'Right Taste, Wrong Place': Local Food Cultures, (Dis)identification and the Formation of Classed Identity

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Abstract

This paper investigates how culinary taste contributes to the formation of middle class identity in a working class context in the UK. We explore practices of food consumption amongst a group of individuals working at a UK university located in a working class city. We find a rather limited and discrepant cosmopolitanism, in which culinary practices are evaluated in terms of those worth engaging in, and those not worth engaging in, based on their 'user friendliness' (Skeggs, 2004) for cosmopolitan middle class dispositions. Depictions of the local food culture as lacking are also dominant, used as a negative ground against which these dispositions are hierarchically formulated. Here middle-class culinary tastes seem to be driven by disengagement with the wrong sort of place and a relatively closed alignment with the 'proper' and the 'safe' rather than by any open creative individuality.

Introduction

Following the recent interdisciplinary interest in social class (Atkinson et al., 2012), this paper investigates how middle class culinary taste operates in a working class context in the UK. We adopt a 'culturally sensitive' approach which looks at how social class 'operates symbolically and culturally through forms of stigmatisation and marking of personhood and value'(Savage et al., 2013: 222). Influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1984) this approach shows how class continues to act as a hierarchical mode of distinction which, rather than being limited to economic structures, is reproduced also through everyday, largely unreflected upon cultural practices, including consumption practices. Following this approach, class operates relationally and contingently in our everyday practices since 'feelings of ambivalence, inferiority and superiority, visceral aversions, recognition, abjection and the markings of taste constitute a psychic economy of social class' (Reay, 2005: 911). This economy is often concerned with the tensions between middle class and working class identities where 'class is produced in a complex dynamic between classes with each class being the other's 'Other'' (Reay, 2005: 923; Skeggs, 2004).

This paper contributes to an understanding of such a dynamic between classes by looking at how cosmopolitan culinary taste displayed by a group of academics living in a working class town in the UK intersects with their middle classed identities. In answering Bottero's call to explore 'why, and under what circumstances, hierarchically differentiated groups adopt explicit class discourses' (2004: 167), our findings show how participants differentiate themselves hierarchically through a distancing from the local working class food culture, as well as an identification with delocalised middle class sensibilities and tastes. These two dynamics of identification and distancing combine in expressions of cosmopolitan culinary taste, wherein only legitimised and user friendly sources are considered; rather the localised, illegitimate and thus risky ones are excluded. We find a highly strategic attitude toward investing and developing the 'right' taste' in the 'wrong' locality. In sum our study contradicts previous understandings of the middle classes as creative bricoleurs, instead we find a highly selective and limited middle class cosmopolitanism which is both safe and ordinary in its alignment with the proper.

Class, Cosmopolitanism and Place

The three main categories of working, middle and upper class emerged as a result of 'machine-based capitalism' and following this people have traditionally been 'classed' based on the basis of their occupation and position in the labour market (Dorling 2014:6). However, many social changes have occurred which render simplistic relationships - such as between office work and a middle class location – as problematic. Given the spread of property ownership, globalisation of markets and increased role of consumption in structuring and directing lifestyles, some scholars have suggested that class has outlived its usefulness in contemporary society (Pakulski and Waters, 1996). Furthermore, the individualisation thesis suggests that individuals are increasingly free to shape their own identities rather than being defined by traditional social divisions such as social class (Beck, 1992; Giddens 1991). However, those who have argued to retain elements of class analysis have worked to broaden and deepen the contours of class theory to provide greater recognition of the importance of wider elements of social class such as social capital and cultural practices (Savage et al. 2013). One key shift here is to maintain and emphasise the relational dimensions of class, as

Savage argues, we should 'see class cultures as contingently embodying forms of individualized identities which operate relationally' (2000: 150). Identification refers to people's sense of belonging to particular social groups (Southerton 2002). Within reflexive modernity with its emphasis on individualisation, contemporary approaches to identity-making often view the self as being part of a narrative (Giddens, 1991) - a work in progress rather than a fixed destination. Studies reveal that individuals rarely admit an overt identification with class categories and yet they still see class as something existing 'out there' (Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 2004; Reay, 2005). Identity is recognised to be simultaneously negotiated by individuals and shaped by wider cultural and structural contexts, such as their position in the housing market (Southerton 2002). Such dynamics of self-identification through connection and difference can be particularly evident through consumption practices.

Bourdieu's (1984) theory of taste, and recent studies following his approach, assume that individual aesthetic preferences reflect individual class positions, which are a complex combination of economic, social and cultural capitals. Taste displays such a combination through two processes: sharing similar preferences and feelings with people belonging to the same class, but also sharing dislike and distance for the preferences of the lower class (Wilk 1997; Bottero 2004; Lawler 2005; Skeggs 2005). For Bourdieu, the sharing of likes and dislikes constitutes the symbolic dimension of class struggle as taste is unequally and hierarchically distributed. Although Bourdieu's work has been criticised for being both ahistorical and reducing cultural choices to the reproduction of the existing social structure (Gartman 1991), we believe that his work offers useful conceptual tools for our study. In particular, Bourdieu's writing illuminates how taste operates through habitus, a set of culturally structured individual dispositions shaping beliefs, thoughts and behaviour. Habitus also includes bodily skills, non-discursive knowledge and non-reflected likes and dislikes. For example, in looking at food consumption, Bourdieu (1984) shows how middle class individuals share a similar and non-reflexive taste displaying the privileges of choice, prioritising an aesthetic disposition rather than simply using food to avoid hunger. Middle class groups have also been argued to share similar distastes for working class food considered filling, fatty, heavy, and representing a working class general 'taste of necessity' (Bourdieu 1984).

Studies inspired by Bourdieu have been focussed more on the middle class' dislikes than its likes (for an overview see Kravets and Sandikci 2014), showing how middle class' taste operates 'in the multitudinous effort *not to be* recognised as working class' (Skeggs, 1997: 74). The few studies looking at the main characteristics of middle class' taste highlight a complex equilibrium between creativity and pragmatism, passive conformity, and adaptability (Hale 2011; Kravets and Sandikci 2014). Such studies show how the middle class disposition is driven by strategies of accumulating cultural capital which needs to be constantly invested in and developed (Gershon 2011; Ong 2006). Others have highlighted how the current British middle class shows a great creativity in domestic consumption practices among which cooking seems to be one of the most prominent (Campbell 2005). Following Campbell, this creative middle class is driven by the desire to express its individuality and distinction from the homogenisation of mass consumption (usually associated with the working classes), by crafting mass produced items in distinctive ways. More recently Kravets and Sandikc's (2014) study of Turkish middle class consumers disagrees with this view of the middle classes as bricoleurs (Arsel and Thompson 2011; McQuarrie et al., 2013) and craft consumers (Campbell 2005). Instead they show how the creative process of orchestrating new mass

produced items is driven more by desires relating to ordinariness and alignment with the 'proper', rather than a desire for idiosyncratic distinction.

The creative process of engaging with new products seems to be particularly pertinent in understanding how the middle classes respond to the intensification of new commodities available in the marketplace wherein potentially more signifiers of the 'right' taste are available (Warde et al. 1999). For some commentators learning how to display 'right tastes' amongst the increasing number of items available and 'possessing the logic in order to reproduce them [the right tastes]' (Skeggs, 2004; 136) become crucial for the middle class accumulation and development of cultural capital (Gershon 2011). Some writers have highlighted how displaying a cosmopolitan taste is seen as the response of middle class people to the increasing availability of commodities, and the consequent anxiety caused by their possible destructive effect on the existing hierarchy of taste (Bourdieu 1984; Hage 1998). Hannerz argues that: 'cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. An intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather the uniformity' (1990: 239). As such to be cosmopolitan is 'to be able to appropriate, distinguish and claim to know the Other in order to generate authority and disposition from this knowing' (Skeggs, 2004: 158). Some writers have highlighted how the middle class cosmopolitan taste is displayed in consuming a wider variety of ethnic food, hence evading 'prior responsibilities for aesthetic judgement of the kind that determined which of a variety of practices or items was better than another' (Warde et al., 1999: 120). Thus, displaying an inclusive rather than selective culinary taste becomes a way of displaying distinction. However, the accumulation of aestheticized cultural experiences, often results in a skimming of the surface of localised cultures to pick up their 'user friendly' (Skeggs, 2004) elements, resulting in a 'self-referential cosmopolitanism' (Savage at al., 2005) wherein only the elements that are useful for an existing disposition are appropriated (Hannerz, 1990). In fact, according to Johnston and Baumann (2007) only certain culinary Others, judged as exotic and authentic are considered legitimate consumption choices, and the ones not adhering to these two criteria are disregarded as 'banal, undistinguished, or unsophisticated' (195).

Studies looking at the spatial dimensions of class show how localities are not simply backdrops against which middle class cosmopolitanism is played out (May, 1996; Robson and Butler, 2001; Atkinson, 2006). For example, May's (1996) study of culinary taste amongst the emerging cultural class, such as artists and media professionals living in a gentrified district in North London, shows how these residents display an exotic taste for food as a way of marking a distance from the other working class residents. Hage's investigation of the growing success of Lebanese cuisines in Australia provides a similar account of 'multiculturalism without migrants' (Hage, 1997: 198) amongst the white middle classes in the inner suburbs of Sydney. These examples betray a sense of place that is 'anything but progressive' (May, 1996) reflecting geographical imaginations that are partial and limited. Detachments from locality therefore coexist alongside attachments to global cities in middle class cosmopolitan place imaginings. However these attachments to global cities do not always reflect an inclusive and open sense of place. For example, in their study of four white suburban communities in Manchester, Savage et al. (2005: 202) found a 'global reflexivity as shaped primarily by a white, English speaking diaspora, rather than by a more far reaching cosmopolitanism' (2005: 202). In addition to social class, other social identities including race and ethnicity (Pitcher, 2014), gender (Skeggs, 1997) and age (Rees Jones et al., 2008) are significant in shaping consumption patterns. For the purposes of this paper, we focus specifically on social class due to its dominance as an emerging category within our analysis of the data.

Research methods

This paper emerges from a multi-methods interpretivist study exploring the domestic consumption of Italian food in 20 middle class households in Brodon, a city located in the north of England. Brodon is a medium sized city in a significantly deprived area of Northern England which, like many other former industrial areas, has suffered from the decline of traditional industries. As a consequence today earnings are lower than regional and national averages while unemployment is higher. Nearly a quarter of people have no academic qualifications and the percentage of people with higher levels of education is lower than in the rest of the country. More than 60% of the working population have manual jobs, and less than 20% have a professional occupation (Census 2011). The 2011 Census indicated that the population of the city is relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity, with almost 95% indicating that their ethnic group is white British (Census 2011).

Being an Italian recently moved to the area, the first author was intrigued by the differing interpretations of, and meanings attributed to, Italian food in this new context. The discourses and practices surrounding domestic food provision (from shopping to disposal) were analysed through mealtime observations as well as interviews with the person in the household responsible for food provision. Initial analysis revealed strong linkages between the type of Italian food that was considered legitimate/illegitimate by participants and their wider middle class disposition. In addition a negative narrative of the Italian food available locally began to emerge very clearly. Therefore after the first two mealtime observations and interviews, the first author also turned attention to the emerging issues of class/distinction and the local food culture, using Italian food as a way of accessing classed discourses of legitimate/illegitimate food in Brodon. The interpretivist approach employed consisted of interviews and observation of participants during mealtimes. The person responsible for food provision in the household was interviewed about the organisation of everyday meals, practices surrounding the process of having a meal, and the division of work in the household as well as the ideas, emotions and life goals associated with domestic food consumption. Interviews were followed up by observation of participants at mealtimes – planning, preparation, serving, sharing, and disposal of the meal were observed. For the purposes of this paper, we have chosen to focus on the interview data as this particularly illuminates class distinction within food practices. Nonetheless, the observations helped to inform the analysis and to contextualise some of the data emerging from the interviews. Participants were informed of the nature and scope of the research and could withdraw at any time. Their participation was voluntary and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. With participants' permission interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Ethical approval was obtained before the beginning of the fieldwork. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants and the town.

In total twenty participants were recruited including eleven women and nine men (see table 1). All interviewees were white British except for one person who defined their ethnicity as mixed White and Black Caribbean. Their age varied from late twenties to mid-fifties, with the

majority being in their late thirties. With the exception of three one-person households, participants shared their homes with their partners and nine of them also lived with their children. Participants defined themselves as middle class in relation to their overall lifestyle including house ownership, level of education, travels, frequency of eating out and attending art exhibitions, museums, music concerts and festivals.

All of the participants were connected with Brodonshire university, a campus university near Brodon. More than half of the participants are academics including lecturers, researchers and professors. Five of them were administrators, and three of them were partners of academics. Most of them knew each other, at least by reputation, being colleagues, neighbours, friends or simply working in the same building. With only four exceptions, participants did not come from the locality. One participant has lived in the local area for her entire life, the other three participants from the locality had moved out the area for jobs or to attend university and had returned only recently. The other sixteen participants had relocated to the area for work and had been resident for less than five years. Some participants lived on or within walking distance of the campus (6) while others lived a short drive away (less than half an hour) in the local town and surrounding countryside (13), one participant lived in a city some distance from the university.

Data emerging from the interviews and observations were analysed thematically. The analysis began after the first interview and was ongoing throughout the entire fieldwork. The aforementioned literature on social class and food consumption was used as sensitising lens to interpret the data. The present interpretation results from a process of moving back and forth between the literature and the data analysis as well as between individual and collective analysis of the data (Willis and Trondman, 2000). The authors found it relatively challenging to study other academics. Reflexivity was indeed a crucial aspect of this work, since, as Denzin (1997: 13) reminds us, interpretive research studies 'are always dialogical – the site at which the voices of the other, alongside the voices of the author, come alive and interact with one another'. In our case the voices of the other were indeed very difficult to distinguish from the voices of the authors, since the authors are also part of the environment under study. As Bourdieu (1988:6) points out in his study of French academia, declaring the authors' viewpoint is the only possibility of unpacking the 'implicit criteria of ordinary experience' and understanding 'their own premises'. Being aligned to our participants' point of view, we found that what our participants said, did and made was in many ways similar to what 'we' say, feel, do and make. It is in recognising our classed positioning that we could unpack what Bourdieu (1988: 6) calls 'the implicit criteria of ordinary experience', which in this case are the boundaries of us and them, made visible through food consumption practices. The writing process of this paper has forced us to examine and reconsider many of our taken for granted and hitherto un-reflected upon assumptions regarding the formation of our own classed identities and this has not always been a comfortable process. This seems to be the case for many ethnographic and interpretivist accounts which are as much 'a way of finding out about yourself' (Richardson, 2000: 923) as the topic under study.

Defining us: Identification, individuality and distinction

Food was a welcome topic of conversation on and around the university campus. The widespread talk of food in terms of eating out and eating at home reflects Warde et al.'s (1999: 123) claim that 'a broad repertoire of culinary experience (for purpose of conversation, comparison, companionship) is a practical tool of intra-class communication and a type of symbolic claim among fractions of the middle class with high levels of cultural capital.' As an asset of the cultural capital that needs to be constantly developed (Gershon, 2011), culinary taste is in fact seen as a matter of creative skills to be managed and kept up to date.

I love cooking new dishes, looking at new recipes and new ingredients! I started cooking when I went to uni and I got into it. I started from basic recipes and then I moved to more complex dishes […]I'm fairly confident in my cooking now. I now look around for ingredients, for new recipes and I try new things in restaurants. It took me a long time to learn how to cook a really good and original meal. […] Now I'm really into baking and I enjoy it so much…we tend to make our own bread at the weekend. It's such a nice thing to do (Tim)

Notably, Tim doesn't attribute his success to an in built skill or aptitude, instead he emphasises that he acquired competencies over time and from exposure to a range of sources. Starting from 'basic recipes' he is now a confident cook keen to 'look around' for new ingredients and recipes and able to make a 'really good and original meal'. Tim seems to be expressing an 'aesthetic self' which 'relies on the accrual of cultural capital in the right composition, of the right volume, with the right knowledge in the right way' (Skeggs, 2004: 136). This aesthetic self involves a process of constantly accumulating the right cultural capital with a self-as-enterprise that needs to be maximised in every aspect of everyday life (Gershon, 2011). This strategic approach to maintaining the 'right' culinary taste was common for our participants and it typically translated into a series of practices including searching for products, visiting websites, buying cookbooks, trying new restaurants, and watching TV programmes. Jenna nicely illustrates this accumulative approach in her archiving of sources of inspiration in a folder:

I have a folder with many recipes that are from scratch. The folder has lots of sections, there is one for Christmas, recipes for cooking for Christmas, I have a meat section and vegetable sections, dessert sections…I also have section based on ingredients, like one is for recipes with lemon, and one with recipes with pumpkin. […] I get lots of inspiration from these recipes

Elsewhere we have shown how the process of meal planning is not only driven by creativity and distinction, but through the idea of saving resources by minimising time effort and labour in the kitchen and increasing efficiency (Cappellini and Parsons 2012). Here we want to highlight how this constant updating of the culinary capital with practices like searching, trying and archiving are driven by the idea of updating the 'right' taste with the 'right' 'sources of inspiration. It appears that some sources of inspiration are considered legitimate and 'proper', or user friendly, in Skeggs' terms, rather others are disregarded as illegitimate, improper or 'not decent' as another participant (Christina) observed.

I cook Italian when I manage to get like really nice mozzarella, which normally I don't, I brought one the other day from Selfridges and I had it with tomatoes and basil…I think this is pretty Italian. It's so reliant on the really good ingredients that …really good tomatoes, really good basil, really good mozzarella…finding them in Brodon isn't very easy…ingredients matter a lot in Italian food (Tina)

Tonight I'm going to cook from this Jamie Oliver book because I read it recently and I saw lots of things I like… Sometimes Italian food isn't very distinctive…this (indicating the cookbook) *is very intriguing because they propose something… quite distinctive* (Tina)

For Tina, Selfridges is a legitimate source of inspiration where her cosmopolitan culinary taste can be accommodated and expressed, while the local scarcity of legitimate sources constrains her expression of her culinary taste. Similarly Jamie Oliver is a source of legitimisation of ingredients and 'distinctive' dishes. A recognised phenomenon of global middle classness (Hollows and Jones, 2010), celebrity chefs, and Jamie Oliver in this case, provide a safe encounter with the Other, as exotic ingredients and dishes have been 'approved' by a familiar and trusted source operating at national (and indeed global) level. In her narrative of passion for food, Tina also mentioned friends living abroad and travels, providing her another source of inspiration for 'distinctive' dishes which she proudly pronounced with the 'right' accent. However, these seem to have a marginal role in her updating of her cosmopolitan culinary taste, which seems to be mostly driven by supermarkets, exclusive department stores, but also celebrity chefs with their TV programs, cookbooks and websites. The local is not completely absent from this list, and it is sporadically referred to in form of a delocalised and romanticised countryside.

David: We tend to buy meat from the local farm. We do like nice meat and we, well supermarket meat is not that great! We like good food and the farm shop has got nicer stuff that you don't get around here in supermarkets or in corner shops

Interviewer: What about local butchers?

David: I've never tried any. I don't know why, but I think farm shops have nicer stuff. You can see that these things are their vegetables, their eggs, their meat. It's different…we prefer farm shops

In describing his legitimate food options, David maps out specific imagined geographies of class through food. The local, small scale production of products such as eggs and meat render them authentic and thus a legitimate consumption choice. While these products are available in local urban shops, for David, the lure of the farm shop evokes a middle class ideal of rural farm life (see Duruz, 1999; Guthman, 2003). If the local working class urban area cannot provide 'good food', the local rural area can provide 'nice stuff', and it is positioned hierarchically in relation to the local urban area. Whether or not good food is available in the urban locality is not really the issue here, its lack is important because it provides the negative ground against which the rural farm shops are evaluated positively.

What is noticeable here is also participants' very complex process of combining products from different sources, including supermarkets, exclusive shops like Selfridges, farm shops and cookbooks. All of our participants might be described as financially comfortable, one participant's description of their finances as "good but we cannot waste money", seems quite representative of the whole. Overall participants seem to adopt a pragmatic attitude to their

taste (Kravets and Sandikci, 2014) combining extraordinary "treats" from farm shops and delicatessens, with "ordinary" products purchased in supermarkets. This pragmatic approach to combining extravagance with budgeting, shows how the culinary taste of our participants is far from being a serendipitous creation, but rather it is more a process of efficient combination of legitimate, thus safe ingredients, which have been approved by trusted and delocalised sources.

'Oh God I'm Not From Round Here': Food Practices, Distinction and Dis-identification

Jokes about local people and their accent and denigratory remarks regarding the local city (i.e. 'Brodon stinks', 'a shit place', 'Oh God I'm not from round here') were not uncommon during informal conversations on campus. These comments, and many others like them, reveal a degree of disgust towards the local area. The working class locality was consistently described in terms of 'lack' (Lawler, 2005). One participant described the area as 'a depressing working class area with nothing in it'. This is a reference to the absence of middle class culture, and indeed the presence of a culture that is considered so inferior to be judged as "nothing". This reminds us of Skeggs' (2004) and Southerthon's (2002) observations that middle class belonging is achieved through establishing boundaries between us and them and by defining the culture of "them" as lacking since it does not conform to the well-established and normalised middle class cultural norms. If the area is seen as lacking middle class consumption options, the existing consumption opportunities are seen as illegitimate, to use Johnston and Bauman's (2007) terminology. For example, one participant observed that 'this area is not good for shops and restaurants', implying that the local options available to obtain food are not seen as a useful resource for her project of middle class identity making and therefore it is nullified in her narratives. An interesting case illustrating this point is Mark's experience of local Italian restaurants epitomising participants' attitude toward the local food offerings.

Mark: I don't know of any genuine Italian restaurants around here. It isn't the same as…there are two places [in Brodon] where I've been recently that are Italian and I'm not sure how Italian they are...there is one in town …

Interviewer: Alfredo ?

M: No, that's new![1]…Bianchi…but they well…do you know when you go to the restaurant and over the door there is the name of who's got the licence? I think one of them has got an Italian name, but maybe it's just the name of an English-Italian …I don't know…you never know…and there is another place in town which is supposed to be a quite good and quite expensive Italian

Interviewer: Have you been there?

M: I have been there…it was ok, but I didn't... The thing is that we lived in London, Finsbury Park, do you know the area?

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[1] Alfredo is not a new restaurant in town.

Interviewer: Yes

M: And around there, there are many quite basic pizza places that serve very good food, at very good prices and it is very much a family atmosphere and when the world cup was on they had like a street party people were on the street…general sort of chaos…you get spoiled if you have got places like that…I mean when… it was there that Paul [Mark's son] *had his first solid food…it was a smoked salmon tagliatelle and it was a really nice place to go…I don't get out so much around here so…*

Mark's suspicious attitude toward the local offerings of Italian food is in contrast with his unconditional trust given to the options available in London wherein his son had his first solid food. He checks the name above the door in the Italian restaurant in Brodon to see if the owners are genuinely Italian. He does not mention doing the same "authenticity check" in the London restaurants which are defined as 'family run' without any clear evidence for this. Here Mark is drawing on a narrative of authenticity to legitimise his choice of London restaurants and delegitimize Brodon's offering. In doing so, the concepts of simplicity and authenticity, outlined by Johnston and Baumann (2007), are used to describe the London restaurants as 'quite basic pizza places' run by Italian families. Mark's assumed ability to distinguish between the 'authentic' and the 'fake' operates as a display of cultural capital and distinction. In a similar manner, Tina and Christina distance themselves from the local area on the basis of the illegitimate offerings of restaurants and shops.

We *don't go out for meals very often, mainly because around here the food is so bad. When I go to London I go out with my daughter and grandchildren, and the same when I go to Manchester…but not here. There are not many good restaurants, there is no point really! (Tina)*

There are no decent shops around here and there isn't even a delicatessen. You are forced to go to the supermarkets… […] *I go to Sainsbury's and when I am in a rush I go to the campus shop (Christina)*

While Tina and Christina's disengagement might have some basis in past experiences, we think that their comments can also be read in symbolic terms. As with Mark, Tina detaches from an imagined local food culture seen as lacking and attaches to the globally networked cities of London and Manchester (Savage et al., 2005), cities where 'genuine ethnic restaurants' can be found but also cities that are connected to global circuits of culture in their imaginaries. While the locality does include a wide range of ethnic restaurants and shops, these were not viewed as connected to these wider circuits, they were therefore not seen as a useful resource for a middle class cosmopolitan disposition. As a result participants experienced the impossibility of expressing their classed dispositions through their locality. In observing that she is 'forced to go to the supermarkets', Christina also allies her tastes with the niche offerings of delicatessens and draws on wider (largely middle class) negative discourses of supermarkets as multinationals providing standardised foods for the mass market.

Participants' *choice not* to consume reminds us of Douglas' (1966) and Southeton's (2002) observations that boundaries of social groups are drawn on the basis of denial and refusal more than on tolerance and acceptance. Similarly Wilk (1997: 181) shows that decisions not to consume are 'more frequent, more obtrusive, and more important in forming personal and social identity than choices to consume'. Such decisions are driven by the anxiety of

consuming the 'wrong' object and being perceived as 'out of fashion', 'out' of a specific (desired) group and thus being in an unsafe position (Wilk, 1997). Here the 'wrong' and indeed 'risky' objects are the local shops, products and restaurants. For participants, distancing themselves from the local culture is not simply a matter of disaffiliation but also, more mundanely, a matter of disregarding it as simply not 'user friendly' (Skeggs, 2004) in their cosmopolitan project of cultural distinction.

Participants showed little interest in exploring the local food culture, which they described monolithically as 'bad', 'not decent', and indeed 'nothing', without any attempt to make distinctions between its elements. This packaging of the local food culture as undifferentiated, as a monoculture, makes it much easier to appropriate it in the project of drawing distinctions through difference (Skeggs, 2004). As such the local working class food culture is merely rendered 'Other', treated as a fixed resource providing the ground against which individuals might locate themselves hierarchically. Indeed the aesthetic criteria used to disregard the local food as an illegitimate option also sometimes transferred on to the local population themselves, as Mark comments:

The problem is that [Brodon] *people prefer their food to be cheap and they don't care about the quality of what they eat. [...] People are happy to spend money on crap pub food but they don't want to spend money when they cook! It's crazy! They don't care…they eat whatever is cheap…*

This disparaging comment clearly represents a hierarchical and moral judgment of the local working class population (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2005), described as people who 'don't care', and who are lacking in (middle class) skill and discernment when it comes to food. Here we clearly see how dislike operates as a symbolic dimension of class struggle, as Mark's narrative of healthy eating and care are rooted in class discourses wherein the most socially valuable ('proper' and 'responsible' in Skeggs' own terms 2005: 968) subjects are affluent and healthy ones.

Conclusion

In a context of both change and continuity in relation to social class (Savage et al., 2013; Dorling, 2014), this paper has focused on one particular occupational group - university workers - to see how class is reproduced through their food consumption narratives. Our study has two key sets of findings. The first concerns the role of food practices in relation to wider projects of middle class and cosmopolitan modes of distinction. Secondly, the findings illuminate the role of a series of imagined local geographies of food cultures which operate as a ground against which middle class and cosmopolitan dispositions are formulated.

The food practices of our participants might be read through the lens of specific middle class orientation towards enhancement through learning and resourcing. The managerial attitude toward investing, developing and keeping up to date the "right" cultural capital, seems to be the major preoccupation of our participants. Here we see obvious manifestations of what Skeggs has termed a middle class 'exchange value accumulative self' (2004: 135) through the everyday practices of shopping in the local farm, updating the recipes folder and buying some 'treats' in Selfridges. In such an accumulation of skills and knowledge, participants do not show any desires to develop an eccentric, diverse and distinctive culinary taste, as suggested

in the literature (Campbell 2005; Arsel and Thompson 2011; McQuarrie et al.2013). Rather we find a much more tamed creativity engaging with a limited set of sources to produce an individual but very formulaic culinary taste. Participants seem to rely on a set of approved, but also "ready-made" set of products and procedures (i.e. local farm products, cooking techniques in Jamie Oliver's cookbook), legitimised as and aligned to middle class tastes. Participants' creative process operates within such a limited framework of sources, products and procedures and hence results in individual outcomes, which are simply a variation on a theme.

We think that the main difference between our findings and the existing literature on middle class creativity is due to the context of study. In our case, participants seem to be constrained in operating with delocalised middle class resources perceived as safe and user friendly for developing a secure middle class culinary taste in a working class area. Such an approach leaves their sense of being middle class largely intact. Adopting a more adventurous bricolage attitude in developing culinary taste appears to be a very risky activity in Brodon, where engaging with the local resources could possibly be seen as developing the "wrong" taste, one very different from the tamed creativity of Brodon campus life. Thus, participants' avoidance of local urban sources and their enthusiastic engagement with the delocalised ones fit the managerial idea of combining creativity with pragmatism, diminishing the risk of failures and of fear of "stand[ing] alone in one's action" and being "the centre of the social spectacle" (Thompson and Haytko, 1997: 22).

As the research participants were all British, their tastes reveal a particular understanding of appropriate food choices – bounded by social class positions and nationality. Indeed, the findings appear to support the stereotype that the British are particularly preoccupied with social class (Dorling, 2014). Yet the narratives also revealed an interesting relationship with cosmopolitanism- a disposition that formed an important part of participants' wider middle class identity (Skeggs, 2004) and which was used to legitimise their food choices. Cosmopolitan discourses of food typically drew on authenticity (Johnston and Baumann, 2007) to legitimise food and restaurant choices. Although Brodon is home to ethnic restaurants including those serving Italian food, these restaurants were not seen as decent and legitimate cosmopolitan choices. We think that this is partly because they were not seen as connected to wider global circuits of culinary culture in participants' imaginaries in the way that restaurants in Manchester and London were. Ethnic restaurants in Manchester and London were seen to embody the right kind of cultural difference when compared with those in the local urban area. These relative judgements draw on specific views of ethnic cultural authenticity. Cosmopolitan theorists observe that this form of authenticity relies on 'ethnic cultural products that appear to exist in themselves and for themselves' (Hage, 1997: 138). The ideal authentic ethnic restaurant experience therefore involves food cooked and presented *by* the ethnic Other *for* the ethnic Other. However, clearly to be successful the local Brodon restaurants need to serve the largely white working class population rather than any imagined, more palatable (to the cosmopolitan), ethnic Other. They can therefore never be authentic in the cosmopolitan cultural imagination.

The reported examples of participants' rejection of the local food reflect a discrepant form of cosmopolitanism (Skeggs, 2004: 157) where only the cultural differences that are useful for participants' existing identities are picked up. Here imaginaries of the global and the local are highly selective and partial involving an 'elective belonging' (Savage et al., 2005: 202) through which distinction is reproduced. The elective nature of this belonging becomes clearer not only when we observe participants' social distancing from the local urban area but

also through their espoused lack of engagement with the urban locality. This lack of engagement was a shared orientation amongst our participants and reflects the 'tectonic' middle class residential strategies found by Robson and Butler (2001) in South London. There are also echoes of the disaffiliation of middleclass groups living in working class areas found by Atkinson (2006). What we have seen is not only a lack of engagement but an active disengagement from the urban locality. This disengagement is based purely on imaginings and largely second-hand iterations of the working class 'them' of the locality. Undoubtedly living and working in close spatial proximity encourages observation and the (re)production of collective interpretations of social life. Here we might be seeing an example of Atkinson's bunker padders in his observation of the choices of the more affluent to withdraw into 'increasingly insulated enclaves' (2006: 819). Rather than being driven by an overt residential strategy we think that the disaffiliation amongst our participants is driven by the pursuit of distinction; they disengage with the local food culture because it is simply not 'user friendly', as previously mentioned. Participants used food practices to mark membership to an academic community which evaluates itself hierarchically in relation to the local food culture of the local area. While local urban residents are rarely referred to directly in these narratives, local shops and restaurants appear to stand for a wider urban local food culture which in mild cases is depicted as lacking, in more extreme cases as indecent (Lawler, 2005).

Overall our study has evidenced a view of social class as a hierarchical mode of distinction, a 'classed consciousness in which the recognition of social divisions – or rather social distance- is embedded in practice' (Bottero, 2004: 993), evident in our case in food practices. The study underlines the relative nature of classed identification with individuals reflecting on their location in relation to other members of the academic community, but also in relation to the wider Brodon population. This recognition of social distance is embedded in choices regarding where you shop, the restaurants you visit, the ingredients you use and the bringing together of these practices to form a wider culinary aesthetic. These culinary knowledges and practices were evaluated in terms of those worth having or engaging in, and those not worth having or engaging in, in terms of their 'user friendliness' as resources for cosmopolitan middle class dispositions.

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Name	Age	Birthplace	Education	Occupation	Household	Household location	Permanency in the area
Albert	37	London	MSc	Technician	Single, living on his own	Local town	18 years
Anna	42	South of the country	PhD	Lecturer	Married with three children	Local countryside	5 years
Catherine	45	Brodon	PhD	Lecturer	Married with two children (both have left home)	Local countryside	All her life
Christina	35	South of the country	Degree	Administrator	Married with two children	Local town	6 years
David	37	Cheshire	Degree	Administrator	Married with no children	Local town	1 year
Helen	39	Midlands	Degree	Administrator	Married with two children	Local town	
Ian	36	Cheshire	Degree	Administrator	Living with his partner	Local town	2 years
Janna	28	Cheshire	Degree	M Phil Student	Living with her partner	A nearby village (walking distance)	4 years
Maggie	40	Yorkshire	Degree	Homemaker	Married with two children	Campus	15 years
Melanie	49	Birmingham	MPhil	Researcher	Divorced with four children two living at home	Another city	2 years
Mark	35	Local area	MSc	Researcher	Married with three children	Campus	Childhood until the university, then the last 3 years
Marilyn	36	South of the country	Degree	Self employed	Married with no children	Local town	5 years
Mike	38	Midlands	PhD	Lecturer	Married with one child	Local town	10 years
Paul	44	Scotland	Degree	Self employed	Married with two children	Residential area (walking distance from campus)	2 years
Gerry	31	South of the country	MSc	Researcher	Single, sharing a house with friends	Campus	6 years
Sue	43	Cheshire	Degree	Researcher	Single, living on her own	Local countryside	2 years
Kevin	46	Local area	PhD	Researcher	Married with three children	Local town	childhood until university, then back in the last 15 years
Tina	55	South of the country	PhD	Professor	Married with two children (both have left home)	A nearby village (walking distance form campus)	20 years
Tracey	42	Local area	Degree	Researcher	Married with two children	Local town	Her childhood until university,

							then the last 2 years
Warren	38	Midlands	PhD	Researcher	Married with no children	Local town	4 years