, as a media brand a subject position itself is framed and narrativised through the lens of celebrity iconography; then, the cultural logic of celebrity (including the celebrity of celebrity), organized recursively as a mode of production, works through discursive practices of *celebritization*. So, *celebritization* describes what happens when the logic of celebrity is exploited as a mode of production in the service of marketing ends. In this sense the cultural logic of celebrity (and of the celebrity of celebrity) is at the core of consumer society, for, as Warhol famously remarked in 1968, ‘in the future everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes’.

celebrities personify sought-after brand features or attributes. In another article, he observes that “everywhere we look, goods and services are suffused with images [and] capitalism is burgeoning from the calculated production of meanings” (1999, 3). Marketplace activity that draws upon cultural resources to ‘thematize a commodity’ so to heighten its meaning is understood by Sternberg as “iconic production” (ibid, 3). He argues that the activity of loading everyday consumer products with evocative meaning, with what Jameson (1991, 91) refers to as a ‘sign flow’ or ‘inner logic’, generates the brand content that animates desire. We suggest that if the commodified celebrity can be understood as a medium of translation, then the brand itself can be seen as a media object, an essential interface in the cultural logic of consumption.

The purpose of this paper is to explore ways in which celebrity functions as a mode of economic production whereby cultural resources, especially differentiating subject positions currently in circulation, are *celebritized* in pursuit of rhetorical appeal. We explore these issues through developing case material from an investigative site that consists of the branding of a celebrity chef through a collection of superior photographic print images situated within a contemporary ‘lifestyle’ cookery book. We take the photographic content of the cookbook, the representations of the commodified celebrity, as constructed spaces or environments with *celebritizing* characteristics.

Within the built environments of the photographic images we argue that representations perform iconographic work as spatialized forms of discursive practice, allowing us to explore the work of celebrity as the content of those images. In other words, the images make available for inspection models of *celebritized* social relations, in this case framed by the narratives into which particular representations of *domesticity* have been inserted. As in a previous study (Brownie and Hewer 2008) we investigate the mediating role played by the cookbook as cultural artefact, seeing it as a way of further circulating powerful cultural codes of masculinity in pursuit of commercial success. In the context of this study we focus on domesticity as an unstable symbolic form which is put to cultural work, appropriated towards the production of meaning and the amelioration of cultural anxieties within the landscaped environments of the images.

CCCT*2

Within discussions around CCT (Arnould and Thompson 2005) we note that the notion of celebrity seems curiously absent, with exception possibly of O’Guinn (1991) and Schroeder (2006). This strikes the authors as strange, given the fact that contemporary consumer culture is literally awash with commodified celebrity product (Wicks et al. 2007) labouring to help us fashion consumer selves with their wiles, charms and managed identities. To the list of celebrity feminine ‘cooks’-the term ‘chef’ reserved for their hypermasculine male counterparts-Martha Stewart, Elizabeth David, Fanny Craddock and Delia Smith, must surely be added that of *Nigella*, (to not italicize it would surely be a sin!). *Nigella* joins that long list of celebrity actresses: Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth, Audrey Hepburn to name but three; and celebrity divas, Madonna and Kylie-all of whom exist in the hallowed territory of fame, celebrity stardom and fandom. Residing in a mythic land in which one’s surname becomes entirely unnecessary, redundant to communicate the appeal, magnetism and sway held and wielded by such iconic celebrity characters.

We argue in this paper that the iconicity of the *Nigella Brand* has as much to do with the *recipes* (Brownlie and Hewer 2008; Holt 2004) which it offers for rethinking feminine identities, domesticity and womanhood within contemporary consumer culture. Hence to explain the attraction, the constructedness of the *Nigella Brand* and

its marketplace appeal, we consider the cultural logic of celebrity, unpacking the role that celebrities play in assuaging doubts and managing cultural anxieties, what Holt (2004) refers to as “meaningful stories, myths that work as salves for contradictions in the nations’s culture” (ibid: xi). While we pay tribute to the insightful work of Holt (2004), especially his concepts of cultural branding and identity myths, in exploring the cultural meanings that celebrity brands circulate, we also recognise the significance of thinking of them as constituting a particular form of *Myth Today* (Barthes, 1985). In this regard, we also draw upon the inspirational work of McCracken who suggests that since “all of us labor to fashion manageable selves, it is inevitable that we should cultivate a knowledge of this [celebrity] world.” (1989, 318).

THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT NIGELLA

“This is a book about baking, but not a Baking Book. The trouble with much modern cooking is not that the food it produces is not good, but that the mood it induces in the cook is one of skin-of-the-teeth efficiency, all briskness and little pleasure. Sometimes that’s the best we can manage, but at other times we don’t want to feel stressed and overstretched, but like a domestic goddess, trailing nutmeggy fumes of baking pie in her languorous wake...” (Lawson 2000, inset page to front cover)

The *Nigella* brand includes all manner of cookware items, from swanky red measuring cups to nifty serving hands, from cookie cutters to an all-purpose pot (well who needs lots of pots cluttering up the kitchen when you can have one), and a wipe-clean laminated shopping bag adorned with cocktails and delectable deli goodies, or as she explains on *Nigella.com* “I have a terrible habit of walking around town with tatty plastic bags and this is my attempt to rehabilitate in style. I can get a spare pair of shoes, books, magazines, emergency rations and the usual rubbish in here, and it actually looks good on the arm too: no more bag lady.” (*Nigella.com*, accessed 28/11/07).

This *Living Kitchen* cookware range is available globally from selected retail outlets. It generates annually more than seven million pounds. The product range is enlivened by a number of glossy-stylized cookbooks (Lawson 2000, 2001, 2007), which can be likened to the ‘How To’ manuals of yesteryear, presenting ready-made solutions or ‘salves’ to our cultural doubts and anxieties—like those of *How to Eat*, *How to be a Domestic Goddess*. This also includes a variety of TV programmes and accompanying books which are exported overseas, from those of the *Nigella Bites* (2000) era, to the most recent offering, *Nigella Express* (2007). Herein, viewers and readers are transported to that fantasyland where the impossible is made possible³—a land in which it is possible to not only *have your cake and eat it*—but a land in which we are drawn into a particular version of feminine identity, a branded subject position around which it is possible to do the cooking whilst caring for others, to give others pleasure, if that choice works for you. However, it is not necessary to be chained to the kitchen sink catering for the needs of others to feel loved, loving and needed. It is also possible to choose to care for yourself, say through taking trouble to feed yourself and choosing food you like rather than deferring to the choices of significant others. In constructing her version of the celebrity chef, pleasures of cooking, eating and caring

²CCCT, ie Consumer Culture Celebrity Theory!!

³For copyright reasons we are unable to reproduce the images from the book here. To view the images seek out Lawson (2007) or *Nigella.com*.

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.

In Nigellaland we are transported to a magical place of plenty, a consumer culture where supermarkets reign supreme; a land in which you can literally *express* it all (but at a cost). This narrativization seeks to assuage any doubts or anxieties experienced by her cash-rich, time-poor, viagra-induced cosmopolitan constituency. This is a hegemonic land of taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), where everybody has that most desired and cherished of kitchen adornments the salt pig (and it has to be full size measuring 16cm x 18cm), to those not in the know a pot for holding salt, but for Nigella aficionados this commonplace object is magically transformed through the story-telling capabilities of our 'brand author':

"I am a complete *Maldon* salt addict, and like to be able to keep my salt out at grabbable distance near the stove at all times. Again, the salt pig I own is functional, but no more, and I wanted one as a part of the range, one I really wanted to live with and take pleasure from just seeing it on the kitchen top."

Woodside et al. (2008) argue that storytelling plays a central role in how people relate to one another and that brands are important actors in the myths that inform such stories and move people to action. Building on this line of thought, we suggest that GastroBrands are thus constructed around their story-telling potential; stories which inevitably do a seamless job of promoting particular 'brand authors' in their pursuit of difference.

ALL ABOARD THE NIGELLA EXPRESS

All aboard the *Nigella Express* then, a homey spectacular realm in which the kitchen becomes a magical familial and social place. A site not simply for domestic toil and drudgery; but a space for self-fulfilment, emancipation, calculated hedonism and premeditated fun. Here we are being sold a particular version of commodified pleasure and liberation: where the gals all look great, even in the morning, and even when making the meals for her imaginary cosmo gastronista guests, for (yummy) dad and for the (yummy) kids. This is a magical liminal realm where the washing-up never needs doing; a land where the inevitable messiness of everyday living and cooking is banished never to be seen; a land where the clamouring pressures of kids and the daily grind of employment are remarkably and effortlessly erased. A glamorous and all too seductive version of femininity and homeyness then, where the mundane and ordinary are never allowed to set foot. Within this gastroporn vista the character of Nigella rules, as a celebrity we all love to hate. And perhaps it is this collectivized hatred that propels the brand and its all too seductive and sex-suggestive myths. In a contemporary consumerland where size zero's rule the celebrity zeitgeist, Nigella stands out in her all too retro-voluptuousness. For her 2000 cookbook offering *How to be a Domestic Goddess*, the inset pages contain golden-hued (sepia would be just too old-looking) images of what can only be likened to 1950's *Stepford Wives* revelling in the delights of taking the Sunday roast from the oven, exuding poise, grace and what can only be described as ecstatic delight at the marvels of deftly wielding a rolling pin and measuring milk from a *milk bottle* (and look what happened to those objects). The blurb for the book offering reads:

"This is a book about baking, but not a Baking Book. The trouble with much modern cooking is not that the food it produces is not good, but that the mood it induces in the cook is one of skin-of-the-teeth efficiency, all briskness and little pleasure. Sometimes that's the best we can manage, but at

other times we don't want to feel stressed and overstretched, but like a domestic goddess, trailing nutmeggy fumes of baking pie in her languorous wake..." (Lawson 2000, inset page to front cover)

So what the Nigella brand offers we might argue is a particular version of 'doing domesticity'; her currency and widespread appeal the result of the Nigella brands' ability to navigate, negotiate and even side-step tricky cultural and feminist contradictions, especially that of drudgery of the domestic sphere. Or as Nigella exhorts in the introduction for *How to be a Domestic Goddess*:

"I neither want to confine you to kitchen quarters nor even suggests that it might be desirable. But I do think that many of us have become alienated from the domestic sphere, and that it can actually make us feel better to claim back some of that space, make it comforting rather than frightening. In a way, baking stands both as a useful metaphor for the familial warmth of the kitchen we fondly imagine used to exist, and as a way of reclaiming our lost Eden." (Lawson 2000: vii).

Here the brand liturgy (in its earliest form) considers the salve (Holt, 2004) for the anxieties of domesticity as female identity to flow from the mythical craft and comforts to be had from baking and enjoying the fulfillment that comes from caring for others and giving them pleasure. In this manner, the success of *Nigella* the celebrity brand cannot simply be explained by recourse to her perceived credibility, or her trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, or even her beauty, as the Brand Management literature (Keller 2004: 376) would have us believe.

Rather the *Nigella* brand exploits multiple competing subject positions in circulation around the identity myth of domesticity. Representations assembled from those subject positions suggest a new narrative of domesticity for the time-starved, body-conscious, self-indulgent contemporary woman. Thus constructs a version for our post-feminist, post-gender, postmodern times that, while sounding overwrought and precious, also strikes an alluring and comforting note. That is to say, the *Nigella* brand does not simply reiterate such brand propositions and values. Rather it performs and enacts such propositions of culinary sexyness and culinary homeyness to thereby rolling-pin out any of the inherent contradictions of our mundane, firefighting, reality tv, work-obsessed everyday lives. The brand, especially in its later form, responds to such collective existential and ontological dilemmas over experiences of time scarcity and stress generated by juggling the roles of worker, wife, parents and yummy mummy (O'Donohoe 2007), to name but a few. Moreover, Nigella's celebrity brand of domesticity generates compensatory resources—Holt's salve (2004)—to help readers respond creatively to erasing the existential tensions and anxieties commonly experienced in their everyday lives. Suggestive perhaps of Baudrillard's (1988) notions of the constraint of pleasure and the view of consumption as a form of production (1988). The introductory blurb of the latest extension of the brand, the *Nigella Express* (2007) cookbook thus reveals:

"The Domestic Goddess is back but this time it's instant. Nigella and her style of cookery have earned a special place in our lives, symbolising all that is best, most pleasurable, most hands-on and least fussy about good food. But that doesn't mean she wants us to spend hours in the kitchen, slaving over a hot stove.

Featuring fabulous fast foods, ingenious short cuts, terrific time-saving ideas, effortless entertaining and simple, scrump-

tious meals, Nigella Express is her solution to eating well when time is short.

Here are mouthwatering recipes, quick to prepare, easy to follow, that you can conjure up after a long day in the office or on a busy weekend, for family or unexpected guests. This is food you can make as you hit the kitchen running, with vital tips on how to keep your store cupboard stocked, freezer and fridge stacked. When time is precious, you can't spend hours shopping, so you need to make life easier by being prepared. Not that the recipes are basic-though they are always simple-but it's important to make every ingredient earn its place in a recipe. Minimise effort by maximising taste. And here too is great food that can be prepared quickly but cooked slowly in the oven, leaving you time to have a bath, a drink, talk to friends, or do the children's homework. Minimum stress for maximum enjoyment..." (www.nigella.com/books/detail.asp?area=5&article=3510)

As a slogan for the brand 'Minimise effort by maximising taste' ain't a bad one. And seeking clarity through recourse to Bourdieu on habitus and social class, especially in his discussion over the role of the new petite bourgeoisie, we might suggest that an ethics of consumption is being enacted:

"Seeking its occupational and personal salvation in the imposition of new doctrines of ethical salvation, the new petite bourgeoisie is predisposed to play a vanguard role in the struggles over everything concerned with the art of living, in particular, domestic life and consumption, relations between the sexes and the generations, the reproduction of the family and its values...the new ethical avant-garde urges a morality of pleasure as duty. This doctrine makes it a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to 'have fun'...The fear of not getting enough pleasure, the logical outcome of the effort to overcome the fear of pleasure, is combined with a search for self-expression and 'bodily expression and for communication with others ('relating'-exchange), even immersion in others (considered not as a group but as subjectivities in search of their identity)." (1984, 366-367).

This is perhaps why the naturalistic *denouement* for every TV programme always has to be the ritualistic display of food as a means for, what Maffesoli (1996) might refer to as, our *being-togetherness*-a culinary gift which makes material the ineluctable and ephemerality of the everyday as a form of *immersion in others*. Communicating and conveying those all-important ethical brand qualities of taste and distinction, but achieved with minimum effort and toil, justified and legitimated visually as doing one's bit for the greater good of others, especially the voracious gastronomists of dinner-partyland.

As a brand then, the Nigella Brand ain't that shy about coming forward; ain't that shy about maximising its brand assets (as they say in the Brand Management textbooks, cf. Keller 2004); ain't that shy about responding to any lingering doubts over the earlier *Domestic Goddess* message, with its all-encompassing, all-too-labour-intensive, back-to-the-kitchen mentality. But most importantly, the Nigella Brand works hard to enjoin us against the choices and dispositions of the *necessary*, an all too terrifying place signalled as Bourdieu suggests by a "resignation to the inevitable." (1984, 372). Instead, through living the *Nigella* way, we might say that the everyday becomes a site for the re-chantment of the labour of identity, pleasure and fun around an ethics of consumption and the all too consuming delights of the spectacular.

CELEBRITIES, FEMININITIES AND THE DRAMATISATION OF THE SPECTACULAR

Within the cultural studies literature on celebrities, Chaney (2002) argues that "celebrities work at the dramatisation of mundanity" (2002, 113). In this way such manufactured characters are said to embody that thin line between communicating and displaying, for all to see, the ordinariness of the everyday and the flight to the spectacular and extra-ordinary. In being able to blur this distinction then rests their appeal. Likewise, Bell and Hollows (2005) explore how celebrities (or 'lifestyle experts') take upon the role of "advising us on consumer choice-*interpreting* the lifestyle landscape for us rather than dictating how to live" (2005, 15, italics in original). They continue by suggesting: "Voice and manner are important here, too, in making expertise ordinary, which also means making it accessible and inclusive." (2005, 15). Perhaps this is why *Brand Delia*⁴ was doomed to fail for the late nineties and early noughties, as all too schoolmarmish, and all too hectoring Nanny Mummy. *Brand Nigella* also treads a tricky line here as a cultural intermediary. But it is clearly the case that her TV gastro-makeover programmes (as do the images within the book) work hard at the dramatisation of mundane spaces, such as the kitchen, garden and dining room table, coupling this with her own silky dulcet tones, cover-girl looks, friendly and flirtatious affectations which work hard to convey the possibilities of the spectacularity of the domestic sphere. In this light, it's useful to turn to Cashmore and Parker's (2003) assessment of the appeal of *Brand Beckham* as a bringing together of seemingly contradictory representations of masculinity "that contradicts, confuses and conflates all in one. He is 'new man' (nurturer, romantic, compassionate partner) and 'new land' / 'dad-lad' (soccer hero, fashionable father, conspicuous consumer-some would argue, all round, cosmetically conscientious 'metrosexual') while demonstrating vestiges of 'old industrial man' (loyal, dedicated, stoic, breadwinning)." (2003, 225). Perhaps we can say that the *Nigella* brand works in a similar way, syncretically blurring the distinctions, the apparent inconsistencies of traditional-stay-at-home-mummy (caring, pinny bedecked-homemaker), with professional-entrepreneurial mummy (smooth operator, woman-on-top, out-competing men), but also managing to conflate such modes of femininity with that of yummy-mummy (sexy, desirable, clad in designer-clothes).

Nigella also has the perfect credentials for that of a Celebrity Gastronomist—a colourful and tragic past. Prior to publishing her swathe of cookery books (2000, 2001, 2007), as Nigella Lawson she was not only the daughter of the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer during the Thatcher years, Nigel Lawson, she was also the food writer for that ultimate fashionista publication *Vogue*. The death of her first husband, journalist John Diamond, and subsequent second marriage to Charles Saatchi is further evidence of her strong media appeal. Her continuing appeal is also assured in blogland, as the range of Nigella's books remain popular in those all-important Amazon reviews with *How to be a Domestic Goddess* scoring a cool 44 out of 51 reviews at the all-important Five Star level. *Nigella Express* appears less popular, but still 21 out of 38 reviews rated it at Five Star. One such review on Amazon.com is typical of most and suggests on the theme of Nigellahood:

"We all adore (or want to be) Nigella in our house! We love time spent fiddling around with a zillion ingredients, gallons of cream and a dozen eggs BUT this is fabulous too!!

⁴Delia Smith is a well-known UK cookbook writer, whose most famous book *Delia Smith's Complete Cookery Course*, published originally in 1978, but since reprinted over 20 times stands not so proud on many a budding cooks' top shelf.

I have two children who love tasty food (who doesn't?) and I needed some new ideas for quick meals! You will find plenty of them in this book and your kids will love trying out some new flavours!! Popular with my two are the white bean mash, chicken schnitzel with bacon and green eggs and ham (frequently accompanied by the Dr Seuss story of the same name!).

Don't be put off by the "Express" element of the title! This is a great book with just enough Nigella chat to also make it a good read when you're not cooking." (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Nigella-Express-Lawson>).

A review which 104 out of 118 fellow readers found 'useful'. Another reviewer was less popular and suggested a counter side to her appeal:

"Nigella herself is possibly the most irritating person on TV today-her simpering, her over-the-top adjectives and her ridiculous outings with her 'friends' who have obviously never set eyes on her before make me reach for the off button. BUT I have to admit that her recipes in this new book are terrific." (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Nigella-Express-Lawson>)

For us, such vitriol and loathing serves to merely add more vitality and dynamism to the relationships (Fournier, 1996) and connections, consumers generate around the *Nigella brand*.

CONCLUSIONS

By way of a contribution we argue that what makes the *Nigella* brand phenomenon of interest to consumer researchers is not only that it employs circulating subject positions of domesticity and feminisms, but that it is playful with them. It self-consciously nudges away at their assumed limits, subtly disrupting uncontested norms, bending them ever so gently to the imperatives of wider contemporary debates about domestic lifestyles. And in offering resources to help undo, or at least resist embedded assumptions about socially acceptable forms of domesticity, we argue that the 'Nigella Express' cookbook also offers material that is suggestive of strategies for the transformative performance of domesticity. We find that the content of those strategies is generated by means of images informed by ideas that turn on the blurring of boundaries between the pursuit of pleasure through caring for others, and the pursuit of pleasure through caring for the self (which in some cases is achieved through caring for others); between the leisured self and the employed self; between the public world of the workplace and the intimate, private world of domesticity; between the stressed, time-short self and the self-indulgent self; between the controlled self and the decontrolled, calculated hedonist self; between self of deferred pleasures and the self of immediate gratifications; between the cooking as pleasure self and the cooking as additional hassle self. It is then possible to understand those images as sites for rethinking, not only how domesticity is performed, but also how we seek to fashion seductive representations of such conduct. Deeply rooted anxieties can surround the disruption of even apparently minor details defining social differentiation, especially fears over the balance achieved between restraint and self-indulgence, between giving and taking pleasure and what that might say about your ability to conduct yourself in a recognizably acceptable way within contemporary consumer culture.

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