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Piper, N orcid.org/0000-0002-4618-9334 (2015) *Jamie Oliver and Cultural Intermediation*. *Food, Culture & Society*, 18 (2). pp. 245-264. ISSN 1552-8014

<https://doi.org/10.2752/175174415X14180391604288>

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Jamie Oliver and cultural intermediation

Abstract

This paper examines how Jamie Oliver, an increasingly global celebrity chef, works in as a cultural intermediary in a variety of ways. The paper explores focus group data from an empirical audience study to demonstrate how Jamie Oliver is received and used by different people. Particular focus is given to the way notions of normality and novelty figure in audience engagement with Jamie Oliver and how these are key to the way he functions as a cultural intermediary. The paper explores instances of positive identification that are often supported through a sense of personal familiarity with Jamie Oliver. It also tracks negative identifications where audiences refuse to accept the cultural and practical value of his suggestions for a culinary lifestyle. These identifications, whether positive or negative, are theorised as cultural intermediation. The paper argues that intermediation should be understood as situated and co-produced as audiences bring moralised notions of self, other, class and gender to bear upon their view of this celebrity chef and his influence in their life. The research finds that the perceived normality of Jamie Oliver is a key factor in allegiance and successful intermediation. Reports of familiarity and personal affinity are often seen as the key to inspiring a willingness to 'try something new'. Resistance to some of Jamie's culinary and social norms by Jamie Oliver highlight the extent to which domestic notions of culinary and social normality are used to defend against his influence and deny his importance as a cultural intermediary. The power of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries should be considered as part of dynamic social processes.

Introduction

Jamie Oliver is a UK based celebrity chef who numbers among a growing, increasingly global proliferation of television cooks. The rather banal title 'television cook' belies what is arguably a staggering range of potential social roles that such figures play in a heavily mediated world. To date academics have been playing catch up with the activities of celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver in order to better understand the cultural, political and economic significance of such rapidly changing figures. The principal concern of this paper is to provide some empirically grounded insights into the role Jamie Oliver plays in cultural intermediation. That is to say, what do people actually do when they engage with this celebrity chef?

Recognising Jamie Oliver as a culinary lifestyle advocate, 'lifestyle guru' (Lewis, 2008) or 'ordinary expert' (Lewis, 2010) raises questions about the way audiences engage with his ideas in practice. Television series' such as *The Naked Chef* and more recently *Jamie's 30 Minute Meals* are exemplary of the lifestyle genre. In the *Naked Chef* one sees a young chef displaying a 'hip', hedonistic urban lifestyle in what is presented as his own domestic life (Hollows, 2003). In *Jamie's 30 Minute Meals*, the viewer sees him appealing to the 'time poor' by insisting on, and demonstrating how to prepare seemingly lavish meals in just half an hour. It may be the case that food media can be about inspiring fantasy (Ketchum, 2005) and vicarious consumption (Adema, 2000; Barthes, 1972) in a viewing context. However these demonstrations of culinary lifestyle are not simply presented as entertainment but as value laden suggestions for domestic practices that viewers might take on. For

example Hollows (2003) notes how he is shown riding a Vespa, arranging dinner parties for friends and using certain kinds of language such as the word 'pukka'¹ (in his case with a pronounced 'Essex boy' accent) to promote a positive view of his lifestyle that potentially beckons audiences to take it on. These so called 'ordinary experts' (Lewis, 2010) such as Jamie Oliver need to be understood in the context of their varied social reception in order to assess whether people really do accept their authority as taste makers and domestic pedagogues. For one thing this might cause academics to reconsider the extent to which a socially differentiated audience regards their particular version of ordinariness or expertise as valuable. An underlying concern in this literature regards the extent to which celebrity chefs and food media carry the ability to democratise taste (Bell and Hollows, 2005). This underlines a key point in the debate about the value of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries. Are they regarded as working to democratise culinary knowledge (see Bell and Hollows, 2005; Powell and Prasad, 2010), or do these presentations actually offer only an illusory opportunity for people to shift their class status through food (see Adorno and Horkheimer, 2007; Barthes, 1972; Lebesco and Naccarato, 2008)? One way to nuance this rather binary picture is to explore the particular ways that consumers exercise judgement in taste and grounds on which they do so.

The practical uptake of his suggestions may not be the most socially relevant form of intermediation since debating the merits of his culinary style and of his worth as a figure within popular culture more generally is an important way for people to participate in public life. As Hill (2005) points out, expositions of particular lifestyles are not merely neutral pieces of information but display what are considered 'good' ways to live. The presentation of desirable ways to cook and live carries with it, and prompts normative questions about the alternatives. These become particularly important in the context that they are presented as 'normal' because they stand to clash with established conceptions of normality in lifestyle amongst a diverse range of people. This leaves open the possibility that presentations of the 'good life' in food entertainment media are implicitly calling other practices into question as 'bad'. Discussing these implicit normative claims is a significant part of food media engagement. For example Skeggs et al (2008) have talked about the way audiences of 'reality TV' actively produce their identities through talking about their viewership. It is for that reason that the terms of debate around their role as cultural intermediaries should be broadened to include the way they enter social dialogue regardless of whether or not they have a significant bearing on social taste or culinary activity.

In the remainder of this paper I briefly discuss the concept of the cultural intermediary and some of the current thinking about celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries. In the methodology I discuss the use of audiencing theory and the use of focus groups as a way to study cultural intermediation in an empirically grounded way. I then take some selected examples from some focus groups to exemplify some of the ways that Jamie Oliver and his audiences are caught up in the process of cultural intermediation. In the first two examples (Maud and James) I discuss the classed and gendered nature of some adoptions of Jamie Oliver's lifestyle advice. In the second two (Wendy and Brian) I discuss how even the rejection of Jamie Oliver invokes a process of cultural intermediation as Jamie Oliver is drawn into social discourses on taste and value. The point of these examples is to draw out some of the diversity and distinctiveness involved in the way people actively engage with

¹ A slang term basically meaning 'good' which this celebrity chef has famously become associated with in the UK.

Jamie Oliver. This situates cultural intermediation in food media as a coproduction rather than a one way flow of information.

Cultural intermediaries and cultural intermediation

Palmer (2008) argues that whilst “lifestyle programming is nothing new in the history of television, recent additions to the genre have become more aggressive in imploring people to rethink their identities, familial relations and political sensibilities in a way that represents a significant shift from a public service ethos to “inform, educate and entertain” (2008:1). However the extent to which people actually do rethink these aspects of life in light of the suggestions of lifestyle media is less well understood. So whilst there may have been a relative upsurge in the way culinary practices are related to social and cultural identity, there remains a gap in our understanding of the way audiences actually deal with these messages in practice. Cultural intermediations, in their specific forms, are defined by the way audiences engage with food media messages.

The concept of the cultural intermediary was originally coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), and was principally intended to apply to an emergent middle class whose work in the so called ‘cultural industries’ worked to move cultural ideas into new social and economic spheres. Nixon and Du Gay (2002) note that Bourdieu defines cultural intermediaries broadly as those involved in the production of cultural programmes including those broadcast via radio and television. In its original conception the term referred principally to those facilitating the flow of information from an expert source to various audiences. Under such a view it would be the production executives and media workers that would be defined as cultural intermediaries rather than the ‘stars’ of media per se. Nonetheless celebrity chefs can be viewed as cultural intermediaries because of the way they distribute culinary and lifestyle information to audiences (e.g. Bonner, 2005; Hollows, 2003; 2010). The experience of food media for the consumer puts them in more obvious contact with the celebrity than it does with their production company. Of course those working to bring celebrity chefs to the screens and books of the consumer can also be regarded as intermediaries but from the point of view of the consumer it is the celebrity that is the chief conduit of information. Further to that and despite recognised semantic issues with the term ‘cultural intermediary’ (De Propriis and Mwaura, 2013) it is certainly the case that they are involved in the business of cultural intermediation alongside their audience counterparts.

A key claim of this paper is that the process of intermediation in the context of food media is defined as a coproduction between audience and media. In its broadest sense cultural intermediation describes the process of moving ‘cultural’ information around. Typically the figure of the cultural intermediary is ordained through the process of imparting forms of knowledge, experience or skill to another person who did not possess this before. The study of the cultural intermediary and the allied process of cultural intermediation places its central interest on the way that cultural information is moved around and how this information comes to shape contemporary tastes and consumption cultures. It is not surprising that celebrity chefs have been considered as cultural intermediaries because much of their work promotes forms of culinary learning (Caraher et al 2000; Rich, 2011) and lifestyle advice (Hollows, 2003; Powell and Prasad, 2010). In short they offer people ideas about ways to shape their culinary and social lives by presenting particular visions of domestic culinary activity. The transfer of ideas through media, whether it is television, book or internet based, can be regarded as a straightforward form of cultural intermediation. It is not necessary for the audience, whomever they are, to act upon it for intermediation to occur. The specific way that

this information is dealt with in a range of social circumstances adds another layer of complexity to the nature of cultural intermediation.

Studying audiences in contexts other than the immediate site of viewing offers a good way to understand some of the facets of cultural intermediation including how people report using ideas from celebrity chefs (or not) as well as how celebrity chefs become part of lived culture through social exchange. Thus, here, I report and analyse the findings from a study informed by the methodological approach called 'audiencing' (Fiske, 1992; Piper, 2013) where analysis of focus group data provides empirically informed insights into cultural intermediation.

Methodology

The principle theoretical ambition of this article is to use an approach informed by the concept of audiencing (Fiske, 1992) to identify some of the key social practices that are involved in the cultural intermediation of food media. The concept of audiencing provides a way to study how audiences engage with media in multiple contexts. Of key interest are the ways that the social uses and understandings of a given text shift according to a range of 'variables' including specific social contexts, practices and locations. For example it has been argued that some audiences deal with particular Jamie Oliver programmes very differently according to whether they are watching him on television or subsequently talking about them with friends (Piper, 2013). This theoretical approach is supported by the use of focus groups where reported behaviours and observed social exchanges relating to Jamie Oliver reveal the complex relationships individuals have to this media.

The following analysis is taken from a series of interviews and focus groups that were carried out in two towns in the UK as part of a research project studying the audiences of Jamie Oliver². Audience engagement with Jamie Oliver's lifestyle programming is explored through the focus group encounter as a key site where audiences form active relationships to Jamie Oliver and to those within their social group. A series of 10 focus groups each composed of around five people and six in-depth interviews were undertaken in Tunbridge Wells in the south of England in 2011³. The focus groups were comprised of individuals that were all known to each other as friends, work colleagues, and mostly both. The groups were comprised of friends and family and were recruited on the basis that they already socialised with one another on a regular basis. They were conducted over dinner and drinks to approximate the 'normal' social conditions that these participants were likely to engage in. Following Holbrook and Jackson (1996) I argue that there are significant benefits to recruiting 'natural groups'. In particular I was concerned to observe how Jamie Oliver is engaged with as part of social interactions including the effects that peer pressure might have on the formulation of responses such as a tendency towards conformity that has been posited by others (Stewart et al, 2006). This 'natural groups' approach was adopted to facilitate a close approximation of the normal social interactions that a group of friends might have and to encourage the openness that familiarity can foster (Burgess, 1996). In regard to this paper I focus on two of those focus groups. The first group was made up of five participants of varying ages. Maud and Alec are married and in their fifties and sixties respectively, Catherine and Rachel are in their mid-twenties and sisters while James is in his mid-twenties and a mutual friend of all. The social composition of this group

² The project is part of a wider programme of research looking at Consumer Culture in an 'Age of Anxiety' (Conanx) funded by the European Research Council.

³ Tunbridge Wells has been typically represented as an upper middle class town where the attributes of wealth and trappings of highbrow culture could be said to thrive (Cobb, 2009).

was mixed, with some participants displaying more working class identifications than others. The second group was comprised of local council administrators and friends (who socialise outside of work). The focus group took place over dinner. The group was made up of four women (28, 32, 50, and 52) and two men (31 and 35). The groups were all white and mostly working class.

I offer some insights into the ways that media figures such as Jamie Oliver are woven into a personalised relationship with individuals and how these personal relationships are brought to bear in social exchanges as Jamie Oliver enters, figuratively speaking, everyday interactions. In common with Skeggs et al (2008), emphasis is placed upon the way individuals produce their identities through the focus group encounter rather than relying on reported behaviours and opinions as the sole source of data. To make the conjoining of audiencing and cultural intermediation more clear, this paper is concerned to explore how Jamie Oliver's ideas are appropriated or rejected, how they are personalised, and how they are spoken about as concrete forms of social practice. In the process, factors of age, gender and social norms are analysed to explore the part they play in the particular ways that Jamie Oliver comes to matter in cultural intermediation

Cultural intermediation in practice – the coproduction of culinary identity

In the following sections I take some discrete examples of people who have engaged with Jamie Oliver and discuss how each of these constitute different forms of cultural intermediation. The sections discussing James and Maud are examples of people adopting aspects of Jamie Oliver's lifestyle suggestions for different reasons according to their age, gender and class position. The second section is drawn from a different focus group and discusses the various ways that these people engage with one of Jamie Oliver's ideas about using a chopping board to serve food. In one example I refer to the way the group talks about the chopping board as a transgression of culinary norms. In another example I talk about the way an individual, Brian, uses the rejection of Jamie Oliver to assert his own domestic sovereignty.

James – Intermediation as novel development

A 30 year old man called James exemplifies the process using Jamie Oliver as a route into novel domestic possibilities and how, in talking about this process, Jamie Oliver becomes part of a cultural intermediation of individual culinary identity. . This section highlights how factors of age and gender appropriate behaviour made Jamie Oliver an attractive cultural intermediary. At the same time it demonstrates how this individual's social and cultural background made this kind of attraction possible.

The excerpts here are taken from a focus group in Tunbridge Wells and principally reflect the conversation between James and a 50 year old woman called Maud. Both of them can be characterised as 'foodie types' and both are certainly frequent and enthusiastic cooks. James was formerly a professional chef and Maud has also worked as a chef in the past. In James' words,

I've been fortunate because my Mum was a home ec teacher so she knew the score, she knew what to do and what not to do...I have memories of, you know, coming here and, you lot had gone off somewhere and we were having a few beers and a smoke the book had just come out and we were like, alright, shall we try that? It, it sparked, like a, because he'd taken away the fuddy duddy, and the regimented side, I've already mentioned this, but that's what I feel. It took it to just a different level, I think I remember reading in the Guide of the

Guardian, just the TV review and it was like a preview of the very first series and they said something about you know the Naked Chef being something refreshing and something different, and by the way ladies he's not naked although some wish he was. And you know things like that, there was obviously a marketing machine but it worked, you know because it did create a buzz because he reached the people that were reachable or wanted to be reached.

James' recollections here are indicative of a formative period in his youth during which he was 'reached' by Jamie Oliver. The introduction of Jamie Oliver into his life was facilitated by what might be considered a fairly middle class 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984). The reference to reading *The Guide* in *The Guardian* newspaper for example, highlights what could be thought of as a typical British middle class source of cultural information and to a certain extent, suggestion on the part of journalists⁴. The connotation here is that this publication could be seen to legitimate certain forms of popular culture and/or offer a powerful source of critique to its readers on different kinds of media. On the other hand, when James refers to the idea that people are 'reachable' by Jamie Oliver, he highlights more than a simple problem of information transfer. What he means is that some people, by virtue of their social dispositions, are more likely to recognise and respond to Jamie Oliver because of his specific appeal. For James, one aspect of this appeal is described in terms of the way Jamie Oliver offers an alternative to the 'fuddy duddy' and 'regimented side' to cookery that he clearly associates with Jamie Oliver's precursors. James suggests that he was 'lucky' in the sense that his mum was a home economics teacher. This reference to his early culinary education is an indication that James was 'primed' for adopting and appropriating Jamie Oliver's ideas into his own culinary practices. On the other hand, there is a suggestion that his break from the culinary norms of the past offered an attractive and amenable way for him to engage with Jamie Oliver in his social life. He points towards concrete examples of 'having a few beers and a smoke' whilst cooking with his friend as a way to show how compatible Jamie Oliver was with his lifestyle and leisure activities at the time.

Maud: So really it just gave you confidence and he must have given lots of people confidence

James: mm [agreeing]

Maud: just to do those simple recipes that were really good, that's the difference between them

James: mm, it took the fear away... [Larousse Gastronomique] assumes a level, whereas this doesn't assume any levels at all and it was just that informality, and and, putting people in that environment makes you think 'ooh I might give it a crack, why not, what have I got to lose'

As mentioned earlier, Jamie Oliver can be thought of as presenting a 'recognisably masculine' (Hollows, 2003) way of cooking that disavows domestic labour in favour of domestic leisure. Hollows draws on the dual figures of the 'new man' and the 'new lad' to suggest that Jamie Oliver has coupled hyper masculine 'laddishness' with stereotypically feminised conceptions of the 'new man' whose enhanced 'sensitivity' and liberality made cooking a recognisable facet of his practice. To

⁴ The *Guide* is as supplement in the popular broadsheet newspaper, *The Guardian*, which is widely regarded in the UK as having a middle class readership.

some extent traces of these figures can be discerned in James' attitude towards him. James talks about his own lack of confidence and Jamie Oliver's appeal in providing an informal context to become a better cook. This self reference to a lack of confidence is not symmetrical with Jamie Oliver's confident approach, although the appeal of this figure for James is undoubtedly related to the desire to get some of that specific brand of domestic confidence. Whether or not James is thinking about this form of appropriation in specifically gendered ways is not clear though. What is clear is that he can present himself as a competent young man in culinary terms and that Jamie Oliver has played a part in that. James' way of describing himself and his relationship to Jamie Oliver espouses a position that does not fit easily with either 'laddishness' or hypersensitivity. The appropriation of Jamie Oliver because of his appeal to a youthful masculine 'foodie' way of 'doing gender' (Cairns et al, 2010) already implies a mixture of these two otherwise contradictory personality traits. What we see here is a man confident enough to talk about his own insecurities around food but who also indicates his desire to appropriate and use some of Jamie Oliver's aesthetics and skills to live a different kind of life. This is a kind of intermediation that seemingly started with a younger man finding a culinary aesthetic exciting and relevant and which continues as part of the way he stories his private and public identity. Jamie Oliver's influence as a cultural intermediary is not forgotten and continues to form a substantive and normalised part of James' cultural reflections but clearly what started off as a way to explore cookery and new lifestyle is now a way to tell a story about his very personal and distinctive development.

Maud – normality as an appeal to social class

The following excerpts are taken from a focus group where Maud, the middle aged woman referenced above, expresses why she feels that Jamie Oliver is appealing, and reflects on some of the specific ways that she personalises and interacts with his ideas about food. In this case-study, we can see how his appeal as a 'normal' bloke is combined with the novelty of his culinary expertise. His perceived normality effectively works in the service of transmitting novel culinary ideas by making them appear more accessible. Here Maud talks about her view that Jamie Oliver presents his real life and how that is appealing in class terms:

[the guests on his show] are his friends and they are his family. But the thing about Jamie is that he's cute, he's managed to get more people on side than, than um Nigella would because he's appealing to the masses. He's not appealing to the upper classes, there are more, there are more of us than there are of them up there do you know what I mean?

One of the key ways that an intermediation takes place here is through the formation of a parasocial relationship to Jamie Oliver. Broadly defined, this concept refers to the way individuals form imaginary relationships with distanced figures, often, but not exclusively those who appear on television and other media formats (Piper, 2012, Bonner, 2010, Skeggs and Wood, 2008). In this case Maud can be seen to form a relatively direct identification with Jamie Oliver based on a recognition of his appeal to the 'masses'. In doing so she actively defines herself against the upper classes and arguably aligns herself much more with a notion of working class selfhood.

There is something quite self deprecating in Maud's reference to herself as part of the 'masses' and yet at the same time there is something affirming about her need to distinguish herself from the 'upper classes'. Jamie Oliver's success as a cultural intermediary is, for Maud it would seem, characterised by her ability to identify with him in class terms. Indeed metaphors of depth, position

and hierarchy can be repeatedly discerned through her identifications with Jamie Oliver. Maud's reference to Oliver as being unlike Nigella Lawson – who is famously regarded as an upper middle class celebrity chef – serves to place him in a sharper class dialogic because in referencing Nigella Lawson she puts Jamie Oliver in a conversation about class. There is Maud, Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson and in that order. Despite this identification, she also flags up a key idea in that she thinks he is 'cute' in appealing to the masses in this way. This suggests that Maud suspects there is some contrivance, or at the very least strategy going on by Oliver, and that perhaps he is not particularly like her in the end. This identification operates then through a semblance of social relations in which Maud can identify herself as a concrete classed entity, even if the relationship with Jamie Oliver is premised on a fallacy of mutual identification. Further to that, her relationship towards Jamie Oliver supports a further identification with an 'us', articulated as the masses. It is this way that engagement with Jamie Oliver's mode of address stimulates a wider framing of her place in a social order. His influence as an intermediary is bolstered by Maud's conceptualisation of him as a democratising figure.

In this next quote Maud exemplifies another process of identification that highlights the importance of Jamie Oliver's perceived normality as a factor determining his success as an intermediary. She does this through a paradoxical example of drawing attention to his interaction with a celebrity musician (Fatboy Slim) over the phone.

Yeah, well I'm reading his book at the minute (referring to unofficial Jamie Oliver biography) and it said that he had a phone call from I don't know, Fatboy Slim who was following one of his recipes on tuna and he said 'well can I use shark instead?' and he said yeah that's fine...Alright he's higher than us, but he's one of us; and people like that, if they're a bit higher

Maud demonstrates a key method by which Jamie Oliver is able to operate as a cultural intermediary. By stating that people like that 'he's higher than us but he's one of us' she introduces the idea that Jamie Oliver is applaudably normal but also appreciably higher in social status. This particular mix of normality and higher social status generates a successful process of identification for Maud. She alludes to this 'highness' by reference to his relationships with other celebrities and indeed to the way his expertise is valued by those people. At the same time, Maud indexes Oliver's normality and that of his celebrity friends by drawing attention to relatively common practices – like phoning a friend for cookery advice. It is in this way that Jamie comes to be seen as both normal, but sufficiently 'higher' to warrant the interest and affections his audiences. Arguably this normalisation of celebrity is precisely what Maud likes, in the sense that it affords her ways to identify with people 'above her' whilst at the same time affirming Jamie Oliver's mundane actions amongst friends are intelligibly equal between herself and them. It is important for Maud that she can discern certain aspects of her own practices in Jamie Oliver, whilst at the same time maintain reasons to hold him in the place of a cultural authority whose advice on cookery or lifestyle propositions might be valid.

However, although there remains a discourse that posits that celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver could be considered as 'expert', and Maud demonstrates that matters of taste are a very personal matter of expertise. She comments that "*Jamie Oliver uses too much lemon for my liking, I would never use as much lemon as he does, but but, but that's all about cooking.*" Maud's reference to Oliver's use of lemon and to her own preferences for its use in cookery demonstrate an important limitation to the

reverence and authority afforded to him on such matters. Whereas Maud asserts her own preference in opposition to his tastes, she also reaffirms an empathy for his position by demonstrating her familiarity with the ethos of personalisation to one's own tastes in cookery. This is a move that sets her apart as an individual with specific tastes but reaffirms her connection to Jamie Oliver through sharing the broader conventions of culinary skill and adaptation. Maud recognizes his expertise as a chef, but also establishes herself as an expert and knowledgeable voice, but being able to speak back to his expertise, and establish her own sense of good taste.

Intermediation as rejection

To publicly reject Jamie Oliver as a culinary and social influence may deny his power as a cultural intermediary and yet paradoxically this rejection is one way that celebrity chefs enter the social fabric. This section discusses some of the ways in which Jamie Oliver's cultural authority is refused or fails to take root. Lifestyle practices that clash with existing sets of relations between materials, meanings and skills are debated and critiqued by a group. In so doing I argue that this form of dis-identification is itself constitutive of a kind of cultural intermediation because Jamie Oliver is still incorporated in discussions of culinary normality. It is in this way that I wish to question what could be meant by intermediation if practices result from suggestive programming and framings of Jamie Oliver that are oppositional to his suggested practices. In other words I wish to posit that in rejecting Jamie Oliver as a creditable source of lifestyle information there is a form of cultural inclusion that still situates Jamie Oliver as an important part of culinary and social life. There is a certain inescapability to his influence that remains even when he is resisted. In the example of Brian (below), one can see how an active rejection of Jamie Oliver's suggestions for the use of the same chopping board is a way for people to assert their own culinary and domestic values. This negative reframing of Jamie Oliver within a moralised reflection on 'normal' culinary practices demonstrates how Jamie Oliver works as an intermediary, even in contexts where his authority is refused. The supporting practice of publicly critiquing him demonstrates some of the limitations of his influence and at the same time his inclusion within everyday debates on culinary practices.

Wendy - Transgressing culinary norms

On occasion intermediation can be seen as a process of discussing the logic of certain ideas that Jamie Oliver proposes. In such instances one can see how Jamie Oliver's suggestions for culinary organisation are actively critiqued by a group according to their ideas about what is normal and morally appropriate. It is in this rather oblique way that Jamie Oliver operates as an intermediary by setting the figurative stage for conversations about people's personal domestic values.

The following comes from a focus group carried out in Tunbridge Wells with a group of friends and colleagues who are having dinner together. The focus group took place over dinner which I cooked for them as a thank you, and as a way to facilitate as near to 'normal' conditions for social interaction as I could. Generally speaking it would not be unusual for this group to meet for dinner although as one participant jokingly pointed out, this dinner party turned out to be more like 'work'. The main point of interest in this interaction is a discussion about Jamie Oliver's use of a chopping board to serve food from in his television series *30 Minute Meals*.

Wendy: No

Debs: Instead he serves it on a chopping board

Mary: Yeah

Wendy: On his rustic board (emphasising syllables)

One point to raise here is that Wendy immediately draws attention to the connotation of the board as 'rustic'. The construction of a culinary aesthetic around ideas such as rusticity is something that audiences acknowledge celebrity chefs doing. Wendy's recognition of 'rusticity' as an intentional technique signals her own recognition of that as a trend but also of her own critical distance from it. However, just as 'ponciness' can be recognised in the form of an intelligible culinary aesthetic, rusticity undergoes an examination of practical value in order to assess whether this form of style comes at the expense of substantive benefits in 'normal' practice. In other words Wendy is making a joke about the chopping board, but it is a joke that the group instantly responds to and recognizes because of the particular way that the word 'rustic' is 'loaded' in culinary terms. It is not a complete rejection of the 'rustic' idea but it is a way to acknowledge that using a rustic aesthetic is stylistic and not substantive. By acknowledging Jamie's rustic board Wendy is affirming her knowledge of, and to a certain extent resistance towards the use of this particular aesthetic as a legitimate marker of social capital.

Mary: Yeah that was on his 30 minute meal thing, he serves everything up on a chopping board. Yeah, it's a bit strange. He says it saves on washing up

Wendy: so where do you eat it? Standing up in the kitchen?

The use of an object that rarely moves from the kitchen immediately implies to Wendy that the diner must come to it, rather than the other way around. It is indicative of the extent to which the proper place of an item (and as we will see later specific practice with that item) is embedded in the imagination of the routine organisation of the home. Further to that, one can see how this imagination and recollection of ones, own domestic logic informs how novel practices are imagined, theorised and evaluated. In other words, certain materials imply specific practices and spaces. Oliver's use of the chopping board outside of its proper and 'normal' space is characterised as strange. It is both out of place but also outside the frame of routinised practices associated with it.

Mary: No, he serves it, he puts it on, it's when he, the programme's the 30 minute meal thing that he, he cooks it all, and then he serves it, on the table and then you help yourself (inaudible) so instead of...

Brian: So you still use plates?

Mary: Yeah you still use plates

Wendy: Oh yeah

Brian: How is he saving on washing up then?

Mary: Well because it's not then transferring what you've cooked...

Debs: to a serving dish (finishing M's sentence)

Mary: to a serving dish (finishing her own)

Wendy: Yeah but why don't you just put it on the plates like normal people do straight from the bowl?

It is striking to note how far out of line the introduction of a novel practice idea places the otherwise 'taken for granted' organisation of eating in the home. Although not evident in the transcript, the tone that Wendy uses in this situation suggests a disdainful reaction. By asking why he doesn't just do what "normal people do", she establishes a critical distance from Jamie Oliver as an 'expert' and affirms that 'normal' practices are just as valid, if not more so than his suggestions. More than this, her resistance to the idea of eating from a chopping board can be demonstrably linked to a domestic moral order. This shows that a rejection of Jamie Oliver's suggestions, although seemingly rooted in routine, normalised behaviour, actually have a very logical set of reasons that are in this case related to childcare and parenting. For example:

Brian: So he prepares

Debs: It's so you can help yourself isn't it

Brian: So if he prepares raw chicken...

Wendy: Yeah but in a family you wouldn't do that, you wouldn't do that with Harry (referring to Mary's 12 year old son), yeah do whatever you want (emulating Mary speaking to her son)

Debs: Yeah, no you wouldn't

Mary: No. A normal family you would dish it up

Debs: perhaps that's why you don't copy him, because

Wendy: Yeah

Debs: the average family doesn't do it like that

Brian: well actually what did we do this evening?

Wendy: yeah but this is a dinner party

Debs: But this is different

Wendy: and we're grown ups

During the course of the evening the participants were offered dinner and it happens that a pot of stew was placed in the centre of the table (on a chopping board to protect the table) for them to help themselves. When Brian draws attention to this oversight by the group they are quick to justify the logic of 'helping themselves' as a practical serving strategy, especially when there aren't children at the table who require assistance. In some ways this highlights how the group is thinking about this celebrity chef in the sense that they assess his suggestions in terms of their everyday utility. They may well be engaged in a focus group that in some senses mimics a typical dinner party, but it is clear that it is referred to as an exceptional event. The presence of the chopping board here and the 'help yourself' organisation of the meal is appreciably similar to the practices of Jamie Oliver that

they have just rejected and yet realising this is not strong enough grounds to reassess the normal, everyday values that they have for dinner time with the family.

There are a number of factors here which are brought to bear in assessing whether Jamie's practices are worthy of adoption. One reason that this micro level of detail is interesting is because it shows how culinary intermediation operates in practice. Novel practices here are assessed in relation to a practical cultural logic rooted in the everyday. From this, close-up perspective one can start to see how certain practices might gain currency and how others are rejected. Whereas Lewis (2010: 583) contends that "expertise today is increasingly caught up in the logic of celebrity", evidence from this study suggest that expertise of figures like Jamie Oliver is not unquestioningly accepted on the logic of his celebrity. Instead, Oliver is subject to scrutiny on the basis of what people see fit to judge as logical (e.g. seeing the point of doing something). Crucially though, his suggestions are assessed according to their own pre-existing attitudes to food and domestic organisation and there are clearly some circumstances where his ideas do not take hold as with the everyday use of a chopping board at (daily) meal times.

Brian – Public rejection as intermediation

This example demonstrates how a public rejection of Jamie Oliver still ends up as a form of cultural intermediation involving this chef by the simple virtue of his inclusion in the social discourse. The example comes from the same focus group carried out in Tunbridge Wells. It is with one participant, Brian, a 35 year old man that the following analysis pivots around. In the following we see Brian trying to describe why Jamie Oliver is so infuriating to him in terms of his contrived 'false', over the top persona. He says of his personal view of Jamie Oliver that:

Brian: He just really irritates me and I hate his voice and his anima...over animated, he's, he's a twat. Oh he just drives me mad, I can't stand the sight of him or the sound of him.

Interviewer (Mike): Why is it? What's behind it though?

Brian: I just look at him on the TV and think there is a bouncing pillock⁵

By drawing attention to Brian's distaste for Jamie Oliver, I illustrate how cultural intermediation can function through the practice of re-audiencing. That is to say that whilst Jamie Oliver presents himself in various ways through his own media, that audiences themselves tend to offer their own interpretations of him and re-present his ideas with their own specific forms influences and values. Specifically, Brian personalises a narrative about his disengagement and even disdain for Jamie Oliver in a way that demonstrates his own cultural capital through a public rejection of the cultural intermediary. Intermediation can therefore be observed in contexts where Jamie Oliver is entirely rejected as a source of desirable cultural capital. . This specific form of intermediation is a co-production where Jamie Oliver is critiqued to other people as a means towards establishing the legitimacy of personal alternative cultures of consumption. Jamie Oliver is still a relatively 'active' part of the cultural intermediation taking place, albeit it in a negative way. The simple fact is that rejection of Jamie Oliver does not amount to removing him from the cultural equation; on the contrary it fully incorporates him within debates on culinary culture.

⁵ A 'pillock' is a derogatory British slang word usually referring to a stupid person.

In the following transcript the group are discussing whether or not they serve food up in their homes in a communal pot for all to share as Jamie Oliver frequently does on television. Brian, having listened to the others talking about whether or not they serve food up in this way, takes the opportunity to reconceptualise this practice on his own terms. He clearly wants to reject any association with Jamie Oliver's cultural influence in this regard and therefore seeks to position (in this case his use of a chopping board) his actions as entirely free of Jamie Oliver's influence. Nonetheless he has to negotiate (with dark humour) the idea that he might have "copied" Jamie Oliver.

Wendy: Yeah well you and Carl don't do that, when you and Carl sit down for dinner, do you do that?

Cath: depends what we're having

Wendy: or do you dish it up on the plate

Brian: I had scrambled egg on toast for breakfast and I ate it straight off the chopping board

[Whole group erupts in laughter]...

...Wendy: see so you're copying Jamie Oliver now

Mary: but he doesn't watch him so he doesn't -

Brian: I didn't know that!

Brian is not joking about eating scrambled eggs off of a chopping board but he is using humour to demonstrate a rather more serious point about the logic of culinary practices. In this case he ate the eggs from the board simply to save time and washing up in the morning. It illustrates an example of using the chopping board, not for cultural novelty but for practical expediency and therefore presents an alternative cultural understanding of this practice. When Brian says 'I didn't know that!' he is showing the group that he does not engage with Jamie Oliver enough to know that he serves food from a chopping board and signalling his distaste for the idea that he would use a chopping board to 'copy' him. His insistence on this seemingly mundane use of the board is a way of communicating a kind of cynicism towards Jamie Oliver but also an affirmation of his own everyday practices. This exchange demonstrates the extent to which Jamie Oliver's influence as a cultural intermediary can be easily overstated and mistakenly allocated because of his cultural pervasiveness. The joke about Brian copying Jamie Oliver only works because he runs the risk of perceptibly losing his culinary autonomy as somebody copying Jamie Oliver. This is an instance where Brian does not want one of his own practices to be associated with the influence of Jamie Oliver but where he also recognises that it could easily happen. Brian is keen to claim the practice for himself, or at least as a practice that predates Jamie Oliver and is rooted in a less conspicuous logic. When Wendy jokes that he is 'copying Jamie Oliver' Brian reacts by stamping his own cultural authority on the chopping board. Wendy and Brian therefore joke around the possibility of a conflation between his use of a chopping board at breakfast as 'routine' (or for want of a better term) and his use of it as 'copied'. In doing so they highlight that they are both aware that the everyday practices that they carry out could be falsely attributed to celebrity influence. This recognition demonstrates the importance of defending one's own culinary authority in the context

of the cultural pervasiveness of Jamie Oliver. If Brian does not assert his autonomy, eating from a chopping board could be derided as a futile attempt to gather cultural capital by taking instruction from a food media pedagogue. This is something that participants in this study make a joke out of but it does underline the point that people are scrutinising how others derive their culinary practices. When the group make fun of Brian by suggesting that he might have been following Jamie Oliver in using a chopping board he responds with a similarly humorous retort. *B: I once had a ploughman's⁶ in the Westbourne Pub and it came out on a chopping board and I just thought ooh, fair enough. That didn't faze me.* Brian's rejection is of Jamie Oliver's cultural capital in regard to a practice that he already has encountered in his everyday life. This public articulation is a kind of re-audiencing because it publicly subverts Jamie Oliver's cultural logic of novelty and supplants it with a personalised narrative of chopping board use. Brian is in a predicament because in order to reject Oliver's authority as an intermediary he first has to acknowledge that his authority is something that is powerful enough to require a defence. Therefore whilst it is worthwhile pointing out Brian's resistance to Jamie Oliver as a potentially laudable aspect of audience activity one should be careful to avoid what Morley (1993) refers to as a 'pitfall' in theorising this as successful elimination of media influence in his life.

Whilst Brian is demonstrably resistant to Jamie Oliver and especially towards being associated with his ideas it is also the case that he has made his entire argument in support of his own practices by reference to this figure. Thus although he is resistant, he is also coproducing Jamie Oliver as a cultural intermediary through the actual process of bringing him into conversation. The cultural ubiquity of Jamie Oliver means that he can function as a reference point in social interactions around food whether or not his suggestions are being consciously (or unconsciously) acted upon. This is itself a form of cultural intermediation as consumers themselves mediate their own views and values around food to one another by referencing this figure. In contrast to the model of cultural intermediation where knowledge flows from the 'expert' to the layman, in this case, the consumer takes on a degree of cultural sovereignty by using Jamie Oliver as a conduit and a reference point for self-expression, and for asserting their own culinary capital.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued for an understanding of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver as a cultural intermediary whose influence is given multiple expressions by different audiences and different individuals. Cultural intermediation is therefore understood as a dynamic process but also one that is structured by pre-existing notions of value, gender and social class. An emphasis on the personalisation of media content enhances an understanding of the way media 'messages' are not simply transmitted, but transformed and augmented in local contexts.

Jamie Oliver's ability to make inroads into the lives of individual consumers is dependent on the way particular aspects of his approach are judged to fit with the social circumstances and aspirations of each individual. The appropriation of Jamie Oliver demonstrates the way that his values, aspirations, familial contexts and gender roles are aligned closely enough with Jamie Oliver's media to make a particular kind of intermediation possible. Viewed through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'habitus' this kind of appropriation makes sense. Jamie Oliver is firmly within his cultural sphere and the behaviours and values he espouses are understood as an appropriate form of development for

⁶ A 'ploughmans' lunch is a meal of various cheeses and salad items that is often served in British pubs.

James. Taking on Jamie Oliver as part of his life was, as it might be known in the pedagogy literature, within his 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1987). So to return to the idea of celebrities offering 'opportunities for learning' has to be understood in the context that audiences (or learners) cultural context (or capital) has a bearing on whether that pedagogy is seen as appropriate for them. It is not the case that all audiences will respond to Jamie Oliver in the same way because they will have to assess whether he is an appropriate intermediary for them.

I have argued that rejection of Jamie Oliver does not signal his failure as a cultural intermediary and that, on the contrary, his figuration as an influence to deny only serves to reinforce his prominent cultural position. As Lewis (2010) points out, part of Jamie Oliver's appeal as a cultural intermediary rests on his ability to present himself as both ordinary and expert. However ordinariness is anything but uniform for a socially differentiated audience and not all expertise is valued so highly by all.

Despite the insistence on the appeal of celebrity chefs in terms lifestyle expertise, the examples used in this paper demonstrate that audiences assess Jamie Oliver as much for his practical utility as for the sense of style he could offer their domestic life. People are actively assessing the practical benefits of the culinary advice he offers and are by no means accepting of his ideas because of stylistic appeal. Novel ideas such as the use of chopping boards clearly have to stand up to being assessed in terms of the ordinary practical domestic values of different audiences. If such ideas do not 'make the cut' (pardon the pun) then they are regarded simply as aspects of Jamie Oliver's style. They stay where they are and are not 'inter' mediated in that sense. This is said to caution against the assumption that these figures have an all pervasive monopoly on culinary expertise. Instead one can see everyday audiences exercising their own expertise with their own ordinary values that are often rooted in practicality and familial attitudes to food.

Hollows and Jones (2010) argue that the ability of different audiences to participate in his particular culinary world, replete as it is with middle class practices (elaborate dinner parties for example) is likely to be variable at best. This leaves open the question of whether and how audiences with different gendered and classed positions are able to engage with his ideas in everyday life. Moreover this prompts the question of how people without the necessary cultural or financial capital to follow his lead assess his worth and how he comes to matter (if at all) in their lives. The findings from this study suggest that people with access to different kinds of cultural capital and differing social values find their own ways to engage with this figure, adopting or rejecting aspects of his oeuvre as they deem appropriate.

As Signe Rousseau (2012) points out, and indeed as Jamie Oliver himself did, the viewing public have largely defined his fate as celebrity and as social force. A wider point to take from this is that the power of celebrity chefs as cultural intermediaries should be understood as a dynamic process. Their expositions and suggestions for different ways to live are negotiated in relation to existing culinary and social understandings of food and lifestyle aesthetics. To say that food celebrities like Jamie Oliver are cultural experts would be to disavow the value that people often afford to their own ways of organising their culinary life. Such figures undoubtedly and demonstrably play an important role in domestic debates about the value of certain practices but they are by no means accepted as authorities in the way that the term 'cultural intermediary' commonly implies. This paper has demonstrated how Jamie Oliver is involved in similar expressions of identity. This is cultural intermediation stood on its head since audiences can be seen to use Jamie Oliver to mediate their

own identities and ideas into the social world rather than the other way around. Above all, the ease with which people talk about Jamie Oliver demonstrates how far food media and celebrity chefs are an embedded part of the social fabric. Jamie Oliver exists as a common resource for talking about food whether or not one sees any particular value in taking up his advice or using his lifestyle as a template for their own. This perhaps is intermediation at its most pervasive; when a lifestyle icon becomes such a prominent form within popular culture that discussing their relative merits becomes a matter of common sense. Observing cultural intermediation as a coproduced phenomenon reveals something of the democracy that already exists in the hands of consumers thus subverting some of the patriarchal logic that the term 'cultural intermediary' has hitherto implied.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my two anonymous reviewers for their constructive and supportive comments on previous drafts of this paper.

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