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# Reconstituting 'masculinity' through everyday kitchen practices

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# Background

- Gender, Power & Space: reconceptualising ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in the domestic kitchen
- CONANX\*: consumer anxieties about food
- Theoretically informed by current theories of practice (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2002) which enable us to explore the context in which everyday ‘sayings and doings’ (Schatzki 2002) are located.
- Bring to the fore those everyday routines and practices associated with kitchen spaces which have largely remained taken-for-granted, invisible, overlooked
- ‘*Kitchen*’, ‘*domestic*’: represent the ‘everyday’

\* Peter Jackson & Matt Watson



## ‘Feeding the family’

- Classic accounts of ‘feeding the family’ (Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991) depict men as responsible for paid work outside home, and women for unpaid work within it.
- Cooking as ‘women’s work’.
- More diverse family/household forms complicate these arrangements, requiring a rethink of traditional gendered roles and responsibilities.



# Diverse household arrangements where:

- both male and female partners work;
- adult children continue to live at home;
- house-sharing arrangements (beyond student life);
- traditional domestic divisions of labour are not adhered to;
- lesbian and gay households;
- solo living



# Men: “stepping up to the plate”

- Studies from the UK, US and Australia (Sullivan 2000, Bianchi et al. 2000, Baxter 2002) indicate that the gap between women and men’s contribution to cooking is the domain of domestic responsibility which has witnessed the greatest narrowing.
- No longer just ‘womenless men’ (Coxon 1981) who cook.
- Shifts can not be isolated from advent of consumer-based living which has provided fertile ground wherein cooking has been reconstituted not only as a recreational, leisure activity, but as a ‘cool’, *masculine* lifestyle choice (Hollows 2003).
- TV chefs as instrumental in invoking notion of ‘masculine domesticity’ (Swenson 2009). See Jamie Oliver: cooking as ‘fun’, distanced both from the world of the professional chef (‘not poncey’) and from routine work of ‘feeding the family’.



# 'Invisible' men

- While increasing numbers of men are finding a place at the stove, this is not reflected in academic scholarship on food, wherein the perspectives of men remain largely invisible (Metcalfe et al. 2009).
- The relationship between domesticity, and foodwork in particular, continues to be under-theorised in the processes of masculine identification (Gorman-Murray 2008).



# Methods

- Multi-generational household study
- Oral life history interviews



- Provisioning 'go-alongs'
- Guided kitchen tours

- Videod meal preparation





# 'Drudgery' V 'coolness'

Marie: *But [TV chefs] have made cooking cool as well. It used to be seen as (.)*

[Louise: *A drudge*]

Marie: *A drudge, women's work, something like that. Now that it's the blokes doing it, and it seems quite cool, but when*

AM: *Do any of your husbands cook?*

Louise: *Yeah, mine does, very, very good cook. Well I cook 'cause I have to and I don't particularly enjoy it, but I do, I cook it, I don't buy pre-packed things but Tim cooks at weekends, and he loves it and he's really good.*

Marie: *He makes chocolates*

Louise: *Yeah ( ) Oh yeah, I'll just sit there ( )*

[*laughing all around*]

Louise: *For me it's a drudge, I've got the kids, you've got work, you've got this, you've got that, I just, I just don't enjoy it, full stop.*

Helen: *I enjoy it if I've got time.*



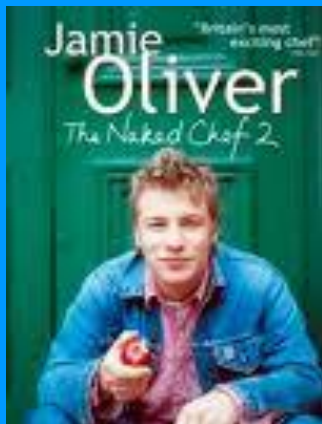
# Cooking as cool: “wicked”

*Steve: Yeah no, I mean I will often (...) cook just for myself but it's for the reasons, yeah that it's quite expensive, I, I'm, I'm, I will more than happily make do with something just for me that isn't, but I do love the cooking process, I absolutely love it, so like even if I do all the cooking on my own (...) you know, like a few weeks ago, made my own pizzas, like from scratch, and you have to make, but you know it takes about four hours by the time you've made the base and everything,*

*[John: It's the pride in it as well isn't there]*

*[Steve: Loved it though, like you know, that for me was like wicked Saturday]*

Male house-sharers, aged 23-30





# Blurring the boundaries

*“There’s two things that I’ve got on the go, I’ve got, this is my database, so I’ve actually gone back to January of this year is when I started doing this... So you can see I’ve been doing it sixth months, I’ve got this, and I’ve got this, if I can remember where I’ve put it (...) ‘Good Food’ (...) now what this is, is a database, of all my ‘Good Food’ magazines... And what I’ve done is, is I’ve put all my recipes that I like into here. So if I want a chicken dish, that brings up everything on chicken that I like... But what this does is this, what I was thinking was, I’ve got all these magazines but how do I know where everything is? Absolutely a needle in a haystack so I thought right, I’m gonna go through each one, pick out all the recipes that I like, so that I can then, if I want to have chicken tortillas, in theory if I got to September ‘08...” (Stuart Charles, 42).*



# Kitchen as 'haven' from everyday life

- Smith and Winchester (1998) observe that for men, cooking can represent an escape from the everyday pressures and expectations of work-based identities.
- Cooking as an opportunity to relax, be creative, to lose oneself in mundane activities which are neither mentally or physically taxing.



*LA: ...I think cooking kind of helped him get over the M.E., although I don't know whether he would say that. He always seemed to really kind of be in a good state when he was cooking, you know. He could come in from work and you know, quite tired and yet...*

*AM: He was energised by it?*

*LA: Yeah, yeah, he always seemed very focussed and calm and that kind of calm focussed energy when cooking.*

(Laura Anderson, 63)



*“I love [baking] ‘cause of the kneading, I love kneading. I get this (...) this mess of stuff into this beautiful silky ball (.) dough and then... I was just ( ) to chopping, chopping vegetables (.) to make er (...) a base for a dish, and I just I’d, I’d chop, I’d just start chopping and immediately my mood would change” (Ted Anderson, 65).*





# Providing a sense of ‘purpose’

*“I wasn’t depressed, but I was back in (.) finished at [university]... So finished without a job... I ended up playing football for two seasons and not really accomplishing much else... And Ready Steady Cook had just started and it was, suddenly it was like, this, for the first time, sort of really engaging cookery show that was young and lively.... I kind of joined in with that a little bit I suppose... And, well, for the first time like really... sort of like pushing the boundaries of, er, our sort of knowledge of food. Getting quite a bit of confidence from being able to churn it out really. So that was that was, was a big point I think, and then I can remember. I was obviously (.) I was doing bits of work, but effectively a sort of a layabout, but cooking these things for Dad, who was like ‘Oh that’s good! That’s fabulous! How did you/where did you learn to do that?’ And there was a bit of a shift, you know (.) from him doing all the cooking to me being prepared to say ‘Well I want to cook because I’ve got something I want to try’” (Jonathan Anderson, 38).*



# Picking and choosing



*"I thought I would have done more (.) I thought I was going to be more adventurous and that [son] would be eating everything by now and we'd have this (.) this little boy that everyone was amazed by because he would eat whatever was put in front of him..."*

*...you know the challenge of (.) cooking well because it, I suppose (..) in the first year or two years it was such basic cooking that it almost wasn't very interesting for me.*

*... I want there to be some sort of interaction with it not just dropping it in a pan and heating it up and then the, at the back of it, actually does taste, looks nice and tastes nice, then I do get you know, it happens all the time really, when you cook enough, you'll put a lot of effort and money and time into it (..) it's not really worked out... I mean it doesn't put me off cooking it I'm always happy to hold my hand up and say there's been a bit of a disaster (.) but then it's turning it into can you fix it so there's a bit of a challenge anyway".*



# Food as simple, as pleasure

*““Yeah, well it’s nice to feed people I think it’s, erm it’s, I mean my mother... her intention was to give people a good feed and that’s, I think that’s a great goal in life... really and it’s erm, there’s nothing better you can do for people than give them a nice meal... a decent meal everyday. It’s a great pleasure, yes.*

*...I don’t know what started, I think it was watching Keith Floyd actually. What I liked about Floyd was, he would just throw things into this big pan, never measuring them, and just tasting them, bit more of this, bit less of that and a bit of something else and a splash of wine and er, producing this lovely food and I thought, this is the way to cook (...) so kind of this organic way of cooking. And I, I remember trying some stuff like that and it was, it went quite well erm, and then I, what really started me off was I bought a, a cookery book ... this book on Mediterranean cooking (...) you know ( ) wow, I’m gonna [laughing] ( ) wow, this is, is wonderful, it’s simple food, it’s lovely food. So I bought it and took it home and I think I, I never stopped cooking really after that*

Ted Anderson, 65



# Crowded kitchens: contesting gendered space

LA: *So he came up with this 'Oh, I'm gonna get rid of it, we're gonna have granite' and started talking to me about granite and, you know... and that's absolutely not, so not the look I want in terms of that sort of, well because there's a lot of dark wood.*

AM: *This is fascinating that it's you that's going for form and him that's going for function,*

LA: *I know, and in the end I said 'Look', and he kept saying to me 'You won't talk to me about this, you won't plan this'.*





*“I’m doing battle with Sally at the moment to get that out but that will come out at some point... Because Sally likes (.) kitchen mess [In one place]... eat in another, where there’s no overspill. Were as I like (.) I’d love to have a big kitchen, if it was me that wall would come straight out ... My biggest bug bear with it is it (.) you can only have one or two in there at a time... you’ve got two of you and the children there and it drives me up the wall... Really does ‘cause I, I like to have space around me”.*

Stuart Charles, 42



# Conclusions

- Emphasis on everyday highlights multiple and fluid nature of *masculinities* (Connell 1995)
- Persistence of gendered inequalities
- Kitchen as a crowded and contested space:
  - ‘masculinity’ has been reconstituted
  - men’s activities/presence as reconstituting ‘women’s domain’

