Culture, identity, and belonging in the "culinary underbelly"

Catherine Palmer (University of Brighton, UK)

John Cooper (University of Strathclyde, UK)

Peter Burns (University of Brighton, UK)

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Abstract

Purpose   Drawing upon social anthropology this paper focuses on the role of culture in identity formation through an examination of the results of research into the culture of the chef. Culture manifest in what has been referred to as the "culinary underbelly" (Bourdain, 2001)

Method/Approach In-depth interviews were conducted with head chefs of Michelin-starred restaurants and celebrity chefs with the aim of exploring the social and cultural processes underpinning the formation of chef identity.

Findings These illustrate what it feels like to belong on the basis of such signifying structures as language, community, and kinship. Being a chef is more than just a job it is sacred work involving sacrifice and pain leaving a physical imprint upon the individual in the form of burns, cuts and scalds. Such marks are the physical manifestation of chef culture.

Research limitations/implications The findings are not generalizable to all chefs. Further research should focus on issues of gender and ethnicity, and on chefs working in different types of establishment and at different levels/ status to those interviewed here.

Originality/value The findings and the analysis of them provide valuable insights into chef identity. This analysis is important because the significance of concepts such as culture and identity for understanding specific job roles is still under explored within a hospitality context. Managers need to be able to understand and work with the cultural dynamics inherent in job roles because these impinge upon key issues such as recruitment, retention and team building of all staff, not just chefs.

Keywords: Chef, culture, work and identity, kinship, human resources.

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

Any discussion of identity needs to acknowledge the complex and often competing contradictions inherent in the concept (Hall, 1996). Such a caveat is necessary because identity may be defined in different ways based upon culture, history, political affiliation or religion and in relation to such as age, gender or sexual orientation. Understandings of identity then depend upon the perspective of the individual or group concerned and the context in which the concept is being examined (Bauman, 2004; Jenkins, 2004; Robins, 1996). From a theoretical perspective the notion of identity has generated much discussion and debate linked to a variety of approaches and disciplines, for example psychoanalysis, literary criticism and theory, lesbian and gay studies, sociology, anthropology and psychology (Bendle; 2002; Elliott, 2001; Erikson, 1980; Giddens, 2001). However, identity is more than a set of theoretical propositions it is above all a lived experience for the individual concerned

(Palmer, 1998). Such a distinction is important because this discussion focuses on the experience of identity rather than theoretical examinations of the concept of identity *per se.* In particular, it is concerned with the ways in which the cultural dynamics or markers of identity communicate the basis upon which belonging and identity are conferred.

The context for the discussion is the world of work and the ways in which identity is shaped by an individual's particular work role. The work-identity relationship is a fundamental part of an individual's self-image as Saunders argues (1981a) the question "who am I?" is most frequently understood in terms of occupational roles and the working environment. Given the centrality of work to many people's lives it is appropriate to examine the relationship between work roles and identity more closely what Ulin (2002, p.707) refers to as "…the cultural articulation of work and identity…". While many studies examine the work-identity relationship (Becker, 1951; du Gay, 1996; Mars and Nicod, 1984; Paoline, 2003; Salzinger, 2002; Spradley and Mann, 1975; Ulin, 2002; Wallman, 1979) limited research is available on this relationship within hospitality studies, especially in terms of the role of culture in identity formation.

A focus on the job of chef is instructive in this respect because of what Fine (1996a) refers to as the ambiguous nature of cooking, ambiguous in terms of the status and meaning of the job within society. Cooking as a job can mean different things and its status varies according to the type of cooking involved, for example school meals or restaurant cuisine. Even the job title is a symbolically charged nomenclature; chef denotes a higher status than cook for instance. Whereas between chefs "cook" is not a derogatory term but rather one of praise, a compliment:

The highest compliment for a chef is when another chef calls that he's a good cook. It would be an insult for a civilian to say "oh, are you the cook"? To a chef that would be a terrible insult, but if another chef says about you behind your back, "dude, that guys a really great cook". That would be the highest praise. That means you can actually do it. (Chef F)

Popular interest in the world of the chef has grown considerably in recent years, as evidenced by the plethora of television programs dedicated to the preparation of food. The world of professional chefs and their kitchens remained largely secluded until the emergence of the phenomenon of celebrity chefs whose open kitchens revealed the previously secret "backstage" (Goffman, 1959) of professional cooking. While this media-generated interest has been accompanied by fascinating biographical accounts of being a chef (Bourdain, 2001; Ramsay, 2006; White, 2006; Wright, 2006) and of the restaurant business (Parkinson and Green, 2001) it has not translated into a significant body of academic literature on and studies of chefs. In 1997 Wood commented that remarkably little methodical analysis had been carried out on the work of chefs or on chef identity. Whilst this point is still valid studies have been undertaken that impinge directly or indirectly on the world of the chef for example Ferguson's (1998) examination of the culinary tradition and the evolution of culinary discourse. Other related studies include those by Bowey (1976), Cameron (2001, 2004), Cameron *et al* (1999), Chivers (1972, 1973), Gabriel (1988), Johns and Menzel (1999), Pratten (2003a, 2003b), Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007), Saunders (1981a, 1981b) and the earliest investigations by Whyte (1948, 1949). Likewise, research on chefs and identity has been carried out in North America by Fine (1987, 1996a, 1996b) and is significant in terms of the sociological structures inherent in what Fine refers to as the "occupational rhetorics" of work and identity (1996a).

These studies notwithstanding, this research focuses on a significant but under researched 'group' of chefs, namely Michelin-starred and celebrity chefs. Such individuals are both interesting and important because their visibility and status enables them to influence wider understandings of what being a chef means.

Despite such studies as those mentioned above little is still known about the cultural processes that perpetuate a sense of identity and belonging among chefs, processes that operate to construct and reinforce what being a chef means to the individual. As Geertz (1973, p.385) states all to often we "……see people through a screen of occupational categories - as not just practicing this vocation or that, but as almost physically infused with the quality of being a postman, teamster, politician or salesman". This physical infusion leads to what Glasser (1988) refers to in her ethnography of soup kitchens as proper kitchen behavior. The research discussed here was designed to explore the ways in which the physical infusion of chef identity takes place. In other words how a chef learns proper chef behavior, learns how to be a chef culturally rather than technically.

A focus on culture locates the research within an anthropological framework since anthropology is concerned with understanding the world through the social and cultural structures that individuals use to organize, guide and give meaning to their lives: structures such as work, play, kinship, ritual and faith (Delaney, 2004; Herzfeld, 2001; Moore and Sanders, 2006). Through these structures fundamental concepts such as family, belonging, identity and community are all constructed and explored by individuals and groups as they *experience* the world around them (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1982a, 1985; Okely, 1983; Van Maanen, 1974). So, work and the particular job undertaken helps to frame the way in which people think and feel about what being in the world actually means, their identity. Before

examining the results of the research it is necessary to consider the ways in which identity can be said to influence and be influenced by the world of work.

Work and identity formation

Occupational identity consists of both visible and invisible components. Visible aspects such as remuneration, conditions, routines and tasks operate alongside invisible or internal aspects such as the unwritten rules, norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that psychologically connect or bind individuals to particular occupational groups (see Paoline, 2003; Van Maanen, 1974). It is these latter aspects that are of interest here and a key factor in understanding these is the external image of the particular occupation. In this regard, Saunders (1981a) argues that societal and cultural expectations lead individuals to have an occupation and to incorporate the values and perspectives of the occupation into a sense of identity. How a society views particular occupations has a bearing on whether the individual considers the identity conferred by their occupation in a positive or negative light. Research into low-grade occupations by Saunders (1981a) demonstrates that if an occupation is stigmatized by society as being low status, as being less "valuable" or important than other types of occupation then this can cause individuals to suffer low self-esteem and self-worth. Wildes (2005) comes to similar conclusions in her research on restaurant workers namely that stigma consciousness among those workers concerned about the way in which society views their particular occupation means that they are more likely to leave the industry and less inclined to recommend the industry to others.

It is not only the external environment that affects identity formation as individuals contribute to the construction of identity through social interaction (Goffman, 1959). The workplace involves myriad opportunities for interaction not only of a social nature but also as a form of socialization inducting the worker as to

the "correct" way to behave. What was referred to earlier as proper kitchen behaviour. Goffman (1959) illustrates the role of the individual in identity construction through a dramaturgical lexicon that defines interaction as a performance that is influenced by the environment (the audience) and employed by individuals (the actors) to provide others with particular impressions. There are interesting parallels between a theatre and a professional kitchen where chefs as individual actors perform their various tasks with differing degrees of flair and attachment to the craft of cooking (see Bourdain, 2001).

In performing the role of chef belonging is established by communicating the characteristics, values and attitudes associated with being a chef to the rest of the group. As Glasser's (1988, p. 4) soup kitchen research reveals belonging is communicated by the daily rituals associated with particular roles "…..guests and in part by the staff, who enact the numerous rituals of daily soup kitchen life, including……announcing the menu, serving the meal, and socializing within the dining room …". Via such rituals "new guests are enculturated and learn proper soup kitchen behaviour". The rituals associated with the communication of chef identity are of concern here, rituals that manifest themselves in the way chefs talk about being a chef. As Cohen argues in his discussion of the symbolic construction of community:

> Instead of asking, "What does it look like to us? What are its theoretical implications?" we ask, "what does it appear to mean to its members?" Rather than describing analytically the form of the structure from an external vantage point, we are attempting to penetrate the structure, to look *outwards* from its core. (1985, p. 20 original emphasis)

The process of identity formation through work can be understood by analyzing the cultural aspects of occupational groups. Drawing upon the work of Paoline (2003)

and Van Maanen (1974) on police culture, occupational culture/s are characterized by shared attitudes, values and norms arising from the range of tasks and problems confronting members of a group in work situations. These attitudes and norms are then developed within the group and communicated to new members through a process of socialization (Paoline, 2003).

Socialization, the means by which people learn the "know how" of acceptable behaviour (Wolcott, 1999) aims to produce individuals that as Geertz has noted are physically infused with the cultural particularities of the group into which they are being socialized. A good illustration of this is provided by Van Maanen's ethnography of the occupational milieu of the American police service in terms of what makes patrolmen a distinct culture with a defined sense of identity. Van Maanen explored the socialization process associated with the patrolmen's enrolment in the urban police department, a process that begins with the initiation rituals passed on through the police academy followed by the gradual learning of the group's shared perspectives and standards once the new recruit is out on the streets. According to Van Maanen, the police academy experience stands symbolically as the recruits' ritual introduction to what it means to be a patrolman.

Mars and Nicod (1984) have undertaken similar research to that of Van Maanen. Focusing on waiters in a hospitality context they argue that "the occupational world of waiters is a world of rites and rituals, of status passages, of minutely divided hierarchies, of closely guarded and secret knowledge that can never be understood from the customers' side of the green baize door" (Mars and Nicod, p. x). Mars and Nicod's investigation entailed Nicod going behind "the green baize door" and working as a waiter at five different hotels. In this way they were able to identify the main components of the waiters' occupational culture, the distinctive value and belief system and the processes through which new recruits were introduced to the

occupational frame of reference. In terms of this discussion the world of the chef is accessed through talking to chefs about what it means to be a chef, about the "secret knowledge" and the ways in which it may be employed to denote belonging and identity.

The world of the chef

I want to tell you about the dark recesses of the restaurant underbelly….

…….because I find it all quite comfortable, like a nice warm bath. I can move around easily in this life. I speak the language. (Bourdain, 2001, p.3*)*

George Orwell's (2003 [1933]) autobiographical novel "Down and Out in Paris and London" provides a fascinating literary attempt to go behind the scenes at various culinary establishments and to describe the social status of the chef. The work he describes is characterized on the basis of long shifts, low wages, intense heat, filth and a total lack of sanitation, characteristics that connect with Bourdain's (2001) more contemporary depictions of kitchen life. The social standing of chefs has risen significantly since the days of Orwell and particularly since the emergence of *nouvelle cuisine* and the democratization of gastronomy (Ladenis, 1997). The image of the chef has shifted from that of "a simple, humble person, someone with little ambition, a plodding, shuffling body who did the dirty work", to that of an artist or star performing for an audience (Ladenis, 1997, p. 194).

Further insights into the world of the chef can be found in Mullan's (1998) "Off the Menu"*,* a collection of conversations with chefs on a number of issues such as their reasons for becoming a chef and their cooking philosophy. Many of the accounts from contemporary chefs highlight the importance of the kitchen environment in terms of understanding chef identity. This environment resembles a

highly organized, rigidly hierarchical, tightly knit community where individuals are expected to learn and abide by the rules and behavioural norms of the group (see Wood, 1997). The New York chef Anthony Bourdain, in his book "Kitchen Confidential", illustrates the sense of communal solidarity that exists among chefs:

> If I need a favor at four o'clock in the morning, whether it's a quick loan, a shoulder to cry on, a sleeping pill, bail money, or just someone to pick me up in a car in a bad neighborhood in the driving rain, I'm definitely *not* calling up a fellow writer. I'm calling my *sous-chef*, or a former *sous-chef*, or my *saucier*, someone I work with or have worked with over the last twenty-plus years. (2001, p. 3 original emphasis)

For Bourdain, chefs share a peculiar world-view together with unusual customs, rituals and practices that define them as a tribe. Bourdain presents a harsh portrait of chef culture where new recruits are treated as "cattle" (p. 293), denied a personality, and where verbal insults about an individual's personal circumstances, sexuality and physical appearance are commonplace. The Culinary Institute of America (CIA), the equivalent of Van Maanen's Police Academy is where many American chefs receive formal training in the technical and cultural aspects of being a chef. The food writer Michael Ruhlman (1997, 2001) provides fascinating accounts of the way in which the CIA technically and emotionally transforms its students from outsiders to insiders, from non-chefs to chefs. As a student of the CIA in 1975 Bourdain illustrates its role in preparing the students for life on the "outside", "anyone who couldn't take Chef Bagna's ranting was *not* going to make it in the outside world…." (Bourdain, 2001, p. 40 original emphasis). Such examples underpin Bourdain's (2001, p. 3) description of the chef's world as "…a culture whose

centuries-old militaristic hierarchy and ethos of "rum, buggery and the lash" make for a mix of unwavering order and nerve-shattering chaos".

For A.A. Gill, a culture and food critic who has worked in the type of kitchens described by Bourdain "no other business would dare to treat its workers as they are treated in a restaurant kitchen" (quoted in Hennessy, 2000, p. 67). However, as Hennessy (2000, p. 67) notes it is chefs themselves who perpetuate the system through an obsession described as being akin to a religious "calling", "any suggested amelioration to the madness of the normal kitchen tends to be opposed by the inmates themselves".

The Scottish chef Gordon Ramsay describes the rules and norms of chef life as "the knowledge". Specifically he states "this job is the pits when you're learning. You have to bow down and stay focused until the knowledge is tucked away…...The weak disappear off the face of the earth" (quoted in Duncan, 2001, p. 10). Ramsay's concept of the knowledge is important, as it points to the systematic transference of culture, identity and belonging between group members. To belong is to have gained access to the knowledge, to earn the right to be called chef.

The research method

Qualitative research was conducted through in-depth interviews with fifteen chefs comprising celebrity chefs and Michelin-starred head chefs from the Great Britain and Ireland "Michelin Hotels and Restaurants Guide 2004". A letter requesting participation in the research was sent to all ninety-one chefs in mainland England holding Michelin stars at establishments named in the guide. The term "celebrity" is applied to those chefs who have a media profile generated by activities such as presenting televised food programs, writing newspaper columns, publishing books, or whose views are sought by the media due to their activities in the industry; this category of chef was

contacted by letter and telephone and three agreed to be interviewed. Of all the chefs interviewed three were female and twelve were male. Eleven face-to-face interviews were conducted with chefs located in England and four telephone interviews with chefs based in England, Spain and North America. The face-to-face interviews lasted between fifty minutes and four hours and the telephone interviews from thirty minutes to three hours spread over two conversations. All the participants agreed to their names and businesses being identified, to the tape recording of the interviews and to the use of the data collected for academic purposes. However, anonymity has been maintained in terms of the attribution of specific comments to individual chefs.

Table 1 Details of the chefs interviewed

Respondent's Name	Restaurant / Location
Richard Phillips	Thackerays, England
Sat Bains	Restaurant Sat Bains, England
Antony Worrall Thompson	Notting Grill, England
Claude Bosi	Hibiscus, England
Anthony Bourdain	Brasserie Les Halles, USA
Tessa Bramley	The Old Vicarage, England
John Campbell	The Vineyard at Stockcross, England
Richard Corrigan	Richard Corrigan at Lindsay House, England
Stephen Crane	Ockenden Manor, England
David Everitt-Matthias	Le Champignon Sauvage, England
Marc Fosh	Read's, Spain
Andre Garrett	Orrery, England
Rose Gray	The River Café, England
Richard Guest	The Castle, England
Prue Leith	Leith's School of Food and Wine, England

Due to their public visibility and the level of skill and experience within the industry, Michelin-starred chefs and celebrity chefs are informative cases capable of producing interesting insights into the culture of the profession. While Michelin-starred chefs may be a small group within the restaurant sector they are highly influential, playing a key role in "trend setting, image building and in setting standards for the industry as a whole" (Surlemont and Johnson, 2005, p. 578). As chefs they have a wide range of experience, including both hotels and restaurants of varying sizes. Such a group collectively shares similar knowledge, training and experience and as head chefs they employ people as part of the kitchen brigade and therefore play an important part in the training and socialization of other chefs. Celebrity chefs are an important group because their media-generated visibility provides them with opportunities to communicate attitudes and opinions to a wide, general audience.

The interviews focused on what being a chef means to the individual and were in-depth in the sense meant by Wengraf (2001, p. 6) when he states "to go into something in-depth is to get a sense of how the apparently straightforward is actually more complicated, of how the "surface appearances" may be quite misleading about "depth realities"". The interview method is particularly useful for exploring the subjective meanings that chefs ascribe to social situations, in other words how chefs experience, shape and give meaning to their world. The interviews were structured around set themes linked to the issues identified by the literature review and the specific questions were designed to explore these themes. A conversational interview strategy was employed in line with that adopted by ethnographers to encourage the interviewees to think about what being a chef means (Flick, 2006, pgs. 166-7; Kemp and Ellen, 1984). As Hammersely and Atkinson (1995, p.152) illustrate ethnographers

do not "…..seek to establish a fixed sequence in which relevant topics are covered; they adopt a more flexible approach, allowing the discussion to flow in a way that seems natural".

Table 11 Interview themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Image of chefs	Internal and external image of the occupation and of chefs Media influences – celebrity chefs Cooking traditions/ evolution of cooking
Being a chef	Self image, attitudes and values Personal background Skill acquisition / training / recruitment issues Gender Michelin star system
The working environment	Organization and structure Leadership and management Control mechanisms Language, clothing and equipment Relationships between chefs, chefs and non-chefs, chefs and other key workers
Social life	Non-work time

The findings from the interviews require a framework within which they can be analyzed as Wolcott (1999, p.69) comments "a question such as "What is going on

here?" can only be addressed when fleshed out with enough detail to answer the related question, "In terms of what?"' In this respect the data was analyzed both within and against the literature concerned with meaning making through culture, primarily but not exclusively that of anthropology. Concepts from the literature were employed to make sense of the data generated "…to use the data to think with. One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to…official accounts or previous theory" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 210).

Billig's examination of family discussions of the British Monarchy provides a useful illustration of the process of analysis adopted here. Billig's aim (1992, p. 19) was "….. to reconstruct patterns of common-sense thinking…" by searching for the underlying themes revealed by the conversations rather than searching for divisions between respondents. The following analysis is organized around the key themes and issues emerging from the interviews with chefs. Given the volume of data generated it is not possible to include everything so what follows is necessarily a selection of conversational excerpts employed to illustrate these themes. However, the focus here is identity as lived experience identity as it is constructed and understood by individuals as they think through what it means to be a chef. Hence detail and depth are integral to the interpretive process. The range of chef voices included and the length of some excerpts are therefore essential to the analysis for it is through such richly detailed reflection that the cultural dynamics underpinning the formation of chef identity are made visible.

Results, analysis and discussion

Being a chef

One of the ways in which identity is formed is in relation to the Other that which is different and in this respect the media and society at large (in particular non-chefs) comprise the chefs' "significant other" (Mead, 1934). Several interviewees discussed how the image of the chef has changed over recent years from that of an occupation of last resort, to one in which respect is based upon individual skill, reputation and the emergence of new forms of cuisine such as *nouvelle cuisine*. However, one interviewee states that in England respect for the work of a chef and the occupation's status as a skilled profession is markedly worse than in other European countries such as France, Italy and Spain. This is interesting as it illustrates the fact that attitudes to the role and function of food, cooking and eating in society are culturally determined:

> I think in France they're very much almost revered as good as doctors and lawyers and that…. You still are very much respected; you're not frowned upon, looked down upon. Here [England], it's like oh you're second rate, dropout. There's still that stigma involved where oh he's obviously not very clever…. (Chef H)

> When I first got into catering, only queers and thick people, that's how it was said, went into catering but now it's totally different, people treat you with respect, oh, you run a Michelin starred restaurant. And I think it will become a more and more respectable career…. (Chef L)

It feels a lot better now than it did when I started. I mean my grandmother was horrified. It was considered to be a very down market profession when I started in the seventies and she said, "oh, you can't possibly do that"…not many public schoolboys went into a cheffing career that's for sure…. But that's all changed now because of television…because of the *nouvelle cuisine* era when restaurants got more recognition, chefs got more recognition…it is considered quite respectable now. (Chef O)

Respect for the profession is, not surprisingly perhaps linked to the type of establishment in which a particular chef works. Hence, those restaurants where the level of skill is deemed to be high are considered more worthy of respect than those where the skill level is deemed to be low. Such judgments are not confined to the wider non-chef society since chefs categorize themselves based upon where they work and external measures of success such as the number of Michelin stars awarded, "…there's still some of that kudos and snobbishness. If you said I work at the Harvester, they'll automatically categorize, oh he's a grill chef or something like that, but when you start saying I'm a chef…I'm up there, they go oh, wow" (chef H). Chefs are not the only profession to base their self-assessment on attributes such as skill, work location and external recognition. However, this quote highlights the existence of what are referred to here as internal mechanisms - internal to chefs that is - for regulating the basis upon which self-worth, self-identity are to be formed. Such mechanisms, even if informally applied are important in terms of legitimating identity, in effect earning the right to be called chef.

Validating mechanisms are evident in the ways in which the interviewees respond to the phenomenon of the celebrity chef, with one in particular denigrated as being "…. not a great cook at all. He's a showman and an entertainer and that's what

he gets paid to do…" (chef D). Whereas, the media chefs deemed worthy of respect were such as Gordon Ramsay, whose television program, "Hell's Kitchen", is felt to be more representative of the stress and pressure as well as the prestige involved in the work of the chef (chefs J and O). The prestige and sense of superiority gained from being a chef is based on the chef's ability to do something out of the ordinary, something that not everyone can do. This ability has implications for social mobility and self-esteem. Doing something out of the ordinary can enable an individual to alter the way s/he is perceived by both self and other in relation to a society's notion of what constitutes a worthwhile and hence proper job:

> …. you know your place in the food chain; you feel a sense of superiority
>
> over your social and economic betters. And also because of the show
>
> business aspect of cooking chefs do something that other people can't. It's
>
> a place where working class people can sort of lord it over society. (Chef F)

In talking about being a chef, words such as vocation, passion and dedication are used by the chefs "…it's not a job, you couldn't look at this as a job, my God!" (chef C). Likewise, a certain type of mindset is required, and to become a top chef, drive, focus and determination is necessary such that "you have to be completely mad…completely barmy" (chef G) to put up with the hours and the pain "there's too much sacrifice to be just a job" (chef I). A chef is described as a unique individual and as displaying the mood swings, volatility and creativity associated with being an artist, the "…kind of person who's got, if you like, a wayward streak" (chef E). Such a self-image leads to a feeling of empowerment and superiority "…in the kitchen you can determine your actual worth on a minute by minute basis…" (chef F).

The cultural dynamics at play here illustrate the fact that chef identity has a physical as well as a psychological dimension to it. Being a chef involves physical pain, not just in terms of long working hours in hot tight spaces but in terms of the burns, cuts, scars and scalds that are part and parcel of every working day. Such physical demands influence the psychological mindset that supports the individual in becoming and remaining a chef. The physical and psychological dynamics of a particular activity have been shown to be crucial to understanding self and group identity in other studies, for example Lewis' (2001) work on climbers and that of Stranger (1999) on surfers. Lewis (2001, p. 75) talks about the "disciplinary stigmata" of being a climber about "…. the cuts and abrasions, the freezing cold and suntraps, the taut muscles and creaky joints…" (p. 74) that identifies the individual as a climber. A chef's disciplinary stigmata symbolize the path taken to acquire the knowledge. Such marks physically communicate the existence of a shared understanding of what being a chef actually entails. For the chefs interviewed here the combination of these dynamics - physical, cultural, and psychological - supports their feelings of superiority and status, supports the view that the occupation of chef is more than just a job it is sacred work.

This sense of superiority is enhanced by the growth of the media chef, by the newspapers, magazines, television and radio programs dedicated to food, cooking and the personalities that serve to endorse or validate being a chef. To some of the interviewees, media representations add a touch of glamour or gloss in a positive sense such that "…now people view it as a very interesting and exciting job and one that one aspires to" (chef K). Other views point to the falseness of the media generated image, to a blurring of the boundaries between "reality" and entertainment (chef D) and to the media reinforcement of stereotypical images of chefs as violent and aggressive. "It's difficult because they [the general public] have so many different

points of view now because we're all over the telly and magazines, we're either very artistic and very aggressive, or we're drunken slobs" (chef L). Such a view illustrates the difficulties encountered when focusing a microscope (in this case the television camera) onto a tiny part of a complex organism. As the line between "reality" and entertainment is blurred myths develop as to what being a chef means, "…they miss out the middle bit on TV, they miss out the years of experience and things like that" (chef L). Similarly, television programs show "…the rest of us or the younger boys coming up that oh, if you want to be a three star chef you're going to have to be fucking tough" (chef C).

'Us' and 'them'

The largely unspoken Other in the above quotes is the outside world, the general public the non-chef, all of whom look into and onto the world of the chef through the window provided by the media. The outside world is important because it provides a boundary through and against which identity can be constructed, maintained and understood by the members of a particular group (Barth 1969; Okely 1983; Salaman 1974). However, the term boundary as discussed here is not meant to imply a clearly defined and distinct segment of a much larger whole but rather to refer to a state of mind, to a way of thinking about and understanding the relationship between self, culture and identity. This use of the term builds upon Barth's (2000) reflections on his own work whereby boundary is seen more as an analytical concept than a discrete bounded entity.

Moreover, chefs are more than just a group of people, they are a 'community' of common minded individuals in the sense meant by Cohen (1985, p. 12) who defines a community as a group of people with something in common with each other, which distinguishes them from other groups, ""community" thus seems to imply

simultaneously both similarity and difference". Similarity and difference are most marked at the boundary between the chef community and the non-chef community or outside world. The internal validating mechanisms referred to earlier illustrate how membership of the chef community is based upon a shared understanding of the criteria for membership. As Barth (1969, p. 15) argues "the identification of another person as a fellow member…. implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally "playing the same game"…..".

It is clear from the interviews that the chefs not only see themselves as a community but that this community is very different from and largely misunderstood by the rest of society "we get bitter about people on the other side of things…I call them the nine-to-fivers because that's how I look at them" (chef L). Similarly:

It [the outside world] doesn't exist. We live in our own world. The world important to a chef is totally different than Joe Bloggs'. People have no comprehension about what we do, or what we go through and we almost divorce ourselves from society because society doesn't understand what we do. Not that society alienates us; we tend to probably want to alienate society, because … they're quite dismissive of what we do and how we get there… (Chef D)

Chefs are very suspicious of the outside world because it's beyond their control. It's filled with uncertainty, capriciousness, people with whom they have little understanding; we see so little of it, so I think fear, apprehension, uncertainty, suspicion, envy, curiosity, that's what we think of the outside world. (Chef F)

These views are interesting because they indicate that for some chefs their sense of communal togetherness provides them with a kind of security blanket with which to protect themselves from a world in which they feel slightly out of step, in which they do not quite fit in. To be a chef is to be on the periphery, on the margins of society. Peripherality in this instance is a state of mind supporting a state of being and according to Cohen (1982b) it is at the edge, at the periphery that individuals become consciously aware of belonging to a culture. Understanding where the boundary lies between "us" and "them" between "our" world and "their" world is important for establishing a sense of belonging, for consciously recognizing similarity and difference.

Belonging and bonding

The psychological boundaries of the chef community are constructed by the nature of the work and the routines and tasks associated with being a chef. A working environment that spills over into the social arena due to the long and mostly unsocial working hours reinforces belonging:

> Chefs do stick together like a breed, they're a bit like wild animals really; they stay in their packs. They're not good mixers…. They do lead quite a loud and rebellious life…in the kitchen but once they're outside you'll find they clam up and they haven't developed the art of conversation very well…it's very hard for chefs, the social side of things…. (Chef O)

The nature of the work defines the world-view, the value system of the whole community. Belonging is thus established on the basis of a shared history, a shared culture and the disciplinary stigmata referred to earlier, the cuts, abrasions and burns

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acquired along the way are markers of belonging that identify group members both to themselves and to each other. This shared history involves "…your own language, you have a shared history in terminology, you all came up pretty much through the same system, you all endured the same kind of gauntlet of hazing" (chef F). The language of belonging includes both the technical terminology of cooking and the ways in which chefs talk to each other before, during and after service. The friendly banter, teasing and mockery, the jokes and insults that go on in the kitchen between the members of the brigade are described by the interviewees as part of the routine of the chef's working day. While largely characteristic of a community dominated by "…young men in a hot kitchen, passionate about what they do…" (chef E) kitchen banter serves several functions. It is a means of letting off steam, a way of initiating new recruits or motivating existing members of the team; it is also used for discipline and control. Nevertheless, whatever the function of language there is mutual understanding between chefs as to how the circumstances of its use are to be interpreted and mutual compliance as to the role and value of such banter in the training and socialization of chefs:

> …. the restaurant manager came in and said to the *sous* chef "oh, you French cunt" and the 'c' word in most other walks of life is not really acceptable, but straightaway it's "oi, its Mr. Cunt to you"……. If you'd have said that to someone in the street it's fighting talk, in the kitchen it just means nothing, nothing at all. It's kitchen banter. (Chef B)

> What people fail to see is that a lot of that is fairly affectionate bollocking, that's the way we talk. …You don't maintain the loyalty of people, needlessly, uselessly and gratuitously bullying them, there has to be some kind of mutual

complicity there. There's a willingness to endure that kind of talking, that kind of communication, it's not taken as seriously or as personally. (Chef F)

While the prevailing view maybe that bullying and violence is a thing of the past "there's very few kitchens left like that now…It's not normal to be physically aggressive with people all the time at work in a nasty way" (chef L) this does not mean that violence and bullying do not exist. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that such problems continue precisely because of the cultural characteristics of the job and the gender of the individual (Johns and Menzel, 1999; Pyke, 2002) and as a result contribute to stress levels among chefs (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007).

Discipline is needed as a way of maintaining order amidst the chaos of service and as a means by which the cultural particularities of the chef's world are reinforced. In this respect, humour, praise and professional pride are considered to be the most common forms of discipline in a modern kitchen "…they obviously have enough respect for me…I just have to turn around and sort of raise my eyebrow and that's enough, they feel guilty enough themselves" (chef A). Similarly:

Sometimes we have to call up the old substitution and say "right, off you go" … if things are going bad we'll kind of embarrass them, make a joke of it and say we're going to have to bring on the old substitution soon. Because that's the ultimate embarrassment, being booted-off a section in the middle of service because you can't do it. It's professional pride, that's the most important thing, that doesn't want to happen to them. (Chef B)

Order, authority and control are also evident in the hierarchical nature of the kitchen environment and there are clear parallels here with organizations such as the army and the police. Although there may be more flexibility in the kitchen hierarchy now than there once was it retains a key role in the transference and reinforcement of chef culture and identity. To be part of the hierarchy, to accept its rules and regulations is to belong to be accepted as part of the team of chefs:

When I started it was very much an army sort of mentality. You had your individual sections. First year apprentices that were really the lowest of the lows then and you spoke when you were spoken to. …You had your squaddies, your privates, which were your first, second, third year apprentices/*commis* and then you had your corporals which were your sort of *chef de parties*, your sergeants, which were sort of *sous* chefs really, right up to the head chef and it was extremely structured. (Chef A)

It's very regimental, very regimental. There's the hierarchy. You've got the head chef in there, he sort of calls the shots and he'll sort of say what's got to be done, when it's got to be done. There's no answering back, whether you agree or disagree the chef is always right and it's "yes chef" and that's end of conversation. You might go out and punch the fridge and might think "Christ! I know I'm right in this instance" but it doesn't matter, whatever the chef says it's "yes", "no", end of chat. You've got that role call, you've got to be sharp, you've got to look smart in the morning, because you are dealing with foods hygiene is a big thing, you come in prim and proper, shaven. You'll get told when you can go on a break, you'll ask when you can go to the toilet, you do this, and you do that. And when service starts nothing happens, you're fixed to

the floor and you do service and you get on with it until afterwards. It is very

regimental. (Chef N)

The structural organization of the kitchen environment is a significant part of

the training process undergone by new recruits. Training is important not just for

learning specific cooking skills and techniques it is also important for inculcating

individuals into the community of chefs, what one chef referred to as "…helping them

to grow into being a chef" (chef J). Thus, to survive, to endure the training is yet

another means by which belonging and identity is conferred as the following quotes

illustrate:

You do realize that it's your training I guess, that up until twenty-five [years old]

you'll do long hours and not get huge amounts of money for it. They accept it

because that's what you have to go through to get there, to get to be the best I

guess, or one of the best, in one of the best restaurants in the country. (Chef N)

It is going to be hard but you've got to be committed. Look at it like a lawyer

would, training for ten years to become a barrister or whatever. Put aside ten

years to learn your craft and then all of a sudden you'll be able to then work on to

a level where you're pushing yourself and you know there's going to be a goal.

(Chef H)

Part of this training may involve what can be termed initiation rites, jokes at

the expense of the young trainee and examples include being asked to chop flour, to

fillet whitebait or being sent down to the store for "a long wait", a Bombay duck or

chicken lips. "I think you do it as sort of tradition to say you've done it, I think, to

say that they've had their training" (chef N). According to Geertz (1973) such rites or rituals serve to reinforce the social ties, the bonds between individuals. They reveal the mechanisms by which the social structure of a group is strengthened and perpetuated, as a result of a shared understanding as to the role and value of the ritual in the bonding process:

> We're using valuable time to train people and we need to weed out the ones who aren't going to make it early, otherwise we're all wasting our time, time that we don't have, this is a hard business. So there is definitely a sort of almost unconscious group effort to probe a new employee, just to push them a little and to see whether they're going to freak out, start crying, go spastic, quit, fail or crack under the pressure. It's not gratuitous cruelty, because once you've endured a couple of weeks and it's clear you can make it, this is a very welcoming world…..
> There's an intense camaraderie there, it's a very welcoming dysfunctional family environment; people want to be in it……There is nothing more satisfying than have somebody do well. (Chef F)

Kinship ties

The above quote is interesting because of the familial kinship ties associated with being a chef. Once accepted, the individual joins a group with strong ties between its members based upon the shared history, language and traditions discussed earlier. This shared experience and understanding of the means by which the title chef is earned, conferred and reinforced creates a powerful bond between members. The importance of the team and the underlying camaraderie that exists within the brigade is illustrated by the fact that chefs have to rely on each other to get the job done. Although individual skill is a necessity it is teamwork that dictates success or failure on

a daily basis. Hence chefs tend to develop strong relationships and are keenly aware of the importance of their role and place in the team. A few interviewees related stories about how chefs and members of the brigade would rather carry on working during service, even if they had an injury, so as not to let the team down. They rarely go sick for the very same reason. Such interdependence and mutual support is illustrated by the following comments:

> These guys in here would do anything for me, anything. And I would do anything for them. We will protect each other right to the end. It's like going into battle almost. … The camaraderie is second to none. (Chef D)

> It's a mutual respect and trust in the people you work with …it's a close knit community, they're all in the same boat, they're all working hard to achieve something…they're all working long hours…they're all doing that together. (Chef N)

> There is this underlying team culture and I guess you get that in a football team, in a cricket team, in any team…if they do something to harm the team, the team will turn on them and bring them back into the fold or discard them…I think the nice thing about a kitchen is that there is this almost family feel, in fact I would say it's not almost, it is family. (Chef E)

The kinship ties that bind individuals together are illustrated by the strong work ethic and team spirit described above. Recognition of such ties contributes towards a sense of group solidarity and loyalty, which according to the chefs can transcend time and place such that a chef can always rely on his/her former brigade in the event of a

crisis. The links between kitchen culture and the team spirit generated in a sporting environment were mentioned by several of the chefs. Links were also made between the work of the chef and performing in the musical or theatrical sense. All such representational metaphors reinforce the idea of the kitchen as a stage peopled by actors engaged in putting on a show. Indeed, Goffman's (1959) notion of selfhood defined on the basis of social interaction as performance is well illustrated by the following comments:

> Curtain up, alone on the stage, and you're there to perform for your audience, the customers…Before the curtain goes up you've got the preparations which could be akin to learning the words, learning the dish…delivering the performance…actors get their acclaim we get ours. (Chef A)

> One of the reasons that chefs are a sort of culture of their own is that what happens in the kitchen is…often compared to a football match. There's a slow build up, everybody is quite relaxed and then for an hour or something right in the middle of service it's incredibly high tension…. it's also a bit like a ballet. Everybody in the different departments are moving like parts of a machine…and there's a real feeling of being part of a *corps de ballet*…all working together like magic…almost without thinking, and then, of course you achieve it brilliantly, let's say, and then there's this terrific feeling of elation, a fantastic buzz and that's, I think, when people are automatically bonded. (Chef M)

Conclusions

It is clear from the above that in order to become and remain a chef an individual has to learn the cultural particularities of what being a chef actually means.

This discussion has focused on some of the mechanisms or social processes by which these cultural particularities are conferred; mechanisms that enable the systematic transference of culture and community between group members. Chefs are moreover, a community of common descent in that they share a history, a tradition, a language of speaking and a language of being that bind members together in the face of what some regard as a hostile world with little understanding of what goes on behind the kitchen door. This is not to say that everyone agrees with the values, attitudes and behavior of all members of the community, as clearly they will not (see Pyke, 2002) belonging is not about uniformity but about a generality of feeling where that which binds the group together is of greater significance than that which separates them. Moreover, the chef voices reveal how identity is constructed through and by the act of thinking about being a chef as Cohen (1985) argues culture can be found in the depths of thinking, rather than in the surface appearance of doing. However, the importance of doing should not be underestimated for in doing the job of chef the individual physically communicates his or her identity as a chef and hence membership of the community of chefs.

The world of the chef is largely a closed world due to the working environment and the nature of the job, and as such the individual has to be a particular type of person to both survive and thrive in this world. Chef culture is the glue that binds members together it is the means by which members recognize themselves and others as belonging to the same tribe. Indeed, one chef refers to cooking as a magic act, and that "…it should remain a magic act…I think our tribal practices should be our own" (chef F). In describing the community in such terms a clear distinction is being made between chefs and non-chefs.   Being a chef involves being given permission to learn the secrets of the tribe, to learn the knowledge. The acquisition and practice of these secrets, this magic denotes membership and belonging with clear

similarities to the way a magician is inducted into the Magic Circle of magicians. However, like a magician chefs are on the outside of society because they are able to accomplish something other people cannot do. Their skill sets them apart and their conditions of work ensure that integration with the rest of society is difficult if not impossible in some cases "I mean…..holding down a relationship is very tough…" (chef O).

Such a position of out-sidedness locates chefs as people on the margin, as people on the periphery of society and as Shields (1991) notes in relation to places and spaces cultural marginality occurs through a complex process of social activity linked to how people live their lives. The long hours, the hard work, the close knit communal ties, the structures of training and discipline are what keep chefs on the margin both in physical terms through the tendency to self-socialize, and mentally as a way of thinking about the self in relation to the Other; to see the self as a species set apart as a tribe with a distinctive way of being. Social and cultural marginality does not have to be seen as a disadvantage since it brings with it a supportive ethos that looks out for group members, offers a helping hand when necessary, fills in for an ill colleague when required. The tightly structured hierarchically organized life of the chef perpetuates the cultural experience of being a chef. As Cohen (1982b, p. 9) illustrates, in marginal communities "people see whatever specific thing they are doing, whatever activity they may be engaged in, as somehow addressing the whole complex of their life". Hence being a chef is not just a job, it is a vocation, a calling; it is sacred work. A "true" chef in the sense understood by the individuals interviewed never stops being a chef, just as an artist never stops being an artist or an actor stops being an actor. The work ethic and the disciplinary stigmata, the marks of cultural difference cannot be erased. The family maybe dysfunctional but it is the only one who understands. "Who else will love us? Who will know us? Who will recognize us?

Who will treat us as equals? Who can we talk to other than our own kind?" (chef F). Such is the culture of the chef.

Implications and further research

The research findings contribute to understanding in what is an under-researched area of hospitality studies, that of the role of culture in workplace identity formation. The findings and the anthropological insights they provide are significant because they highlight some of the ways in which chef identity is constructed and maintained. Being a chef is about more than the acquisition of technical skills and competencies it is above all about culture, about belonging and about identity. Managers need to be able to understand and work with the cultural dynamics inherent in job roles because they impinge upon key management concerns such as recruitment, retention and team building of all staff not just chefs. Questions such as why do some teams work better than others? Why do some individual's "fit" and not others? How can individuals and work groups with a high degree of skill, artistry and individualism best be managed? Is "managed" even the right word to use? How does an understanding of culture help to address issues such as workplace stress, absenteeism and retention of staff? Further research should build upon these findings to address such questions. In addition, widening the focus of this research to encompass different groups of chefs and specifically issues of gender and ethnicity would add much to the understanding of the role of culture in the formation of chef identity.

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