

‘The Bake Off beefcake with the best buns in the business’¹: Sex, pies and Paul Hollywood

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Abstract

As one of the judges on the hugely successful BBC series *The Great British Bake Off* (2010–), Paul Hollywood has become a food icon in the United Kingdom. Like other celebrity chefs, he has augmented an appreciation for careful food preparation and enhanced taste experiences, resisting the widespread consumer desire for easily accessible convenience food. This article explores Hollywood’s persona and the extent to which personality attributions associated with a ‘Northern’ identity paradigm are an intrinsic part of his appeal. I argue that Hollywood is selling more than cakes, pies, pastries and fancy bread through his various endeavours both on- and off-screen: he is selling an idea of the North as a place which values hard work, frugality and resourcefulness. For all the posturing about ‘food porn’ in the press, Hollywood’s work often celebrates the simplicity of comfort food, or the staples that define the routines of home cooking where repetition and familiarity are key aspects of the experience. Despite his success in the United Kingdom, Hollywood failed to emulate that success in the United States when he co-hosted *The American Baking Competition* (2013). This begs the question: what is it about a television star like Hollywood that makes his commodity value appeal and resonate in one

market but ultimately sink without trace in the international market? Might we consider

Hollywood as a case study in the limits of the transnational celebrity?

Keywords

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Paul Hollywood is ordinary *and* extraordinary. He is what James Bennett (2008) would describe as ‘televisually skilled’ *and* ‘vocationally gifted’. He’s an ordinary man from Cheshire with a telegenic face (his piercing eyes are regarded as an asset) and a talent for artisanal baking. He has been described in the popular press as the ‘George Clooney of Baking’² and has become one of Britain’s most successful celebrity chefs, fronting five series of *The Great British Bake Off* (2010–) with Mary Berry. Along with Berry, Hollywood cements the Britishness of *The Great British Bake Off* (hereafter *GBBO*), bringing his ‘Northern lad’ persona and his expertise in

baking to further distinguish the unique package of attractions that has made the series one of the BBC's biggest successes in recent years. Hollywood has done remarkably well out of a skill – baking – that is often associated with the North of England (the seminal Hovis campaign of 1973 conflates the geographical and the gastronomic), and yet his rise to prominence as a television personality has not been problem-free. Like Cheryl Cole before him, he was unable to emulate his success on *GBBO* with the American spin-off, *The American Baking Competition* (2013), which was cancelled after only one season. Following this failure, Hollywood returned to the United Kingdom where he would continue judging on *GBBO* with Berry, in addition to fronting *Paul Hollywood's Bread* (2013) and *Paul Hollywood's Pies & Puds* (2013).

Hollywood embodies the often contradictory nature of television stardom where this is achieved primarily in the role of presenter: success is often dependent on an appeal to a specific demographic, in this case a British audience. However, the attributes that make for success in one market can leave that same celebrity hamstrung in the global marketplace. David Lusted (1984/1986) acknowledged the contradictory nature of television stardom, in response to the growing body of scholarship on stardom and performance that preferred to focus on the film star. Lusted mapped out an alternative framework pertinent to the institutional context of television which pivots around 'the mythology of the individual' and argued convincingly that television is

dependent on the proliferation of stars as personalities, producing a 'glut' that exposes the myth of the 'rare' individual (1984/1986: 73). In a collection inspired by the work of Roland Barthes and the publication of *Mythologies* (1957/2000), Lusted sought to address the specificity of the medium of television, and his contribution provides one of the first attempts to address the issue of television stardom, primarily from the perspective of the UK market. Hollywood's commodity value as a 'persona' draws on notions of heritage, nostalgia and an idealized construction of Northern identity that made him well-positioned to launch a career in the United States. That Hollywood failed to break into this lucrative market in a format that he was already well-established in is surprising, given the global appeal of foreign chefs. Diane Negra acknowledges such an appeal in her discussion of the significance of ethnic food cultures (2002) in the United States, noting that these chefs are often closely associated with ideas of heritage and the dissemination of these ideas in the North American market.

On the surface it would appear that this market was not quite ready for Hollywood's distinctive presentational style, one steeped in associations with the north-west of England. However, the failure of the series to resonate with an American audience was largely attributed to Hollywood's affair with his co-star Marcela Valladolid during the production which led to a backlash on social media. Where Hollywood's chemistry with his co-judge Mary Berry and presenters Mel

Giedroyc and Sue Perkins is an integral part of *GBBO*'s appeal, *The American Baking Competition* bizarrely suffered from a lack of on-screen chemistry between Hollywood and Valladolid. This was compounded by reservations about Hollywood's accent that attracted negative reviews from American critics who did not take to his 'posh Scouse' inflections, whereas in the United Kingdom his 'flat Mersey vowels' are regarded as an asset giving him a distinctive identity that sets him apart from other celebrity chefs (Gannon 2013). Where Americans seemed to find Hollywood 'bland' despite his distinctiveness as a presenter and judge, British audiences warmed to a carefully cultivated persona based on a combination of sexual attractiveness and 'blokeish' charisma. This begs the questions: what is it about a television star like Hollywood that makes his commodity value appeal and resonate in one market but ultimately sink without trace in the international market? Might we consider Hollywood a case study in the limits of the transnational celebrity?

An ordinary 'lad' from Liverpool

Liverpool has of course made an enormous contribution to the global profile of the arts and creative industries of the United Kingdom, most obviously through the music scene with The Beatles the most famous example of the city's global success story. Paul Hollywood can hardly be considered famous on the same scale. His fame corresponds more pertinently to the idea of

the ‘local celebrity’ model as advanced by McElroy and Williams (2011), on a par with other notable Liverpudlians such as Cilla Black, Paul O’Grady and most recently, John Bishop, all of whom carved out successful careers on television. Hollywood might also be considered another example of ‘Merseypride’ (Belchem 2006⁹), following in an established tradition that seeks to capitalize on a culturally imagined idea of Liverpool that is in line with idealized attributions of ‘Northerness’, as described here by Dave Russell:

Being Northern imbues individuals with valuable cultural associations implying a capacity for hard work, a lack of pretension, a certain generosity and warmth and much else. While the notion of the North as a ‘breath of fresh air’ enters the national culture largely on terms laid down elsewhere, within the North that idea has enjoyed deep and continuous existence. (2004: 277)

These attributions can be detected in Hollywood’s presentational style, including his approach to judging, which is honest but far from the acerbic and sometimes brutal style of someone like Simon Cowell of *The X Factor* (2004–) and *Britain’s Got Talent* (2007–). Hollywood’s criticism is given with warmth and without rancour.

In his article on Diana Dors, Tommy Cooper and Eric Morecambe, Lusted argued that the perpetuation of the mythology of the individual has two dominant ‘inflections’ – personal endeavour and achievement on the one hand, and rags to riches folk myth on the other:

One stresses individual achievement through personal effort and competition, and particularly serves the interests of capital. The other is the folk myth (the Cinderella story or the Log-Cabin-to-White-House story) in which the individual succeeds through nature or fate, rather than effort, position or circumstance. (1984/1986: 73)

Lusted argues that this myth is central to the formation and consolidation of the television star as personality. For a television celebrity like Hollywood the ‘personal effort’ inflection is dominant although the folk myth is also invoked to a certain extent in attempts to narrate his success. For example, in his unauthorized biography of Hollywood, Dagnell repeatedly stresses Hollywood’s work ethic, noting the gruelling schedule of working at the Dorchester (2013: 40), and his stint in Cyprus at the Anassa, where ‘he was expected to deliver an enormous quota of baked products every single day’ (2013: 49). Russell’s summary of Northern attributes could be read as a blueprint for Hollywood’s public persona. He’s described as hard working and lacking pretension: Dagnell, for example notes that he doesn’t want baking to be perceived as elitist but

something that anyone can do (2013: 41). He is portrayed as loyal in seeking to give back to the area where he grew up: 'Paul is keen to return to Merseyside as often as he can' (2013: 27). His success as a master baker is attributed to sheer hard work in this version of Hollywood's life story, although there is an element of incredulity that someone of such humble beginnings should achieve such spectacular success: 'Paul had already achieved what might have seemed an impossible task as a young boy growing up on the Wirral' (2013: 43), bringing an element of folk myth to the tale. However, Hollywood's story is not without contradictions. Although the area from which Hollywood hails can hardly be described as tantamount to a 'log cabin', with its associations of rural poverty, there is nevertheless a constructed story of spectacular success from modest beginnings, which necessitates glossing over the reality of Hollywood's background: he comes from a line of bakers and his family had a successful chain of bakeries. With such a strong family interest in baking, it is hardly surprising that he went on to become a master baker. Although marketed as an 'unauthorized biography' promising explosive revelations about Hollywood's life, in reality Dagnell's book is unfailingly positive and complimentary.

Hollywood's sense of himself as 'a lad from Cheshire' is a major facet of his appeal as a television personality, and is repeatedly noted both by Hollywood himself, and by interviewers.

His success as a judge on *GBBO*, where he brings an element of Liverpudlian ‘no-nonsense toughness’ (Belchem 2007: 227) to the proceedings, and a contrast with the older, genteel Mary Berry, is difficult to separate from his physical appearance and his Liverpool background. His accent, which is not so pronounced as to be considered wholly typical of the area from which he hails (and it is certainly not as broad as either Cilla Black’s, Paul O’Grady’s or John Bishop’s), is nevertheless an audible marker of Liverpool origins. Belchem bestows somewhat dubious praise on the rising cachet for this distinctive accent when he describes it thus: ‘Once considered a hindrance, its distinctive accent is now a marketing asset, placing Liverpool at the top of the league for call centres...’ (2007: 228).

Moreover, Hollywood’s skill as a presenter can be attributed to his effective interaction with other ordinary people; he has the ability to put people at ease in front of the camera. Cookery shows rely heavily on the participation of the public either as contestants or as a de facto studio audience, as they appear to be in *Pies & Puds*, and being able to connect with the public through what seems to be unscripted, unrehearsed spontaneous chat over a shared appreciation for food that is unpretentious, is incredibly important. Appearing to be relaxed on-screen, and making others at ease so that they too appear relaxed, is an integral part of his success and made his transition from baker working at some of the top hotels in the world, to successful television

personality, possible. His sex appeal may set him apart according to Dagnell (2013: 5), and there is evidence that this sex appeal is performed through on-screen flirtations, as is purported to be the case with *GBBO* contestants. In Series 4, for example, much was made of the apparent on-screen flirting between Hollywood and Ruby Tandoh. However, Hollywood operates as a presenter in a format that is scheduled as light entertainment family viewing, and as Paul Sheehan aptly notes in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2013), his commodity value is consolidated around the perception that he is ‘a paragon of televised wholesomeness’.

Television, John Langer reminds us, in one of the earliest accounts of the television personality system, foregrounds ‘intimacy’ and constructs personalities as figures of identification:

It is left to television’s personality system to take up this process of embourgeoisement and move it forward, considerably advancing the ‘intimate vision’ to the point where what is presented on television is precisely that which is ‘the ordinary’, where the everyday has superseded and supplanted ‘the exceptional’, where ‘the exceptional’ is the exception rather than the rule. (1981/1997: 166)

Television competition shows like *GBBO* and *MasterChef* (revised format 2005–) are where the exceptional and the ordinary intersect. The mastery of a difficult skill, such as those associated with artisanal baking, implies the exceptional rather than the ordinary. ‘Artisanal’ implies time, skill and care in food preparation, qualities that are less associated with the everyday than with the special or – to deploy the language of *GBBO* – the ‘showstopper’ element that marks a product out as exceptional. Although Hollywood is readily described as an artisan baker, his own business venture of an artisanal bakery ultimately failed (Robinson 2014), suggesting that the market for the niche is fraught with peril; even if that business is fronted by one of the best known faces in British television, the risks are hardly diminished.

Lusted describes Tommy Cooper, Eric Morecambe and Diana Dors as ‘icons of intertextuality’ (1984/1986: 74), each representing ‘a direct and experiential identification with the materiality of working-classness; pub culture over wine bar, soccer over cricket, nappies over nannies’

(1984/1986: 74). What then is the significance of a television personality such as Paul

Hollywood? Does he represent the materiality of middle-classness? Picnics over pub lunches?

Using the concept of ‘journalistic story-making’ (Marshall 2014), whereby Marshall argues there is an active construction of narrative around seminal life moments (both personal and professional landmarks) circulating in the growing market for celebrity stories both online and in

print journalism, it could be argued that Hollywood's story is complex and taps into Dave Russell's (2004) popular composite image of the North, summarized as follows: 'the North of England represented "authenticity", "real life", "difference", "working-class culture"' (2004: 3). Hollywood's significance as a cultural signifier of a particular place and lifestyle simultaneously conveys an idea of the North and Liverpool's place within that discursive frame, arguably remaking the North in an aspirational middle-class image – the picnic *and* the pub lunch. In a revitalized Northern city like Liverpool it is possible to have both. As Richard Dyer notes in his seminal account of film stardom, 'one needs to think in terms of the relationships [...] between stars and specific instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions in the culture' (Dyer and McDonald 1998: 59). Although not a film star per se, arguably we need to think along similar lines with the television personality and celebrity: how then does Hollywood represent 'specific instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions'? The answer can be ascertained through examination of what Marshall calls 'affective power' to argue that celebrities 'embody emotional investment in some way' (1997: 54–55 cited in Marshall 2014).

Memory, masculinity and the maternal: From 'patisserie porn' to comfort food

How does the audience invest in Hollywood? The answer lies in the key role he plays in *GBBO* where Hollywood brings a masculine edge to what might otherwise be a wholly feminized

concept: with two comedic female co-presenters and an older female judge, the idea that he embodies ‘real baking by a real man’ (*Daily Telegraph* feature entitled ‘Fifty Shades of Granary’, cited by Dagnell 2013: 5) is crucial to the success of the format. Moreover, the key judging relationship of Berry/Hollywood has been described by a Liverpool-based journalist as a ‘mother and son pairing’ (Bolger 2013). There is of course a contrast here with the other major BBC competitive cookery series, *MasterChef*, presented by John Torode and Greg Wallace. Although both programmes contribute to an idealized ‘hyperaestheticization of domesticity’ (Negra 2002: 73), in which skill and inventiveness are paramount, *GBBO* could be accused of overtly feminizing baking, with three female presenters (Berry, Perkins and Giedroyc), an accusation that is obviously offset with the appearance of Hollywood.

The complex nexus of meanings around identity make it possible for Hollywood to be at once Northern *and* typically English, a working-class ‘lad’ *and* a middle-class artisan. The discourse surrounding baking often situates it within the sphere of the maternal, and ‘the mother and son pairing’ of *GBBO* can also be detected as a key element in Hollywood’s cookbooks and in *Pies & Puds*. My analysis of *Pies & Puds* suggests that the maternal is a discursive frame actively cultivated through the story-making elements and the ancillary material accompanying the baking, for example in segments when Hollywood is shown out and about interacting with local

food producers and communities, or when he speaks directly to the camera about an experience of a particular taste or food. The sense of the maternal as an inspirational influence on the participants further intersects with another discursive frame: ‘the nostalgic’, in which baking is constructed as another heritage industry that can be reclaimed through simple acts of baking.

Both discourses are evident in the introduction to the tie-in book for *Pies & Puds*:

My mum was a great pastry-maker. I remember her one and only pie plate, which she would use for all kinds of sweet and savoury pies [...] As a boy, I would pick sour apples from a tree in our garden, or gather blackberries from round about, and they would all end up in one of Mum’s pies. (Hollywood 2013b: 4)

It is the mother rather than the father (who was after all a baker by profession) who is repeatedly referenced by Hollywood as a source of inspiration. Comfort food is repeatedly extolled as the ideal in the series. Likewise, Kalina describes the format of *GBBO* as ‘a collective yearning for homely traditions, domesticity, celebrations and artisan skills that are in danger of being rubbed out by industrial practices’ (2013). We need to qualify this description, however, with an acknowledgement that at least in the case of *GBBO*, the audience’s yearning for copious displays of comfort food is matched by the demand for high stakes stress, which inevitably encompasses

the labour that is required to achieve these culinary feasts. The media debate following the baked Alaska debacle of Series 5, in which one of the contestants unceremoniously dumped his botched creation in a bin, amid speculation that one of the other contestants had sabotaged his efforts, suggests that the irony of the situation is often lost on the media. Nevertheless, the prevalence of comfort food in both series brings to mind Diane Negra's description: 'Comfort food is a fetish that marks the place of an earlier experience of nurturance and identification – it is intended to repair the distance between a pleasurable memory of the past and our current state' (2002: 69).

For Negra, comfort food is a type of food that alleviates stress and is defined as 'home-made food prepared in abundance' and/or an 'often remembered dish from childhood' (2002: 69).

Comfort food serves a very specific function in providing emotional reassurance and nourishment rather than purely calorific sustenance or fuel. The on-screen investment in comfort food evident in *Pies & Puds* and *GBBO* presents an experience of comfort food at one remove, and Hollywood's role as presenter is crucial in negotiating the experience for the audience. Of course the audience cannot taste what is made or smell the end result; we rely on the linguistic, verbal and gestural signifiers to communicate pleasures associated with eating food, and this is where the participants play an important part in fulfilling the promise of oral pleasure. Publicity for *Pies & Puds* puts food into an emotional context as Hollywood candidly acknowledges his

own personal failings and links his current state of mind with a particular culinary mind-set as he tells one interviewer that he is 'on the divorce diet' (Gannon 2013).

Celebrity chefs have been discussed as symptomatic of the trend for 'food porn' and have even been likened to porn stars themselves; for example, the celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain (2001) makes this comparison. Some celebrity chefs are very strongly associated with sexualized discourse: Magee's (2007) analysis of Nigella Lawson and contrast with 'food Puritan' Martha Stewart is instructive of an emergent porn/puritan paradigm. Hollywood's biographer describes his work as 'patisserie porn', further conflating the culinary with overtly sexualized discourse: the celebrity chef is all part of the excessive stylization of food in popular culture – present in lavish photography, set design and adjectival descriptions of taste, smell and appearance, all serving to titillate the reader or television audience as consumer.

However, there is more to this trend than sensation and titillation. Foodstuffs have their own commodity value and they often invoke a whole range of cultural associations when they are experienced either through taste, touch, sight and smell. Hollywood's great skill is in exploiting the potential of food to resonate emotionally. He manages to negotiate the fine line between 'patisserie porn' on the one hand and good old-fashioned home baking on the other.

Exemplifying a departure from the culture of ‘continuing food sex tyranny’ (Ellen 2015), a series like *Pies & Puds*, often foregrounds memory and childhood experiences of rituals revolving around food, and actively seeks out recipe accessibility and attainability, the potential for food to evoke commensality and emotionality.

The cookery show is a very popular television genre; capturing an audience share in an increasingly competitive market is a challenge. *Pies & Puds* arguably relies on three key aspects to achieve this: the magazine-style format that covers a variety of items in each episode; the focus on ‘easy and honest’ recipes that are not intended to be daunting for the aspiring chef at home; and the charisma of the presenter. The emphasis on comfort food and nostalgia is for example evident in Episode 18 when Hollywood tells the audience: ‘up North where I grew up, the locals love their black pudding as I do’. He travels to the spiritual home of the black pudding (a distinctive type of sausage made from dried pig’s blood) – Lancashire – and the Northern town of Bury to explore the origins of this distinctive staple. Moreover, to underscore the connectedness with the target audience, three ordinary women are invited to share their own black pudding recipes, with varying degrees of difficulty: one involves black pudding and scallops, one does black pudding and filo pastry, and one does a pie. Hannah, from just outside of Manchester, joins Hollywood in his kitchen to watch him make a ‘poor man’s beef wellington’

with sausage and black pudding. Hollywood stresses that the recipe and its execution is uncomplicated, as we are told that any favourite sausage meat will do – ‘just take the skin off’ – and there is some banter about Hannah calling him a chef. The working-class staple of the black pudding is jokingly referred to as ‘the Northern truffle’. The atmosphere is jovial and unintimidating. Further items in this episode invoke an idea of the North that is strongly rooted in ‘the past’.

Travelling to the oldest traditional sweet shop in England, Hollywood evokes a sense of place that is commensurate with the continuation of traditions carried down from generation to generation. He repeatedly uses the term nostalgia and begins the segment with the link: ‘I’m making a traditional pudding that’s full of flavour and memories of my childhood. I want to rekindle that sense of fun and enjoyment we all remember from when we were kids’, before playfully biting into a multi-coloured sugar candy string necklace that many people will recollect from childhood. The shop in question is a family-run business that opened in 1827 and is replete with classic jars of candy. Hollywood samples a number of sweets as he chats to the owner and enthuses that the experience has brought back ‘flavours that I’d forgotten’. He tells us with a degree of intimacy about getting his pocket money every Saturday and spending it on sweets, sometimes making himself sick. The whole point of the encounter is to stress the flavours and

the inspirational first childhood experience through sweet things, which culminates in Hollywood making a pudding with liquorice and the sweet shop owners bringing him his own sweet – bright blue – named ‘Hollywood’s Eyes’.

Episode 18 of *Pies & Puds* concludes with another historically resonant dish – Black Forest gâteau, considered a 1970s staple, that is reimagined by Hollywood in the form of a trifle. The idea of commensality is reinforced with the various studio guests sharing the different dishes prepared by Hollywood, and they discuss different taste sensations. What is interesting is the way in which this particular series constitutes pleasure as something shared, lived and recollected through culinary consumption with Hollywood as guide. He is not marked as such through expertise alone but through a sense of fondly remembered moments that anyone could share or empathize with. Even when there is the potential for intimidating culinary knowledge and expertise, Hollywood is at pains to stress the attainability of recipes that can be adapted, as he does in Episode 11 when the esoteric is combined with a celebration of the ordinary, the everyday: a medieval pudding from Sussex is recreated, and Michelin-starred chef Tom Kerridge guests and makes bread and butter pudding. A Michelin-starred chef is someone who has reached the pinnacle of professional achievement, yet Kerridge and Hollywood’s seemingly informal chat is anything but elitist, as they discuss the shared inspiration of their mother’s

cooking – Kerridge tells Hollywood that ‘she can cook like any good mum’ and you don’t have to use ‘flashy bread’ to make a good bread and butter pudding.

Within the cookery programme format, the celebrity chef provides a familiar anchor. According to Langer, ‘the personality system works directly to construct and foreground intimacy and immediacy’ (1981/1997: 167). The television personality is an ‘anchoring point’ (1981/1997: 170), a stable identity within the flow of events, therefore we might consider Hollywood as anchoring an experience of a particular sense of place – the North – with a particular historical moment – the past – which has specific signifiers: for example, ‘established in 1827’ or ‘from the 1970s’. According to Hewison in his seminal account of the Heritage Industry, ‘(t)he nostalgic impulse is an important agency in adjustment to crisis, it is a social emollient and reinforces national identity when confidence is weakened or threatened’ (1987: 47). The affective power of celebrities like Hollywood might then be to offset the current climate of economic austerity and adversity; the visibility of mediated accounts of deficits, recessions and negativity about financial institutions and indeed the uncertainty of the future. The prevailing sense that we are no longer living in an age of unbridled affluence affords a degree of escapism to food programming formats like *GBBO* and *Pies & Puds*.

Hollywood is, as Lusted notes in relation to Cooper, Morecambe and Dors, an ‘icon of intertextuality’, having also published a number of books either to tie in with his television work or off the back of his television work. According to Magee (2007), cookbooks can be understood as ‘objects to be consumed as status symbols’ and even ‘become objects of fetishistic adoration’.

In 2014 he published *Paul Hollywood’s British Baking*, which features an image of himself on the cover with a simple old-fashioned mixing bowl and a dash of flour. It is the same image that would be used to promote his British Baking Live Tour that ran through November and December 2014 in 25 venues including Liverpool, Dublin and Aberdeen. The concept underpinning this particular book is to take the different regions of the British Isles and to cover half a dozen or so recipes that exemplify them. For the section on the North, Hollywood tells the reader that Northerners love their food: ‘Life in the North, whether for farm or factory workers, has always been tough, the climate bracing to say the least, and the hills, dales and moorland inhospitable in Winter. Food is really fuel here, and Northern thriftiness means that nothing goes to waste’ (Hollywood 2014: 147).

Hollywood also reminds the reader of the centrality of the pie to the culinary heritage of the North, a type of food that is regarded as synonymous with ‘frugality’. In the tie-in book for *Pies & Puds*, Hollywood explains the concept:

You’ll see that many of the recipes have their roots in the North of England. That’s because I’m a Northern lad and it’s Northern cooking that springs to mind when I think of pies and puddings. They remind me of my own youth, growing up in the Wirral. We eat lots of pastry up North and we’re very good at making it! (2013b: 4)

This appears comparable to the overinvestment in ethnic food as described by Negra, with geographically and culturally specific types of food performing a fetish function in society. Specifically, the purpose of the fetish object (in this case foodstuffs such as pies, puddings, soda bread and the like) marks an overcompensation in food through exaggerated and sometimes sensual descriptions often linked to images of kinship, and frequently (but not exclusively), an ideal of family life that cannot be recaptured:

Fetishism, as a dynamic that facilitates the reconciliation of the sure knowledge of loss with the intransigent desire to maintain belief in what has been lost [...] the fetishistic overvaluation of ethnic food serves to stabilize an image of ethnic family life that at some level we know can never be recaptured. (Negra 2002: 69)

In *Pies & Puds* the audience is reconnected to a romanticized, nostalgically re-enacted moment through Hollywood's narrative of remembered moments from his childhood (such as picking fruit from a tree in the garden to be used by his mother in one of her pies, getting the weekly pocket money and spending it on sweets), something that it is assumed the audience can identify with experientially, to a past that is uncomplicated, simple and yet full of flavour and abundance.

Damage limitation: Managing the celebrity sex scandal

If 'frail mortality' is a characteristic of Lusted's television personalities (1984/1986: 77), the celebrity sex scandal exposes the 'frail morality' of the celebrity, or as Chris Rojeek (2001) argues, the admission of personal failings makes the celebrity just like us. Sex scandals fascinate because 'they allow for the expression of transgressive impulses as well as a reassertion of normative ideals in a ritual process that occurs over time' (Arthurs 2004: 67). Therefore it is possible to see how Hollywood managed to weather the storm about his affair; in revealing

understandable human failings, he became more empathetic and ordinary. Following the failure of *The American Baking Competition*, Hollywood found his private life threatening to derail his professional success as his extra-marital affair became the fodder of celebrity magazines and received significant coverage in the British press. There was speculation that he would not be back to front the fifth series of *GBBO*, but his sacking failed to materialize and he has indeed returned to co-judge the latest series. When referencing Hollywood's public persona, the media often privileges his 'sex symbol' status over his culinary skills (see [for example, e.g.,](#) Pukas 2012), therefore he may even have enhanced his appeal by exposing his flaws and failings to the public. Pre-publicity for the 2015 series of *GBBO* had Hollywood succumb to the television equivalent of the confessional – he appeared on *The Jonathan Ross Show* (2011–) in November 2013 and in a convivial interview his sex appeal was foregrounded by Ross, who introduced him as 'baking's biggest heart-throb since Mr Kipling'. Ross repeatedly drew attention to Hollywood's physical stature, his big 'chubby' fingers, and even enticed him to give him a shoulder massage, producing candles for the occasion. It was all 'tongue-in-cheek' but it served to illustrate just how central Hollywood's sexual magnetism is to his television image. The interview concluded with Hollywood acknowledging his indiscretion in the United States, the huge mistake he had made, and crucially how he still loved his wife.

As a television personality it seemed appropriate that he would use the medium of television to exert damage limitation – much as Hugh Grant did so spectacularly in 1995 when the launch of his film career in the United States was rescued from a scandal about the solicitation of sex acts on Sunset Boulevard by an appearance and an admission of all-too human guilt on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (1992–2014). Appearing on chat shows and adopting the confessional mode of ‘fessing up’ to personal failings is part and parcel of the culture of fallibility. Both Grant and Hollywood chose to make appearances on high profile talk shows noted for an atmosphere of humour and neither had their failings forensically examined in any detail. However, the simple act of making an appearance and being prepared to make an admission of sorts, is often enough to dampen the most severe censure. Rather than representing ‘freedom’ and ‘unfettered constraints’ (Marshall 1997: 246), celebrities such as Hollywood are constantly scrutinized and subjected to the ‘constraints of a hierarchal society’ (Marshall 1997: 246). The threat of constant media scrutiny, even for a minor celebrity, challenges notions of personal freedom and autonomy by subjecting the celebrity individual to socially imposed constraints that continue to enshrine monogamy within the bounds of heterosexual marriage. As Jane Arthurs notes, ‘the norm is heterosexual monogamy in a sexual union designed for the reproduction and care of children rather than for sensual pleasure per se’ (2004: 68).

The sex scandal becomes a media event according to Arthurs, reinforcing the social, sexual and political order: containment of scandal is necessary in order to minimize the ‘conflict with the institutionalized address of television to the “family”’ (2004: 55). Scandal occurs when there is a failure to control the ‘leakage’ of information, wherein the wrong type of information ends up in the public domain. This is applicable to Hollywood’s situation, when he suddenly found that the media was more interested in his personal failings than his skill as a presenter or indeed baker. Scandal abates when a ‘line is drawn under the affair’ (2004: 57), which is often when there is a confession, or media outlets decide that public interest has waned. When the celebrity persona is actively constructed around notions of family, as Hollywood’s seems to be, there is always the possibility that the exposure could completely derail the career. However, as Hollywood’s public persona is repeatedly conflated with a hyper-masculinity and a physical attractiveness that is supposedly desirable for a female consumer, the transgression of infidelity can be contained as temptation is constantly being negotiated by the celebrity. Hollywood tells one interviewer: ‘I get at least one marriage proposal every week... luckily my wife thinks it’s hilarious’ and ‘Women do flirt, yes. They just want someone from the telly. They come and talk to you and I guess baking is more attractive and so they feel they have something in common with me’ (Smith 2013). Reassuringly, he tells the reader: ‘but I’m just a man from Liverpool. I enjoy what I do and if that gets people baking, then even better’.

The moral censure phase of the Hollywood scandal culminated with publicity for *Pies & Puds*. A confession, initially on the *Richard Bacon Radio 5 Live* [\(2010-2014\) afternoon](#) show [in 2013](#), and subsequently on the *Jonathan Ross Show*, marked the point at which the institutional machine of the BBC sought to draw a line under the affair through a sanctioned mode of confessional emotional outpouring. That this was successfully achieved could be attributed to Hollywood's ready acceptance of moral culpability, as he talks about deserving the negative scrutiny in the Bacon interview, and there is an element of self-flagellation behind his admission.

Conclusion

It would be easy to dismiss Paul Hollywood as just another celebrity chef who got lucky in landing a part on what would go on to be one of the BBCs biggest shows for many years. However, *GBBO* was not initially a roaring success, and it has taken five series for it to be regarded as something of a 'phenomenon'. This is in large part down to the team fronting the series and this includes Hollywood, who brings something unique to the table. I would argue that Hollywood has made it possible to reach a broader demographic within the domestic UK market because the concept of 'Britishness' needs to be much more diverse than the Union Jack bunting would suggest: by actively incorporating a celebrity that can encapsulate a distinctive Northern

identity (encompassing the Northwest, Cheshire, Liverpool, the Wirral), *GBBO*, and subsequently *Pies & Puds*, demonstrates that it is advantageous within the United Kingdom to assert an identity that appeals beyond the monolithic. Despite some negative press (such as Barbara Ellen's disdain of food posturing and 'food sex tyranny' as previously noted), the appetite for food programming is hardly abating and celebrities like Hollywood are finding that 'identity' is often a more lucrative asset than the vocational skills they trained so hard to master. However, while success within a 'local' market is often dependent on the perception of distinctiveness, this can constrain appeal on the global stage, as is the case with Hollywood's brief adventure in the United States.

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Notes

¹ This quotation is taken from an episode of *Alan Carr Chatty Man* (2009–) first transmitted 18 April 2014.

² See, for example, Laura Prudom's description 'Meet Paul Hollywood, "The George Clooney of Baking" and "American Baking Competition Judge" (2013).