‘Don’t be a smart arse’: Young Workers, Individualization, and an Ethic of Enterprise in Jamie’s Kitchen

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Abstract:
In Jamie’s Kitchen the high profile celebrity chef Jamie Oliver set out to transform a group of unemployed young Londoners into the enterprising, ideal worker of 21st century flexible capitalism. The paper will argue that this reality TV series provides a means to explore key features of new work regimes. We will analyse particular aspects of the increasingly powerful individualising and normalising processes shaping the lifeworlds of young workers in a globalising risk society. Processes that require those who wish to be positively identified as entrepreneurial to do particular sorts of work on themselves; or suffer the consequences.

Drawing on Foucault’s later work on the care of the self, and the individualization theses of the reflexive modernization literature, we identify and analyse the forms of personhood that various institutions, organisations and individuals seek to encourage in young workers; and the ways in which institutionalised risk environments increasingly individualise the risks and uncertainties associated with labour market participation. The paper argues that our understandings of what it means to be a worker of the world, are being rearticulated around the idea that we are free to choose. And we must exercise this freedom – reap its rewards, carry its obligations – as individuals.
Introduction

Peter Richards: Don’t be a smart arse. Because I know my work. I know my work because I know it’s good. You know your work because at the moment it’s crap. You’re going to be doing this for real. You’re going to be sending this out to somebody to eat and pay for and I wouldn’t be prepared to pay for that.

Peter Richards, chef/lecturer, disciplining trainee in Jamie’s Kitchen who tried to substitute Peter’s work example for his own, inferior, example

Episode Two: Jamie’s Kitchen, Broadcast in Australia on Channel 10, 29/7/2003

In this paper we will identify and analyse certain aspects of the increasingly powerful individualising and normalizing processes shaping the lifeworlds of young workers in a globalising risk society. Drawing on the care of the self, and reflexive modernization literatures we will argue that these processes require those young people who wish to be positively identified as entrepreneurial to do particular sorts of work on themselves; or suffer the consequences. Our discussion of a so-called ethics of enterprise is grounded in an analysis of the reality TV series Jamie’s Kitchen, and emerges from an interest in analysing youth transitions into the brave new world of work (Beck 2000), and the processes of individualization that shape participation in labour markets.

Foucault’s (1978; 1985; 1986; 1991; 2000a&b) later work on the care of the self enables us to identify and analyse the forms of personhood that various institutions, organisations and individuals seek to encourage in young workers. The literature on reflexive modernization (Beck 1992; Beck et al 1994) directs attention to the ways in which institutionalised risk environments, such as labour markets, increasingly individualise the risks and uncertainties associated with transitions and labour market participation. At the intersection of these two literatures a space emerges in which we can argue, that, in workplaces such as Jamie’s Kitchen, the exercise and practise of freedom is regulated in ways that seek to produce entrepreneurial young people.
The Fifteen Foundation and Jamie's Kitchen: Youth Transitions in the Brave New World of Work

We need to apply entrepreneurial, self-directive, self-promoting, me-incorporated thinking to every aspect of our lives - our participation in learning activities, the way we manage our careers, our finances and investments, how we market ourselves, our ability to treat our lives as business enterprises (Your Business Network 2000, Are You a Career Entrepreneur?)

The Foundation exists to inspire disadvantaged young people – homeless, unemployed, overcoming drug or alcohol problems - to believe that they can create for themselves great careers in the restaurant industry...We want to provide skills and experience in food preparation and service at the same time as helping our people to believe in themselves, to know that they can achieve anything they want in their lives despite what setbacks they may already have experienced (Fifteen Foundation, 2005).

Processes of globalisation – characterised by increased competition, rapid technological change and economic uncertainty – have, in the past three decades, profoundly changed the world of work and the ways employers, trade unions and governments think about labour markets and workers. The consequences of these emerging labour market trends are uncertain, and uneven in their appearance. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2004) indicates that the youth labour market is characterised by higher levels of job mobility, higher unemployment rates than older workers, lower average incomes and a different occupational profile to the rest of the working population – for example, many ‘youth’ jobs are in the hospitality and services industries that are characterised by precarious forms of employment. These trends have provoked community, academic and policy discussions to consider the concept of youth transitions in new ways (Furlong and Kelly 2005).

Under these circumstances a number of writers have highlighted the emergence of widespread anxieties and uncertainties as individuals work away at their own Do-It-Yourself (DIY) biographical projects (Bauman 2001; 2005; Beck et al 1994; Beck 2000; Giddens 1991; Rifkin 1995; Sennett 1998). A globalising risk society has restructured the demand for labour intensive manufacturing and service jobs - these processes have rendered the world of paid work increasingly uncertain and risky. As Ulrich Beck (2000: 3) argues, in the brave new world of work ‘one future trend is clear. For a majority of
people, even in the apparently prosperous middle layers, their basic existence and lifeworld will be marked by endemic insecurity. More and more individuals are encouraged to perform as a ‘Me & Co.’, selling themselves on the marketplace’.

In this context we are concerned with examining and analysing the ways in which young people *practise their freedom* (Foucault 2000a&b) in relation to the world of paid work at the start of the 21st century. Work related individualising processes create new pressures for workers to practise their freedom in particular ways – in work organisations where concerns with performance, efficiency and competition generate new relationships between more and more aspects of a worker's life.

To practise one’s freedom is to develop certain dispositions, behaviours, capacities and commitments – in settings in which others seek to manage or encourage particular behaviours and dispositions. It is in the compulsion to choose, to make appropriate choices from a range of culturally and historically specific options that we not only *practise* our freedom, but also carry the responsibilities and obligations, or reap the rewards that flow from practising our freedom in these ways (Rose 1999; Foucault 2000a&b). Central to this way of thinking about the ways in which workers are encouraged to know themselves, and to act in particular ways, is Foucault's (1983: 220-221) play on the ambiguous meanings of the term *conduct*. Conduct, as Foucault uses the concept in his discussions of *governmentality*, points *both* to the action of leading others, and to a 'way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities'. That is, we *conduct* ourselves in certain ways, in spaces in which others also seek to *orchestrate* our behaviours and dispositions. Of interest in this discussion are the variety of behaviours and dispositions; relationships and commitments; obligations and responsibilities that are identified as, *rightly*, being of concern when it comes to imagining what it means to be a worker citizen (Dean 1995). The drama of *Jamie’s Kitchen* brings a number of these individualising processes to the surface – and in doing so points to a range of tensions produced by these processes.

*Jamie’s Kitchen* was televised on Channel 4 in Britain in 2002 and appeared on Channel 10 in Australia in 2003. In this TV series the high profile celebrity chef Jamie Oliver set out to transform a group of unemployed young Londoners into the enterprising, ideal
worker of 21st century flexible capitalism. This series, and its figure of the entrepreneurial, risk taking, small businessman (who in this instance is also a global celebrity brand) seeking to develop similar dispositions and behaviours in a workforce that initially does not display such character features, provides a means to explore, key features of new work regimes.

The by now familiar reality TV format – a critique of which is beyond the scope of this paper – provided a public, even manipulative, insight into the trials and tribulations of unemployed young Londoners, a celebrity chef, and trainers/instructors as 15 young people were trained to be chefs for a new restaurant (8 eventually graduated). The restaurant was named Fifteen, mirroring the number of trainees in the first intake. Since this initial series there have been larger yearly cohorts of trainees, and in 2004 Fifteen Foundation was established as a charitable organisation. Fifteen Foundation has since opened restaurants in Cornwall (UK), Amsterdam (Holland), and, in 2006, Melbourne (Australia) (Fifteen 2005; Lethlean 2006).

Jamie’s Kitchen: Training, Passion and Processes of Individualization

In this section we present a series of snapshots from Jamie’s Kitchen to illustrate the ways in which participation in precarious, globalised labour markets exemplifies the possibilities, challenges and tensions for a biography that is increasingly opened up to processes of individualization.

Voice Over: Celebrations are over. The hard grind begins. In 12 weeks of chef school the trainees must learn the basic do’s and don’ts of cooking. Only then can they train under Jamie himself. And these starry eyed students are in for a shock. To give them a kick-start Jamie has enlisted a strict German at the top of his profession.

Herr Bosey: Our standards are high and if I show you now a certain kind of standard that I expect you to repeat. There is no middle way, there is no short cuts, there is only one way, the way I’ve been showing you.

Voice Over: From now on, every move they make will be closely policed by teachers like Herr Bosey. Unused to such scrutiny 17yr old Duane Montford is the first to feel the pressure. The chef does not mince his words with Michael Pizzey either.
Episode Two: Jamie’s Kitchen

The risk society, reflexive modernization literature has provoked debate on the ways in which biographies are increasingly opened up to by processes of individualisation (Beck et al 1994; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Processes of ‘individualization’ are, for Beck (1992: 127), ‘neither a phenomenon nor an invention of the second half of the twentieth century’. However processes of reflexive modernization can be characterised by the transformation of the 'systems of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity'. A variety of, largely, autonomous processes increasingly open up more and more aspects of a person’s life to the idea, and to the very practice, of choice. Many aspects of life were often a matter of fate, or of duty, or were predetermined by an accident of birth. Many still are. But increasingly, for more and more people, life has become - as Giddens (1991) would argue - a reflexive project that is both a life of choice, but as a consequence of this, a life of uncertainty, risk and ongoing anxiety about the choices to be made and the consequences that flow from making these choices.

Peter Richards: I have doubts about Duane. I was bloody angry because he was taking the piss out of me. Now he doesn’t need to do that...I give him far more than he gives me. All I expect him to give me is commitment and I’ve told him this.

Duane: When I started, I started off crap cos I was messing about, mucking around. Doing things I shouldn’t be doing and then I had this big talk with chef and he told me I had to pick up or I’m coming off the course. Sometimes I go too far on the funny side. First I started off in a really good school called Woolidge polytechnic. I used to be really naughty, badly behaved. Didn’t do my work. Throwing chairs everything. Got excluded. I made a record in that school for getting excluded the most which was 126 times – well I’ve never been expelled. If I got kicked off the course I would never be able to live with myself.

Trainee Duane Montford discussing his difficulties with developing and exhibiting the behaviours and dispositions considered appropriate for continued labour market participation.
These processes of 'individualization' are carried by, and indeed, carry processes of 'standardization'. The penetration of market relations and of abstract systems into every aspect of the lifeworld compel the individual to choose. At the same time these processes promote, paradoxically, forms of market and institutional dependency, forms of 'standardization'. These processes of individualization, carried increasingly by market relations, deliver individuals 'over to an external order and standardization' that was unknown in the enclaves of familial and feudal structures' (Beck 1992: 130-132 original emphasis). This form of standardization is of a different order precisely because it occurs within processes which compel individuals to 'choose', which set them 'free' from traditional coordinates, and which make them responsible for their own biographies.

These twin processes of individualization and standardization generate contradictory impulses within and for certain generational clusters. Populations of young people, in this instance, are increasingly constructed, and construct themselves, as being responsible for their own biographies. In this sense the future participation by young people in the good life is in their own hands. Individualization processes result, argues Beck (1992: 135), in individual biographies becoming 'self reflexive' and 'self produced'. The self in this sense becomes a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) project.

Voice Over: After turning down thousands of other eager applicants Jamie can’t turn a blind eye to the three kitchen truants - whatever they’re going through.

Jamie: There’s stuff going on that I don’t know about and I can’t relate to because I’ve never been through some of the things they go through. You know problems with family and stuff. So I think I have to consider situations…

Peter Richards: I look at it from the point of view, you know, you’re going to employ these people and how comfortable would you feel as an employer?

Jamie: Hmmm.

Jamie Oliver and Peter Richards (chef/trainer) considering what influences might be shaping trainee attendance and engagement in the context of continuing absenteeism by some trainees

Episode Two: Jamie’s Kitchen
Jamie: But the reality is I am going to inherit them very shortly and I’ve got to open up a first class London restaurant open to all the press who are going to have their knives out and I’m still going to have to worry about is Pizzey going to season that salad just right? This has always been about training unemployed people to a really professional level. I want them to be employable. I’m not doing them any favours by laying down the red carpet and giving them an easy ride. You know if there is dead wood in the group holding it back you know I have to deal with it.

Jamie Oliver talking about the risks he faces as an entrepreneur in attempting to train young people who possess, or display few of the dispositions and skills the industry/job demands

Episode Two: Jamie’s Kitchen

Livelihood, suggests Beck (1992: 13), is secured, tenuously, in the labour market. Increasingly, 'suitability' for the labour market is dependent, for young people, on participation in schooling. Individuals and groups who are 'denied access to either' are confronted with the very real possibility of 'social and material oblivion'. Particularly in the context of labour markets which demand flexibility, generic skills and transportability of credentials. Institutionally generated risk environments such as labour markets, and the consequences they have for individual biographies, emerge as 'no longer just events and conditions' which are visited upon individuals. Rather these risks are the 'consequences of the decisions they themselves have made' (Beck 1992: 136 original emphasis). Here the problems and the issues associated with transformed labour markets, globalising economies, and the types of training which might be appropriate for these changed circumstances, are concerns which affect large populations. Yet, as Beck (1992: 135 emphasis added) points out, in the face of these largely autonomous processes of individualisation 'what does that mean for the forging of my own fate, which nobody else can do for me?'

It is under these conditions that nearly a thousand young, unemployed Londoners tried out for the 15 training places offered in Jamie’s Kitchen.

Jamie: Don’t cry sweetheart. I’m not bollicking you I’m giving you a last chance.
Kerry-Anne: I know I’m wasting it. I want this more than anything in the world.
Jamie: Let’s cut the shit right. One more day not turning up is really not good enough. I have to see you really meaning this because, you know what, I’m putting myself out for you guys. I really am. Not just for you guys but on the whole bloody project.
Kerry-Anne: I feel so shit at the moment.
Jamie: Why do you feel shit?
Kerry-Anne: Because I feel like I’m relying on everybody else and I shouldn’t be.
Jamie: Relying on everybody else?
Kerry-Anne: Yeah, they’re always giving me cigarettes and stuff because I’ve never got any money because I’ve got a debt to pay.
Jamie: What are you going to do? Where are you going to go after if you don’t do this?
Kerry-Anne: Nothing. It will break me if I don’t do this anymore.
Jamie: Do you think you can do it? Should I give you another chance?
Kerry-Anne: Please

18 yo Kerry-Anne Dunlop talking to Jamie about her life circumstances and their impact on her ability, capacity and motivation to attend training sessions
Episode Two: Jamie’s Kitchen

Conclusion
The successful trainees in Jamie’s Kitchen have developed a form of selfhood that might save them from the risk of social and material oblivion that hangs over individuals in a globalised risk society. What, though, might be some of the costs that flow from the never ending demands of participation in precarious labour markets? What of those who can’t/won’t develop these forms of personhood?

We have highlighted particular aspects of the increasingly powerful individualising and normalising processes shaping the lifeworlds of worker-citizens in a globalising risk society. These processes require those who wish to be positively identified as entrepreneurial to do particular sorts of work on themselves; or suffer the consequences. Our understandings of personhood, of what it means to be a worker of the world, are
being rearticulated around the idea that we are free to choose. Not only are we free to choose but we must exercise this freedom – reap its rewards, carry its obligations – as individuals. This discussion of an ethic of enterprise emerges from a concern to explore certain tensions in an individualised, globalised world of work. Tensions that become apparent in the sort of analysis we have developed. These tensions can be found;

- in the various processes of individualisation and normalisation which compel us to be free, but to practise that freedom in limited ways: to not be a smart arse

- within the fields of possibilities that might be more, or less, open for some individuals and groups and which are shaped, for young people by social class, gender, ethnicity, geography, and family employment and education histories;

- in the very idea, or possibility, of acting otherwise in an individualised, globalised world of work.

References


