

Occupational identity and culture:

The case of Michelin-starred chefs

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study seeks to conceptualise how the occupational identity and culture of chefs is constructed and maintained through both work and social interaction.

Design/methodology/approach – The research follows a qualitative interpretivist approach; in total 54 unstructured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with Michelin-starred chefs in Great Britain and Ireland.

Findings – Drawing upon the fieldwork, fresh insights into the social structures and processes which underpin the creation and maintenance of the occupational identity and culture of chefs are revealed in the chefs' own words.

Theoretical implications – This study generates empirical data that informs contemporary debates about the role of work in identity formation with particular emphasis on the induction – socialisation process. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that identity and culture are interrelated in the sense that the cultural components of an occupational culture operate to reinforce a sense of identity among its occupational members.

Practical implications – The findings suggest that Michelin-starred chefs have a strong occupational identity and culture. Strict rules and discipline are often used in kitchen brigades

as a means of monitoring quality and maintaining the high standards of performance. The occupational socialisation of new members is a long and painful process, that very often exceeds the limits of banter and it is analogous to the military induction. The phenomenon of bullying and violence in commercial kitchens is identified as an unacceptable behaviour that needs to be eliminated. This can be achieved with changes in the education and training of the young chefs and the strict enforcement of the anti-bullying policies.

Originality/value – The understanding of chefs occupational identity and culture is critical for successful hospitality operations; nevertheless this is an under researched area. This study is unique in terms of scale and depth; it is expected to provide useful insights in both theoretical and practical perspective, regarding the formation of chefs' identity and culture in organisational settings.

Key words – Chefs; Occupational Identity; Culture; Great Britain and Ireland; Haute Cuisine Restaurants

Paper Type – Research paper

Introduction

A particularly noticeable trend in the hospitality literature has been researchers' tendency to investigate the hotel and catering workforce as a whole, which has therefore resulted in a lack of consideration being given to the particularities of specific occupational groups, such as chefs (Allen & Mac Con Iomaire, 2016). It is not surprising therefore that little methodical analysis has been carried out about the work of chefs (Alexander et al., 2012; Wood, 1997) and, in particular, the social structures and processes (i.e. the kitchen 'ideology', symbols, rituals, rites and myths) which underpin the creation and maintenance of the occupational identity (Palmer et al., 2010)

and culture of chefs (Cameron, 2009). A notable exception, however, can be found in the work of Fine (1996a) which demonstrates how chefs and cooks in the United States (US) see their status within categories of self-concept and perceptual images held within society. However, Fine does not focus on the high-end of professional cooking, where, in his words, ‘a more self-conscious aesthetic dynamic occurs’ (Fine, 1996b, p.16).

The world of ‘haute cuisine’ chefs has traditionally remained secluded, until the emergence of the recent phenomenon of celebrity chefs and their ‘open kitchens’ (Palmer et al., 2010), revealing the previously secret ‘backstage’ (Goffman, 1959) of professional cooking. Haute cuisine is defined as the high-end of professional cooking (Balazs, 2001; Pearsall, 2001), whilst being generally associated with critical acclamation, as embodied in the institution of the ‘Michelin Guide’ and its star rating system (Surlmont & Johnson, 2005). Although a marginal and elite segment of the restaurant industry, ‘with less than 0.5 per cent in volume’, the haute cuisine sector plays a key role in ‘trend setting, image building and in setting standards for the industry as a whole’, (Surlmont & Johnson, 2005, p.578).

It can be argued that although the case of chefs has sometimes been identified as unique (notably in terms of the image of the cooking profession and corresponding motivations to enter the field), researchers have tended to consider the hospitality workforce as a whole, often portraying them as marginal and deviant, and highlighting the fusion between work and leisure (Cooper, 2012). The existing literature suggests that, although the body of knowledge about chefs has grown in recent years, the identity and culture of this occupational group has remained little investigated (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008). This study seeks to address this research gap and to provide empirical data by examining the occupational identity and culture of chefs in Great Britain and Ireland ‘haute cuisine’ restaurants. In particular, the research investigates

the social structures and processes (i.e. the induction to kitchen ‘ideology’, symbols, rituals, rites and myths) that help to perpetuate a sense of cohesion, identity and belonging that defines ‘being a chef’ (Cooper, 2012).

This paper begins with a critical discussion of occupational identity and occupational culture as two interrelated and intertwined concepts. The discussion then focuses on the investigation of chefs’ occupational identity and culture and identifies the key theoretical contributions. The following part analyses the selected research approach for this study and the challenges that emerged before, during and after the fieldwork. Next, the findings are presented in thematic areas with each being critically discussed. The last part of the paper summarises the conclusions and also discusses the implications of this research.

Literature review

Occupational Identity

Identity is an ambiguous and contested concept, which has been used differently across various social science disciplines and has therefore generated a variety of meanings (Ashcraft, 2013), making a specific definition of the term difficult (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Sökefeld (1999) retraces the shift that the usage of the term ‘identity’ has undergone within social sciences over the past few decades. As the Latin root of the term illustrates – *identitas*, from *idem*, ‘the same’ – the original meaning of ‘identity’ was ‘sameness’ and in psychology this meant ‘selfsameness’, that is, ‘a disposition of basic personality features acquired mostly during childhood and, once integrated, more or less fixed’ (Sökefeld, 1999, p.417).

The focus of this paper is on the realm of work and most specifically with the occupational identity of chefs and their 'brigades'. In addition to the analytical categories of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and age frequently used in academic definitions of individual identity, it seems legitimate to include a person's work/occupation as a significant contributor to identity, especially in light of the centrality of work to people's lives in industrialised societies (Van Maanen, 2010). Hughes (1958) argued that our work is directly linked to our sense of self, our course of being and our way of life. In addition, Saunders (1981a, p.128) has argued that "the question 'Who am I?' is increasingly seen by many social interpreters in an occupational sense". An examination of the relationship between work roles and identity is thus seen as an anchor point to the study of identity formation (Fraher & Gabriel, 2014). Cooper (2012) suggests that social thinkers have always, since the birth of sociology, shown some concern for the relationship between work and identity, albeit implicitly. In a post-WW2 context, the Symbolic Interactionist stance and its derivatives in occupational sociology posit the centrality of pre-defined occupational roles and reference groups to identity (Goffman, 1959) and the interrelationship between the societal status conferred to a person's occupation and that person's self-image and sense of self-worth (Saunders, 1981a).

In response to criticisms directed at occupational sociology, studies of occupational communities do not generalise the applicability of the process of work identity formation to all types of work, but instead focus on occupational identification within occupational communities, for which the defining criteria and determinants have been outlined in the work of Salaman (1986) and Van Maanen & Barley (1984). Whilst the study of chefs' occupational identity could benefit from an analysis of the occupation from the perspective of existing theories on occupational communities, the latter have ceased to be current objects of investigation for sociologists since the advent of the post-modern debate (i.e. Bauman 1998; Casey, 1995).

Yet, despite the undeniable changes that have marked the world of work in the post-industrial era (fluidity, fragmentation and instability), generalisations about the loss of identification with work are found wanting in the face of the enduring significance of work, and shared workplace cultures in particular, for many occupational groups (Strangleman, 2012). This study thus departs from the post-modern tradition, and posits that a person's work/occupation is still a significant contributor to identity in modern society.

Occupational Culture

Although there is little consensus in the work literature on what constitutes a culture, occupational cultures are often understood as 'those systems that develop in physically and socially separate work settings' whereby 'members of ... [occupational] groups share a sense of common identity and perspective that transcends the place where they work' (Rothman, 1998, p. 44). Organisational and occupational researchers have tended to focus on single and discrete elements of culture, such as rituals, symbols and myths (Pfeffer, 1981), thus leading to the violation of traditional anthropological conceptions of culture (e.g. Kluckhohn, 1942) which stress how cultural elements closely interact with one another. Trice & Beyer (1984) argue that this lack of integration can be attributed to the fact that researchers often fail to place their chosen cultural concepts within some overall definition of occupational culture, therefore highlighting the need for better conceptualisation of the term.

Based on a comprehensive review of the field, Trice & Beyer (1984) conclude that an occupational culture comprises of two interdependent components: (1) its substance or the networks of meanings contained in its ideologies, that is, the beliefs, values and norms of conduct that allow members of an occupation to make sense of the world in which they work;

and (2) its cultural forms or the means by which an occupation conveys its ideologies to its members, such as rites, rituals, ceremonies, symbols, physical artefacts, stories and myths. In *Occupational Subcultures in the Workplace*, Trice (1993) revisits the above arguments in more depth and explains that whilst cultural forms are observable entities, ideologies are abstract and taken-for-granted ideas, which help justify the ongoing behaviour of occupational members, and provide members with clear guidelines for action and social interaction. Aside from beliefs, ideologies are often most clearly embodied in values, which express ‘what is valuable or worthless, respected or disdained, important or unimportant, commendable or deplorable’ (Rothman, 1998, p.53). Thus, while journalists value the search for newsworthy events, scientists seek to push back the frontiers of knowledge, and sportsmen/women advocate the confrontation of pain and injury under all circumstances (Rothman, *ibid.*).

Trice (1993) also suggests that occupational members can become very emotionally attached to their ideologies, therefore leading to the emergence of an ethnocentric (‘us’-versus-‘them’) mentality and sometimes to social isolation through a process of self-segregation, as other groups with different beliefs are distrusted and disliked. Trice’s conceptualisation offers a useful working model for analysing occupational cultures, as it precludes researchers from examining cultural forms in isolation from the group’s underlying beliefs and values. Based on Trice’s (1993) work, the present research strives to consider both the occupational ideology of chefs and its associated cultural forms. It is also argued that the underlying theoretical orientation of this study is the notion that identity and culture are intertwined (Cameron, 2009; Cameron et al., 1999) in the sense that the cultural components of an occupational culture operate to reinforce a sense of identity amongst its occupational members.

Chefs’ Occupational Identity and Culture

The identity of chefs is, first and foremost, rooted in social interaction and derived from the socio-cultural practices of their occupational group (Bourdieu, 1990). Their occupational identity is formed through the dialectic of internal-external identification, as conceptualised by Jenkins (2004). Their identity is therefore influenced both by their occupational peer group, who constitute ‘significant others’, and by the views and attitudes of ‘others’ (non-chefs), towards them in the ‘outside world’ (Cameron et al., 1999; Goffman, 1959; Kang et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2010; Saunders, 1981a). The outside world is the wider audience of society at large, all of whom look upon the world of chefs through the window provided by the media. In this respect, the media and the general public comprise the chefs’ ‘generalised other’ (Mead, 1934). Yet, chefs are also compelled to build a sense of identity by drawing from the existing meanings and ways of doing things that have informed and characterised the occupational culture of chefs for many generations (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008).

It is argued that individuals working in the same occupation develop distinctive occupational, not organisational cultures (from which they derive common values and sets of behaviour), because of the amount of similarity in work and social settings (Gomez-Mejia, 1983). Although the development of a shared workplace culture has often been linked to the process of work identity formation, as illustrated in the case of occupational communities (Barth, 1969), it is right to point out that the sharing of cultural features is not in itself sufficient for a group of individuals to develop a sense of identity: “Socially relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership, not the overt ‘objective’ differences” (ibid., p.15). As both Barth (1969) and Cohen (1985) have suggested, once a group has negotiated its identity at the boundary with other groups, cultural traits may, however, become symbols of identity that help perpetuate a sense of belonging amongst the group members. Although occupational cultures are often acknowledged to form integral parts of organisational cultures, it is interesting to note, along

with Hofstede et al., (1990) and Trice (1993), that occupational culture has largely been overlooked by organisational culture researchers and scholars.

The earliest systematic investigation of restaurant workers was Whyte's (1948) action-research study of restaurant and kitchen behaviour in a large Chicago restaurant, which is firmly rooted in the human relations tradition. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Wood (1997), remarkably little methodical analysis of the work of chefs has been carried out since. In the UK context, only the now dated research of Chivers (1973) is dedicated entirely to the occupation of chefs and cooks, although Chivers's quantitative study predominantly focuses on occupational choice and expectations, and corresponding class consciousness, and thus does not directly deal with chefs' and cooks' occupational culture and identity. In the US context, a notable exception can be found in the work of Fine (1996a, 1996b), most of which is based on fieldwork carried out in the 1980's in four Minnesota restaurants (all in one city). Through participant observation, Fine systematically analyses the work of chefs and cooks from a sociological perspective and depicts how chefs use occupational rhetorics to describe themselves as scientists, artists, accountants, surgeons, psychiatrists, and handymen in a complex and malleable conceptualisation of their professional self. These bundles of rhetorical images were provisional, situationally dependent and, like self-constructed narratives, not necessarily consistent with each other (Fraher & Gabriel, 2014). Yet, neither Chivers nor Fine are concerned with chefs and cooks working in haute cuisine restaurants, and both their findings are now significantly dated.

More recently, studies in Great Britain and Ireland have focused their attention on the culture of chefs and the various occupational challenges, among which are discussion papers on kitchen violence (Johns & Menzel, 1999) and on the effects of chef occupational culture on hotel-

organisation culture (Cameron, 2009; Cameron et al., 1999). Similarly, Pratten's (2003a, 2003b) papers on the retention and training of chefs and the qualities that make 'a great chef', respectively, are mainly conceptual and based on limited primary data. Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons (2007) investigated the effects of occupational stress on chefs' behaviour and locus of control; they reported a high level of stress, problems in communication and in some cases the existence of bullying and violence. Alexander et al., (2012) investigated the bullying behaviour experienced mostly by younger and junior ranked chefs. They found such behaviour to be a cohesive aspect of the chefs' culture, which affects neither job satisfaction nor commitment. Burrow et al., (2015) provided an anecdotal account of a (male) chef's experiences from the early stages of his career as a commis chef to the day he was appointed as a head chef in a haute cuisine restaurant. Allen & Mac Con Iomaire (2016) profiled head chefs in the Republic of Ireland; their findings include the following: the sector is still male dominated (84%); there is a high turnover in the sector; an increased rise in the attainment of degrees was observed; and the career path to become head chef is long and challenging. The problems of high turnover and retention have been also investigated in different countries (i.e. Iverson & Deery, 1997; Karatepe, 2013; Robinson & Beesley, 2010) and pose as the key challenges for chefs as an occupational group.

To conclude, it can be argued that along with identity and culture, this empirical research demonstrates the occupational challenges and frustrations in a working environment that is described as 'mundane, degrading and dehumanising' as well as 'thrilling, exciting and rewarding' (Burrow et al., 2015, p.1).

Methodology

Drawing upon the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology, this research falls into the fields of hospitality and human resources management studies, and focuses on chefs and their kitchen 'brigades'. Based on the interpretivist paradigm (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) the research adopts an inductive approach and the use of an 'ideographic' methodology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), which involved the collection of rich and qualitative evidence based on the first-hand knowledge of chefs and their 'brigades', in order to be viewed and interpret the social world through the eyes of the chefs under study.

The use of in-depth, face-to-face, unstructured interviews was employed in order to investigate the chef's self-concept and explore how chefs construct their own reality on the basis of a personal framework of beliefs, attitudes and values. The interview, as numerous authors have commented, is arguably the most intensively used technique for data collection in social research (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Bryman, 2001). This informal interview format, which is often likened to a guided conversation, was selected since it is designed to elicit information for qualitative analysis on a diversity of germane issues, while incorporating the flexibility to explore emergent topics in particular detail (Unruh, 1983). In-depth interviews were conducted throughout Great Britain and Ireland with 54 Michelin-starred chefs, until theoretical saturation was reached (the point at which no major new insights were gained) (Charmaz, 2000). This part of the research took 14 months to be completed. The interviews varied in length, extending anywhere from 34 minutes to five hours and 37 minutes. The average interview time however was two hours and 57 minutes.

In order to secure 'good' data, the researcher tried to build-up trust and rapport with every chef (Di Domenico, 2003). A relaxed atmosphere was promoted and respondents were assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be safeguarded. As such, a consent form (including a

confidentiality agreement) was included in all 54 interviews. It was agreed that all the interviews would be conducted via prior appointment at the workplace of the respondents. This enabled the main researcher-interviewer to place the respondents in their natural settings. This further supports the social action/interaction orientation as it may be argued that the interview itself is a form of social encounter involving focused interaction between two parties (Poland, 2002). In this case, the interviewer and the interviewee interact, albeit in the knowing situation of an interview, in order to ascertain the chefs' own definitions and beliefs in a natural setting in which they are familiar.

The first interview was conducted as a pilot study and was utilised to pre-test questions and to identify important issues and useful lines of enquiry. From this trial run the researcher was able to determine which questions were confusing and/or repetitious, what subjects could freely follow one another in conversation and what potentially pertinent topics had been excluded. A flexible interview guide (Charmaz, 2000) was used for all the interviews conducted. This was used as a guide or prompt to topics for discussion and there was no predetermined fixed ordering. Thus, the researcher was free to probe for further detail or further clarification during the interview while ensuring that the chief topics were covered (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). It was found that the time available to interview participants varied. Owing to the need for sufficient time to gain useable and comparable data, rather than decline the offer to interview, it was decided that all thematic headings and key points would be broached during each interview, with more or less probing as dictated by the circumstances. The intended methods of analysis were also considered when constructing the interview guide.

The contact details of all potential participants were sourced from the Michelin Guide(s) Great Britain and Ireland. Participants were recruited by sending a letter/email to each chef

explaining the research and asking for volunteers to agree to participate in an unstructured, in-depth, face-to-face interview. The recruitment of interviewees was carried out on an availability basis. The researchers however endeavoured to make the sample representative by taking into consideration the following issues: The location of the establishment (rural/urban, i.e. London); the type of establishment operated (hotel/restaurant); the number of Michelin stars held (1, 2 or 3); the chef's status as patron or employee; the chef's gender/ethnicity; the size of the kitchen 'brigade' and its gender mix. Indeed, ensuring that the participants form a representative sample increases the generalisability of the findings (Mason, 1996).

All interviews were audio recorded. The 54 interviews were later transcribed verbatim (with the exception of 'ums' and 'ahs') in order to facilitate analysis (Jennings, 2005). To ensure a thorough and consistent approach was achieved across all interview transcripts, all the interviews were professionally transcribed. Moreover, in order to facilitate interpretations of the interviews, researcher observations and impressions noted during the interview were also utilised. These 'memos' were subsequently written in the margins of the relevant transcripts alongside the accompanying data to which they refer. At the end of an interview the researcher often switched off the recording device and engaged in casual conversation with the respondent. The emerging themes and discussion from the analysed data follow in the next section.

Table 1: Participant restaurant & chefs' profile

Restaurant & Location	Chef's Gender & Nationality	Restaurant & Location	Chef's Gender & Nationality
1. <i>Ynyshir Hall</i> Powys, Wales	Male English	28. <i>The George</i> <i>Isle of Wight, England</i>	Male English
2. <i>The Waterside Inn</i> Berkshire, England	Male French	29. <i>Thornton's Restaurant</i> <i>Dublin 2, Ireland</i>	Male Irish
3. <i>L'ortolan</i> Berkshire, England	Male Scottish	30. <i>Gravetye Manor</i> <i>West Sussex, England</i>	Male English
4. <i>Orrery</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English	31. <i>Restaurant Martin Wishart</i> <i>Edinburgh, Scotland</i>	Male Scottish
5. <i>Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles</i> <i>Perthshire, Scotland</i>	Male Scottish	32. <i>The Goose</i> <i>Oxfordshire, England</i>	Male English
6. <i>The Star Inn</i> <i>North Yorkshire, England</i>	Male English	33. <i>Gidleigh Park</i> <i>Devon, England</i>	Male English
7. <i>Arbutus</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English	34. <i>Restaurant Michael Deane</i> <i>Belfast, Northern Ireland</i>	Male Irish
8. <i>The Ledbury</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male Australian	35. <i>Restaurant Nathan Outlaw</i> <i>Cornwall, England</i>	Male English
9. <i>Summer Isles</i> <i>Ross-shire, Scotland</i>	Male Scottish	36. <i>Northcote Manor</i> <i>Lancashire, England</i>	Male English
10. <i>Bath Priory</i> <i>Bath, England</i>	Male English	37. <i>The Longridge Restaurant</i> <i>Lancashire, England</i>	Male English
11. <i>Hibiscus</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male French	38. <i>The Square</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English
12. <i>Midsummer House</i> <i>Cambridgeshire, England</i>	Male English	39. <i>Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons</i> <i>Oxfordshire, England</i>	Male French
13. <i>L'Ecrivain</i> <i>Dublin 2, Ireland</i>	Male Irish	40. <i>The Castle</i> <i>Somerset, England</i>	Male English
14. <i>The Capital</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male French	41. <i>The River Café</i> <i>London, England</i>	Female English
15. <i>Yorke Arms</i> <i>North Yorkshire, England</i>	Female English	42. <i>Chapter One</i> <i>Dublin 1, Ireland</i>	Male Irish
16. <i>Morston Hall</i> <i>Norfolk, England</i>	Male English	43. <i>The River Café</i> <i>London, England</i>	Female American
17. <i>The Greyhound</i> <i>Hampshire, England</i>	Female South African	44. <i>Restaurant Sat Bains</i> <i>Nottinghamshire, England</i>	Male English
18. <i>1 Lombard Street</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male Austrian	45. <i>Pied à Terre</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male Australian
19. <i>The Fat Duck</i> <i>Berkshire, England</i>	Male English	46. <i>The Box Tree</i> <i>West Yorkshire, England</i>	Male English
20. <i>Lucknam Park</i> <i>Wiltshire, England</i>	Male Welsh	47. <i>L'enclume</i> <i>Cumbria, England</i>	Male English
21. <i>JSW</i> <i>Hampshire, England</i>	Male English	48. <i>Ockenden Manor</i> <i>West Sussex, England</i>	Male English
22. <i>La Trompette</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English	49. <i>The Clock House</i> <i>Surrey, England</i>	Male English
23. <i>Maze</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English	50. <i>The Old Vicarage</i> <i>South Yorkshire, England</i>	Female English
24. <i>Number One at The Balmoral</i> <i>Edinburgh, Scotland</i>	Male English	51. <i>Tom Aikens Restaurant</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English
25. <i>The New Angel</i> <i>Devon, England</i>	Male English	52. <i>The Hand & Flowers</i> <i>Buckinghamshire, England</i>	Male English
26. <i>The Vineyard at Stockcross</i> <i>Berkshire, England</i>	Male English	53. <i>Plumed Horse</i> <i>Edinburgh, Scotland</i>	Male English
27. <i>Braidwoods</i> <i>Ayrshire, Scotland</i>	Male Scottish	54. <i>L'Escargot</i> <i>London, England</i>	Male English

Findings & discussion

For the purposes of this study, it was decided to refrain from using a specialised software (i.e. NVivo) as from the outset the researchers' intention was to immerse themselves thoroughly in and engage with the data in order to capture their meaning (Coffey et al., 1996). Thus, 'thematic analysis' was deemed as the most appropriate method for this study. According to Savage

(2000, p.1493) thematic analysis is consistent with a realist approach in that it is 'assumed that there will be some fit between the outcome of the data analysis and some external or overarching reality'. The aim of the thematic analysis was to identify key patterns and themes in the data using a process of coding, thereby developing categories from clusters of codes, in turn generating themes from these categories. Details of the chefs interviewed are listed in Table 1 (the chef's names are not disclosed due to the confidentiality agreement). Based on the above, the following presentation and discussion of the findings is limited only to specific characteristics of this occupational group.

Occupational Identity

In order to examine the occupational identity and culture of chefs, it was particularly interesting to identify chefs' perceptions of the status and standing of the occupation and of chefs themselves, as they perceive it to be viewed, through the eyes of the outside world. The process of chefs' identity formation can be better understood by analysing the cultural aspects of this occupational group (Palmer et al., 2010). Cohen (1985) argues that 'community' implies both the notion of similarity and that of difference, insofar as members of a group have something in common with each other, whilst the thing they have in common distinguishes them from the members of other possible groups. The world of an individual employee in the restaurant industry is a very closed and incestuous one (Kang et al., 2010). Chefs' friendship groups only tend to comprise other chefs and frequent movement between kitchens is commonplace. As a direct consequence, the occupational community of chefs is much more close-knit than is seen in other professions (Palmer et al., 2010). Drawing upon the work of Cohen (1985), it becomes clear that chefs derive a sense of belonging, loyalty and similarity with their peers, by collectively constructing and embracing a front of similarity through shared symbols and other markers of identity which communicate what 'being a chef' means (Burrow et al., 2015;

Kang et al., 2010). Belonging is therefore established on the basis of a shared culture, as the following quotation clearly illustrates:

“The only friends I’ve got are in the industry, I’ve got no friends outside the industry, I’ve got nobody that’s a painter, or this, or this, or this, I don’t know anyone from where I grew up; all I know is chefs. If you look through my phone and my mobile, they’re all chefs. Chefs or waiters – that’s it – or suppliers. And you just think about it, and you think to yourself, ‘Why haven’t I got any proper friends?’ Proper friends wouldn’t understand what I do. I can’t have a f**king Saturday night off. ... And to be honest with you, I wouldn’t know what to talk about with them. I don’t know what to talk to normal people about, because all I know is food.” (Chef 40)

Chefs are more than just a group of people; they are a group of people with something in common with each other which distinguishes them from other groups. In other words, they are a ‘community’ of common minded individuals. Bourdain (2000, p.124) argues that chefs share a peculiar world-view, together with unusual customs, rituals and practices that define them as a ‘tribe’. Their unsocial working hours indeed contribute to their exclusion of ‘normal’ social interaction and their subsequent deep commitment to their colleagues, or what Bourdain (2000, p.56) refers to as a ‘blind, near-fanatical loyalty ... under battlefield conditions’.

Occupational Culture

When applying Douglas’ (1982) theory of ‘grid/group’ analysis to the present study, it can be argued that, taken as a whole, the occupational culture of chefs is characterised by a strong ‘group’ identity and strong ‘grid’ dimension characteristic of tight work-groups and communities – ‘wolves’ in Mars’s (1982) terms – whereby group boundaries are strongly defined. As the internal validating mechanisms highlighted clearly illustrate, membership of the chef community

is based upon a shared understanding of the criteria for membership, in other words they speak the same language. The kitchen brigade is treated as a family; part of the social cost of membership of this family is the demonstration of dedication to the familial group (Cohen, 1985). This cost is paid through the individual putting the needs of the group above their own, in the sense that they will not take time off for sickness and they will work through pain or injury (Burrow et al., 2015). Indeed, the burns, scalds, cuts and scars attained whilst working in the kitchen are seen as signifiers of occupational validity (Bourdain, 2000; Simpson, 2006; White, 1990). From the following quote, it is evident that having 'done their time' and 'earned their stripes' and the subsequent right to be called 'chef', chefs share a common bond between them, a shared feeling of understanding, an affinity with one another, a sense of camaraderie and a feeling of mutual respect:

“When you hit this Michelin standard, then there’s a respect there, I think. Once you get into the higher echelons of achieving, then, from other places of similar achievement, there seems to be a respect, I think. I wouldn’t think twice about phoning just about anybody from a starred restaurant, or hotel, or whatever to speak to another chef. You’ve earned your stripes, I think. And you do get a respect from other chefs, definitely.” (Chef 36)

It is further evident that membership of the chef community is based on the ability to do the job. If you can do the job, then you are accepted into the family. What is more, the research brought to the fore that cultural acceptance amongst chefs is global and transcends social class, gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. In addition, it can be argued that 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 (Balazs, 2002; Allen & Mac Con Iomaire, 2016). The nature of the work defines the worldview, the value system of the chef community.

Furthermore, participants identified a few of the cultural symbols which denote chefs' belongingness and occupational enculturation, such as the quality and quantity of their (own) kitchen knives, their ability to chop rapidly and efficiently and their knowledge of French service and French phrases (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008).

Occupational socialisation

Studies of occupational cultures have identified the crucial role played by occupational socialisation in inculcating the knowledge and beliefs of the group to newcomers, in order for them to behave like their co-workers and become accepted in the occupational culture (Trice, 1993). The process of occupational socialisation is deemed crucial for the induction and integration of newcomers to the occupational culture in the case of young chefs (Burrow et al., 2015; Mac Con Iomaire, 2008). A significant part of chefs' socialisation occurs through banter in the kitchen (Alexander et al., 2012). Friendly banter, verbal insults, teasing and mockery, and practical jokes and pranks, serve to induct new recruits into the familial group but also serve to construct the social hierarchy of the kitchen:

“I wouldn't say chefs are the most politically correct people, but it's never done in a malicious way. You might hear a racist comment, but not done nastily – done in a joking way. ... But it's just banter. If there was ever anything that was malicious, then it would get stamped out, not just by me, but by the other guys. Because there is a team mentality, there is, 'If you're going to bully him, then everybody's going to suffer.' So they sort of look out for each other. I think that's very, very strong, actually, in kitchens – very strong. ... I'm sure it exists everywhere, building sites, and garages, and I'm sure there's banter in every sort of group environment. Chefs are no different. They're probably a little bit worse in some cases.” (Chef 1)

It can be argued that the use of banter can be easily turned into bullying during the kitchen brigade's new member socialisation. Johns & Menzel (1999) argue that chefs in the early stages of their career would tolerate mistreatment and abuse, as the opposite would imply weakness. The process of occupational socialisation and induction to the occupational culture is long and painful but this is considered by many well-established chefs as the only way to advance in the culinary profession as a Michelin-starred chef (i.e. Bourdain, 2000; Simpson, 2006; White, 1990). The following quotation depicts graphically the conditions under which socialisation takes place in 'haute cuisine' restaurants:

“I've worked in kitchens where people have literally been stood on their section in tears, blokes crying. The sort of mental abuse and physical abuse that I've seen people take is really, really bad, especially in some of the more upmarket kitchens. However, I don't think that it is as rife as it was in the 90s. ... But you hear stories from people that worked in certain kitchens, and if you believe what you hear, then it's still pretty bad. But then there's some sort of sick pleasure that people get out of saying, 'Oh, I worked here and he used to whip me every day, and he used to stick a knife in me,' and all this carry on. For some reason, they like it". (Chef 9)

Throughout the course of the fieldwork, discussions with the chefs revealed that this violent and aggressive means of induction is often regarded as being analogous with the means of induction to the military. In both the restaurant industry and the military, the same notions exist of 'building' a functioning member of a unit by means of the initial removal of their previous behaviour patterns, followed by the subsequent rebuilding of these behaviour patterns to conform to those required by the organisation (Salin & Hoel, 2011). In this way, both in the restaurant industry and in the military, once they have been through this process, an individual

can be relied on to perform the correct actions in the correct manner at the correct time, to a far higher degree than individuals who have not endured this type of induction:

“When you’re a head chef and you have a commis in here, it’s a bit like having a new Private and you want to sort of bring them down to your level, strip them completely naked of their – humiliate them, like a Sergeant Major would in the barracks to a new recruit who’s not even put on his khaki uniform. Basically it’s a form of cruel indoctrination, I suppose. Then you rebuild him up”. (Chef 43)

The aggressive and violent nature of induction into the catering industry for young, new recruits is shown here as being the result of imitation on the part of more senior, higher ranking chefs – these chefs in turn imitating the behaviour learnt from and handed down by their superiors during their time as new recruits. The majority of the chefs participating in this study reported that receiving abuse as a junior chef and then reversing the roles as a chef, is part of the occupational socialisation process that builds-up the ‘macho’ character needed to survive in a Michelin-starred kitchen:

You knock them down and build them up, then knock them down and build them up. I have had it done a lot – a lot. The Anonymous was a prime example. I got ridden for about six months by the senior sous-chef. ... He rode me every day – every day. But that’s the way it was then”. (Chef 50)

Significantly, those individuals with very dominant personalities, the ‘Alpha Males’, are the individuals who most often rise to the highest echelons of the profession. Those who cannot cope with the constant pressure either leave or are pushed to what Crompton & Sanderson (1986) term ‘gendered niches’ such as the salads or the pastry section (Burrow et al., 2015). To conclude, it can be argued that the survival of the young chefs’ induction and socialisation

denotes compatibility and ability to integrate as well as a way to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the head chef and the rest of the kitchen brigade (Burrow et al., 2015).

The role of discipline in kitchen brigades

According to the chefs interviewed, the militaristic hierarchy of the kitchen brigade is still, albeit to a lesser extent, prevalent in today's kitchens as there is a need for structure and discipline in order to maintain order, authority and control (Balazs, 2001). As previously highlighted, these are requirements due to the intense nature of the job and the extreme working environment (i.e. consistently executing each and every dish to an exact standard of quality and excellence day in, day out, under severe temporal constraints, in a highly pressurised and stressful environment). Hence, such military organisation and the highly regimented nature of the kitchen brigade are understood by all the members of the kitchen brigade as a *sine qua non* in the kitchen (Balazs, 2002); it is something that keeps them performing as a team in order to ultimately achieve and maintain a standing of quality and excellence day in, day out. Chefs often compare this to the means by which the military functions, even citing comparisons of carrying out service with going into battle (Gill, 1997; Simpson, 2006):

“If you're organising something, it can be a massive function, it can be a small party, whatever, but if you don't get your *mise en place* and you're prepared for it, as it were to go into battle, then the whole thing is going to go pear-shaped. So there has to be a certain amount of discipline – especially chefs. They're just like caged animals, mostly.”

(Chef 46)

The importance of the team and the interdependency that exists between the members of the kitchen brigade is illustrated by the fact that they have to rely on each other to get the job done. Indeed, it is teamwork that dictates success or failure on a daily basis. Thus, members of the

kitchen brigade are highly aware of the importance of their role and place within the team. The hierarchical nature of the kitchen brigade is thereby pivotal in the transference and reinforcement of the occupational culture of chefs. To be a member of the kitchen brigade is to abide by the rules and regulations of the kitchen hierarchy and the behavioural norms of the group. Overall, the highly regimented and rigidly hierarchal nature of the kitchen brigade that characterises the occupational culture of chefs thereby constitutes another social construct that defines and reinforces the occupational identity and culture of chefs.

The myth of the creative and violent chef

The perception of the outside world with regard to the status and standing of the occupation and the image of chefs, is neatly illustrated by Chef 16 in the following terms:

“I think chefs are still pretty much lumped into the category – sort of fairly – of being hard, disciplined, pretty tyrannical, often abusive, leaders at the top of a long ladder that they have had to climb themselves being abused, and having to work like dogs all the way from the bottom of that long ladder”.

Despite the evident elevation of the status and standing of the occupation and the new found respect and recognition afforded by chefs themselves, the perception of the outside world with regard to the image of chefs is still somewhat spontaneously associated with the deeply ingrained archetypal cultural stereotype of the aggressive, authoritarian, tyrannical, temperamental, volatile, violent and abusive chef (Johns & Menzel, 1999). Chef 8 further elaborates the point:

“I suppose people always think of chefs as hot-headed, aggressive, violent, foul-mouthed. ... I must admit, in my early part of my career, when I was first taking charge of a kitchen, I used to be like that. I used to be completely off my nut at the stupidest thing, and throw

things, and kick things, and be a complete prat. But that was because I'd worked for probably two of the most violent chefs that have ever been in the UK, so I saw they got results by doing it that way. I'd also worked for very timid chefs that also got results, I must add, but the dominating guys for me were the ones that were aggressive, and the big personalities and the big mouths. So I suppose I thought that was the way to do it".

The Michelin-starred chef Gordon Ramsay corroborates the aggressive and violent behaviour that is part of the stereotype of professional kitchens in his own inimitable style as 'battlefields' (Simpson, 2006). In other words: 'A kitchen has to be an assertive, boisterous, aggressive environment, or nothing happens' (cited in Hollweg, 2001, p.9). Perhaps more insightful still is Ramsay's observation that '...you need to get a beating to do well. Cooking is dog eat dog. The weak disappear off the face of the Earth' (cited in Duncan 2001, p.10). A.A. Gill, the restaurant critic who has worked in such kitchens states that there is 'no other business would dare to treat its workers as they are treated in a restaurant kitchen' (cited in Hennessy 2000, p.67). He also argues that chefs sustain and defend their 'Edwardian' working conditions and resist any attempts to improve their hours, for they 'take stoical pride in the assault course of the training in the school of hard knocks, branding burns, blistered feet and cirrhosed livers' (Gill, 1997, p.96). Similarly, for Hennessy (2000, p.67), it is the chefs themselves who perpetuate the system through an obsession described as being akin to a religious 'calling', to the extent that '...any suggested amelioration to the madness of the normal kitchen tends to be opposed by the inmates themselves'. The above are reflected in Chef's 10 quote:

"They have stripes like on an army uniform. They think it's, 'Yeah, I'm hard.' Chefs are always, 'Oh, I can do this quicker than you,' there's a little bit of a competition, 'I'm harder than you,' and everybody I think refers back to that quote from Marco [Marco Pierre White], the SAS, everybody wants to be in a tough kitchen, in a hard kitchen. ...

Battle scars – that’s what they are. They’re like battle scars. ‘Oh, yes, I worked at Anonymous, look at my arms.’ ... Some people thought that was really cool to the extent that sometimes people would deliberately burn themselves”.

Gordon Ramsay has described the above rules, norms and rituals of chefs’ life as ‘the knowledge’; specifically he states: ‘[t]his job is the pits when you’re learning. You have to bow down and stay focused until the knowledge is tucked away’ (cited 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 (Burrow et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2010). It is precisely these cultural processes by which occupational identity is formed that constitute the subject of investigation of this study (Cooper, 2012).

Conclusions

This paper has provided useful insights in both theoretical and practical perspective regarding the formation of chefs’ occupational identity and culture, by interviewing more than half of the Michelin-starred chefs’ population in Great Britain and Ireland. The research findings presented above suggest that Michelin-starred chefs are a strong occupational community with a distinctive occupational culture. A kitchen brigade is often compared to a family and engenders a high degree of group solidarity, bonding and camaraderie between its members. This is what informs the unusually tight-knit and often perceived as walled-off nature of the restaurant industry. The research findings identified that the aggressive and violent nature of induction into the catering industry for young, new recruits occurs through banter, which can easily be transformed to bullying and violence. This is the result of imitation on the part of more senior, higher ranking chefs – these chefs in turn adopt the behaviour learnt from and handed down by their superiors

during their time as new recruits. Indeed, however disastrous the consequences, it can therefore be argued that from a cultural viewpoint, chefs are able to derive a sense of identity by embracing and perpetuating the myth of the creative and violent chef (Johns & Menzel, 1999). The myth is further reinforced by the fact that the chefs who make it to the top of the profession are often the ones who have willingly endured harsh working conditions and mistreatment. It was also revealed that this violent and aggressive means of socialisation in commercial kitchens is often regarded as being analogous with the means of induction to the military and paramilitary organisations (i.e. police and fire service). The role of discipline in 'haute cuisine' restaurants is often used as a means of monitoring quality and maintaining the high standards of performance.

Theoretical implications

This study generates empirical data that informs contemporary debates about the role of work in identity formation and the structure of occupational identities in our contemporary society (i.e. Van Maanen, 2010). More specifically, the role of occupational socialisation (Figure 1) is emphasized in occupational groups that are based on a military hierarchical structure. The acceptance or rejection of the new recruit by the leader and the rest of the team is the pivotal point that determines the new recruit's future as a team member. 'Survivors' become full members of a closed group that treats its members as a family under the constant monitoring of a strong leader; in addition, 'survivors' are entitled to career progression when the 'knowledge' is acquired. On the other hand those who cannot cope with the harsh socialisation process (labelled as 'Defeated') are excluded from the group and moved to secondary posts; as a result they eventually quit their job or even change career. This model applies to occupations that require a high level of team work such as Michelin-starred chefs. In addition, the findings of this study suggest that identity and culture are interrelated in the sense that the cultural components of an occupational culture operate to reinforce a sense of identity among

its occupational members. As already discussed above, the occupational identity and occupational culture are deeply embedded in the new member socialisation process.

Insert Figure 1 here

Practical implications

Commercial kitchens, especially in haute cuisine restaurants, tend to have their own distinctive identity and culture, which is not necessarily synonymous with the organisational culture. This can have serious implications in terms of people management – there are numerous accounts about the notorious clashes between the restaurant or hotel manager with the head chefs. Michelin-starred kitchens are silos and this can be catastrophic for the rest of the organisation. There is therefore a need for further research in order to understand how we can bridge the gap between organisational and occupational culture not only in ‘haute cuisine’ restaurants but also in the hospitality industry as a whole.

The key implication that emerges from this study that is also confirmed by previous research (i.e. Alexander et al., 2012; Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Johns & Menzel, 1999), is the problem of bullying and violence in commercial kitchens, which is further enhanced by the exposure of celebrity chefs in the global media. The image of the creative and violent chef is definitely not the right message to pass on to the young aspiring culinary arts students. It is therefore imperative to adopt a new way to teach and develop young chefs. Mac Con Iomaire (2008) suggests a work placement mentoring system for students, which is a brilliant idea to help young people develop a better understanding of the kitchen culture. Unfortunately, this is not enough to eliminate these unacceptable behaviours from commercial kitchens. On the other hand, it is encouraging that the increasing exposure of bullying cases in media and the enforcement of strict anti-bullying policies on behalf of the industry is a step forward in this

battle. This is another area of research that could potentially identify the profile of the offenders and the magnitude of the phenomenon.

Research Limitations & Future Research

It must be acknowledged that the research focus on haute cuisine restaurants constrains the scope and generalisability of the study. The research scope was also ultimately influenced by pragmatic reasons related with costs, especially time and financial resources, thus preventing the researchers from carrying out a longitudinal study and gathering data across different national cultures. No claims for generalizability therefore can be made beyond the context of UK haute cuisine restaurants. Although it is impossible to apply the research findings to the whole population of chefs working in commercial kitchens, the research findings nevertheless provide an original contribution to knowledge, by conceptualising how the occupational identity and culture of chefs is constructed and maintained through both work and social interaction.

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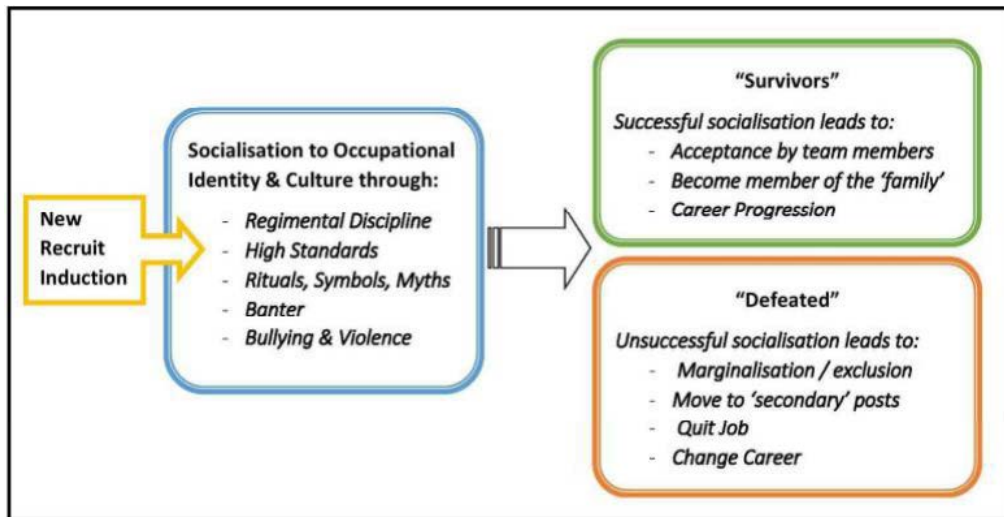


Figure 1: Chefs' socialisation process

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