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***Nigellissima*: A Study of Glamour, Performativity and Embodiment**

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**Abstract**

This is a study of glamour, its complexities, and its relationship with and role within celebrity culture. We explore glamour in the context of Nigella, the London-born TV cook, food writer and self-proclaimed ‘domestic goddess’ of British culinary culture. In our study we consider the interconnections between glamour, specifically Italian-style retro-glamour and performativity in Nigella’s career. We also address the role of embodiment and authenticity in the masquerade of femininity. Our analysis focuses on Nigella’s glamour over time, considering its creation, enactment, and re-affirmation following scandal. We conclude by speculating on glamour’s complex and ambivalent relationship with celebrity culture, and the role of vulnerability in creating authentic and enduring glamour in contemporary consumer society.

**Summary statement of contribution:**

This study draws attention to the growing literature on glamour, exploring its complex relationship with celebrity culture and its relevance for the concept of transformation in consumer culture. Focusing on Nigella, the authors use glamour as a lens with which to analyse her career, arguing that Nigella employed a glamour aesthetic in order to create, perform and ultimately re-affirm her glamorous persona *Nigellissima*, despite ‘moments of rupture’ in her life and career that challenged this.

Keywords:

**Glamour, Celebrity Culture, Nigella, Femininity, Performativity, Embodiment**

**Introduction**

Glamour is both a pervasive quality within celebrity culture and a force apart, in many respects standing aloof from that culture, even though it is often conflated with it (Wilson, 2007). Its ambivalent relationship with celebrity culture, and misinterpretation as being synonymous with consumption in a consumer society, ignores its complex origins and many manifestations through time. Indeed it is by its very nature continually evolving, becoming more diffused and its meanings more nuanced in response to changes in the historical, cultural and social landscape (Postrel, 2013; Wilson, 2007). In this study we seek to capture its elusive essence, exploring its relationship with celebrity culture as we do so. To consider the complexity of glamour as a concept, we offer a study of an object of glamour, in this case Nigella, the London-born TV cook, food writer and self-proclaimed ‘domestic goddess’ of English culinary culture. We argue that Nigella’s media persona perfectly embodies the complexities of glamour. To justify our focus on glamour, we observe that glamour is a word that conjures up an array of associations, such as enchantment, otherworldliness, luxury, untouchability, contrivance and illusion. Another important quality of glamour is transformation, for both the object of glamour and for those who behold it. Indeed glamour must have audiences that are willing to suspend their disbelief and envision their own lives transformed (Postrel, 2013). The promise of transformation is glamour’s ultimate, magical effect, and thus we think it apposite that we submit our study of Nigella to this special issue on ‘Celebrity Convergence and Transformation’.

Our focus is on how the complex quality of glamour was staged, performed and ultimately re-affirmed, we argue, in Nigella’s career. We explore the interconnections between glamour, femininity and performativity as we do so, showing how Nigella used a glamour aesthetic to enact a powerful and entrancing masquerade of retro-femininity. It is not unusual to find glamour and retrospection coupled together: indeed glamour often offers a backwards glance to an idealised past, the ‘vintage effect’ of gazing on a past adorned with “glamorizing fantasy” (Brown, 2009, p. 19). In Nigella’s case, the allure of retro glamour she evokes (Gundle, 2008) draws on quintessentially Italian roots. We will show how her persona (*Nigellissima*) consciously pays homage to the maggiorate, the voluptuous female film stars of 1950s Italian cinema (Buckley, 2008). We also consider the perils of being positioned as a glamour icon and media ‘star’ in celebrity culture, and the difficulties of maintaining one’s aura of glamorous otherworldliness, an essential condition of glamour, when reality intrudes and we get to glimpse the reality behind its façade. Finally we consider how glamour survives when it is revealed to have become a masquerade that conceals a very different lived experience.

There have been a number of studies in the marketing and consumer culture fields that have studied ‘Brand Nigella’, primarily the work of Brownlie and Hewer (Brownlie & Hewer, 2005; Brownlie & Hewer, 2011; Hewer & Brownlie, 2008). In their 2005 study Brownlie and Hewer discuss culinary texts as objectifications of culinary culture, “representations whose performative work is rendered invisible” by the background work of the author and the commercial interests of the media that work to support the particular “aura” being offered (p. 14). Whilst glamour is not mentioned, they do discuss the mythical re-enactment of the past in Nigella’s constant nostalgic reference to her personal history, and the mystification processes and “magical practices” Nigella represents for her audience. In their later study of 2011, they write that Nigella’s carefully crafted culinary world focuses on “celebrations of voluptuary feminine appetites: those empowering spaces of transformation, transgression, glamour, and covetousness” (p. 1). And in their 2011 study they focus on the dreamlike nature of Nigella’s world, including Nigella’s constant, playful reference to 1950s femininity, which offers a dream “where the mundane and ordinary are never allowed to set foot” (p. 484). Brownlie and Hewer’s work, whilst alluding to glamour and its attendant qualities, has not explored the concept of glamour, as their focus has been on celebrity, representation, myth making and the social and cultural practices surrounding celebrity culture. Nor have they looked at how glamour has the transformative power to alter all aspects of visual culture, not least people. This is one of the key aims of our study of glamour in the context of Nigella; namely to show how she was transformed by glamour, and also how glamour enabled her to connect with an adoring audience by offering them a powerful rhetoric of escape that also held within it the alluring promise of their own transformation (Postrel, 2013).

The word glamour has become commonplace in contemporary consumer culture and it is freely applied to many things in celebrity culture and in fashion texts, impossible to ignore yet hard to describe and encapsulate. In fact it has only recently become the subject of academic study, and then primarily in the fields of media studies and cultural studies (see, for example, the work of Brown, 2009; Buckley, 2008; Dyhouse, 2011; Gundle, 2002, 2008; Postrel, 2013; Thrift, 2008; Wilson, 2007). So, despite the ubiquity of the word in contemporary consumer culture, glamour has yet to attract the attention of marketing, consumer behaviour and consumer culture scholars. We hope to address this absence in our study.

We begin with a review of glamour, including where it originated and how it developed in the Hollywood star system throughout the 1920s and 1930s. We then discuss glamour in the context of 1950s Italian cinema, which offered an alternative ideal of glamour to that offered by Hollywood. Next we offer a review of the literature on performativity which is located within feminist theory, to demonstrate how glamour is staged and performed in the media landscape. This then leads us to our methodology, which is to explore the concept of glamour in the context of the critical moments in Nigella’s career, so-called ‘moments of rupture’ to the narrative that changed it and created a new storyline and new meanings. This enables us to better understand and interpret the emergence and enactment of Nigella’s particular brand of glamour. We go on to consider whether Nigella’s way of being glamorous and of doing glamour, pleasure and domesticity can be perceived as an empowering vision for contemporary women. Finally we consider the threat to Nigella’s carefully constructed 1950s style Italian glamour when the reality of her life was revealed in two scandals in 2013. This will lead us to speculate on the relationship between glamour, celebrity culture and authenticity.

**Glamour**

The words glamour and glamorous are ubiquitous in contemporary consumer culture, and are typically associated with celebrity lifestyles, conspicuous wealth and luxury consumption; indeed all things that are desirable, appealing and often tantalisingly out of reach for most of us. In fact the concept of glamour is closely associated with celebrity culture, as the latter is considered to be the site where so many forms of glamour proliferate. Despite the close relationship between the two, however, they are not synonymous. In fact Wilson (2007) makes a convincing case for glamour and celebrity being quite different. She argues that glamour is otherworldly and indifferent to the approval of others, unlike celebrity culture that often seeks the limelight (and approval) of the public gaze. She writes: “Glamour is the result of work and effort – artfully concealed, of course” (Wilson, 2007, p. 100), whereas celebrity clamours to be noticed and often manifests a desperate quality. Wilson believes that glamour and celebrity are polar opposites: celebrity “is all about touch; glamour is untouchable” (2007, p.101). As we will seek to demonstrate, glamour has its own very particular nuances and complex meanings, meanings that have evolved historically to give it its central place and, we will argue, significant role in contemporary consumer culture. In order to begin to understand the nature of glamour and where it originates, it is necessary to go back to its source.

The etymology of the word ‘glamour’ reveals its elusive qualities as well as its illusive properties. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, glamour means 1 magic, enchantment, spell; 2 a. A magical or fictitious beauty attaching to any person or object: a delusive or alluring charm; b. Charm, attractiveness; physical allure, esp. feminine beauty; *v.* To affect with glamour, to charm, enchant.

Most sources agree that the word is derived from two main roots, the Icelandic word *glamour*, which is a poetical name for the moon, and is thus associated with mystical and mysterious psychic moods, supernatural aspects and has omnipresent yet ultimately unattainable properties. It is also derived from the Scottish word *glamer* or *glamour*. This word refers to “the supposed influence of a charm on the eye, causing it to see objects differently from what they really are.” (Oxford English Dictionary, p. 553). Indeed the illusory nature of glamour was emphasised by the Scottish phrase *glam-sight*, which was an illusion or ‘moonshine’ in Scottish dialect. Two other possible sources were *glimbr* (meaning splendour) or *glam-skygn*, meaning ‘squint-eyed’ (from *The Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 1879, in Gundle, 2008, p. 37). This meaning also emphasises its visual power to dazzle its beholder, as well as its’ lunar, and by implications, extraordinary and otherworldly associations. The enchanting and bewitching properties of glamour are evident too in the French word *glamaire* which means a book of spells. According to Brown (2009) the word glamour has strong associations with the concept of a charm, and she contends that its original Scottish meaning was somewhat darker in hue than the Oxford English Dictionary definition would suggest, observing that it had links with the black arts, such as the occult, magic and necromancy. In time the word came to be defined in English as ‘delusive or alluring charm’, and was typically applied to a woman and the feminine arts, particularly a woman’s eerie power to cast a spell on others.

The word ‘glamour’ entered common parlance in American English, especially in Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s, and was associated with the so-called ‘Silver Screen’ and its celebrated ‘Screen Goddesses’ such as Marlene Deitrich, Greta Garbo and Jean Harlow, stars who shimmered, shone and sparkled before the dazzled gaze of an adoring cinema audience. According to Ewen (1988) and Gundle (2008), Hollywood was the most complete embodiment of glamour, capable of turning individuals into “desirable icons for a mass audience” (Ewen, 1988, p. 89). It brought the allure of glamour to a mass audience, early descriptions of Hollywood referring to it as a ‘glamour factory’ that churned out enchanting visions for a voracious public gaze (Gundle, 2008, p. 176). Indeed Postrel (2013) notes that glamour is all about “human longing and its cultural manifestations” (p. 221), offering a tantalising mixture of desire, grace, mystery, and an illusion that dreams are attainable.

By the 1930s, however, the Hollywood dream factory demonstrated that glamour was more than just visual enchantment. True to its original associations, films began to emphasise female sophistication, agency and self-possession, and glamour was represented as a powerful assertion of female identity and power (Dyhouse, 2011). As such, women in films who possessed glamour could triumph, but equally such dangerous and transgressive power could herald their downfall (Buckley & Gundle, 2000; Dyhouse, 2011). By the 1950s, the end of the Second World War heralded the emergence of a more wholesome, non-threatening and ultra or, one might say, hyper form of feminine glamour that was more girl next door than unattainable and potentially deadly goddess. Whilst American cinema offered dizzy and often childlike, ‘peroxide blondes’ such as Marilyn Monroe, Doris Day and Debbie Reynolds, a very different aesthetic of female glamour was emerging in Italy, and it is to Italy that we now turn our attention.

Italian cinema in the 1950s developed its own brand of glamour and its own film stars that embodied and displayed a glamorous aesthetic, an aesthetic that had a long history in Italian culture (Buckley, 2008; Buckley & Gundle, 2000; Gundle, 2008). Buckley, in particular, gives us a fascinating account of Italian female film stars in the 1950s, such as Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida and Silvana Mangano, who were depicted on screen as having aristocratic aloofness, a key characteristic associated with glamour, as glamour requires distance in order to be alluring, whilst also inspiring imaginative longings in its beholders (Postrel, 2013). As well as having aloofness, however, the Italian film stars also possessed more approachable qualities such as earthy sensuality, peasant roots and natural beauty. Its stars had to negotiate this complex terrain in order to be truly glamorous according to Italian cinematic ideals. These maggiorate were “bearers of glamour” in a brave new commercial and democratic world where glamour was attainable for all (Buckley, 2008, p. 269).

The democratisation and commoditisation of the concept of glamour is now widespread and diffused, freely applied to all aspects of consumer culture that are special, alluring and desirable, from people, to places, to products, to experiences (Gundle, 2008; Thrift, 2008). Brown (2009), writes that glamour now denotes “both a formal category and an experiential site of consumer desire” (p. 1), and is attached to anything that can dazzle or enchant our eyes and senses, as befits its essential quality: a “visual language of seduction” (Gundle, 2008, p. 23). It continues to denote taste and class, with its enduring associations with luxury, high culture and the aristocracy, but the advent of conspicuous consumption and consumer culture resulted in it becoming associated with celebrity, the nouveau riche, and with extraordinary displays of wealth, whilst still retaining its original spellbinding aura of remoteness, elegance and mystery (Gundle, 2008). Glamour has continued to retain its early associations with the “manipulation of surfaces” (Thrift, 2008, p.1). Put simply, glamour is endowed with transformative power to alter the surface of things; capable of changing the apparently mundane and ordinary into visions of the sublime and extraordinary.

We will argue that it is in the “polished surface” of things, in the apparent “stance of impenetrability” (Brown, 2009, p. 5) that the true elixir of glamour resides: it is dazzling yet beyond our reach; offering a glittering shield to those who possess its power, a shield which separates them from the ordinary. The challenge, then, for humans who are propelled into the heavenly firmament of celebrity and stardom, is how to be special and extraordinary to those who gaze upon them, whilst simultaneously continuing to exist as human beings beneath the polished surface, the dazzling sheen of glamour with which they are cloaked. Glamour is not only about appearance, of course; it is also about movement, action, affect and effect, and so we now consider how glamour is enacted and performed in the media landscape, in order to consider how glamour is actually done in contemporary celebrity culture, and specifically how it was acquired and given agency in the case of Nigella.

**Glamour and performativity**

Gundle (2008) writes: “Glamour is always theatrical; it is a performance or parade that has no meaning unless it is widely viewed. Indeed it is only through perception and reception of visual effects that it comes into existence.” (p. 390). Postrel (2013) would concur with this when she refers to glamour as offering “a lucid glimpse of desire fulfilled” (p. 127). According to Parker and Sedgwick (1995) performativity enables “a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed interatively through complex citational processes.” (p. 2) We believe performativity is thus an ideal means for understanding Nigella’s brand of glamour, given her performative aspects and her own overt references to the “ironic dream” she created in her book *How to be a Domestic Goddess* (in Hollows, 2003, p. vii).

The relationship between biographical agency, symbolic spaces and the body has attracted considerable interdisciplinary attention (see for example Grosz 1994). Marketing studies have looked at how consumers develop their agencies around their subversive bodies. Gurrieri and Cherier (2013) show how oversized women construct online collective identities that use their bodies as a site for denouncing difference in the marketplace, as well as enacting a subversive contestation of patriarchal and moral discourses around ‘ideal’ bodies in the fashion industry. Cultural studies of glamour confirm that the “primary characteristic of femininity is the female figure” (Buckley, 2008, p. 273), and that the essence of a woman’s glamour is her sexualised body, which can undergo extraordinary transformation and evoke prestige and power for women. Sociological studies on the democratisation of glamour demonstrate that a glamorous body is now more broadly defined, departing from the normative ideal of a white, young, thin and healthy woman (McRobbie, 2009; Skeggs, 1997). Such studies argue that glamour is not simply about manipulating the body; it is also a matter of attitude (Skeggs, 1997). These studies also highlight how the term represents a shift in ideas around feminism(s) and femininity (see for example Moseley, 2002, and Swan, 2005). Indeed Hollows (2003) highlights how post-feminism encourages us to draw on a wide range of repertoires and new (and often retro) ways of envisaging, presenting and performing “embodied feminism” (Davis, 1997).

Underlying the notion of glamour is the idea that glamour is something that one assumes; a mask that changes how we appear to others. The concept of femininity as a masquerade was first articulated in an article by psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in 1929. She argued that there was no real distinction to be made between ‘genuine womanliness’ and ‘the masquerade’, suggesting that they were inseparable. According to Craft-Fairchild (1993), one can view the masquerade of femininity as a submission to patriarchal codes, or see it as a disruptive practice, “a feminocracy … a realm pervaded by female desire, authority, and influence.” (Castle, 1986, in Craft-Fairchild, 1993, p. 52). The masquerade of femininity, later embraced by Lacan and more recently, by feminist theorists such as Butler, has been an important means for de-essentializing and deconstructing gender and performance. Butler (1989) extended the concept of gender as a performing rather than a being issue, claiming that gender is constructed and reproduced through repetitive performativity. For Butler there is no pre-existing subject or a doer who is determined before the performance, and the subject is not free to choose the gender he or she is going to enact, since gender is a rigid frame of scripts, but these scripts are mutable.

Inspired by Butler, critical marketing studies have paid particular attention to the context wherein such norms are disrupted by subversive performances. Goulding and Saren (2009) show how Goth festivals are transgressive spaces wherein participants reclaim their fluid gendered identities through “self-fashioning” (p. 43) their bodies. These festivals represent temporal and spatial “sites of contestation where orthodoxy is challenged and identities are constructed and ‘performed’” (p. 27). Other marketing studies have highlighted how glamorous performances are powerful subversive tools for disrupting the masculine academic environment (Maclaran, Miller, Parsons, & Surman, 2009; Swan, 2005). Swan (2005) highlights how performing glamour in the classroom is a way of acquiring both power and pleasure, and challenging the dominant, bodiless academic culture. Similarly Maclaran *et al*. (2009) argue that glamour can be employed by female academics to subvert the male dominated cultural environment of business schools. These last two studies show how glamour “gives agency, strength and worth and is not restricted to youth” (Skeggs, 1997, p.111), but is available to all women regardless of their age, race and social class (McRobbie, 2009). Indeed these studies show how glamorous women are agentic actors performing femininity with confidence (Skeggs, 1997), combining notions of respectability and sexuality in varied public spaces.

The above studies offer a particular way of looking at glamour which emphasises that “femininity is indeed a kind of drag” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 542), wherein women emerge as powerful actors able to evoke new meanings and responses in others. If these studies see women as players in control of their identities in various contexts, nothing has been said about the role of audiences, co-actors, co-authors and other agents in the ‘masquerade of femininity’ (Riviere, 1929). We therefore consider the role of others in the staging and enactment of Nigella, describing the part played by these agents to transform Nigella Lawson, journalist and food writer into *Nigellissima*, a voluptuous vision that evoked 1950s Italian film star glamour, oozing femininity, charm, sensuality and regality; in short, the maggiorate, who were also groomed by others in order to have the desired effect on their audience (Buckley & Gundle, 2000).

The maggiorate, recruited at beauty pageants throughout Italy, offered an aesthetic style that was less obviously constructed than their Hollywood counterparts of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. They were typically dark, full-figured, wore little makeup, projected a primitive and uncultivated appearance, and their natural beauty was reinforced by their often being placed in rural, natural settings. Most importantly, they were transformed in the narrative, their bodies adorned with luxurious clothes and elegant accessories from designers of the emergent fashion industry in the country. Indeed it was through fashion that the “glamorising process in force” can be seen (Buckley, 2008, p. 274). These Italian film stars referred to their modest working-class backgrounds, but their lifestyles were extravagant and far removed from the everyday life of the majority of Italian women who “could merely read about them in the illustrated magazines and newspapers” (Buckley, 2008, p. 279). Through incorporating aristocratic traits into their images they performed glamour as a matter of “poise, elegance and aloofness” (Buckley, 2008, p. 280) and hence they revitalised the myth of royalty, deposed just after World War Two in Italy, by becoming “the queens of the people” (Buckley, 2008, p. 282).

**Methodology**

In this study we consider how glamour provided a means to stage and enact a particular transformation in order that a compelling manifestation of Nigella the brand could emerge and flourish in myriad media forms. In order to understand this complex relationship we looked at Nigella’s story as a long, albeit ‘messy’ narrative in which *moments of rupture* occurred. We argue that these moments showed the discrepancy between Nigella Lawson, Nigella, and *Nigellissima*, since crises and scandals challenged her glamour, in particular the mask of pleasure, desire and projection of transformation and mystery that underpins its rhetoric (Postrel, 2013). These revealing moments, as the fluid relationship between the brand and the mediated woman converged, caused the real woman to come to the surface and be glimpsed by her audience. Such moments demanded a new enactment of glamour, and a repositioning of the mediated woman and the brand, as we will demonstrate in our analysis.

This complex analysis of brand Nigella and Nigella Lawson’s narrative has been inspired by the critical incident technique first theorised by Flanagan (1954). Following Flanagan, an incident is “any specifiable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). An incident becomes critical when it is presented as an “extreme behaviour, either outstandingly effective or ineffective with respect to attaining the general aims of the activity” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 338). More recently, others, such as Edvardsson and Roos (2001) and Cope and Watts (2000) highlight how such incidents are critical as they represent a significant deviation of established and taken for granted norms and conventions. Representing a destabilisation of norms, these incidents are revelatory of the prevailing nature of such norms and of the intense reactions (emotions and evaluation) that such incidents can cause in the people involved in them (Cope & Watts, 2000). Given that glamour is unconventional and defiant of the mundane (Dyhouse, 2011), the critical incident technique was considered the optimum one for understanding if and if so, how, Nigella’s performances of glamour destabilise norms and conventions of femininity and domesticity, and how such mediated disruptions were understood by Nigella herself and other actors involved in the process of glamorisation.

In order to fully understand the disruptive nature of these incidents, Flanagan (1954) created a critical incident technique that as he said “does not consist of a single rigid set of rules governing such data collection. Rather it should be thought of as a flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand.” (p. 335). Such a flexible set of principles refers to the researcher selecting and judging reports of the incidents from different sources depending on the aims of the study. Applied in various fields including organisation studies, nursing, service quality studies, and psychology, this technique has been used to analyse a heterogeneous set of sources including personal accounts from actors involved in the incidents, through interviews, and participants’ observations, but also secondary data such as reports and archive documents (Chell, 2004). Taking advantage of the flexibility of this technique, we analysed a heterogeneous set of secondary data consisting of the mediated accounts of Nigella, produced by Nigella Lawson through interviews and biographical notes in her cookbooks, as well as interviews and written comments of other actors (friends, colleagues, and collaborators) asked to give accounts about Nigella and Nigella Lawson. This set of data consists of Lawson’s interviews from 2007 to 2014, one documentary of Nigella’s life, a biography of Nigella by one of the authors, and Nigella’s own cookbook (Lawson, 2000). We are aware that this sample does not represent an exhaustive reading of all materials published by and about Nigella. Rather it offers a critical and chronological reading of continuities and discontinuities of the representation under study (Martens & Scott, 2005). This is a well-established strategy in consumer studies, wherein authors seek to unpack the overall spirit of a representation over time (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2006).

Given the flexible nature of the data collection of the critical incident technique, some have highlighted how the analysis of the data is in itself a creation of the incident under study. As Tripp (1993, p. 8) notes:

…critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident.

In our case we identified three critical incidents in Nigella’s narrative, judging them as ruptures in the flow of the story. These were the diagnosis of her first husband with cancer in 1997; marriage to Charles Saatchi in 2003; and two scandals that came to light in 2013. It is noteworthy to say that this interpretation is the result of three authors looking at the same narrative from different vantage points and areas of expertise. The first author has a background in gender and media studies, and was particularly interested in the concept of glamour in relation to constructions of femininity in popular culture. The second author is interested in food consumption practices and media representations of food discourses, and hence looked at the incidents as a matter of understanding gendered performances in the kitchen. The third author has a background in journalism and media studies and focused on the narrative as a mediated construction and re-construction of a celebrity over time. The authors’ different perspectives combined in a unique analysis, wherein each of the three different moments of rupture are unpacked in terms of performances of glamour, gendered performances in the kitchen, and the mediated reconstruction of Nigella the brand.

Having analysed Nigella’s career through the lens of glamour, our aim is not to claim that our interpretation is the only possible one of Nigella, but, like others who have studied media representations in consumer studies (Brownlie & Hewer, 2011; Hirschman, 1998; Hirschman &Thompson, 1997), we have the more modest aim of providing “a think piece, a broad-brush polemic” (Brewis & Jack, 2005, p. 51) of the analysed material. As interpretive researchers we engaged in an iterative process in our reading of multiple texts, drawing on Hirschman’s (1998) work on expert reading of texts, whereby a second (expert) ideological perspective sits with a (common) interpretation of complex texts to try to arrive at a deeper understanding and unravel the complex meanings that surround cultural products.

**Staging Glamour: Nigella Bite***s*

The first moment of rupture that heralded the beginning of Nigella was imbued with tragedy and loss. It is widely believed that Lawson and her husband, the journalist John Diamond, planned the creation of Nigella in an attempt to maximise her earning potential after Diamond was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1997. Lawson was already a well-respected journalist in print media, with regular food columns in Vogue and The Spectator. Diamond and agent Ed Victor persuaded her to write a book about the stories and the food that might provide the narrative of her life. “ The book, *How to Eat: The Pleasures and Principles of Good Food*, was a success, and Lawson and Diamond decided to maximise on its success by establishing their own production company, MYC TV, and take their idea of a TV show on Nigella and her own kitchen, to Channel 4. This is Lawson’s account of the incident of becoming a TV star:

*I never wanted to do TV and then it happened by mistake […] I had no plans or ambitions for myself, but John certainly had plans for me. He used to say “you have got such a confidence in your views about food, you know you taste so much and you think everybody else is like that, and is not, and you should write about that and you should write showing people how you feel, how to feel* (Lawson, 2007).

This reveals Nigella’s raison d’etre as a Domestic Goddess. She wanted to make her audience share her pleasures in cooking, baking and eating, offering them an escape from the everyday into a foodie heaven of ideal domesticity and conviviality. Recalling the maggiorate who were ‘discovered’ by men like film producers and fashion experts during beauty contests (Buckley, 2008), Nigella’s ‘star quality’ was recognised by the men in her life, especially her husband, who later advised her to bring out her ‘inner vamp’ for the cameras, a side that prior to this only he had been privy to (in Smith, 2006). As the TV producer, Janice Gabriel, who had previously approached her for a TV programme, observed: “Everyone wanted her because she was glamorous, bright and famous as the daughter of the Chancellor” (Gabriel, in Smith, 2006, p. 122). Lawson seemed to have all the ingredients for being a glamorous TV star: she was beautiful, highly educated and came from a privileged background; these combined elements gave her high cultural capital. What was missing was the alchemic combination of these elements to craft a magical representation of her life, and transform a beautiful and privileged woman into a glamorous TV ‘star’. As previously discussed, glamour is a matter of appearance and performance (Dyhouse, 2011; Gundle, 2008) and of manipulating or polishing surfaces, separating the ordinary from the extraordinary, and fabricating the magical (Brown, 2009; Thrift, 2008). In this initial phase of staging glamour two elements were particularly important: Lawson’s social caché, and her attractive appearance.

If the Italian film stars of the 1950s were ‘discovered’ as working class local beauties and then transformed into the queens of the country (Buckley, 2008), Nigella’s background was far from being a modest one and provided a key attribute in the staging of *Nigellissima*. She belonged to an elite class, which gave her aspirational appeal, and of course intensified her glamour, if we recall the otherworldly quality of those who are perceived to possess glamour. The Nigella that emerged in front of the camera was a limited, but well-planned and carefully edited version of her life, constructed to look effortless, as Bruce Goodison, who directed the pilot for Channel 4, said:

*My idea was to ignore the recipes and do a lifestyle show – a window into the world of Nigella. […] It was more like an Almodovar film than a cookery programme. (*Bruce Goodison, in Smith 2006, p. 127)

In so saying, Goodison acknowledged that Nigella offered a fascinating and intrinsically interesting spectacle to an audience because of the unique combination of physical, intellectual and affective qualities she embodied. The ‘stage’ was Nigella Lawson’s own kitchen, a middle class and very well furnished room, wherein guests were invited for dinner, the children helped set the table, and Nigella talked to the camera, showing how effortless it was for a woman like her to chat about her travels abroad, to improvise, and to entertain in the ‘mundane’ space of her own kitchen. “It is almost embarrassingly low effort”, Nigella tells her audience, after having prepared Fusilli pasta with Sicilian pesto, combining sultanas, almonds, capers, anchovies, and other uncommon ingredients. She informs us that she has tasted many different, “baroque” versions of it on her travels in Sicily. Also she emphasises that she enjoys cooking up such effortless dishes when she is hosting large dinner parties: “I do this a lot for a big crowd of people…it is the perfect thing to cook when you have lots of people to feed because it is no effort” (Lawson 2007).

This was clearly the kitchen of a woman of high cultural and social capital who had absorbed a certain continental approach to cooking from her many travels abroad. Significantly too, Nigella’s kitchen was a languid place that was romantic in its languorous effortlessness and indulgent atmosphere, a far cry from the efficient, hygienic and disciplined kitchens of other TV cooks at the time. The above example does not simply epitomise Nigella’s cosmopolitan culinary taste (Warde, 1997); it shows how staging glamour is about concealing mundane effort (an essential aspect of glamour, as it must not be perceived to be contrived) and elevating the ordinary to the extraordinary through the adoption of a certain ‘devil may care’ attitude (Skeggs, 1997).

Given that the glamorous background of Nigella’s kitchen was already there, all that was left was to glamorise Nigella herself. As in the case of the maggiorate, whose voluptuous bodies were transformed into extraordinary bodies (Buckley, 2008), Nigella was transformed into a magical persona by a team of stylists. Lawson was described by the TV producer, Janice Gabriel, as “a rushed mum. She had so many things to do that she didn’t necessarily focus on her appearance” (in Smith, 2006, p. 123). Lawson was encouraged to abandon her signature look of glasses, tent-shaped clothes, long tops (to hide her bottom and legs), loose black trousers and flat shoes and to wear more figure-hugging clothes. Director Bruce Goodison described Lawson’s attitude to her body and her clothes before she was transformed into the ‘domestic goddess’, observing her struggles at being looked at and her dread of looking ‘fat’.

*She didn’t want to look frumpy and she didn’t want her arms to show, although she did show them quite a lot as it turned out. Her personal trainer would come regularly and take her for a run most days. Nobody else cared about whether or not she looked fat.* (Bruce Goodison, in Smith, 2006, p. 156).

Similarly Janice Gabriel, one of the producers, describes the process of grooming Nigella’s body for the TV camera:

*She always wore trousers or long skirts. I never saw her ankles. We dressed her for the pilot, and I think we got a couple of outfits from Whistles but she asked us only to get tops, and she kept her black bottoms on. She would say that she had tree trunk legs and that she had really big thighs but she disguised it really well because she’s really slender on top. Her hands, her shoulders, her neck are really quite delicate.* (Janice Gabriel, in Smith 2006, p. 130).

As with the maggiorate, whose bodies were objects of severe discipline (Buckley, 2008), Nigella’s body was tamed with a regime of exercises, well-cut clothes in a particular 1950s aesthetic style, and diet. Before long, Nigella Lawson had stepped into the shoes of an extraordinary woman, *Nigellissima,* the ‘Domestic Goddess. Her ‘look’ was thus carefully contrived and staged, created to have the desired effect; making the most of her seductive appearance, and bringing out her inner vamp for the enjoyment of an adoring public. The result clearly drew on the ‘retro-glamour’ effect (Gundle, 2008) with its tribute to the Italian film stars of the 1950s and 1960s. This was noticed by many commentators at the time, including Alex Bilmes (2001, January, 7) of UK men’s magazine GQ, who observed:

 *She looks like the voluptuous star of a Fellini film who has come unstuck in time and found herself transplanted from Rome circa 1960 to present-day Shepherd’s Bush. A statuesque, olive-skinned, doe-eyed, pouty-mouthed bella signora with long, dark, straggly hair and English teeth, beamed across time and space to entrance us with her upper-crust stove-side manner and alluring looks.*

The extent to which Nigella’s screen persona was constructed by various agents has always been openly acknowledged by Lawson herself. In the preface to her book *Domestic Goddess*, she compares her new incarnation to a cross between Italian film star Sophia Loren and American film star Debbie Reynolds, acknowledging where her glamour comes from (the silver screen circa 1950), and emphasising its constructed nature. She writes of her “fond, if ironic, dream; the unexpressed ‘I’” (2000, p. vii) that her new image allowed her to indulge, making it clear that it contained escapist elements and that she didn’t take it too seriously.

**Enacting *Nigellissima*: The Maggiorata**

The second ‘moment of rupture’ was the death of Nigella Lawson’s first husband, John Diamond, in 2001, followed by her relationship with and then marriage in 2003 to the millionaire Art dealer and ex Advertising man Charles Saatchi. The death of her first husband and her second marriage attracted media attention and criticism, given that her brand persona was based on the domestic life of her nuclear family (Smith, 2006). Lawson herself gives an account of this moment of rupture, reinforcing her high cultural capital and self-confidence in being herself:

*I am completely aware that starting a relationship with someone 6 months after your husband has died seems incredibly quick, it is, and I know that, and if I was sitting gossiping about someone else I would say “mmm she did not waste her time” … life is what it is. If I am happy, if the children are happy, if John’s parents are happy, I do not know why I would be worried about the general consent* (Lawson 2007)

Such an ‘incredibly quick’ change in Lawson’s life required a repositioning of Nigella’s TV persona and public image. The kitchen remained the main stage of Nigella’s programmes, but it was transformed into a TV studio as Lawson moved to Knightsbridge with her new husband. Compared to the early days of *Nigella Bites,* whenDiamond and their young children had been an integral part of the narrative, Nigella was often alone in her kitchen, alluding to a family life that was no longer on display. To compensate for these absences, Nigella exaggerated her ‘vamping in front of the camera’, appearing to be supremely self-confident in her manifold charms but also engaging in a form of self-parody, somewhat embarrassed by her public persona, as she confessed to the Guardian journalist Sally Vincent at the time (in Smith, 2006).

The retro-glamour reference was exaggerated with more décolletage and pinched waist dresses that made the most of Lawson’s sultry good looks and hour glass figure. The long black skirts were replaced with 1950’s style belted skirts revealing her legs and emphasising her voluptuous figure. The central attention of the camera was Nigella’s face with her immaculate make-up and her revealing cashmere sweaters. In this restyling process, Lawson was far from being a simple objectified body on display for the audience’s gaze, and she insisted on being as authentic as possible in front of the camera:

*I … find intimidating the ideal of glamorisation – In TV… you can’t airbrush my tummy out because I know that everybody else is thin and I felt very weary of …and I didn’t think it was honest to present an airbrushed tummy person, because I eat, and you can’t eat and have a concave tummy.* (Lawson, 2013)

The camera exhibited ‘what Nigella is’ with a sexualised and dramatic effect, carefully planned to put the sculpted, voluptuous body at centre stage. This effect was far from being ‘unplanned’ and ‘natural’. Despite her discomfort with her body, then, Nigella learned to embrace her curves and celebrate them, adopting a certain attitude that recalls Swan’s (2005) observation that glamour is as much about attitude as it is about an attractive appearance. Director Bruce Goodison colluded with Lawson to create a theatrical performance that was excessive, subversive and saucy:

*I was absolutely upfront with her about the fact that we were making gastro-porn. I’d stop the tape, and ask her to take more time licking the cream off the strawberry, or to whip eggs more sensually. I made no bones about it* (in Smith, 2006, p.132)

The ‘vamping effect’, and indeed the ‘gastro-porn’ effect was characterised by her ability to flirt with the camera with double entendre, facial expressions, sexually suggestive actions, and her humorously exaggerated verbosity. Expressions such as “Don’t worry, Matron will be *very* gentle with you” (Smith 2006, p. 117) recalled the heyday of the British Carry On films. In an interview with Sue Lawley on the UK radio programme Desert Island Discs, Nigella acknowledged her deliberate linkage of food to sex in her TV cookery programme, and she also acknowledged the key role played by the camera lens in enabling her glamour to manifest itself. Despite the overtly sexual nature of her performance, she also claimed that she envisaged a female, sisterly spectator, rather than an objective, male, lustful gaze:

*I do feel food is quite sexy, and when I’m talking to a camera it is quite intimate. I feel like I’m talking to a sister or a friend* (Lawson, in Smith, 2006, p.129)

In so saying Nigella underlines the fact that she saw herself as engaged in a playful performance. Glamour is a form of communication and persuasion, writes Postrel (2013), and Nigella offered her audience the tantalising prospect of finding their own inner goddesses. It may also be the case that Lawson knowingly disrupted the dominant, patriarchal narrative by addressing a community of women that she was a part of (Radner, 1995). Nigella’s performance emphasised that glamour is a matter of attitude (Skeggs, 1997), rather than the simple over exposition of the body. Indeed Nigella’s playfulness is an example of her agency behind the camera, and her attitude toward her exaggerated parodic performance challenged the complex relationship between women and food in the kitchen that had existed heretofore.

Nigella loves to eat and her appetite is one of the main characteristics of her performance in the kitchen: ‘I have nothing to declare but my greed’ she writes (Lawson, 2000, p. viii). In acknowledging the pleasures of eating what she has cooked Nigella clearly opposed the dominant discourse of dieting, self-discipline and weight control. In her attitude to food Nigella is thus a foil to the prevailing cultural discourse that women have a problematic relationship with food. Her position can be viewed as a powerful assertion of the body’s sensual appetites, and a challenge to the view that food is women’s enemy. Nigella’s relationship with food was ultimately framed as one that embodied agency and indeed empowerment and authenticity.

Nigella’s hyper-suggestive performance in the kitchen never became too alienating or distancing to the audience, since it was always playfully ironic. Indeed on more than one occasion she defined her taste as ‘kitsch’ and ‘camp’, highlighting how her attitude towards her performance was a deliberate exaggeration of femininity (Smith, 2006). McRobbie (2009) writes that femininity is a kind of camp, and in Nigella this is clearly evident in her parodic homage to the non-threatening, domesticated, retro-femininity of the 1950s, mixed up with a suggestive Italian-style cinematic sex appeal. It is telling that the director of her TV programme was inspired by the work of Spanish director Pedro Almodovar, whose movies are well-known for their ironic subtext that serves to mimic (thus revealing) dominant discourses of gender. In the case of Nigella, one of the dominant discourses that was disrupted was the self-sacrificing, functional and efficient woman in the kitchen (DeVault, 1991). Nigella’s cooking style is far from being polished, refined and efficient, unlike Delia Smith and Martha Stewart (Brunsdon, 2005). Nigella plays with this implicit reference and makes a parody out of her dis-identification. In doing so, she subverts the tyranny of the kitchen, positively relishing its messy chaos and turning carelessness into an art in a way that entranced her fans:

*I could not do anything perfect if I try, and I am slightly impatient, and I have no training and I cook like a normal person cooks* (Lawson, 2013)

Whilst the glamour aesthetic was borrowed from the 1950s, Nigella’s performance shows how her kitchen is not a place of drudgery and housewifely duties that feminism saw as an enslavement of women, but an authentic space where women can enjoy themselves (see also Hollows, 2003). She explains this when describing the reaction of people to her book *The Domestic Goddess*.

*A lot of people wrote about it without having read it so they thought it was something it wasn’t. They thought it was something about praising housework. Anyone who knows me knows that it is with great reluctance that I approach a vacuum cleaner. When I was attacked of being antifeminist or retrograde, although I thought it was ridiculous, I thought, you know if I was a columnist when this book came out I would have done exactly the same* (Lawson, 2007).

Nigella’s kitchen was thus free from the unappealing and enslaving domestic tasks often reserved for women. It was a magical realm where a glamorous woman could put on a complex performance combining sexual innuendo, intellectual irony, and maternal and sisterly warmth. This was a refreshing change from the norm, as discourses of pleasure were typically absent from other TV cookery programmes (Brunsdon, 2005) and from ‘mortal’ women’s accounts of their everyday cooking (see for example De Vault, 1991).

**Re-Affirming Glamour: The Essential Nigella**

The glamour of Nigella’s multi-million pound lifestyle was drip-fed to her audience by the media for ten years until the spell was broken in 2013, when photographs of Saatchi with his hands clasping his wife’s throat shocked Nigella fans across the world. This dramatic *moment of rupture* was followed by Nigella’s departure from the marital home the following day and then the alacrity of divorce proceedings only seven weeks later. The narrative was to be disrupted further a few months later with the 2014 court case against her personal assistants, the Grillo sisters. Nigella’s comments on these incidents in her life are themselves very revealing of her attempt to separate Nigella Lawson from her media persona:

*To have not only your private life but distortions of your private life put on display is mortifying but, you know, there are people going through an awful lot worse and to dwell on any of it would be self-pity and I don’t like to do that* (Lawson 2014a,)

*There’s an old saying that what other people think of you is their business but I don’t have the ability to be anything other than myself* (Lawson 2014, in Goldenberg, Vogue, 2014, April, p. 245)

Lawson publically acknowledged the tragedies and dramas of her life, and this included her problematic relationship with dieting, and her flawed relationship with Saatchi. These accounts are also revealing of Lawson’s acknowledgement of her own vulnerability and also hint at a certain quite confidence in her right to be true to who she was. We think that these moments reveal Nigella’s separation from her public persona, and her embarrassment when these two worlds collided. Indeed they show a certain proud defiance in the face of exposure, which reaffirms what one expects from a glamour icon! (Wilson, 2007; Postrel, 2013). Nigella’s strategy was to establish a new enactment of glamour, holding together vulnerability and dignity without denying the centrality of the body and its frailties. It is also in this phase that the role of an adoring audience helped to support Nigella.

The spell was broken to reveal that Lawson was a tormented woman with tragedies in her life, and most importantly she was a woman who had found herself at the mercy of an apparently abusive husband. This seemed to be in marked contrast to a brand created around the domestic life of a wealthy maggiorata feeding friends and family in her welcoming kitchen. Rather than seeking to hide such a contradiction, however, Lawson emphasised the opposing dimensions of the brand and the woman, telling Nigella’s back story as one that was troubled and beset with tragedy. Thornham (2007) argues that “The femininity offered by woman-as-image cannot be occupied or lived; it can only be worn or performed” (p. 46). Lawson had committed herself to occupying this idealised space, and she did so, despite the growing gulf between reality and the role she performed as a ‘domestic goddess’. Her open honesty at making public this gulf and revealing some of her more intimate vulnerabilities is, according to some, the secret of her success. As director, Bruce Goodison had noted eight years before: “She’d had a lot of tragedy in her life and that gave her something that people could relate to” (in Smith, 2006, p. 127).

Even in this phase Nigella’s body took centre stage. Once a temple of desirability, Nigella’s body became a symbol of domestic violence perpetrated in the public space of a famous restaurant in London, the ignominious moment captured on another customer’s mobile phone. This incident shows how the enchantment of glamour was brutally disrupted, revealing the vulnerability behind the façade of a glamorous and desirable TV celebrity and media darling. The vulnerability of this body brought low is in dramatic opposition to the dignified body of Nigella Lawson entering the court of Isleworth crown court a few weeks later, when the armour of glamour was once again assumed, but with a difference. Abandoning the revealing 1950s style of *Nigellissima*, Lawson wore an austere, almost funereal outfit of black trousers and a mid-calf black coat. Her gaze was fixed and stern as she proudly looked ahead, avoiding the many cameras that greeted her arrival, her manner of entering the courthouse later described by the media as the ‘Nigella swish’. We read her appearance as a manifestation of glamour’s distance, untouchability and strength (Wilson, 2007). Her silence also heightened the impact of her ‘entrance’; a wonderful asset for creating and maintaining glamour, as Postrel (2013) has noted. Indeed Nigella’s body and her defiant, dignified and reserved demeanour were important elements that enabled her to regain her respectability. In a TV interview some time later, she said:

*I am not an innocent. I understand how it works and I just don’t involve myself. I don’t speak and I don’t comment. You know, I could say things and they would be indiscreet and I don’t want to. […] you can survive anything yourself but when I see other peoples’ private lives being treated in a cavalier way I feel I can’t read this. I don’t want to be colluding with it. …. I just perhaps feel, you know, having had a layer of skin removed, that I’m more sensitive to other peoples’ misfortunes.* (Lawson, 2014c)

This recalls Postrel’s (2013) observation that grace is a key aspect of glamour, witness Nigella’s empathy with other people’s treatment at the hands of the press in the above interview with Michael McIntyre. Thanks to her deliberate silence and dignity in the face of scandal, and the dressing of her body in sombre, funereal attire, Nigella was able to emerge triumphant as a dignified, glamorous woman, showing that true glamour is more than skin-deep (Skeggs, 1997). The broken spell, or the layer of skin removed, as Lawson herself describes it, also revealed the willingness of Nigella’s audience to maintain the myth of *Nigellissima* the glamorous woman. This is not surprising, according to Postrel (2013), who writes that glamour is “an endlessly generative mixture of imagination and communication” (p. 209).

Comolli (1980) is writing about cinema when he describes the complicity of the audience in the game of narrativity, but it can also be applied to Nigella’s audience: “The spectacle is always a game, requiring the spectators’ participation not as passive, alienated consumers but as players, accomplices, masters of the game even if they are also what is at stake” (p. 140). Postrel (2013) also refers to this relationship, writing that glamour emerges “from the interaction between object and audience” (p. 12). Underlining this relationship, perhaps, the exposure of Nigella’s flawed marriage was met with an extraordinary show of loyalty. Headlines such as “Wrath of the Domestic Goddess”, and “Nigella Lawson’s bravura fight back” had her fans hailing her “20 times a Goddess” after the Grillo sisters’ case referred to her dignity and defiance in the face of the crisis. Saatchi’s threat to ‘destroy’ his wife led only to his own undoing, in the media at least, as #TeamNigella, an amorphous, nameless mass of loyalty and affection booed and hissed at the dark, brooding villain, and the tragic heroine was the one who stole our hearts. She was compared to ‘Princess Di’ on Twitter as a reminder of the powerful trinity of tragedy, injustice and imperfection.

Nigella appeared on the cover of Vogue magazine in April 2014, which also included an interview with her. The issue, appropriately entitled ‘Fresh Start’, shows Nigella looking fresh-faced and youthful, dressed in a sea-green lace dress in a retro, 1960s style. Indeed her pale, subtle makeup, elegant appearance and ‘up-do’ hairstyle emphasise her delicate beauty as well as her regal qualities, as befits one who embodies glamour. This photo feature marks the culmination of her glamour and her triumph as an icon of glamour, made more alluring by her fallibility and by the imperfect reality of her life with Saatchi. She became a woman like many of her audience; the distance momentarily closing as the façade of glamour shattered, only to be magically rebuilt, thanks to her dignified and discreet handling of the personal crisis.

**Discussion**

Our analysis of Nigella shows the fundamental differences between celebrity and glamour, chief among them being the distance that glamour creates in those who possess it. Wilson writes that celebrity “is all about touch; glamour is untouchable” (p. 101). Postrel (2013) would concur with this, emphasising that it requires distance with just enough familiarity to fire an audience’s imaginations. We think that Nigella struck the balance perfectly. In our analysis we show that glamour is transformative, enabling people who possess it to become elevated to a level that mere mortals can only aspire to and dream of. Whilst Nigella fell to earth when the scandals of her real life were revealed, she was quickly elevated once again to the heady heights of stardom, saved by her adoring public who cherished her otherworldly appeal and her ability to rise above the squalor of scandal.

Nigella thus perfectly embodies the untouchable quality of glamour which is the secret of its power. It is difficult to possess but once possessed it is difficult to lose. Wilson (2007) writes that glamour is elitist, whereas celebrity is democratic. She argues that glamour “depends on what is withheld, on secrecy, hints, and the hidden” (p.100), whereas celebrity, in marked contrast, depends on what is shared, revealed and exposed. It is glamour’s secretive and mysterious element that fascinates us. In the case of the Hollywood stars and Italian maggiorate, admiration and respectability emerged from their ‘poise, elegance and aloofness’ (Buckley, 2008, p. 280). In the case of Nigella, her respectability and elegance served to arouse admiration amongst her legions of supporters, and reconcile her public persona and private life. Her high cultural capital, good manners and English upper-class breeding may be the secret of her success; it is these attributes that have arguably enabled her to maintain her glamour and resist a fall from grace.

In our analysis of the key moments of Nigella’s life and career we have traced how the glamour of the ‘domestic goddess’ was staged, enacted and then re-affirmed. The three moments of rupture and their attendant crises in Lawson mediated life, are resolved with a new enactment and reinvigoration of glamour. *Sprezzatura* is a word that originates in Italian high culture and is defined as ‘studied carelessness’, reticence and nonchalance (Oxford English Dictionary). We think it is very apt in the context of the staging of Nigella’s TV glamour. Nigella drew on her particular background to acquire a certain defensive irony, hiding her foibles and disappointments behind a façade of studied carelessness. This may offer some insights into Nigella’s compelling stage presence and the mood of languidity that pervades her performance in the kitchen. Furthermore, her performance was framed within a script that evoked women’s unarticulated desires and longings. In looking at glamour as a means by which femininity can be constructed and enacted, Nigella drew on a particular form of retro-femininity. Nigella’s re-invention of herself is the essence of the ‘masquerade of femininity’, and demonstrates how “the body is the vehicle *par excellence* for the modern individual to achieve a glamorous life-style” (Davis, 1997, p. 2).

As in the case of the maggiorate of the 1950s, *Nigellissima* was the result of considerable effort and grooming, an ironic homage to a period of hyper-femininity in women’s history. However, Nigella’s persona also challenges patriarchal domination in the kitchen and rejects current discourses of mothering as self-abnegation and self-sacrifice (De Vault, 1991). If current discourses of mothering highlight how mothers construct their womanly identity by feeding the family with “food that satisfy them [the family members]” (De Vault, 1991, p. 40), Nigella cooks food that will satisfy herself as well as her children. Furthermore, she draws attention to the emotional power of food to nurture more than just one’s own body. She thus serves as an ambassador for the kitchen as a site of women’s culture, a place for women to gather to share confidences, experiences and to laugh together (Radner, 1996). She achieves this intimate, emotional connection with her female audience whilst simultaneously appealing to a male audience with her playful and sexually suggestive manner and voluptuous appearance.

Although we acknowledge the transgressive twists through which Nigella enacts gender norms and conventions, Nigella’s transgressive twists never really challenge the power structure in the domestic sphere. They belong to the magical world of glamour that she creates. She wants her audience to simply *feel* like a domestic goddess without necessarily *being* one. The appeal she makes to us is thus at an emotional, experiential level. Nigella does not encourage her audience to change their lives, but simply to allow themselves the time and space to be momentarily enchanted by the magical and glamorous world of the kitchen that she has created for them, and to perhaps dream about what they may become. Her performance is thus far from being a list of instructions for aspirational women who want to ‘learn’ how to do glamour, but it is more a suspension of the gender debates around home, children and self-indulgence. If some have highlighted how Nigella creates a utopian escape for middle class women juggling between different and polarised feminine identities (Hollows, 2003), others have highlighted how her magical world is not to be taken literally (Magee, 2007), not least by Nigella herself (Lawson, 2000).

**Conclusion**

In this study of glamour and how it is staged, enacted and re-affirmed, we have drawn attention to a growing body of literature on glamour in the cultural studies field that offers a fascinating lens through which to explore contemporary culture, and its relationship with performativity and actualisation of the self. Performing glamour enabled Nigella to reconcile and negotiate different and contrasting discourses around femininity and feminism. She also represents an extraordinary case of excellent brand management in which the challenges she faced in her private life made her more determined to protect and reinforce the glamorous aura of Nigella the brand. Glamour is dynamic, and it can be enacted differently over time. Indeed Postrel (2013) writes that glamour is fragile because perceptions change (p. 21). Nigella’s glamour evolved as her circumstances evolved, allowing Lawson to become *Nigellissima* and to remain glamorous despite the incongruences and contradictions between the glamorous brand that she and others had constructed, her mediated persona, and her private life. It is in this constant transformation that Nigella’s persona shows how glamour is not simply about manipulating surfaces (Brown, 2009), but is also about balancing a precarious equilibrium of contradictory surfaces, and readjusting the balance once the narrative is disrupted. It is this constant re-balancing of elusive contradictions that makes Nigella such an enduring example of glamour.

Nigella shows how success can be achieved by adaptation whilst remaining true to the core promise of the brand (Alexander, 2009). In Nigella’s case, this core promise centres on transformation and above all, transcendence, an essential quality of glamour, as we have discussed. Whilst she has openly acknowledged the contradictions, incongruences, and indeed convergences of her public persona, such contradictions make her branded self more authentic and thus more appealing to her audience. They also mark her out as possessing glamour, as distinct from merely being a celebrity.

Brown (2009) writes that: “Glamour emerges from narrative desire, from the beauty that overlays the ugliness of modern life” (p. 9), but she argues that it offers something “that cannot be enacted. Transfixed, one gazes at a world of possibility that is foreclosed, inaccessible, yet endlessly alluring” (p. 171). This is a view also shared by Wilson (2007), who writes: “The celebrity is desperate for our attention. That is why she can never be glamorous. For true glamour is expressed in Garbo’s icy indifference” (p. 106). Brown writes about glamour’s “magical ability to shape and reshape the objects before us, to make them better, more tantalising, by pressing them into an inhuman dimension” (p. 9). If we accept these arguments, glamour’s essence, for all its myriad manifestations in contemporary celebrity culture and consumer society generally, continues to reside in the abiding image of the screen goddess who is as alluring as she is unattainable, a tantalising illusion of perfection, with “the polished surface, the stance of impenetrability” (Brown, 2009, p. 5) that glamour bestows on her. We believe that Nigella and her mediated embodiment, *Nigellissima*, beautifully illustrate the enchantment and enchanting power of glamour, a force that both transforms and transcends those who possess it, and promises those who observe it that they too can be magically transformed, however briefly, when they behold it.

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