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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE CAREER EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE CHEFS IN  
MALAYSIA: A NARRATIVE APPROACH**

**Nur Amirah Binti Haji Mazlan**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of Sunderland  
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## **Abstract**

Female chefs in the culinary sector encounter barriers which affect their career experiences. This sector and the wider hospitality industry demands long working hours which are challenging for female chefs, in addition to other gendered issues that affect their career development. Despite the awareness of female chefs' skills, abilities and success stories, their presence is still limited, especially in Malaysia, a country with substantial ethnic diversity. Literature has suggested that gender and ethnicity have an intersecting relationship that impacts women's careers. Underpinned by theories of gender, ethnicity, behaviour and careers, this research explores the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia, using a narrative approach. It highlights the individual experiences of female chefs from the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia: - Malay, Chinese and Indian. The research explores the factors that influence women's career behaviours and perceptions, and investigates whether the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity has an impact on women's career experiences and how they perceive their future career prospects.

Underpinned by feminist epistemology, narrative stories were collected via semi-structured online interviews with eighteen female chefs from the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. The findings have identified that female chefs' career experiences, are reflected in their behaviours and perceptions and these are gendered. Family and confidence levels have shaped their career behaviours, while adaptability and continuous development influenced their career perceptions. Interestingly, the research found that female chefs' careers were also affected by their body size, physical strength, stereotypes, and work-family commitments, all related to being a woman in the kitchen. From the point of view of the female chefs interviewed, there is no significant intersectionality between gender and ethnicity in terms of their career experiences and perceptions. However, the findings demonstrate that the influence of ethnic diversity on their career experiences is multifaceted, representing both opportunities and challenges. In viewing future careers, the findings suggest that continuous development is crucial to how female chefs see their career planning.

This research, by gathering the career experiences of female chefs from three ethnic groups in a single study, adds critical depth to the literature on gender and career studies, addressing women's career strategies and behaviours. The narrative approach has enabled female chefs to share career stories and experiences that reflect their career journeys, offering new perspectives about women's careers, especially in the context of Malaysia. Theoretically, this study contributes fresh insights by revealing the complex relationships between gender, ethnicity, careers, and behaviours. Furthermore, this study also provides important practical recommendations for the management of the culinary industry in Malaysia so as to increase the awareness of different career pathways for female chefs.

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Female chefs often face unique challenges in the hospitality and culinary industry (Md Mubin et al., 2021). Even though more women are breaking through the barriers and achieving success in the professional kitchen, in comparison to men, there are still fewer women in top-level positions in the industry. Underpinned by theories of gender, ethnicity and careers, this research seeks to explore female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia. This chapter introduces the background of this research, starting from the evolution of women in employment before focusing on the career of female chefs. Throughout this research, the terms 'woman' and 'female' will be used interchangeably, and this research's position in using these two terms will be established. Following that, as Malaysia provides the research context, a discussion about the position of women in the country, the ethnicity and relevant employment condition will be outlined. The research aim, objectives, and thesis structure will also be presented in this introductory chapter.

## **1.2 Background and Rationale of Research**

Today, women's involvement in employment has increased tremendously, and it cannot be denied that research and debate about women's careers still proliferate. Women's participation in employment has a long and complicated history, and the issues about women and careers are continuously debatable, especially regarding opportunities and progression. Some early research such as Roberts (1988) and Bradley (1989) indicate that the segregation of women in employment stems from the ideology about men and women in a social context. Men, as the primary breadwinners, are involved in social labour while women are responsible for the home, taking care of children and the house chores; they are not expected to earn money (Roberts, 1988). This can be defined as a division of labour, heavily influenced by gender roles that affect various aspects of a society such as culture, workplace, identity, and social position (Acker, 1990; 2012). There was limited choice in the work that women could

do, and in this early research, women were said to prefer to stay at home doing domestic work, focusing on being mothers (Bradley, 1989).

Previously, women were said to mainly focus on their reproductive roles in the family compared to productively contributing to the economy (Roberts, 1988). Swinbank (2002) also argues that the assumption that women relied on their husband's job created a pay gap for both men and women; hence, women whose work is equal to men are often given low pay or value. Ansari (2016) advocated that the division of labour based on gender has created more discrimination against women, making women's career progress slower even though both genders may be working within the same job scope. Patriarchal norms lead to the perception that men are better suited for positions with authority or leadership, whereas in a household context, men are typically responsible for providing financial support, while women are expected to focus on childcare, taking care of family members, and handling household chores (Spierings, 2014). This is also linked to notions of womanhood, where being a woman, means having a strong instinct to nurture, and being a wife and mother should be prioritised over paid employment as Poduval and Poduval (2009) suggests that women carry an extra burden of responsibilities both in the workplace and in the home.

Traditionally, women are expected to be the primary caregiver, which is embedded in almost every culture, giving a perception that women will encounter work-life challenges if they become involved in the labour force (Mustapa et al., 2018). The controversial typical feminine skills in women's careers are still embedded within the thinking of gender-career roles; even though women possess high qualifications (education, career position), family commitment still seems to be a burden (Chua et al., 2016). The family is one of the reasons behind women's career choices and advancement and being at the top level of the career ladder might not be the main aim for some, but instead, having a balance between work and family is prioritised (Mustapa et al., 2018). The issues of marriage and family also may push women to seek self-employment because of the increasing demands on their time, as self-employment offers a greater degree of flexibility and enables women to allocate more of their time towards domestic obligations linked to marriage (Patrick et al., 2016). However, it may be the case that there are also pull factors that lead women into self-

employment. For example, women can be influenced by the need for changes in career, being independent and looking for challenges (Hughes, 2003). In addition, both push and pull factors influence self-employment for women that vary depending on individuals and the particular socio-economic context pertaining in a geographical locale (Hughes, 2003).

Spierings (2014) advocates that employment can often be challenging for women because it may be interpreted as neglecting their presumed primary role as caregivers, which society expects them to fulfil by being present at home. The author also mentioned that this scenario can unfold in two ways. Firstly, in areas where economic needs are particularly demanding, only women facing significant financial pressures might enter the labour market. The second aspect involves the caregiving responsibilities and the traditional family norms, society continues to expect women with children to remain at home. As mentioned, the presence of children also is often assumed to be a catalyst for women's pursuit of self-employment (Bago and Dessy, 2020), as opposed to salaried employment, due to the amplified time commitments imposed on women as primary caregivers (Patrick et al., 2016). The presence of distinct gender roles and power dynamics within households affects how the distribution of income and caregiving responsibilities is perceived (Spierings, 2014).

When women joined the labour force, the traditional roles in taking care of families started to change, affecting the typical structure of family responsibilities, demonstrating that gender studies are more complicated than simply issues of gender-based roles or equality (Bowden and Mummery, 2014). Even if women have decided to work, many factors affect their career choice because it is a complex decision, especially as it involves social norms, family responsibilities, education levels and career opportunities (Sarkar et al., 2019). When there is a strong societal norm dictating that women should not have a public or income-earning role, women's employment prospects are weakened via these manifestations of classic patriarchy which highlight the significance of household conformations (Spierings, 2014). Situation can be worse for women working in male-dominated jobs who probably experience more significant career challenges, as some masculine practices are more distinct, meaning that the historical gender hierarchies are still firmly embedded

(Martin and Barnard, 2013; Nemoto, 2013). In other words, the assumption that women need to 'perform' or 'act' in a certain way in their occupations or schematic gender roles reflects a duality and dualism that are deeply rooted in societal expectations. In careers, there's certain expectation on how women should act. Society also may expect women to perform or portray typical traits of femininity and womanhood (such as being nurturing, and/-or supportive).

Feminist and gender studies have embodied the research context in various career and employment fields. Incorporating gender studies is seen as an effort to bring more realistic views towards multiple gender issues in different contexts such as career, culture, health and possibly many more (Zaborskis, 2018). Despite the increasing work opportunities, with global attention shifting its focus to gender equality and empowerment, gendered issues within organisations are still evidenced and affecting women's career experiences (Bishu and Headley, 2020; Guyalo et al., 2022).

Women's careers have always intersected with many gendered experiences that pose barriers in many aspects, such as inequality, society and organisational structure, stereotypes, discrimination, lack of opportunities and mentoring, glass ceilings, and issues of work-life balance (Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Alfarran et al., 2018; Bishu and Headley, 2020; Hutchings et al., 2020; Topić, 2020; Schizas et al., 2022; Aydın and Erbil, 2022; Khan, 2022). However, these career barriers can vary depending on a given woman's working environment, position, age and marital status (Ibáñez, 2017; Dollija et al., 2021). Previous research also has shown the ongoing trends that cover multiple issues pertaining to women's issues in their employment (England et al., 2004; Al Kharouf and Weir, 2008; Sarkar et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2022) and women in a male-dominated workplace (French and Strachan, 2015; Bishu and Headley, 2020). Despite that the research about women's employment has increased tremendously within various occupational areas, women still face multiple issues pertaining to their gender, thus calling for more extensive research into women's career experiences.

### **1.3 Female Chefs' Careers**

This study focuses on women in professional kitchens, and it is therefore important to see how and why this culinary profession is still male-dominated. The idea of domestic

and professional tasks began during the Industrial Revolution, which divided domestic tasks into a more feminine, private sphere, while professional work was more masculine and focused on the public context (Farrell, 2016). Domestic cooking for women was, and still is, affected by the sexual and cultural division of labour, meaning that women's involvement in cooking is undervalued (Swinbank, 2002). Traditionally, women were the ones who dominated the cooking tasks, mainly in a domestic context, but from the professional aspect, it was different as here men dominated (Bartholomew and Garey, 1996; Selçuk Kurtuluş et al., 2018), and it fitted men better as a career (Druckman, 2010). It is only in recent years that studies on food were highlighted within the third feminism wave, establishing a new understanding of domestic work for women (Farrell, 2016), and women's involvement in the culinary profession began to increase in the 1990s (Yu and Jyawali, 2021; Gvion and Leedon, 2019).

According to Swinbank (2002), initially, women only prepared food and this was unrecorded in history as a success; instead, it was just a story inherited across family generations. For example, traditional recipes or cooking methods. The authors then compared the women's cooking task to men's cooking tasks, which men was seen to be more competitive and innovative, contrary to domestic cooking tasks. The continuation of this ideology led to the definition of the chef profession as a man's job in the social context; it was gendered and male-dominated (Chen et al., 2020) because it was the male chefs who mostly spent their time in long hours of training and endured the physical labour required (Gvion and Leedon, 2019).

Haddaji et al. (2018) contend that professional kitchens are highly gendered, and women are exposed to considerable gender barriers within them. In many societies, women are often disregarded in professional cooking because it is still perceived as a masculine job (Farrell, 2016; Gvion and Leedon, 2019). A professional kitchen could refer to a place that is important, complicated, and holds diverse connections; it possesses ongoing interactions with organisations, culinary creations, and flavours that are unique to a specific locality, or nation (Freitas et al., 2020). A professional kitchen is nearly always a commercial kitchen, that deals with high customer turnover, and mass production with heavy-duty kitchen equipment, along strict hygiene

procedures (Dephna, 2021). In other words, the concept of a 'professional kitchen' refers to a kitchen space within a commercial establishment to facilitate food planning and cooking.

In this research, a chef is conceptualised as an individual or professional working in diverse culinary businesses, with a range of skills, expertise, and experiences. The study focuses on female chefs in Malaysia across the Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups. In fact, the terms 'cook', and 'chef' were initially said to be gendered (Farrell, 2016) and had different meanings (Mahfud et al., 2019). The term 'chef' comes from the French word 'Chef de Cuisine', meaning the head of the kitchen, one who is professionally trained in culinary arts, who possesses the skill to advance in the hierarchy of the kitchen, who has a high status in the public eye, and who is a man – the term is thus strongly linked to masculinity (Druckman, 2010; Farrell, 2016; Harris and Giuffre, 2010a; Suhairom et al., 2019). In comparison, a 'cook' referred to those who prepare food at home, are self-taught, feminine, follow the chef's instructions and are less skilled, thus term is thus linked to women (Druckman, 2010; Farrell, 2016). The distinction between a chef and a cook represents a twofold occupational classification. As the duality suggests, there are two important elements that correspond to one another (Farjoun, 2010), for example the terms 'cook' and 'chef' are often used in the professional kitchen, but these roles in practice are not necessarily separate, and can be viewed as interconnected aspects of the culinary profession. Whereas dualism, also refers to two fundamental elements but with significant differences and a clearly defined boundary (Farjoun, 2010), for example, the presence of two distinct roles, responsibilities, and hierarchies for the 'cook' and 'chef'.

The strong relationship between a professional kitchen and masculinity also comes from the imitation of the military system, which is called a brigade system. This hierarchical style prioritises skills and roles that affect women in the professional kitchen, and this continues to exist in the modern kitchen setting (Farrell, 2016; Harris and Giuffre, 2010b). The origin of this system was defined by a chef named Georges-Auguste Escoffier, who established the brigade system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this system stressed the importance of hierarchical position, meaning high-level chefs were strict and women who joined the profession struggled (Druckman, 2010). The hierarchical



system starts with an executive chef as the leader, followed by a 'Sous' chef as the first supervisor, and the chain of command is completed by cooks (Farrell, 2016). The main reason behind this system is due to the skills needed for a specific role in the kitchen, and this is where the division of labour between a chef and a cook is evidenced; a cook's tasks are probably limited and do not need expertise as compared to a chef (Harris and Giuffre, 2010a).

Contemporary media representation such as in the BBC's *Masterchef* programme also reflect the continuity of this gendered image, as contended by Herkes and Redden (2017). The authors have discussed how the image of male contestants that enjoy preparing meat, adopt a firm and assertive posture, which is further emphasised by the associations of risk linked to cooking with fire and the frequent displays of men sharpening knives, carving meat or standing confidently with their arms crossed. These align with the established gender stereotypes already recognised in the food and media studies (Herkes and Redden, 2017). In addition, media representations of men in the culinary discipline also become crucial in understanding the ideas about masculinity that influence male catering trainees (Steno and Friche, 2015). In turn, the representation of celebrity chefs has a substantial impact on perception, because as role models for trainees, they resemble the 'ideal' professional chef (Steno and Friche, 2015). The debate on female chefs' representation in the media has also raised the question about portraying chefs as a gendered profession. Media has presented female chefs' careers or their tasks as dull or uninteresting; they are expected to work in a pastry kitchen with a slower pace (Yu and Jyawali, 2021). Druckman (2010) argues that the women in the media, like in cooking shows are portrayed as cooks that prepare simple food or family meals, such as Rachael Ray and Nigella Lawson. The author also criticises the appearance of women who are not seen as professional chefs that wear chef jackets, but with a background of a home kitchen and additional feminine gestures; however, the reality behind a professional kitchen is that female chefs struggle to fit in with the masculine environment with non-feminine appearance, contradictory to what is portrayed on television.

Generally, on popular culture, male chefs often show masculinity and possess highly technical skills compared to female chefs, who show feminine characteristics

resembling home cooks (Chen et al., 2020). Again, the role of media has a massive influence on this, where women are presented as home cooks, but men are the professional chefs, leading to the representation of femininity and masculinity that worsens the existing gender segregation in the profession (Chen et al., 2020). This image has strengthened the perception of women as feminine domestic home cooks, which contradicts the masculine style of a kitchen (Farrell, 2016). The idea of a masculine professional kitchen gives little room for aspiring female chefs, creating an ideal image of a chef as a man in a chef uniform (Yu and Jyawali, 2021). Yu and Jyawali (2021) further suggest that female chefs are expected to fit into this image, be physically able to work long hours and endure the pain associated with cooking (such as burns, cuts, and lifting things). They continue to seek recognition by adhering to masculine rules and styles without complaining (Gvion and Leedon, 2019). This is worsened by the situation in a professional kitchen that is said to involve a harsh environment and abusive behaviour that has become a culture (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008). The kitchen also involves “shouting, screaming, swearing and bullying” that become the norm, and female chefs need to adapt to “sexism, dirty talk and jokes” (Gvion and Leedon, 2019; Yu and Jyawali, 2021, pp. 618).

A chef’s career also involves high occupational stress, influenced by the aforementioned bullying, an increased workload, feeling unappreciated, and communication challenges (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007). This makes learning and development challenging for female chefs (Haddaji et al., 2018). The culinary profession demands a chef to have a strong physical ability because it is physically exhausting, hectic and often involves heavy work (Suhairom et al., 2019). The argument of a need to be strong physically to be in the profession is evidenced when this is said to be absent from women; even though they have the required skills, it is not enough to be considered a success (Haddaji et al., 2018), although other chef competencies such as “skills, taste, food knowledge” in culinary careers accompanied by “interpersonal, leadership, managerial and motivational skills” are essential (Mahfud et al., 2019, pp. 1067). Thus, this highlights the opinion by Druckman (2010) previously, where the author contended that if female chefs challenge the masculine

style in the kitchen and possess equal culinary skills to male chefs, is it still possible for female chefs to receive recognition in the professional kitchen.

The typical and expected feminine characteristics that women usually portray have disadvantaged women in the culinary profession (Chen et al., 2020). Even though women have the skills and creativity in the kitchen (Druckman, 2010) that are essential for a chef's career (Haddaji et al., 2018), gender discrimination is still firmly embedded. Despite the reality that more successful female chefs are present currently, most remain employed in lower positions and face salient career barriers (Farrell, 2016; Selçuk Kurtuluş et al., 2018; Harris and Giuffre, 2010b). Albors-Garrigos et al.'s (2021) study focused on barriers to chefs' careers and uncovered that work-life balance, the working environment and lack of mentoring are the reasons that impede the progression of many female chefs.

West and Zimmerman (2009) previously emphasised that 'doing gender' was conceptualised as an ongoing process depending on a situation. Bradley (2013) further mentioned that the concept of 'doing gender' or 'gendering' can be observed as functioning on three distinct levels that mirror the context of a career. The first level pertains to the patterns of individual gendered behaviour. The second level involves institutions, such as the workplace, which often operate with strict and established gender norms, regardless of how liberated and gender-aware individuals may be. Finally, these individual and institutional behaviours contribute to the development of gendered structures at the societal level. Masculinity in 'doing gender' was also portrayed clearly by a study by van den Brink and Stobbe (2009). Their research focused on female students in a science university's department and shows that female students avoid standing out as women and distanced themselves from what they referred to as the 'girly girls.' They adapt their behaviour to align with the preferences and tastes of the dominant group, presenting themselves as more masculine than their female peers. They construct their gender identity in accordance with this dominant image. The concept of 'doing gender' reveals that these female students choose to be invisible as women to help them to manage stereotypes. Danielsson's (2012) research also mirrors the ideas of 'doing gender'. For example, the study contended that female physics students may not only encounter the

established masculine standards within the field, but they may also encounter distinct expectations regarding how a female physics student should behave. As gender is not perceived as an intrinsic characteristic of an individual but rather as a construct that individuals shape and adapt within particular social contexts (Danielsson, 2012), it can be performed in such situations. Similarly, in other career domains such as in technology, security and construction (Saifuddin et al., 2022; van Rensburg, 2021; Olofsdotter and Randevag, 2016). Saifuddin et al.'s (2022) research shows that Bangladeshi women in male-dominated technology careers simultaneously undo and redo gender to sustain their careers, and to help them to empower and express themselves. In a study by Rogers and Deflem (2022) on women in heavy metals music, they also admit that by showing masculinities enable them to be 'accepted' and taken seriously. While for workers in the construction sector, both men and women need to adapt to masculine narratives depending on their situation, women, especially, navigated the challenges by determining the extent to which they needed to align with masculine norms; - in other words they had to be more cognizant of balancing the 'doing and undoing' of gender (Olofsdotter and Randevag, 2016).

Selçuk Kurtuluş et al. (2018) suggest that the reason behind the career barrier is due to women having different responsibilities (home and work), long working hours, and gendered physical and verbal harassment, which makes the representation of women in the culinary profession limited, restricting them from reaching top level positions. A study by Harris and Giuffre (2010a) that focuses on work and family challenges for female chefs has found that the kitchen structure poses a barrier, making female chefs rethink having children, as they could be a hindrance to a successful cheffing career. Recently, it also has been illustrated, in a study of female chefs in Sri Lanka, that reported issues such as limited career development and opportunities, issues in work-life balance, children, pregnancy challenges and gender discrimination (De Silva and Thulemark, 2022) are all barriers. All in all, it shows that masculine styles in a professional kitchen, added to stereotypes of gender roles, are still embedded in chefs' careers, which grant worse outcomes for female chefs.

According to Albors-Garrigos et al.'s (2020a) study, both media and academia have a similar focus when discussing female chefs' careers. The authors mentioned that both

focus on stories of celebrity or famous female chefs, their success or skills, and issues affecting a female chef's career like the glass ceiling, barriers, discrimination and financial difficulties. However, topics related to the early stages of female chefs' careers, sexual harassment and award-winning female chefs are rarely discussed (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020a). It is evident as well that research on the chef profession focuses on issues - such as occupational stress (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007), work practices (Bloisi and Hoel, 2008), gender-culinary revolution (Farrell, 2016), the importance of chef training and creativity in food production (Pang, 2017), chef competency (Mahfud et al., 2019), role of media (Chen et al., 2020), female chefs career progression (Selçuk Kurtuluş et al., 2018; Gvion and Leedon, 2019; De Silva and Thulemark, 2022) and chef innovativeness (Tugay and Pekerşen, 2022).

Narrowing down to the focus on female chefs as a research topic, most cited research can be seen through the study of elite female chefs' careers (Bartholomew and Garey, 1996), feminist analysis in the culinary profession (Swinbank, 2002), female chefs' absence (Druckman, 2010), work-life issues for female chefs (Harris and Giuffre, 2010a), female chefs' expectations of the culinary industry (Harris and Giuffre, 2010b), female chefs' career barriers and experiences (Haddaji et al., 2017a; 2018), female chefs' career barrier to Michelin Stars (Haddaji et al., 2017b), and gender discrimination and the glass ceiling (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020a; 2020b; 2021).

The research above concludes that in some western contexts such as in the United States and other European countries women in the culinary profession remain in the minority, primarily due to the prevailing masculine culture, although a few researchers argue that there are no substantial gender obstacles (Haddaji et al., 2018). In Valencia, female chefs continue to face a pervasive gender bias regarding their abilities and recognise the necessity to demonstrate their competence (Haddaji et al., 2017a; Haddaji et al., 2017b). Apart from that, although a study on female chefs in Istanbul reveals that these women view themselves as skilful, it is acknowledged that physical weakness can be a drawback (Selçuk Kurtuluş et al., 2018). Narrowing down to the context of Asia, Sri Lanka's female chefs do admit that they face very significant barriers to career advancement via career discrimination (De Silva and Thulemark,

2022) while, in even further geographical relevance to the current research, Malaysian female chefs find conflict between work and family commitments have an impact on career dedication and progression (Md Mubin et al., 2021). In a recent study on female chefs in Indonesia, the results reveal that female chefs have a lack of understanding about what can be considered as gender discrimination in the kitchen; they also voiced the opinion that the typical 'aggressive hot long hours' kitchen image needs to be changed. The participants in this study also mentioned that more resources or support must be given to female chefs in the industry while they emphasised the need to change the social norms that portray women as suitable in the domestic sphere rather than having an established career (Septiani and Siscawati, 2023). This shows that female chefs are still facing various barriers to their career and the gendered issues happen across the Western and Asian contexts.

Despite awareness that chefs' careers for women are increasing, statistics in the US show that in 2021 only 25.2% of chefs were female compared to 74.8% being male (Zippia, 2021). Data by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2017 also previously shows that, in the UK, only 23,733 chefs were female compared to 135,065 male chefs. However, the number of female chefs in the UK has increased from 2016, and women now occupy a quarter of the cheffing positions in the industry in 2023 (Chef's Pencil Staff, 2023). Although there are limited statistics on female chefs in Asia, statistics in South Korea have shown that only 9% of Michelin star restaurants in the country were led by female chefs, less than Italy (10%) and Spain (11%) (Chef's Pencil Staff, 2023).

In the context of female chefs' career in Asia, a recent article in 2023 written by Yong in the Michelin Guide analyses interviews with 18 female chefs who lead Michelin star restaurants in Asia including in China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand. The interviewees agreed that female chefs in Asia face greater obstacle due to a stronger patriarchal traditional culture, and that there could be career barriers such as family objections, long and demanding working hours and work-life conflicts, there are female chefs who still strive in their careers by overcoming stereotypes (Yong, 2023).

It is expected that Malaysia's culinary and food service industry is more complex, when compared to the above national cultures (Zahari et al., 2009), because it involves many aspects around culture and ethnicity. Abdullah et al.'s (2009) study of Malaysia found that the turnover intention for employees in the kitchen department is caused by income and relationship with the supervisor. In fact, the study has revealed the reality behind the limited number of female chefs in the country despite the fact that it involved 15 hotels across Klang Valley (a major urban corridor in Malaysia including Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Putrajaya), with only 13.5% of female chefs recruited compared to 86.5% being male chefs. Similar research in the Malaysian context was conducted by Md Mubin et al. (2021) who suggested that female chefs' career advancement and commitment was affected by a lack of equal opportunities, and work-life challenges.

Other research also has focused on the broader cheffing context of Malaysia, such as chef skills (Suhairom et al., 2019), gastronomy and culinary education in universities (Zahari et al., 2009), employees' turnover in the hospitality sector (Suleiman AlBattat and Mat Som, 2013), and chef turnover (Abdullah et al., 2009). Still, none has taken the approach to understand female chefs' careers experiences, particularly within the Malaysian context. In fact, female chefs in Malaysia are still underrepresented, and except for those celebrity chefs that often appear on television shows, information on female chefs is still very limited.

A recent article by Khoo (2022) quoted an interview with chef Mandy Goh, who became the female executive chef at St Regis Langkawi in 2019. She mentioned that there are no gendered differences in the challenges of being a chef in Malaysia. Her statement appears to provide an example of progress in diversifying leadership roles within the industry. However, her perspective on the absence of gendered differences in the challenges faced by chefs in Malaysia contradicts earlier reports, indicating that there may be varying experiences among female chefs in the country. For example, previously, Durai (2016) quoted interviews with female chefs in Malaysia and found that the reasons for the limited number of female chefs is the harsh and sexist kitchen as a workplace, the stereotype that female chefs belong in the pastry kitchen (as this is more accessible and the tasks are easier for women) which reinforces traditional gender roles and potentially limits women's opportunities in other culinary domains. In

addition, Durai (2016) also quoted a statement by a male executive chef, Rene Ottlik, from the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur hotel, which stated that 80% of chefs are males compared to only 20% of females, in Malaysia's professional kitchens.

The discussions above shed light on the dynamics within Malaysia's culinary and food service industry. Although previous studies have explored different sides of the culinary setting in Malaysia, there remains a notable gap in research regarding the experiences of female chefs, particularly within the Malaysian context. This information collectively highlights the challenges within the Malaysian culinary industry, specifically in the representation and experiences of female chefs. It points out several key aspects of the Malaysian culinary industry and the position of female chefs as suggested by research such as that conducted by Md Mubin et al. (2021), indicates that female chefs in Malaysia encounter significant challenges related to career advancement and commitment.

The present research thus calls for further investigation about female chefs in the country. Limited information from the media can also be seen as not highlighting the story behind the chef profession, except for those so called 'celebrity chefs'. This research gap warrants investigation into the current position of female chefs in the country. This culinary profession is physically demanding, and with issues of family commitments that are strongly embedded in chef careers.

#### **1.4 Gender, Ethnicity and Employment in a Malaysian Context**

In the effort to understand the experiences of female chefs in Malaysia, firstly, it is crucial to see how women are positioned within the country's general context. Malaysian women have actively participated in various industries, contributing towards the country's economic activities in addition to their traditional role at home (Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Mustapa et al., 2018). This is evidenced by the positive percentage change of women's participation in the country's labour force since 2018, even though there is a slight fluctuation (see Table 1 below):



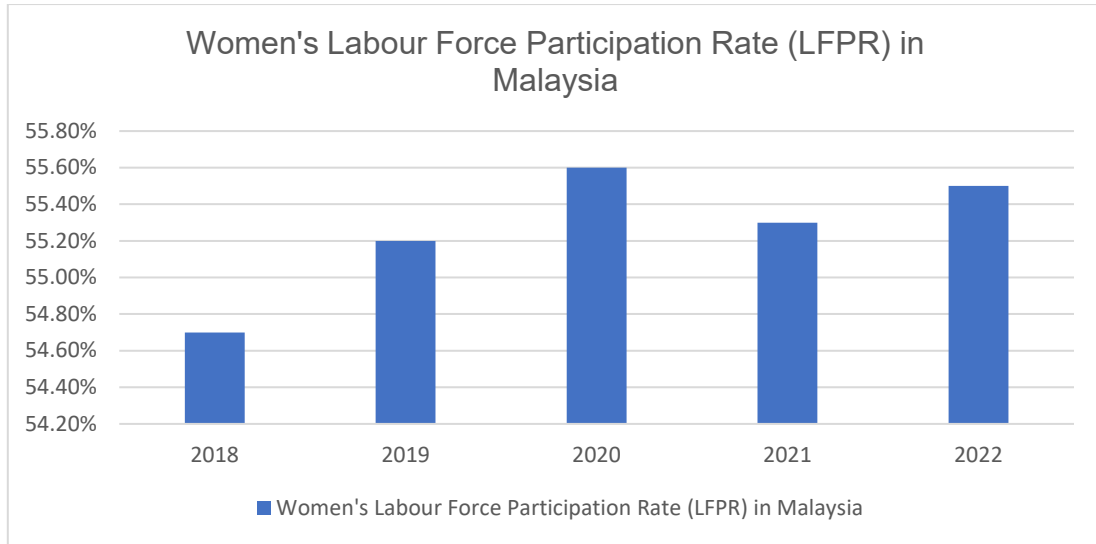


Table 1: Women's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Malaysia (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2018 – 2022a)

Furthermore, the country has shifted its focus towards positioning women within higher managerial levels, mainly because they have better education access and show more significant potential in their careers (Subramaniam et al., 2016). Malaysia has continuously included women in various development plans and traditionally established five years of economic development plans. One of the focuses is women's empowerment in multiple fields, such as gender equality (Malaysia Country Gender Note, 2021). According to the note, women mainly dominate in employment in household activities with 98.3%, followed by the education sector with 60.2%, followed by 56.4% in the accommodation, food and beverages services industry, with the most negligible participation in the electricity and gas supply with just 6.8%. This is reflected in Table 2 below that outlined the details of gender employment by industry in Malaysia:

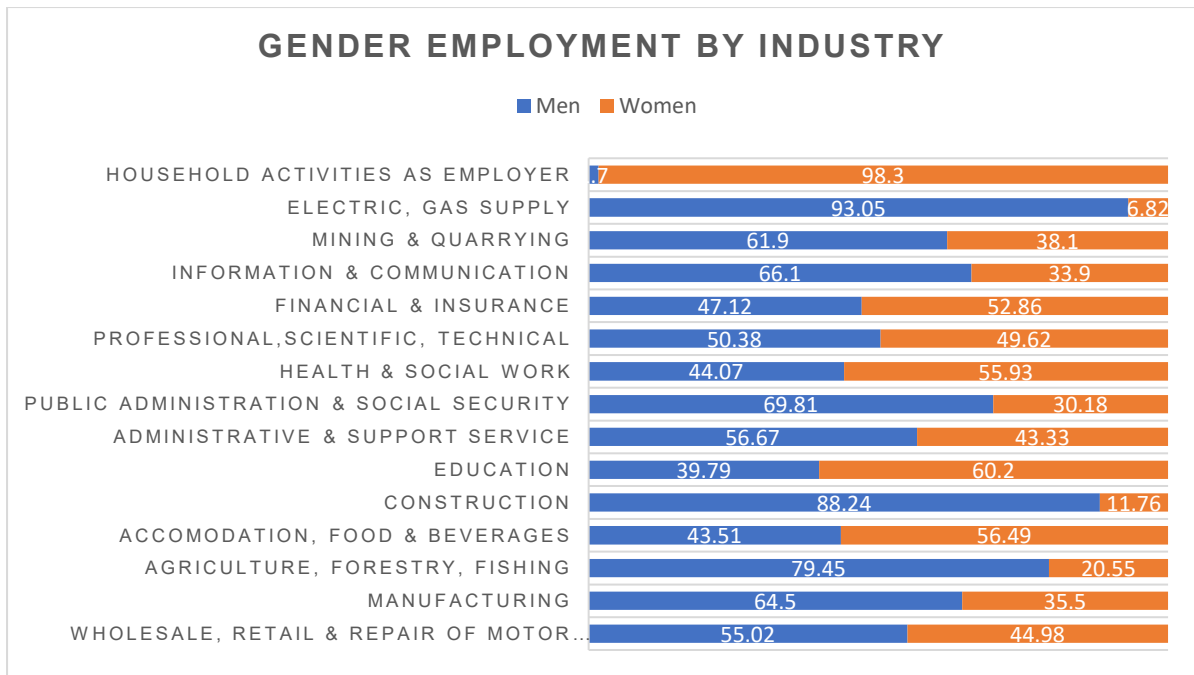


Table 2: Gender Employment by Industry (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021)

However, despite that some industries are dominated by women, statistics in the year 2021 indicated that only 1.9% of women were categorised as an employer, where most women worked as employees - 82%; 10.7% were self-employed, followed by 5.4% being unpaid family workers (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2021). This has shown that women's participation in various employment contexts in the country is still imbalanced. Concerning the food and beverages industry, employment data in 2021 also shows that 35.4% of people are employed in the food and beverages service, followed by 33.6% in retail trade and 5.6% in accommodation services (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). In 2017, 283 511 women were employed in the food and beverages services; however, only 17,113 were categorised as skilled, and most women were classified as low-skilled (Food and Beverages Services, Annual Economics Statistics, 2018). Despite the high number of women participating in food and beverage services, the number is still low compared to men, especially in acquiring high positions.

Malaysia's effort to continuously elevate and protect women in the social context can be seen through the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in 2001 with its objectives being increasing in women's participation in

the country's development, protecting women, families and communities' rights from discrimination, providing equal opportunities, and strengthen family institution (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2022). This aligns with the country's effort to improve women's involvement in many sectors. Despite that, women are still facing salient career barriers, not only represented by slow career progression but also issues about family responsibilities. A report by Malaysia Country Gender Note (2021) also shows that women in Malaysia face issues in their labour participation as they experience career breaks and choose not to continue their careers after that, especially when they are 30 years old and beyond. According to the report, the main barrier to women's careers in Malaysia is their household and family responsibilities that restrict them from advancing up the career ladder; 60.2% of women chose not to be employed due to housework in 2018. This was supported by Subramaniam et al. (2016), who quoted family responsibilities as a barrier to women's career advancement in Malaysia.

A survey, called Voices of Malaysian Women on Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace was conducted in 2020 and involved 1010 working women. The survey highlighted several issues pertaining to women in the workplace such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment and offensive sexual banter. Particularly on the issues of family and women's careers, 83% of respondents suggested that there should be better career support for working mothers, 47% mentioned that they were asked about their marital status during interviews, 27% mentioned that they were questioned about their ability to commit to their job task because they were pregnant, and 23% of women who had children believed that they did not receive adequate amounts of maternity leave. In addition, 23% of women mentioned that they received negative comments about their work commitments when they had to leave work early because of childcare responsibilities (Voices of Malaysian Women on Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace, 2020). Most of the respondents mentioned that women did not receive enough support from their workplace, and that their husbands were not given enough leave to help them which resulted in mothers sacrificing their time at work (Voices of Malaysian Women on Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace, 2020).

The research findings above have shown that the social norms and cultural practices of women as the main people responsible for family care are still prevalent in Malaysia, and this is similar across ethnic groups (Malaysia Country Gender Note, 2021). Probably due to the collectivist style of Malaysian society, women appear to prioritise their family over their career, influencing many career decisions (Mustapa et al., 2018) as in most Asian countries, women show high commitment to their families (Abdullah et al., 2008).

Pertaining to ethnic groups and cultures, Malaysia is a country with substantial ethnic diversity. Its ethnic composition constituted by *Bumiputera* which of 57.9% Malay and 12.2% other *Bumiputera* (a term referring to natives from the state of Sabah and Sarawak, who are not Malay (Abu and Connaughton, 2019)), 22.6% Chinese, 6.6% Indian, and 0.7% from other ethnic groups (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). According to Din et al. (2019), the country's geographical position is vital for explaining ethnic diversity in Malaysia today. The author further argues that the cultural communities within the three main ethnic groups mentioned, helps each group in protecting ethnic identity through language, culture and religion, where those from the same group strongly bond with one another. Ishak (2020) recount the historical aspect of Malaysian ethnicities: Malays and other indigenous communities are categorised as *Bumiputera*, enjoying specific privileges stipulated in the Malaysian constitution as 'sons of the soil'. Conversely, the Chinese and Indian communities are classified as *non-Bumiputera*. None of these groups are monolithic; they consist of individuals with varying languages and religions. While Malays are predominantly Muslim and speak Malay, other *Bumiputera* communities, particularly in the two Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, practice different religions and have their own distinct ethnic languages. The Indian community is primarily Hindu and speaks Tamil, while the religious and linguistic diversity among the Chinese is more intricate. Following Malaysia's independence, the Constitution emphasised the need to protect the special status of Malays, thus the Malaysian government introduced a formal quota-based affirmative action policy in 1971 to uplift the status of the majority Malay population (Ramiah et al., 2014). According to Hill et al. (2012), a notable and defining feature of Malaysia has been the central role of ethnicity in its social, political, and economic landscapes

that stem from the division of labour imposed during the colonial era, where the ethnic Chinese community dominated trade and tin mining, the Indian community played a substantial role in professions and as estate labourers, while the predominantly less affluent Malay community primarily engaged in agriculture and held undisputed political dominance. Despite political dominance being held by the Malays, the non-Malay communities, particularly the Chinese, manipulate economic influence and some political influence, while the Indian community has limited political and economic power (Ramiah et al., 2014; Ishak, 2020). A larger proportion of Chinese individuals reside in higher-income households, while the Malay and Indian populations are more prevalent in lower-income households which is reflected in their financial position (Abdullah Yusof, 2019).

In the context of well-established groups within a nation, as seen in the relationship between Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaysia, these groups have coexisted for an extended period and operate within clearly defined and accepted cultural spheres. It is likely that realistic threats play a predominant role in shaping intergroup dynamics for the majority group (Ramiah et al., 2014). However, this balance is delicate because if the Chinese community starts to perceive a threat, they may retreat into a more pronounced cultural distinctiveness, resulting in the loss of the progress made in fostering positive intergroup tolerance (Ting and Ting, 2020). Ethnic politics continue to pose a potential risk, prompting government leaders to emphasize the ongoing need for managing ethnic conflicts and towards the ideal of national integration being a top national priority (Ishak, 2020). The target to achieve national unity across ethnic groups has repeatedly been embedded in the country's system and policy, especially in education, business and economy. Malaysia is among the countries that has succeeded in managing issues regarding ethnicity and minimising income inequality between ethnic groups; however, the risk of ethnic conflict still can exist, driven by different views on social issues, identity, religious beliefs or languages (Sriskandarajah, 2005; Shamsuddin et al., 2015). The non-Malays may perceive Malay dominance as a threat to their ethnic identities (culture, language, and defining characteristics) which were strongly affixed in the Chinese community; meanwhile Malays also probably were still concerned with preserving Malay identity,

strengthening Malay-Islamic power, and enhancing their economic well-being (Ishak, 2020).

Nevertheless, research on ethnic issues in Malaysia is still limited. Kim and O'Brien (2018) state that ethnic discrimination, or racism, impacts women's careers but also affects career choices and behaviour. Yet, to understand how Malaysian women in a particular ethnic group experience their chef careers, further investigation is needed to complement the gender discussion in this research context. This is because studies on the career barriers for women in different ethnic groups in the country are still minimal (Kim and O'Brien, 2018). In connecting gender and ethnicity in women's careers, it can thus be said that limited studies have combined these two factors, especially in Malaysia. This calls for further inclusion of women's employment in research, focusing on Malaysian women, especially for male-dominated occupations. In order to recognise women's position in the Malaysian labour force, particularly in a professional kitchen, the intersection between ethnicity and gender must be considered as outcomes that women experience in these areas involve various aspects.

Substantial research has shown an increasing focus towards women's employment in Malaysia. Most studies have quoted that family responsibilities are career challenges for Malaysian women (Abdullah et al., 2008; Muhammad and Ahmad, 2009; Saadin et al., 2016; Jogulu and Wood, 2011; Subramaniam et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2017; Kaur et al., 2017). Other research has also offered a different focus on women and employment, for instance, the glass ceiling (Subramaniam et al., 2016; Ismail et al., 2017), career advancement and work-life balance (Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Mustapa et al., 2018), career aspirations and organisational support (Hassan et al., 2020; Hamzah et al., 2022), and, networking and mentoring (Ismail and Rasdi, 2007; Md Yusoff et al., 2011).

In the Southeast Asian context, studies about women in employment is also evidenced, for instance in Vietnam (Maheshwari et al., 2021), Thailand (Yukongdi, 2005), Indonesia (Lindawati and Smark, 2015) and Singapore (Dimovski et al., 2010). But the research is still limited, compared to the western context of studies on women and careers (e.g., Kirton and Robertson, 2018; Arifeen and Syed, 2019; Fernando et

al., 2019; White and Smith, 2022), the middle east (e.g., Al Kharouf and Weir, 2008; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Alfarran et al., 2018) and India (Sarkar et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2022; Khan, 2022). Even though some research has focused on the chef profession in Malaysia (e.g., Suhairom et al., 2019) and one focused on female chefs' career advancement (e.g., Md Mubin et al., 2021), none have specifically investigated women's career experiences in professional kitchens, especially in regard to intersectionality of gender and ethnicity. Thus, this research advances the knowledge about female chefs' career experiences in professional kitchens in Malaysia, which has thus far received inadequate attention compared to other research areas.

As the central focus of this research is gender, particularly women, it is important here to briefly discuss the meaning of this term. Gender is considered to be a socially constructed identity which is "expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, interacting with socially structured relationships in divisions of labour and leisure, sexuality, and power between women and men" (Swain, 1995, pp. 258 – 259). Gender is not the same as sex. Stock (2021) emphasised that sex determines the biological classification of a person as female or male. In other words, sex is a more straightforward concept where the biological characteristic is referred to. Simply put, the term 'woman', is a self-representation of an individual.

Yet, the notion of 'woman' is embedded with stereotypical behaviour such as being responsible for the family, children, and domestic tasks, mainly related to femininity (Stock, 2021). That's how being a woman is traditionally viewed, even though now these stereotypes of feminine traits have started to change. Indeed, within contemporary social contexts the usage of the words female and woman have transformed rapidly (Paçarizi, 2021). Hotine (2021) advocates that the argument about the female body (biology) has created discrimination, especially as Stock mentioned, mainly because the social understanding of the female body is always associated with gender norms. Thus, the discussion of these two terms, especially within socially constructed behaviour or society, is somewhat arguable because how females and women are being referred to has evolved. In fact, it has been argued that the biological traits (female or male) are themselves socially constructed (Stock, 2021).

While acknowledging the traditional distinction between sex (female/male) and gender (man/woman) with the former seen as biological and the latter social and cultural, the thesis also recognises that these binary distinctions are now being disrupted. However, in the context of Malaysia, there is an alignment between sex and gender which manifests in material relations, experiences, and perceptions and thus the key words 'female' and 'woman' are used interchangeably in this thesis. That is, by referring to female chefs as women, this research also recognises the effects of gendered constructions on career experiences. Further discussion of the conceptualisation of gender as a social construct can be found in Chapter Two.

### **1.5 Research Aim and Objectives**

This research aims to explore female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia. It will be done by adopting a narrative approach as the qualitative method utilised in this study. Three research objectives support this research aim:

RO1: to critically explore the factors that influence women's career behaviours and perceptions.

RO2: to investigate whether the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity influence women's career experiences.

RO3: to explore how women perceive their future career prospects.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

These primary research questions will be used as a guide to the narrative approach taken in this study:

- 1) What are the factors that influence women's career behaviours and perceptions?
- 2) How does the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity impact women's career experiences?
- 3) How do women view their future career prospects?

Research question one explores the factors influencing female chefs' career behaviours and perceptions. Female chefs' career behaviours are closely related to their individual career stories and experiences and how they see any factors within



their career journey that have influenced their behaviour. Female chefs' perceptions about a chef's career are also investigated by viewing how they think about their careers by stages, which will then determine their career planning.

Research question two investigates the extent of the role that gender and ethnicity play in female chefs' careers. Ethnicity is one of the main focuses of this research, due to the ethnic diversity of Malaysia which provides the study context of this thesis.

Research question three explores how female chefs view their future career prospects. This is to determine their career planning and how female chefs see their career progress from past experiences. Viewing future career prospects enables female chefs to foresee career changes and challenges and develop career plans suited to what they anticipate about their career achievement as a chef.

## **1.7 Overview of Thesis Structure**

In this chapter (Chapter One), the important background of this research on women's participation in employment has been outlined to understand some of the key issues behind women and their careers. Further, an underpinning review of female chefs' careers has been outlined, establishing the discussion of the professional kitchen system and issues pertaining to chefs' careers. Background information on gender and ethnicity in the Malaysian context has also been introduced, which helps to locate Malaysian women's position in the labour force. The rationale of this research that supports the research aim, objectives and the study overview was also presented.

Chapter two will provide a contextual understanding of the literature on gender and careers. This chapter will include an introduction to gender studies, explicitly how feminism has emerged, the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity, and gender and careers before discussing careers in tourism and hospitality. The evolution of gender studies and issues with women's employment is also outlined, which provides an understanding of the issues around women and their careers.

Chapter three explains the underpinning theories related to gender, behaviour and careers. Four theories are outlined, focusing on the discussion of which these theories contributes to understanding women and careers. Details of the theories were

discovered from the existing research, followed by establishing a theoretical framework to guide the research sub-questions and interviews.

Chapter four outlines the underpinning philosophical approaches that mirror the research direction, epistemologically and ontologically. The focus here is on interpretivism and social constructivism that fit this research context alongside feminist epistemology. As this research adopts a qualitative method, the explanation of the narrative approach is also outlined, as well as reflexivity in positioning the researcher's perspective.

Chapter five specifically explains the research method and approach, particularly in the data collection process. It highlights the research background of the interview process, research questions, techniques, sampling and participants' information. The data collection was carried out in Malaysia's professional kitchen context, while the data analysis process was supported by NVivo software.

Chapter six is the first chapter discussing the findings from the data collection. From the interviews, this chapter provides an in-depth understanding primarily of the role of gender, the body, the family and ethnicity in female chefs' careers. Specifically, it offers four gender-related themes on the body and family: menstrual, physical ability, stereotypes and family commitment. The two ethnic themes that are discussed are ethnic diversity and perspectives with language. The links between the gender discussion outlined in Chapter Two also will be explored.

Chapter seven is the second chapter that discusses the findings from the data collection. The discussion concerns the relation to female chefs' career choices and experiences with vignettes of the participants that provide detailed narratives of their career stories. Four themes are outlined in this chapter - the process of career choice and family influences, female chefs' career goal development, the role of emotion and behaviour, and the need for continuous development in the interviewees career experiences. This chapter also provides a summary of how the findings contribute to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter eight is the concluding chapter of this thesis. Detailed discussion about the achievement of the research aim and objectives is outlined in relation to the literature

discussed. The theoretical and methodological contributions from this thesis are offered, followed by the practical implication, limitations, and recommendations for further research. A reflective note is presented, followed by the final remarks about the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia.

## **1.8 Summary**

This chapter has set the scene behind women's participation in employment and focused on the culinary profession. It is contended that the positioning of women in the domestic sphere is responsible for the division of labour. Women are not seen as needed in contributing to economics production in the public sphere, family are their primary responsibility. As women started to participate in various occupations, gendered divisions and stereotypes continued to be embedded within society. This ideology has continued its effect on many professions, including the culinary industry. When it comes to cooking as a profession, the occupation seems to adopt a masculine style and its origin are male-dominated. The system practised in the kitchen benefits men and continues to disadvantage women.

The background of the research context pertaining to gender and ethnicity also has been outlined, with the hope of seeing the position of women in the Malaysian labour force improved. Despite the fact that Malaysian women's participation in various employment has positively increased, they are still dominating the low-skilled and low-level positions; this is mainly affected by family and household responsibilities. Thus, this calls for further investigation and this research aims to explore female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia using a narrative approach. The next chapter reviews the literature in gender studies and its relation to careers.

## Chapter 2 Gender and Careers

### 2.1 Introduction

This research seeks to investigate the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. This chapter mainly aims to discuss the development of gender studies and feminism and how these subjects relate to women's careers. The chapter examines three main issues in gender studies. Firstly, the early contribution of gender-based studies and how gender studies correlate with women's careers in general is discussed. Secondly, this chapter moves towards the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity; discussion of this has been mentioned in the gender studies and feminist literature. Thirdly, gender studies in the hospitality and tourism context are discussed as this provides essential underpinning for the exploration of female chefs' career experiences.

### 2.2 Gender as Social Construction

As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the definition of gender and sex are closely aligned. Sex is initially defined by the biology of a person; the chromosome is said to determine the biological sex (Bem, 1981; Trauth et al., 2016; Heller, 2019). The initial category of sex is binary; male and female, based on biological characteristics (Hotine, 2021). Sex identifies a person with their main characteristics such as their reproductive organs, followed by other characteristics such as physical structure, muscle, hair, and voice, which possess their own categories for male and female (Stock, 2021). However, because sex is often generally identified by a person's physical body, this creates different social perceptions about what males and females are *supposed* to be (Wren et al., 2019).

In a subtle distinction, gender, as compared to sex, is based on behaviour and social and psychological characteristics often associated with 'femininity' and 'masculinity' (Westbrook and Schilt, 2014; Hotine, 2021) that begin during the childhood phase of development and within a particular cultural environment (Robbins and McGowan, 2016). Social development is the aspect that differentiates behaviour between genders, such as the view that refers to men's and women's differences in their social

roles that can create stereotypes (Blakemore et al., 2008). In relation to employment, Bradley (2013) advocates that the deeply ingrained patriarchal values associated with heterosexuality and marriage have also seeped into the workplace, and children are conditioned to associate specific types of work with either gender, learning to associate caregiving responsibilities with women and jobs involving machines/technology with men. This thinking continues to influence career choices through gender stereotypes, societal pressures, and external influences; thus, individuals enter workplaces heavily influenced by gender norms, with established patterns of behaviour (Bradley, 2013). These norms are engrained within the division of labour as a fundamental understanding of feminine and masculine behaviour (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Although gender is a vital way of constructing human social life and identity (Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009; Blakemore et al., 2008), it is, however, argued that individual awareness of one's gender is highly changeable and not a fixed foundation to determine identity (Bradley, 2013). According to Reimann (2004), the term gender symbolises the stereotypical classification of masculinity and femininity in society. Still, the stereotypical view that feminine characteristics are mainly associated with women and masculinity with men have often already formed a socially constructed perspective; normativity which demands both men and women to act based on these orderly roles (Trauth et al. 2016). Although there is no universally applicable definition of what it means to be 'feminine' (Bradley, 2013), it is a social construct that serves as a fundamental division in all societies, an ongoing process and repeating action which varies depending on time, place, and culture (Bradley, 2013; de Padua Carrieri, et al., 2013). Butler (1990) raised questions about the process of constructing gender, particularly when feminist theorists assert that gender is a cultural interpretation of biological sex or is culturally made. She poses questions about the method behind this construction and the possibility for gender to be constructed in alternative ways. Furthermore, she offers inquiry as to where and how this construction occurs. Problematically, idea that gender is simply 'constructed' implies a certain level of determinism, where bodies are seen as passive receivers of an unyielding cultural diktat (Butler, 1990). Instead, gender isn't merely a definite label

for individuals; it's a wide-reaching social phenomenon that shapes everyone's personal experiences across different aspects of life (Bradley, 2013). These constructions exist within hierarchies, forming dominant ideas of femininity and masculinity (de Padua Carrieri, et al., 2013). In other words, individuals, whether men or women are not solely defined by their gender; rather, they are always situated within a specific social context (Mirchandani, 1999).

Gender identification started to change with a more liberal concept about viewing gender as socially variable (not just pertaining to men and women), such as including trans-men and trans-women; the idea is that people can choose their gender according to their identity, which might not necessarily match the sex attributes that they are assigned at birth (Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Westbrook and Schilt, 2014; Westbrook and Saperstein, 2015). Thus, gender and sex are complicated concepts, entangled with “statuses, roles, behaviours and meanings that are socially constructed, historically determined, situationally enacted, and culturally reinforced” (Heller, 2019, pp. 39-40). In other words, gender and sex are an expression of an individual (Wern et al., 2019).

The argument about sex and gender categories has received attention from various perspectives, and the ongoing debate is around the extent to which they are socially constructed. One perspective challenges the traditional categorisation of sex as male and female, arguing that sex should not be binary because there is no particular description of fixed biology. Mainly, hormones are rather complicated and can't be defined solely by biology (Hotine, 2021). Instead, sex involves various social and cultural aspects (Babatunde and Durowaiye, 2015). Stock (2021) argues that there are no specific characteristics that are crucial for being female and male because there is a variation of an individual's characteristics. The misconception and biases about a person's biology have created discrimination and stereotypes, thus influencing the social interpretation of sex (Hotine, 2021). As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, in the context of this study into professional kitchens in Malaysia the term 'female' and 'woman' are used interchangeably. Indeed, here sex and gender are seen as aligned with the constructionist perspective, conceptualised as a complex and influential factor that encompasses the societal constructs and expectations

surrounding femininity and masculinity, impacting career choices and experiences in the culinary field. Further, gender is seen as linked with other intersecting factors such as ethnicity that will be covered in this study, influencing the unique challenges female chefs may face.

### **2.3 Overview of Feminist ‘Waves’**

Gender studies and feminist ideology began in the 1960s, focusing on discrimination (Bem, 1993) alongside the development of women’s studies as academic research in the 1970s (Zaborskis, 2018). Feminism is deeply rooted in women’s thinking; it was said that different women have different needs, and the way women interpret what is the typical ‘women-roles’ also may vary, thus influencing women’s behaviour (Bowden and Mummery, 2014). In understanding feminism, social norms have become the challenges women face throughout their lives; they determine men’s and women’s specific roles and identify the issues surrounding gender equality (Bowden and Mummery, 2014). Feminist thinking has contributed to a more substantial definition in viewing gender differently, where various feminist ideas have proposed different ideologies that aim to support women, examine existing challenges, achieve social changes and organisational equality (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). Feminism goes beyond just understanding men’s and women’s behaviour.

To facilitate an understanding of feminism in this research, there is a need to distinguish the differences between each feminist ‘wave’ to enable a cohesive discussion towards advancing women’s position in this study. It is said that feminist ideology consists of four different waves, highlighting different philosophies to empower women. The first wave originated in the 1850s (MacLaran, 2015), but the peak was reached in the 1900s (Phillips and Cree, 2014), and it highlighted liberal thinking to support women’s rights in their community (Liu et al., 2020). It also emphasised giving equal opportunities to women in politics (such as voting), the economy and that women’s contribution was no different to men. It also involved legislation to protect women and children, enabling women to gain opportunities in education and careers (Cree, 1996, cited in Phillips and Cree, 2014).

The second wave started in the 1960s, lasting in prominence to the 1980s (Phillips and Cree, 2014; MacLaran, 2015). The primary focus was on issues in the workplace, such as career equality (Cavanaugh, 2018), the challenges faced by women in society (Shields, 2008; Schuster, 2017) and targeting a broader group of women (Liu et al., 2020). This movement has been recognised internationally to highlight the concerns of justice, economics, and culture (Dorer and Hipfl, 2013). Women had experienced changes in their career and family lives at this time; hence it can be said that the focus during this wave was also to protect women against domestic violence (Phillips and Cree, 2014), especially within the structure of society (Schuster, 2017).

The third wave has expanded the view to various versions of feminist ideas, urging for equality, equal gender pay, and the importance of educating people on gender problems (Cavanaugh, 2018). According to MacLaran (2015), in the 1990s, feminist ideology faced drastic changes that brought the third wave that highlighted the relationship between multiple controversial factors such as race, class, and ethnicity in addition to gender. MacLaran (2015) also stated that this had a cultural impact on social science studies that questioned different understandings of gender. Because the third wave suggested diversity, it has also been affected by intersectionality - black feminism recognised non-traditional gender thinking and that women should be valued by their unique identity; paved the way towards modern feminist thinking (Schuster, 2017). Snyder (2008) previously stated that this wave urged unity rather than critique and embraced cultural differences.

The concept of intersectionality recognises the uniqueness and the differences of people's identity (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Due to that, women in different ethnic groups may experience different ethnic experiences (Chua et al., 2016). Despite that, third-wave feminists critiqued the ideas of the second wavers and stated that women do not share a similar experience (e.g., personal, social, political) as Chua et al. (2016) mentioned above. But they continued to carry forward the previous waves' concerns with a different approach (Snyder, 2008), and continuous feminist issues have led towards the fourth wave (Phillips and Cree, 2014).

Phillips and Cree (2014) advocate that the awareness of public attention, especially through media, insisted on a new form of feminism which brought about the fourth



wave. This fourth wave is said to have started in 2008, conveying the agenda from the third wave through an online platform (Baumgardner, 2011). Many topics in the fourth wave are closely similar to the previous waves, but it looks forward to solving the unsolved issues about equality, discrimination, and empowering gendered bodies (including men and transgender people), basically by trying to include the lived experiences of the individual (Peroni and Rodak, 2020). Several media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, have become the medium of discussion, which has become more flexible (Phillips and Cree, 2014). Being flexible here is not only to address individual issues but is meant in a broader sense (Peroni and Rodak, 2020). It fits within a modern, contemporary situation, especially with the digital and technology revolution (Fullagar et al., 2019a). This fourth wave was affected by the emerging technology that involves culture, career, and communication that makes feminist agendas more approachable, making the gendered issues more globally relevant, and allowing broader online spaces that encourage debate, engagement, and discussion (Phillips and Cree, 2014; Fullagar et al., 2019a).

Shiva and Kharazmi (2019) mentioned that the social revolution has restored the movement of feminist ideas to ensure that women become more proactive in voicing their opinions or speaking about the challenges they face regarding stereotypes and discrimination. Chamberlain (2016) suggests that the fourth wave enables feminists to be more active by utilising social media with easy access to gain women's support through the internet's rapid reaction. This can be seen through a few social media discussions that created hashtags such as #MeToo, #AskHerMore or #ILookedLikeAnEngineer that gather global attention from women and inspire them to voice out their thoughts (Fullagar et al., 2019a). This feminist wave is still evolving, with the expectation that more issues will be brought up, such as body shaming and sexual harassment, to protect victimised women (Shiva and Kharazmi, 2019).

Fullagar et al. (2019a) have extensively discussed the engagement of fourth wave feminism within post-feminist debates. The authors advocated that the mobile social changes within media culture, especially in online spaces nowadays, need more focus. As it involves more complex experiences, looking into the post-feminist context enables a more extensive discussion of gendered issues in a more contemporary

manner, suited to the current global situation, where women face multiple challenges such as violence, inequality and discrimination (Fullagar et al., 2019a). The primary characterisation of the fourth wave sits in the current web and social media movement, connecting people, and providing new spaces for sharing thoughts (Peroni and Rodak, 2020). In other words, the gendered discussion is made within the current, ongoing global and digitalised trends, positioning gender in a broader socio-cultural setting (Fullagar et al., 2019a).

Nevertheless, the feminism discussion and its exposure in the media has increased the potential for women to be abused (online); in addition to the issues regarding women being openly debated, women can be misinterpreted as being 'too sensitive' (Chamberlain, 2019; Kruschek, 2019). However, it can't be denied that the ongoing digitalised trends have helped to make gendered and feminist discussions more noticeable. To highlight women's voices, especially within an international context was probably more challenging in the previous feminist waves.

Although globalisation has highlighted feminisms in a broader aspect, the complex effort of international involvement remains controversial. That is, the efforts to represent all women have been hindered by problems like eurocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, and racism (Roy, 2016). Western feminism's introduction of its 'modern' ideas to the Global Majority nations through colonialism brought with it attitudes of superiority and imperialism, resulting in a complex relationship between Western feminism and the non-Western world, and failed to acknowledge the culturally specific concepts of 'women's rights' held by women in other parts of the world (Hamid, 2006). Different waves of feminism emerged in various parts of the world in response to specific historical, cultural, and societal contexts, each wave building upon the achievements and challenges of its predecessors. For example, feminist movements in Islamic regions, including Turkey, Egypt, and Iran, began to take shape in the early 1900s, coinciding with similar developments in the Western world; women in these regions started to question their rights, and were partly influenced by Western ideas (Dalaman, 2021). Middle Eastern women's activism started in the early 20th century with anti-colonial movements, and this activism predated the Arab Spring and digital revolution (Tazi, 2021).

The second-wave feminism arrived at the Islamic region about 15-20 years after it started in the West (Dalaman, 2021). Particularly in Turkey, although the movement wasn't strong until the 1980s - initially aiming for rights against gender discrimination, domestic violence, and fostering a new feminist identity - it later shifted its focus to challenging societal norms, unjust laws, and providing critiques of the patriarchal structure (Adi, 2019).

Controversially, the second-wave feminists of the West have often been said to have looked at feminism in other societies as being bounded with outdated traditions and religion, particularly in the Global Majority world where women were perceived as a powerless group, creating a 'feminist cultural divide' (Hamid, 2006). The emergence of political Islam in the Muslim world has aided in reinforcing stereotypes depicting Muslim women as universally oppressed with limited knowledge; Western feminism still struggles to grasp the intricate dynamics of religion, culture, and politics in the Muslim world (Hamid, 2006). Islamic feminism, which emerged in the 1980s, centres on the Quran and Hadith, with a particular emphasis on women's issues among educated, reformist Muslim women living in urban areas who sought to reconcile their Islamic identity with concerns about social, gender, equality, and family dynamics influenced by globalisation and acculturation (Dalaman, 2021).

In relation to the other parts of the world, while looking at the East Asia context as an example, Lukyantseva (2023) outlined that the second wave of feminism in Japan was sparked by protests against the Vietnam War and the US-Japan Security Treaty, marking the birth of modern feminism in the country. The author states that for the first time in Japanese history, there was emphasis on the need to reassess women's roles and rights in society, whereby in Imperial Japan women had financially restricted, isolated, and prevented from political involvement or organisation. In similarity to Japan, Malaysia also experienced a concordant feminist wave. Ariffin (1999) in her study has explicitly outlined the history of feminism in Malaysia. She has suggested at the beginning of the feminist wave in the country, the meaning behind Malaysian 'feminism' specifically is quite unclear; the main early focus of the movement in the country was to address many broad issues faced by women (violence, oppression). The author also contends that during the process of gaining independence from the

British, women actively participated in the country's political parties, however, still, the involvement of Malaysian women including in the economic sector is limited. Women in Malaysia, continue to face the stereotypes of what their social and employment roles should be, and this is strongly associated with the patriarchal norms which still prevail in the country. Having said that, although there are groups of women in Malaysia that strive to bring forward women's issues, there are still women who are more cautious in voicing their opinions or referring to themselves as feminists, mainly to avoid them from appearing to be too 'westernised' (Ariffin, 1999).

The emergence of third-wave Arab cyberfeminists, like women of colour in the West, sees an emphasis on the importance of intersectionality becoming more important (Tazi and Oumlil, 2020). This is also where Malaysian women from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) in the country are more willing to challenge Malaysia's patriarchal system and its treatment of women (Ariffin, 1999). In the 1990s, women's rights activists in Egypt worked to address challenges like female genital mutilation, yet the initiatives led by NGOs had limited influence on the societies they aimed to transform (Hamid, 2006). During this time, the concept of Islamic feminism emerged, broadening the horizons of feminist interpretations and actions, although it also sparked discussions about the alignment of Islam and feminism (Dalaman, 2021).

Analysis also shows that fourth-wave feminists in the West and Arab cyberfeminists share similar interactions and interests, not just focused on women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: they also care about global women's issues (Tazi and Oumlil, 2020). The revival of Arab women's activism focused on challenging authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring, rather than colonial rule, marking a notable advancement towards gender equality with the use of new media technologies (Tazi, 2021). However, Tazi (2021) further suggests that Islamic parties came to power in many Arab states for the first time during the Arab Spring, and they were not supportive of women's social, political, and legal rights with new forms of violence emerging. Despite that, the use of digital technologies to fight against authoritarianism gave women more public presence, and improved their social status, allowing them to advance their rights (Tazi, 2021). Women in the Arab region used online activism, like the #women2drive campaign in Saudi Arabia to show their agency, sparking a new

era for Arab women's activism which challenged the perception that Arab women are powerless (Tazi and Oumlil, 2020). The disparity of the feminist waves across the globe shows that Western feminists often overlook the experiences and challenges faced by women in other countries; the true problems faced by women in 'other' places are often not understood (Dalaman, 2021). This has also shaped how and why Malaysian women avoid the label 'feminist' because it's often seen as a foreign concept, brought from the West, mainly by Western white women, and thought not to apply to local circumstances, with the cultural and religious context having profoundly influenced the way the women's movements has evolved in the country (Ariffin, 1999).

The different feminist waves provide an important context for understanding women's positionalities within their respective societies, especially the historical and continuous issues and challenges affecting women. Such sensitivities allow for a better understanding of the ways discussions about gender have persisted, especially in the Malaysian context of career experiences in professional kitchens for female chefs that might create issues such as inequality, leadership, and work-life balance. In addition to that, the introduction of feminist waves and the issues addressed can help to direct this study in recognising the arguments and narrative career experiences for Malaysian women in a professional kitchen.

The discussions above, charting and exploring the different waves of feminist politics, each have theoretical perspectives to support them. Furthermore, all the various theoretical feminist perspectives, including feminist standpoint theory, empiricism, and postmodernism, share a common belief that current knowledge and theories are flawed, requiring changes to be more inclusive with the aim to reframe issues related to patriarchy, and to advance feminist principles (Perry, 1994). The initial wave, known as feminist empiricism or liberal feminism, centred on women's legal rights and voting, arising from the industrial society and the strand of liberal political at the time (Pritchard, 2014), challenges the traditional empiricism (Harding, 1986).

Feminist standpoint theory emphasises the significance of considering power dynamics as a distinct barrier in the pursuit of scientific knowledge which it is not only about one's gender but also social positions and class (Gurung, 2020). It forms a distinct feminist idea rooted in the theory of gendered activities and social experiences

(Harding, 1986). According to Aitchison (2005b), standpoint feminism encompasses various standpoints like Marxist feminism, socialist and radical feminism, each emphasizing different power dynamics in society. The author further explained that Marxist feminism links gender relations to economic relations and class, while socialist feminism identifies a dual system of oppression involving both patriarchy and capitalism. This means that standpoint feminism theory explores the idea of multiple truths from various social and political conditions, to understand the perceptions of individuals who have their own unique viewpoints shaped by their societal position (Krane, 2001). In other words, these feminists believe that addressing gender-based power imbalances call for various social perspectives (Pritchard, 2014); furthermore it values the experiences of those labelled as 'others' (Krane, 2001).

Post-structural feminism introduces gender as a crucial element that questions the dominance of masculinity in shaping the understanding of reality, and emphasises the interaction of power, knowledge, and discourses, in gender relations (Mquirmi, 2020). Two key concepts in poststructuralism have greatly influenced feminist thinking (Pierce, 2010). Pierce contended that firstly, poststructuralism views reality and knowledge as socially created, arguing that people collectively agree on what reality is, and it is a norm for a dominant belief. Pierce also mentions that poststructuralism highlights how certain groups are considered superior, especially those in power. Poststructuralism seeks to challenge these dominant beliefs. Secondly, poststructuralism rejects the concept of essentialism, which says there's an essential identity that remains the same over time. Instead, identity is seen as shaped by one's position in a particular context. Feminist poststructuralism doesn't just note differences between men and women, but seeks to expand options, break down the fixed ideas of 'male' and 'female,' and explore subjectivities that don't fit into those categories through seeing power as something shaped by language and context (Gannon and Davies, 2005). Postcolonial feminists emphasise the cultural diversity among women and the effects of colonialism on gender. Postcolonial feminism is consistent with poststructuralism in that it rejects the concept of one truth, which has been important in Western philosophy, showing how ideology and cultural connections shape gender relations (Aitchison, 2005b).

## **2.4 The Intersectionality of Gender and Ethnicity**

There is no doubt that the later feminist waves have attempted to highlight women's issues in various social contexts, including ethnicity. Race and ethnicity, were discussed as bearing a close relationship to the idea of intersectionality. Hence before the discussion of intersectionality is brought forward, there is a need to define the meaning of it within the idea of social construct, especially in relation to gender. Research has described intersectionality in two definitions. Either it is a social classification that is correlated with inequality, or it is related to the individual's identity (Else-Quest and Hyde, 2016). Race has been referred to as a unique physical or biological characteristic of humankind, while ethnicity is referred to as the representation of cultural identity, nationality, language, and religious belief that is correlated with the ideas of intersectionality, important in constructing human lived experiences (Frable, 1997; Nittle, 2020; Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Blakemore, 2019). According to Collins (2015, pp.2), "race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability and age" are socially constructed categories, and they intersect. This means all the factors mentioned by Collins will influence one another, furthermore, they are primarily associated with social inequalities.

Intersectionality has been discussed openly in the feminist discussion since the 1970s, and research has always stressed the importance of highlighting the issues of gender, ethnicity, and class in practical and theoretical understanding (Vuola, 2017). Intersectionality includes discussions of fairness, equality, and the stigma of being a 'woman', apart from other discussions about discrimination as the main feminist interest (Dorer and Hipfl, 2013; Dhawan and Castro Varela, 2016). Gender studies also started to include various aspects (e.g., class, race), mainly because identities were socially constructed, not to mention these playing an important role in society (Essers et al., 2010; Arifeen and Gatrell, 2013; Dorer and Hipfl, 2013; Robbins and McGowan, 2016). The development of gender identity is viewed as a process that includes ethnicity and race, making gender discussions more complex, as illustrated in the concept of intersectionality, which influences people's behaviour (Hoffman, 2006; Acker, 2012; Smith et al., 2019).

The intersection of gender and race/ethnicity originated from the studies of women of colour and multi-racial feminism theory (Browne and Misra, 2003). Crenshaw (1991) suggested the idea of intersectionality to describe Black women's needs that emerge from the issues of inequalities and oppression (Shields, 2008). In fact, intersectionality was undervalued before Crenshaw's discoveries (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality as propounded by Crenshaw includes gender, race and class, to enhance better identification of issues such as violence against women of colour especially in various social contexts (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; Collins, 2015). Crenshaw's ideology was that issues of women and race/ethnicity are very complex and could not be understood by a single explanation, and thus needed to be further explored (Mizrahi and Greenawalt, 2017) to help to describe how a person endures various discrimination and injustice (Sang, 2018). Although the initial focus was on Black women's concerns, especially surrounding social injustice, a more contemporary approach has been taken from this original idea (Collins, 2015). A more modern approach is to include women from other minority ethnic groups and create a more comprehensive discussion of social issues or oppression concerns (McBride et al., 2015). In other words, the initial purpose of intersectionality has been broadened.

Studies by intersectional researchers suggest that gender is shaped by other social identities (Shields, 2008; Robbins and McGowan, 2016). In a social context that forms a discriminatory environment, an individual will face different types of discrimination because of their gender *and* ethnic background (Smith et al., 2019). Hazari et al. (2013) suggested that more gender-ethnic intersectionality research should be conducted as it can be challenging to understand women's unique perspectives without it. Many feminists also urge an investigation of the experiences among identities, mainly from the intersection of gender and ethnicity, by considering people's differences, and this must be included when studying gender (Shields, 2008; Vuola, 2017).

The gender-stereotypical thinking strongly embedded in a particular society, especially in viewing how men and women should behave according to their sex and gender traits, creates difficulties, especially for women, where their particular intersecting identity can become more problematic (Smith et al., 2019). Not only that, but because



women in different ethnic groups probably face different ethnic challenges or situation, investigation of the intersection of gender and ethnicity from a multiracial viewpoint, such as involving a wider ethnic group, must be established (Browne and Misra, 2003; Shields, 2008; Kim and O'Brien, 2018; Mooney, 2020). In fact, it is contended that there is a lack of understanding beyond the western context of intersectionality, as the west has been the location of many studies; it is possible that intersectionality is perceived differently in other places (Collins, 2015).

The division of social class based on gender, ethnic group, and age within a community and society is also evidenced; thus, class will affect a person's experiences and opportunities (Warner and Brown, 2011; Warner and Shields, 2013; Chua et al., 2016; Rosette et al., 2018) especially if a particular ethnic group is strongly associated with a certain social class. Hoskin et al. (2017) agree that intersectionality provides a framework for an individual's social development and discrimination can affect an individual's perception of themselves (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020a). Social class, gender, and ethnicity are explicitly related, and the relationship is complicated, especially within a social and economic context (Lundy-Wagner, 2012; Warner and Shields, 2013) influenced by different identities or ethnic groups which are closely linked to stereotypes (Mizrahi and Greenawalt, 2017; Rosette et al., 2018).

Warner and Shields (2013) also suggested that intersectionality comprises two-levels; personal and socio-structural. It influences a person's social experience at a personal level, where their identity could be an advantage or not on a socio-cultural level. This mainly because social discrimination involves not only gender but also ethnicity (Dhawan and Castro Varela, 2016). Thus, the effort to achieve equality must also focus on vulnerable social groups such as women or those from certain ethnic groups (Doherty, 2004). In fact, women potentially face worst discriminative situation based on their gender and ethnicity (Chua et al., 2016), with many more possible types of discrimination that arises from the social environment, such as class or religion, that have not been studied adequately from a feminist point of view (Dhawan and Castro Varela, 2016). Because of the dynamic nature of intersectionality as a concept, other similar social constructs can be studied as being intersecting, such as family, employment, and identity (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality reflects people's lived

experiences because no one single identity can be used to describe how a person are viewed in a social context; it varies from person to person (Shields, 2008). In other words, more discussion can be unpacked when it comes to intersectionality.

Postcolonial feminism and intersectionality are closely related in that they both recognise and analyse the complex ways in which multiple dimensions intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. The word 'postcolonial' refers to all cultures impacted by modern imperial movements and means that those who fight for gender equality also work to break down the structures of empire and colonialism (Dube, 2020). Since imperialism often uses factors like race, gender, age, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and culture to support domination, a postcolonial feminist approach considers all these factors together (Dube, 2020). However, the main conflict between postcolonialism and feminism revolves around the resistance strategy, especially in relation to the cultures of the colonised: since feminism was largely promoted from Western countries, it was hard to separate it from appearing to support the colonisers (Dube, 2020). Postcolonial feminist perspectives reveal the enduring impact of colonial legacies on marginalised individuals across different regions and emphasise the need to examine the intricate interplay of social injustices that sustain gender and racial disparities worldwide (Mirza, 2009).

As well as being aligned with postcolonial feminisms, the attention to the study of intersectionality has created a more cohesive and dynamic discussion that covers multiple academic contexts such as gender, culture, media, humanities, policy, education and many more (Collins, 2015). For example, research by Sang (2018) aimed at establishing an understanding of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and feminist ideas in the work experience of women in academia; in exploring social justice and weight stigma for women across different ethnic groups (Himmelstein et al., 2017); stereotypes for business immigrants (Essers et al., 2010; Gregoriou, 2013); communication challenges for women from an ethnic group (Wang, 2019) and the intersection of gender-ethnicity in emotional expression (Monroy et al., 2022). The diversity of the above studies shows how intersectionality can be viewed differently as it is socially constructed (Collins, 2015; Monroy et al., 2022). Hence, the role of ethnicity in influencing women's careers should be investigated further, especially in a

Malaysian context where there is significant ethnic diversity. Intersectionality, in the context of this thesis is conceptualised as a multidimensional context that identifies the complex relationship of different factors that may shape the careers and lived experiences of women in the culinary profession. It allows for further investigation of a female chef's experiences that may not be defined solely by her gender but also can be influenced by intersecting factor such as ethnicity. This approach aims to uncover the unique narrative within career experiences faced by female chefs in Malaysia, considering the various ways in which gender and ethnicity intersect to shape their career, perceptions, and behaviour.

#### **2.4.1 Intersectionality and Careers**

Gender and ethnicity as a part of can be seen as an important contribution towards the social context of a career, associated with stereotypes, discrimination and self-efficacy (Frable, 1997; Atewologun and Singh, 2010). Difficulties for women might arise from discrimination based on gender, difficulties in communicating, being in a male-dominated environment, and work-life balance (Acker, 2012; Wang, 2019). Adib and Guerrier (2003) advocate that although gender itself may be the main reference in gender research, it is significantly correlated with other identity factors, especially race, ethnicity, and class regarding women's careers, which refers to the concept of intersectionality discussed above. The intersectional approach helps understand the relationship between career and ethnicity for women, such as the issues of salary, discrimination, and migration that construct career experiences (Browne and Misra, 2003). It also allows further exploration of the disadvantages faced by individuals and how inequalities pose challenges in the workplace (de los Reyes, 2017; Tariq and Syed, 2018).

Dahl and Krog (2018) advocate that the relationship between gender and ethnicity might differ in various career contexts. Understanding intersectionality in women's experiences will assist in determining how women are able to progress further in their careers (Essers et al., 2010), especially as gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, and other prominent identities can have an impact on a person's life and experiences (Mizrahi and Greenawalt, 2017). Ethnic practices in the social context seem to be embedded in the gendered career environment, this can be seen as a barrier towards

women, especially those from a particular ethnic minority (Wang, 2019). It is advocated that the combination of ethnic and gendered challenges may affect women's commitment and satisfaction about their jobs and increase the turnover rate (Rosette et al. 2018). Intersectionality also may impact hiring decisions, especially when it is related to recruitment, or it can happen across career stages (Deros and Pepermans, 2019). This is supported by Dahl and Krog (2018) in that discrimination based on ethnicity could happen as early as recognition of a person's name that describes their ethnic identity, and it could happen across career experiences. It also includes career opportunities for some ethnic groups that might face discrimination or receive a lack of support (Chua et al., 2016).

It has also been predicted that gender and ethnicity impact social development in a career that may lead to inequality (Browne and Misra, 2003). It is emphasised that intersectionality portrays an image of inequality in terms of experiences and organisational structures (Warner and Shields, 2013). Gender stereotypes possibly affect women's chances of employment and the availability of support for them, in addition to the influence of their ethnicity, that possibly makes the situation worse (Rosette et al., 2018; Wang, 2019). Incorporating intersectionality in studying employment has been one of the crucial concepts that unpacks various possible social inequalities, such as segregation in the workplace and work-life balance (Collins, 2015). This can be seen as a central focus in different career discussions, such as for immigrants (Flippen, 2014; Netto et al., 2020) and in a broader career context, such as in medicine (Fleming et al., 2022) or in counselling (Adamson and Johansson, 2016) but such research it is still considered limited towards individuals' specific careers. This means further studies are needed to unpack the inequality or challenges in a career, from the perspective of intersectionality.

The informal inequalities in work that have often been overlooked create issues in the workplace. Thus, incorporating intersectionality will help to develop more extensive studies in looking at issues of discrimination between people with different identities (de los Reyes, 2017) in a global and diverse workplace (Rodriguez et al., 2016). As discussed, intersectionality includes various identities, and this research will be focusing on gender and ethnicity, mainly as Malaysia is the main context for this

research with significant ethnic diversity which intersectionality studies is still underexplored. Not only will an intersectional lens help to unpack women's lived experiences, but it will highlight any differences that individuals might have in their employment contexts (Mooney, 2016).

## **2.5 Gender and Careers**

The development of feminist studies has created more awareness of the importance of gender equality, such as in career opportunities, despite the continued stereotypical thinking that women should commit to families, as compared to men who are still often viewed as breadwinners (Bowden and Mummery, 2014). The historical role of women in employment has been outlined in the previous chapter, looking at how the division of labour especially in the social context, has contributed to women's position in the workplace today. Acker (1990) posits that there is an extensive study on women and careers, but these studies are still lacking in a systemic feminist theoretical discussion. Gender and organisation discussions such as about the job roles, income inequality, culture, identity, and supportive work environments are vital when looking at women's careers, as the concept of a 'job' itself was, historically, seen as a gendered idea due to the notion of gender-based work division (Acker, 1990). Feminist and gender studies embody the research context in career organisation (Dorer and Hipfl, 2013; Grosser and Moon, 2019) and the purpose of gender studies is to bring multiple gender issues to more prominence, and to bring realistic views towards gender concerns regarding various contexts such as career, culture, health and possibly many more (Zaborskis, 2018).

The study of gender in organisational settings started with the psychological studies on feminine and masculine behaviour in the workplace that is correlated with gender stereotypes which are particular to a community or society (Rosette et al. 2018). Gender and work have often been said to involve a person's emotions, actions, identity, masculinity and femininity, which means an organisation is always gendered because many factors of gender are situated in an organisation (Acker, 1990). In fact, careers are gendered, mainly because job allocation and communication styles are easily divided into masculine and feminine attributes and behaviour, where the stereotypes of women's and men's jobs are continuously embedded in the

organisation (Acker, 1990; 2012; Dashper 2019). This is supported by Chua et al. (2016), that women are likely to hold positions in the services sector which are often linked to feminine skills, thus making gender a prominent factor in job assignments.

Even though not viewing women based on gender when it comes to their careers can be helpful, there will be more career barriers for women progressing towards career goals (Doherty, 2004). Acker (1990) suggests that there is a need to introduce a systematic discussion of gender and career in organisational contexts because most gendered issues happen based on gender discrimination in terms of positions, pay inequality, and the working environment, underpinned by stereotypes of masculine and feminine attributes. This means discussing gender and career is more complex especially when it relates to a socially constructed situation.

Gender equality in the workplace is no longer a new area of concern in the media and academic research. As more effort and awareness from the public was seen to support gender equality, this agenda benefitted women in employment. With more women joining the workplace, the traditional roles of women in taking care of families have changed, which brings further debate on the work-life balance and commitment to family responsibilities (Bowden and Mummery, 2014). The most prominent discussion has often been about women occupying the top positions in the career ladder, 'glass ceiling' positions, often prohibited to women by stereotypical thinking of women usually occupying lower-level job positions that do not need specific skills (Acker, 1990). Moreover, Acker (1990) further advocated that childcare often demanded women's commitment at home rather than them focusing on their careers. The career opportunities open to women have traditionally been driven by typical feminine skills regarding suitable roles for women, and even though women may possess high qualifications (education, career position), they may still be burdened by family commitment (Chua et al., 2016).

Looking at women's careers is not only about leadership, work-life balance or stereotypes but involves wider barriers or challenges for women in employment. The gendered thinking, social norms, roles, and identities which are closely related to women's careers (Acker, 1990; Grosser and Moon, 2019), are essential to explore, thus, in-depth investigation into women in specific careers must be established further.

With research about women in employment increasingly the focus across academic disciplines, it is necessary to also consider this within the specific context of the hospitality and tourism industries, given the importance of these sectors to our contemporary social world. The next section will focus on these sectors and specifically on women in professional kitchens.

## **2.6 Gender and Careers in the Hospitality and Tourism Industries**

The culinary sector, and within this the professional kitchen, are closely related to food and beverage services and play an essential role in hospitality and tourism. Thus, there is a need to discuss how gender is positioned in these industries. Gender studies began to emerge in leisure studies in the late 1970s and expanded to different feminist-gender perspectives through broader disciplines in the 1990s (Aitchison, 2005a). Research by Swain (1995) shows that gender research in tourism and hospitality has been categorised into five different stages: the absence of women in the sector; strategies to increase women's involvement; attention to the differences between genders; incorporating feminist ideology in the industry; and enhancing gender knowledge. Nevertheless, the challenge for women is that they often are at a lower level of tourism and hospitality employment. Research on this is still underdeveloped, even though the focus on female leadership in tourism has seen to have been given more attention in the recent years (Mooney, 2020).

As with the broader issues of women in employment, discussed above, a career in the hospitality and tourism sector is said to be gendered (Kogovsek and Kogovsek, 2015; Dashper, 2019). Being a woman has become an instant barrier that obstructs career advancement, and women are often viewed as not having the right attributes to succeed in their careers (Dashper, 2019). Although women seem to contribute fairly broadly to the industry, gender discrimination still strongly exists (Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). Women are still being viewed based on their gender and ethnicity which possibly diminishes their job opportunities and become career barriers for women in tourism and hospitality organisations, especially in top-level positions (Aitchison, 2005a; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Pizam, 2017; Díaz-Carrión and Vizcaino-Suárez, 2019; Hutchings et al., 2020).

Women are often viewed as not competent enough to perform in the industry, influencing their own perception about their capabilities and chances for career success (Burke et al., 2008). Even if women are employed in the industry, they still seem to occupy lower-status jobs, with limited career opportunities (Adib and Guerrier, 2003). In fact, the stereotypical jobs that are said to be suitable for women are still strongly embedded in the industries, especially tasks related to domestic roles (Cole and Ferguson, 2015; Gebbels et al., 2020). Thus, women feel demotivated to progress further in their careers and this influences their job satisfaction, which may lead to a lack of motivation to perform well (Kara et al., 2012; Dashper, 2019). Despite the highly gendered nature of the hospitality and tourism industry, it is still a significant career path for women (Morgan and Pritchard, 2019).

The hospitality and tourism industry cannot be separated from its demanding work commitment, and it involves hiring individuals from different backgrounds to suit the nature of global tourism (Suhairom et al., 2019). The core service provision of the contemporary hospitality and tourism business is to deal with customers from all across the world; accordingly, the industry needs to employ more employees from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Doherty, 2004; Manoharan et al., 2014; Manoharan and Singal, 2017). The ethnic identity of an employee is a crucial factor in recruitment, and an ethnically diverse environment helps to increase customer satisfaction and leads to a more diverse working culture (Manoharan et al., 2014; Gajjar and Okumus, 2018; Haldorai et al., 2019).

Particularly in the hospitality context, intersectionality studies have been extensively discussed across several areas. The study by Mooney et al., (2017) looked at the intersection between gender, age and ethnicity for hotel workers for both men and women and demonstrated that hotel careers are significantly gendered but particularly cause career failure for women from a specific ethnic group. Other studies have also seen to examine intersectionality between various identities (e.g., gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture) in travelling activities (Gao and Kerstetter, 2016; Yang et al., 2018; Kong and Zhu, 2021), hospitality education (Wen and Madera, 2013), hospitality business (Altinay, 2010), and in many tourism related topics (e.g., Cole, 2017; Mooney, 2018; Chambers, 2020; 2022).



From the research done on intersectionality in tourism-hospitality contexts, there is general consensus that there are many possible intersections in society that will influence how people respond to a certain situation and behave. However, in the context of careers, there is still limited understanding of the effects of the intersection between gender and ethnicity (Kim and O'Brien, 2018). Thus, employing intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in this research allows for an in-depth insight into the study of women's careers, especially in Malaysia as a multi-ethnic developing-world context. Including different ethnic groups in one study enables more voices to be heard on the role of ethnicity in the careers of women working in professional kitchens.

The hospitality and tourism industries have a poor career environment, low salaries, and inadequate career opportunities; moving up the career ladder takes longer, and people may change their careers at some point (Poulston, 2009; Mooney et al., 2016; Cassel et al., 2018). The employees in these industries seem to face great stress, and emotional challenges such as job conflicts and these stressors affect their career commitment (Pizam, 2004; Chu et al., 2012; Kasa and Hassan, 2019). Research demonstrates that careers in these industries demand a high level of commitment to long working hours (Dashper, 2013; Mooney et al., 2017). This is probably worse for women because of the gendered segregation and masculine organisational structures which result in a loss of skilled women in these industries, not to mention the after-effects of such structures towards their motivation (Kogovsek and Kogovsek, 2015). Mooney et al. (2016) advocate that careers in this industry are lacking employees' enthusiasm, commitment, and are facing a high turnover rate. To ensure employees can engage further with their work and career, the need to practice equality, empowerment and better working conditions is significant (Liu et al., 2017).

Studying how men are positioned within the context of career, masculinity, and gender stereotypes is also crucial for advancing gender equity and understanding the multifaceted dynamics of workplace and societal expectations. The 'breadwinner' norm is so powerful that it combines men's responsibility for economic and social status, making men feel significant societal pressure to embody this ideal (Bridges et al., 2020). Although men seem to benefit specifically from masculinity, they also often

face the pressure in the context of what is called the 'glass escalator' – that is to shift into managerial positions or high-status roles that are considered masculine (Seeley, 2018). Men expect a more significant boost in their career self-expectations especially when they don't face work-family conflict and they are expected to conform to the 'ideal' worker norm (Coron and Garbe, 2023). The connection between masculinity, work, and career also is maintained through interactions in the workplace, particularly in male-dominated professions (Bridges et al., 2020). The latter authors further contend that this relationship involves the impact of job segregation by gender, the influence of the breadwinner norm, the devaluation of femininity, and the existence of masculine cultures in the workplace. It will be recalled from Chapter One that in the context of hospitality workplaces, even the terminology used to refer to those who work in professional kitchens is gendered with the term chef seen as referring primarily to men and associated with masculine qualities while the term cook is considered to refer to women and associated with feminine qualities. This kind of dualism between masculine (a male chef existing in the public sphere of the professional kitchen) and feminine (a female cook normally existing in the private domestic sphere) has implications for both men and women. That is, men actively try to display their masculinity to counter perceived threats, while women find themselves walking a tightrope between 'performing' masculinity and femininity in their professional roles (Bloksgaard, 2011).

However, there is limited research on how men's career choices and professionalisation are influenced by their experiences (Ljunggren and Eidevald, 2023). For example, a study by Batnitzky et al. (2008) on men who come from the Indian middle-class shows that their careers were influenced by various factors that represent the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and social class, especially in the hospitality sector where the industry is both gendered and class-based, resulting in a predominantly male and middle-class workforce.

But still, research shows that men, in general, enjoy some benefits from male privilege, perpetuating the idea that masculinity is superior to femininity in a hierarchical, binary gender system. However, factors like race, class, and sexuality also could affect how

much privilege a particular man can experience in a situation (Seeley, 2018). Ultimately, masculinity is entangled with work and occupations in many ways, and the link between masculinity, work, and career is a crucial aspect of understanding gender inequality (Bridges et al., 2020).

The hospitality context in this research is closely related to food and beverage services including the professional kitchen. As outlined in Chapter One, the gendered division of labour has shaped women's involvement in the professional kitchen. A chef plays an important role in the hospitality sector in providing food services (Aguirre and Andrade, 2013). Suhairom et al. (2019) advocate that besides cooking, a chef's career is a representation of skills and behaviour, however, the research pertaining to this culinary profession is still minimal, thus exploring the chef's career as part of the hospitality industry is important. Furthermore, kitchen job tasks are also regarded as gendered (Dashper, 2019). Studies have focused on the barriers for female chefs and have questioned their capabilities to succeed in chef careers, especially in the male-dominated kitchen environment (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020b). It is often discussed that women have always been viewed as suitable to work in a career that matches their domestic roles, with them cooking at home or being cooks rather than chefs in professional kitchens, as compared to men who can build a career at a more professional level (Swinbank, 2002). Gender stereotypes that happen in the kitchen seem to be salient as this happens across cultures, suggesting that women are only suitable in domestic roles rather than in the professional kitchen (Jeffrey et al., 2018). Research by Albors-Garrigos et al. (2020a) focuses on investigating gender discrimination in careers in the culinary sector and finds that female chefs in the kitchen also faced gender-ethnic discrimination. This suggests that gender and ethnicity do have an impact on the careers of chefs especially, at the managerial level, and are significant factors of discrimination (Adib and Guerrier, 2003).

The lack of mentoring support has also become a salient barrier to women's career advancement in this industry (Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018). This is because the importance of mentoring support and gender equality awareness is said to be advantageous to promote career opportunities (Jeffrey et al., 2018). Many studies

have highlighted the strategies to help women in the hospitality industry overcome career barriers, however, they still seem to be lacking (Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018) especially in terms of the practicality. It is known that various direct or indirect factors can be the cause of the limited involvement of women in the industry such as marriage, childcare, and gender stereotypes, especially the perception that the work does not align with family commitment (Kara et al., 2012). Research by Jeffrey et al. (2018) stated that a lack of knowledge about career opportunities for women in the professional kitchen and the culinary sector is evidenced, in addition to a lack of knowledge about gender stereotypes in the kitchen that must be explored from the culinary education stage. This is further advocated by Jeffrey et al. (2018) in that the industry knowledge within hospitality-tourism education must be elevated to encourage women in their future career endeavours while further research should focus on the career decision of female chefs especially in relation to gender equality and empowerment. This must align with better career planning and equal opportunities for women in hospitality and tourism and requires strong support by relevant organisations (Burke et al., 2008).

Research has shown how gender studies has emerged in the context of hospitality and tourism. Some of the early research such as that by Swain (1995) suggests that the development of hospitality and tourism has been influenced by gender, considering identity and behaviours. Generally, it can be said that hospitality-tourism research has improved in many ways by including modern feminist thinking, and social and gender equality, thus making gender research in this area more diverse (Díaz-Carrión and Vizcaino-Suárez, 2019). Chambers et al. (2017) also noted that the utilisation of feminist ideology in tourism research will help to confront patriarchal beliefs that have disadvantaged women, while making changes to the gendered academic career through collaborating with various study fields.

Research has increasingly focused on gender in tourism studies, associated with the issues brought up in the previous three feminist waves (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015). Most denotes that research about women's careers in the hospitality sector has mostly evolved around the workplace context, where the most salient barriers towards women's career progression are evidenced (Gebbers et al., 2020). Remington and

Kitterlin-Lynch (2018) agree that gender research in the hospitality and tourism context is developing, with focus on low wages, limited career advancement, career opportunities, the lack of training support and work-life balance that are real challenges to women in the industry that widen the gender gap. Gender research in tourism and hospitality has also highlighted multiple gendered topics such as career position, progress and leadership (Kogovsek and Kogovsek, 2015; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Dashper, 2019; Denizci et al., 2019a; 2019b; Gebbels et al., 2020; Mooney, 2020; Gerged et al., 2022), academic research and education (Small et al., 2017; Koseoglu et al., 2019; Neil, 2020) and travel experiences (Pereira and Silva, 2018; Simour, 2020; Douglas and Barrett, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2022). Even though attention towards gender and women in hospitality and tourism covers various topics, more in-depth exploration is needed to understand the career experiences of ethnically diverse women in the culinary profession, which is seldom explored.

Both structure and agency also shape and are influenced by individuals' social surroundings (Garbe and Duberley, 2019). Structure means the rules and resources that are interconnected that keeps a social system going (Giddens, 1984); in other words, it involves social, cultural, and organisational factors that influence or may constrain the choices and opportunities available to female chefs such as societal gender norms, stereotypes and the hierarchical organisation of professional kitchens. According to Carvalho et al. (2018a), structure could also mean family, household responsibilities, gender role expectation, or any external structure that influence women's ability to take individual action and make choices. Agency means the effectiveness of people's actions (Sewell, 1992), or an individual's capacity to make choices and take actions, meaning that female chefs use agency when they make choices about their career in many ways. People can use their agency to navigate, question, and change their situations, navigating and impacting factors like gender and social class (Hammarstrom et al., 2015). As women have the ability to make choices (agency), they can decide to act differently from their expected roles and duties, either by following expected roles, modifying or rejecting them, or creating new roles and duties that suit them personally (Afiouni and Karam, 2014).

In a different area of work to culinary, research on women in the Bangladeshi technology industry also found out that their career challenges come from structures (traditional social norms) rather than their agency, in making choices that align with their personal values and career goals (Saifuddin et al., 2022). Despite the constraints imposed by established gender norms in family and societal contexts (structures), women exercised individual agency to navigate and sustain their careers in this context (Saifuddin et al., 2022). Furthermore, Afiouni and Karam's (2014) study on women in the Arab Middle East shows that their career success is localised (via sociocultural norms and family) and flexible, shaped by both structures and agency. Despite facing similar societal expectations, women adapt different strategies to success, thus emphasising the necessity of studying both structures and agency, instead of focusing on one or the other (Afiouni and Karam, 2014).

In other words, female chefs exercise agency when they make choices about their careers, and when they navigate challenges and opportunities in their careers; structure might include factors such as societal gender norms, industry stereotypes, and the hierarchical organisation of professional kitchens. The interaction between agency and structure in the career of a female chef is complex. This is because while women have the ability to make choices and pursue a career, they also operate within a context that impacts their career experiences and perceptions. For example, a female chef may have the agency to choose a particular culinary domain but might encounter structural obstacles in a male-dominated kitchen environment. Understanding this dynamic can help us to recognise the challenges women in the culinary field may face and the determination they demonstrate in navigating their careers while working within the structural constraints that exist.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter has offered a theoretical overview of gender and the feminist movements to establish an understanding of gender concepts that support the research direction and provide better understanding of how gender affects women's careers and the relevancy of it in the hospitality and tourism context. Another important discussion that emerges from the area of gender studies is the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity that was highlighted in the discussion of the feminist waves, especially in

relation to how these factors influence women's careers. It can be concluded that the feminist waves have highlighted various gender issues that are increasingly significant in this current time. The ongoing modernisation of media and technology has resulted in women's opinions and experiences becoming even more prominent. As gender is a crucial factor in constructing a person's life, identity and career, there is a need to further understand the role of gender in the career of female chefs. The intersectionality between gender and ethnicity also has a great influence on one's career, suggesting that women are greatly influenced by these two social aspects of life, and thus the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity is a central focus of this study.

The notion of a 'job' itself is also gendered, mainly through the classification of suitable male or female jobs and stereotypical masculine and feminine skills; this is also reflected in careers in hospitality and tourism. This, in turn, impacts women's career opportunities in these industries, which is correlated with work-life balance, discrimination, and organisational structure. In fact, as food and beverage services play an important part of tourism-hospitality businesses, female chefs face greater career barriers that might affect their career experiences. In addition, it is important to note that with the notion that gender is socially constructed, women possibly have different gender-related career experiences, especially in relation to their ethnicity. Thus, this further supports the significance of this study which explores the career experiences of female chefs from different ethnic groups in Malaysia. With the continuous effort to support career equality and opportunities, the establishment of new understanding about women's positions as professional chefs can contribute to the women's career experiences literature. The following chapter outlines the underpinning theories that correlate with gender, careers and behaviour in order to illustrate how a person's career is constructed. This is an important aspect of the direction of this research which seeks to examine the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia.

## **Chapter 3 The Underpinning Theories of Gender, Career and Behaviour**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews theories concerning gender, behaviour, and careers. In the previous Chapter Two, the discussion focused on the meaning of gender, the feminist waves, gender intersectionality and careers, importantly including within the context of hospitality and tourism. The purpose of the current chapter is to establish in more detail the theories that will help shape the research direction in understanding different perspectives of gender, behaviour, and careers. To begin, this chapter explores Gender Schema theory that is developed through personality and attitude to aid in the discussion of gender-based behaviour. To investigate the career experiences of female chefs, a discussion of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Self-Efficacy follows, mainly to understand the behaviour of a person from a social perspective. Finally, Career Construction theory is explored, to further investigate how a career is constructed; this theory is then adapted to the female chefs' career. A theoretical framework for the thesis is then developed based on the theories mentioned. While careers are discussed as important in a social context and for identity, careers also affect a person's life and behaviour (Blustein, 2017). Thus, this chapter serves as a framework for understanding gender and behaviour that helps this research in looking at female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia.

### **3.2 Gender Schema Theory**

In the previous chapter, it was outlined that gender is socially constructed and is embedded with the stereotypical view of masculinity and femininity. This perception of gender can be referred to as a schema. According to Clément-Guillotin and Fontayne (2011), a schema is a key aspect of cognition that predicts a person's perception and thought, and this can happen in a person's mind even before the events have occurred. Gender schema is an assumption that there is separate gender-based categories that follow specific attitudes such as masculinity and femininity and gender role expectations (Bem, 1993; Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). The purpose of a gender schema is mainly to see from a wider perspective how society has created gender-



based categories (Starr and Zurbriggen, 2017). It consists of two understandings about gender development: either the natural growth from childhood phase or the development of social identity throughout a person's lifetime (Bem, 1993). This schema is also defined as a stereotype that classifies people based on gender information such as physical attributes and behaviour (Barberá, 2003; García-Sánchez et al., 2019).

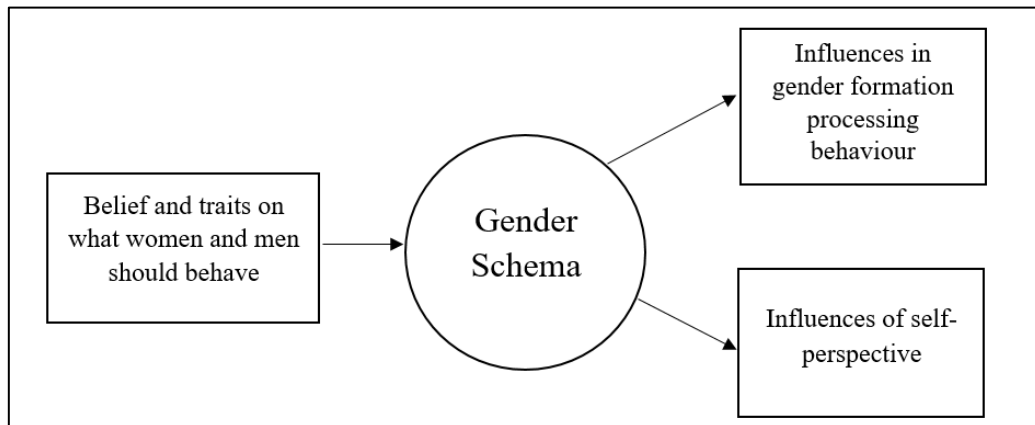


Diagram 1: Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981)

As illustrated in Diagram 1 above, Bem (1981) in her research on Gender Schema Theory (GST) stated that the categorisation of people based on gender is often associated with processing gender information that is based on a schema. The theory contributes towards the understanding of social norms embedded in processing information about gender (Liben and Bigler, 2017). It is also suggested that gender identity, gender-based expected roles and behaviour are created through GST by categorising specific roles for men and women (Bem, 1981; García-Sánchez et al., 2019). In fact, gender schemas underpin continuous behaviour that unconsciously happens to people and form a perspective about the correct gender act in different social contexts (Kollmayer et al., 2018).

This theory explains that a schema can be developed as early as childhood, and it continuously forms a gender perception over time even though it can vary depending on cultural background or societal context (Fagot and Leinbach, 1989; Lemons and Parzinger, 2007; Starr and Zurbriggen, 2017). Not only can gender schema be

understood from a cultural or societal perspective, but such a schema is also somehow associated with memory, which then shapes a person's social judgement about gender categories (Schmitt et al., 1988; Clément-Guillotin and Fontayne, 2011).

The gendering process can be a natural act in categorising attributes and attitudes based on masculine and feminine characteristics regardless of differences between people (Kollmayer et al., 2018). Basically, masculinity is framed as “aggressiveness, independence, and dominance” while femininity is framed as “warmth, compassion, and understanding”, with these framings being socially constructed (Lortie et al., 2017, pp. 158). In some situations, this schema becomes an internal motivation or provides a belief on how individuals should behave based on gender traits (Bem, 1981). Lemons and Parzinger (2007) stated that GST helps to reveal gender stereotypical attitudes and support the statement by Bem (1981) that individuals with a strong gender schema belief tend to show stronger stereotypical attitudes. This view proposes that persons with traditional gender behavioural thinking in characterising women and men tend to strongly view, act and differentiate gender information (García-Sánchez et al., 2019).

Some early research viewed individuals in the context of gender schema. In this sense, a person was viewed as either schematic or aschematic; where schematic individuals prefer to follow fixed gender thinking compared to aschematic individuals who are more flexible towards gender information (Bem, 1981; Gould and Stern, 1989; Hudak, 1993; Range and Jenkins, 2010; Pohlmann and Chen, 2020). Schmitt et al. (1988) also advocated two more types of individuals when interpreting gender schema. First is the sex-type person who prefers to follow traditional gender thinking by using masculinity and femininity principles and are consistent about their behaviour and way of thinking. Second is the non-sex-type person who is much more flexible in their action and who is willing to adapt to more non-traditional gender thinking. This is supported by Starr and Zurbriggen (2017) who suggest that individuals who practice gender schema prefer to act based on their typical gender thinking behaviour as compared to those who are not, as the latter group view gender as an unimportant factor in defining behaviour.

It is contended that gender schema relies heavily on categorising people based on gender roles, primarily by the stereotypical gender attributes that cover various aspects such as physical characteristics, behaviour, ability, character, thinking, and careers (Barberá, 2003; Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). However, the schema tends to refer to individuals based on gendered style or behaviour, rather than gendered physical or biological characteristics (Pohlmann and Chen, 2020) but it also closely relates to gender expression (Range and Jenkins, 2010). Individuals less exposed to gender-attributes may have lower stereotypical behaviour, which means different people will react differently when it comes to gender schema (Barberá, 2003). This means that if a person is likely to have been heavily influenced by a gender-schema, they will become more stereotypical, if a person has not been exposed to gender-schema, they will become more open about how men and women should behave.

A gender schema often views attitudes and activities as portraying masculinity and femininity (Meagher, 2017; Pohlmann and Chen, 2020) such as jobs that are associated with gender-based skills (e.g., housekeeping as feminine, construction as masculine). For example, men are recognised as having the ability to manage stressful environments and being fit for more demanding physical situations when compared to women, who are more suitable for roles requiring interpersonal skills; these are assumptions that describe what roles men and women should work in (DeArmond et al., 2006). This schematic view also has influenced how women see themselves based on femininity (Lortie et al., 2017).

Gender identity and work, together shape how people see themselves in relation to gender roles, meaning that men with strong gender schema-based self-identities tend to prioritise status-related aspects in their careers, while women with strong gender schema-based self-identities are more inclined to favour elements linked to social and emotional fulfilment (Eddleston et al., 2006). The bias in the way people process information also can lead to unwanted behaviour in the workplace, influencing what men and women should do in the careers they choose (Lemons and Parzinger, 2007).

Nevertheless, gender schema theory has also been criticised, even though such criticism is often not substantially discussed. For example, early research has suggested that to incorporate gender as one of the factors in studying people or situations is irrelevant, as there is no distinct category of gender, with femininity and masculinity mainly shaped by culture or society (Hudak, 1993). Another criticism is by Tenenbaum and Leaper (2002) who mentioned that gender schemas arguably can provide rational thinking because people might act and think based on emotions. However, because a gender schema influences people unconsciously, a given schematic act is already a norm in the wider society, hence this theory itself has justified the need to neutralise gender schema thinking to give more flexibility for individuals in interpreting their masculine and feminine attributes (Golden and McHugh, 2017), as Bem advocated before in her research. Gender schema theory has nevertheless contributed to an understanding of gender through multiple lenses.

Specifically, Starr and Zurbriggen (2017) explored how this theory has been discussed over time. They suggest that the theory continues to be utilised across research settings such as in communication studies and business, being used to discuss various topics about stereotypes, employment, population and many more. Although the main context of the theory is not focusing on stereotypes, still, the theory has opened more flexible discussions with regards to the avoidance of stereotypical behaviour such as for children and women. The ongoing research on gender schema theory is evident in multiple disciplines. These include understanding gender in consumer behaviour (Gilal et al., 2020), marketing (Pohlmann and Chen, 2020), therapeutics (Black and Gringart, 2019), writing (Range and Jenkins, 2010), entrepreneurship (Arshad et al., 2016; Lortie et al., 2017), careers (Starr and Zurbriggen, 2017; Olsson and Martiny, 2018) and technology (Lemons and Parzinger 2007). In other words, it is contended that a gender schema has a greater influence on many social aspects of an individual.

In addition, research by Arshad et al. (2016) sought to understand the role of gender in a South Asian context and combined gender schema theory with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Their study suggested that for women, gendered social

norms have a more significant impact on their attitudes toward entrepreneurship, while the influence of social norms is weaker on men's attitude towards entrepreneurship. Gender stereotypical thinking is particularly noticeable when it comes to career decisions, and in the categorisation of gender roles in employment (Arshad et al., 2016; Olsson and Martiny, 2018), in turn influencing people's attitudes and behaviour at work (Eddleston et al., 2006). Accordingly, gender schema thinking could influence female chefs in their career choices and affect their career experiences. Despite the criticism of gender schema theory from the current stand of thinking which sees gender as a socially constructed identity, and the argument about gender-based behaviour, further exploration is needed to understand the influence of gender schema thinking within female chefs' careers. Starr and Zurbruggen (2017) also contended that even though the theory covers various disciplines or studies, it is still lacking in an understanding intersectionality. They also suggest that the gender schema theory can allow in-depth study about women and the social perspective towards feminine attributes. Moreover, with the ongoing and more contemporary views of women, employment and domestic roles at home, intersectionality could possibly add a different perspective in the gender schema.

Gender schema theory as discussed in this research can help in understanding female chef's behaviour that might be associated with gender schema thinking. Gender schema theory emphasises that individuals can have schematic thinking about gender attributes, and it will therefore be useful to see whether female chefs in this study manifest gender schema thinking or not in their career experiences or in looking at their careers as chefs. As contended, different people might have different behaviours or perspectives towards gender schema thinking, and schematic behaviour might vary. So also, can people's exposure in categorising gender attributes differ or change based on experiences within their social or career environments.

Gender schema theory, when applied to the context of intersectionality and careers, helps to illustrate how individuals' gender-related expectations and stereotypes can intersect with other social categories like ethnicity, influencing career experiences. In the case of female chefs, this theory can shed light on how societal gender norms and

stereotypes, when combined by other factors such as ethnicity, can shape career experiences, leading to a more inclusive understanding of the challenges and opportunities women face. The application of gender schema theory is important in addressing the research objectives of this study which investigates how gender roles shape the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia, thus contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their professional journeys.

### 3.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) was developed to assess the factors that influence a person's behaviour. The theory suggests that the intention to act is a motivation for people and it also explores a person's likelihood to perform a specific behaviour. In other words, this theory assesses how likely it is for a person to act and what influences their behaviour. Diagram 2 below illustrates the Theory of Planned Behaviour, by Ajzen (1991).

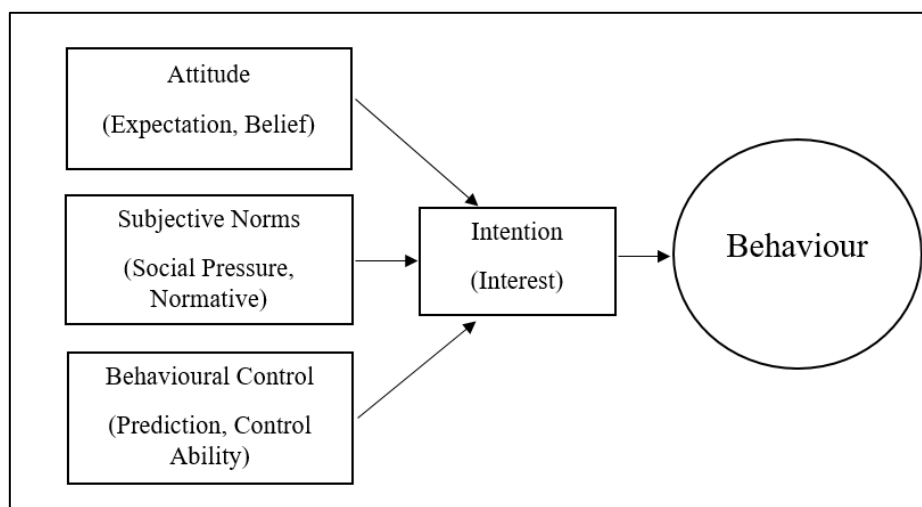


Diagram 2: Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)

Three aspects determine behavioural intention. First, is the attitude, which refers to a person's expectation about a specific behaviour; second, is subjective norms that refer to social pressure in executing the behaviour; and third, the behavioural control which predicts an outcome that probably occurs due to the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Anderson et al., 2017). There is a positive relationship between attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control that could increase the intention of a person to perform a certain

behaviour, and this relationship significantly influences human behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Chen and Hung, 2016). The three main factors in this theory (attitude, subjective norms, behavioural control) are thus correlated to one other in predicting or shaping a person's behaviour. Attitude is a self-perception in performing a behaviour, and may affect individual behavioural intention towards a subject, a group of people or a situation (López-Mosquera, 2016; Barrat and Cooke, 2018). Furthermore, it is proposed that memory, experience, and perspectives can affect attitude and, expectation of behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Kim and Han, 2010; Mancha and Yoder, 2015).

Specifically, subjective norms are correlated with anticipated social pressure before a behaviour is performed that will affect the decision to behave in a certain way (López-Mosquera, 2016; Moore and Burrus, 2019). Whereas behavioural control helps people to predict their own behaviour and anticipate the challenges that might happen due to performing a particular behaviour (López-Mosquera, 2016; Moore and Burrus, 2019), it also can increase the likelihood of performing a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Willingness to perform a behaviour is the most crucial element in the TPB to determine a person's intention in behaving and readiness to become involved in a certain activity (Mancha and Yoder, 2015; Anderson et al., 2017). Ajzen (1991) suggests that the ability of a person to control their behaviour can influence their expectation and create greater confidence in themselves. Those, who express interest in their intention will likely perform their behaviour well (Chen, 2016; Barrat and Cooke, 2018; Moore and Burrus, 2019). Even though it can vary in different situations (Ajzen, 1991) - Chen (2016) advocates that TPB significantly contributes to the explanation of how an individual acts based on their intention and their actual behaviour. Besides, it can help to understand a person's emotions in relation to a certain behaviour (Barrat and Cooke, 2018).

This theory has been extended across disciplines, mainly to recognise and predict people's behaviour such as in medicine (Wiese et al., 2021), customer behaviour (Arora et al., 2017; Taufique and Vaithianathan, 2018; Wang et al., 2021) and travel behaviour (Japutra et al., 2019). For example, in understanding customer behaviour, the TPB is used to investigate customer attitudes before purchasing, and in this sense,

it was found that purchase intention or pre-experiences will be able to predict real purchasing behaviour (Arora et al., 2017). This is similar to Wang et al. (2021) who studied people's intention to use green energy and found that their behaviour was influenced by experiences and motivation. Japutra et al. (2019) further suggested that behaviour was influenced by people's mindsets - if a person is firm with what they think before they act, they will be more engaged with the behaviour. In relation to career intention, TPB has also significantly helped in predicting job-seeking intentions that will affect real behaviour in the workplace (Ajzen, 1991; van Hooft et al., 2004). TPB has also been used to highlight the importance of attitude and belief in positively influencing work engagement and commitment (Wiese et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, criticism of the theory cannot be fully avoided, especially regarding the theory's intentions to predict behaviour (Ajzen, 2011; Kor and Mullan, 2011). Despite the theory suggesting that attitude, beliefs, and control are used to guide people's behavioural intention, this also depends on the individual's *actual* self-control (Ajzen, 2011). Due to the theory's focus on intention and planned behaviour, research shows that it is still lacking in predicting other important elements in behaviour such as unconscious intention, emotion, and impromptu response (Sniehotta et al., 2014). A definite criticism of TPB by Sniehotta et al. (2014) also highlighted the limitation of the theory in accessing a person's behaviour as it does not explain how individual perceptions can change according to unexpected situations thus making it difficult to understand attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control. This is further supported by Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci (2020) who contended that unplanned behaviour could be created from other unexpected factors that may affect a person's attitude and planned behaviour. As the planned behaviour is a crucial component in TPB, it is also argued that the planning of behaviour and attitude can change according to the situation and level of motivation because a person's beliefs or planning might not be fully developed (Case et al., 2016) thus making this theory not concrete enough to predict and help individuals to plan their behaviour.

Chen and Hung (2016) argue that the theory might only predict a person's behaviour based on their realistic thinking and that it neglects the emotional condition of a person in performing a behaviour. This is despite Ajzen's contention that TPB has never



claimed that emotion is not important in a person's behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). Ajzen (2011) further advocated that behaviour can also be influenced by the individual's mood, which while not covered extensively in this theory, the expectation is that in performing a behaviour, other emotions could be triggered. Ajzen (2011) contended that including additional factors in the theory to improve behavioural prediction is unnecessary, as the belief that an individual has about a certain behaviour could be different based on personality or other factors (such as age, education, career, media influence).

The TPB has received multiple criticisms in relation to its ability to predict behaviours, and, as such, significant changes to the TPB were outlined in the Theory of Reasoned Goal Pursuit (TRGP) by Ajzen and Kruglanski (2019). The authors advocate that the TRGP focuses on understanding and predicting human behaviour within a motivational context, underlining the importance of considering people's active goals and how they perceive a particular behaviour's chances of potentially advancing these goals. The TRGP expands on the TPB in that it differentiates between outcomes that align with goals related to obtaining things, and those related to gaining approval from others (Hamilton et al., 2022). Goals can refer to things that directly benefit individuals and those aimed at gaining recognition from their social circles with high motivation leading to strong intentions to perform a specific behaviour (Ajzen and Kruglanski, 2019). However, although Hamilton et al.'s (2022) study utilises TRGP to measure students' physical activity, the authors acknowledge a limitation in that their small sample size was a barrier to thoroughly analysing the TRGP and most studies still rely on the TPB.

In other words, the TRGP takes a more goal-oriented perspective (Ajzen and Kruglanski, 2019) emphasising that individuals set goals and pursue them based on their preferences and motivations. It considers the strategies people employ to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the TPB focuses on the intention to perform a specific behaviour and includes three main factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. It examines how an individual's beliefs and social influences impact their intentions and, subsequently, their actual behaviour. Thus, to explore the career experiences of female chefs, the TPB would be more suitable as it specifically

helps to explain or predict intentions and their composite factors, and the perceived behavioural control that influence people's behaviour (Hagger, 2019; Ajzen, 2014).

In the context of female chefs' careers, understanding their intentions, attitudes, social norms, and perceived control over their career experiences as a whole can provide valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities they face. The TRGP that builds upon the existing TPB provides a fresh path for future research exploration (Ajzen and Kruglanski, 2019) that is valuable in goal-setting and pursuit of goals, but it might not fully capture the factors that influence the experiences of female chefs especially in looking at gender. It allows for a thorough exploration of how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control affect careers, shedding light on the factors that may shape the experiences of women.

Female chefs' behaviour can be viewed through the lens of TPB by looking at their attitudes, how they perform a behaviour in their career, and whether others' behaviour (e.g., colleagues) has an effect towards their career behaviour. By interpreting female chefs' careers via a TPB understanding, this enables the researcher to study the factors that might influence female chefs' career behaviour and how they predict their behaviour when experiencing careers in professional kitchens. As the three factors in TPB (attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control) lead to the behavioural intention of a person before the exact behaviour is performed, female chefs' behaviour can be analysed via this theory especially to see if any of these factors are influencing their career behaviours and experiences.

### **3.4 Self-Efficacy Theory**

Based on the theory of planned behaviour discussed above, researchers conclude that the theory is correlated with self-efficacy theory first developed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977). Ajzen (2002) mentioned that behavioural control is possibly influenced by self-efficacy. This can be interpreted as the level of confidence to perform a behaviour, which can be influenced by other people's perceptions, especially when that behaviour is related to gender. Self-efficacy can also consider a person's identity such as found in their ethnicity and nationality and these factors could enhance the theory's efficiency in differentiating people's attitudes and social

environments (Mancha and Yoder, 2015). Ajzen (1991) suggested that perceived behavioural control was consistent with the self-efficacy theory by Bandura (1982), which previously Bandura (1977) claimed would be able to guide people in controlling their actions to achieve a certain goal and influence a person's behaviour.

Dickerson and Taylor (2000) justified that an individual must believe in their abilities to improve their self-efficacy which is correlated to the behavioural intention factor discussed in the TPB. The combination of believing in one's own abilities and motivation would lead to high expectations in choosing certain behaviour or activities, the effort made by a person to do things, and the capability to face difficult situations (Bandura, 1977). This means that if people believe in their ability to achieve goals and control their own behaviour, they will develop higher self-efficacy (Lent and Brown, 2006). As illustrated in Diagram 3 below, the theory comprises of four factors:

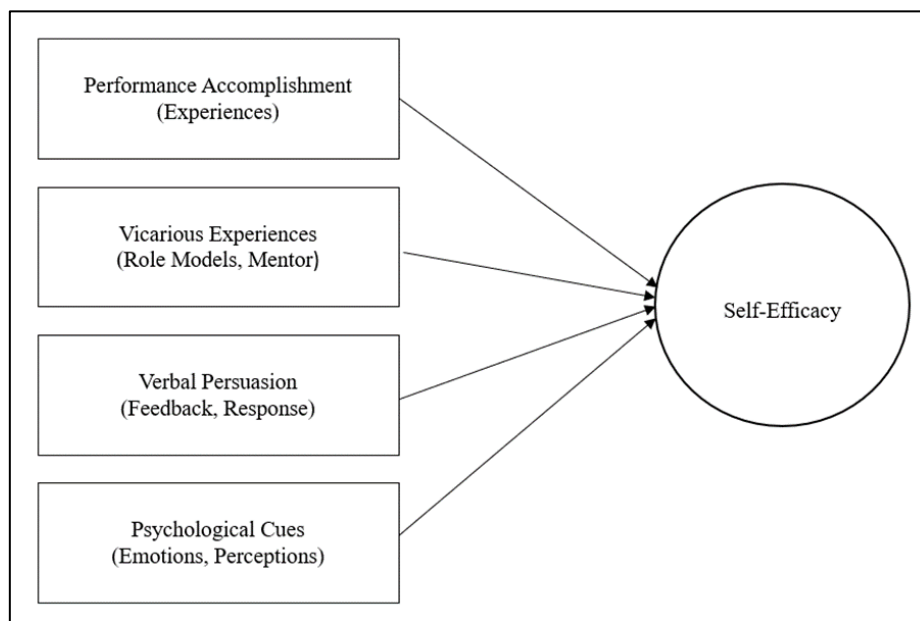


Diagram 3: Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Bandura (1977) explains that the first factor is performance accomplishment; this is based on what an individual's personal experiences about their skills and effort are. Second, are vicarious experiences, which means; learning from others' experience in managing a task or observing the possible situation that a person might face. The third is verbal persuasion. This is a common type of influence through verbal recommendation that helps a person predict a future situation. Fourth, psychological

cues or emotional encouragement refer to a person's emotions in a situation, either positively or negatively impacting their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy indicates the level of determination in facing challenges. Observing others' performance, could increase the level of self-efficacy together with verbal persuasion support that helps an individual in believing in their abilities to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1982). In terms of careers, self-efficacy acts as the belief of individuals in their ability to achieve expected career goals in the future through support, encouragement, knowledge and advice that enable the process of career decision-making (Restubog et al., 2010). It is important as it determines the level of confidence someone has in selecting a career pathway and to predict a future career.

Lent and Brown (2006; citing Bandura 1986), claimed that self-efficacy, future expectation and work environment affect a person's career perspective where their career choice is determined by a belief in their own capabilities. It is suggested that self-efficacy is directly linked with personal and career interests and expectations that lead to career goals (Sheu et al., 2010; Inda et al., 2013). Outcome expectation and self-efficacy are significantly related to one another and contribute toward achieving goals (Sheu et al., 2010; Inda et al., 2013). In other words, when a person has an expectation of what can happen in the future, they possess high levels of self-efficacy.

Research by Tian et al. (2019) suggest that people with high self-efficacy will perform better in their job task and feel more engaged in their work. In contrast, people with low level of self-efficacy might face more substantial difficulties in their career opportunities, work commitment and career expectation (Ballout, 2009), mainly as there is a correlation between self-efficacy, careers, job task and performance (Bandura and Locke, 2003; Beattie et al., 2016). Self-efficacy determines a person's work attitudes, commitment and motivation in facing difficulties in the workplace (Bandura, 1977), and Mancha and Yoder (2015) advocate that it can be used to determine behavioural control and the final act of behaviour as well. Feakes et al. (2019) and Ajzen (1991) agree that the individual's beliefs influence their employment intention, attitudes, self-efficacy or perceived behavioural control. Generally, individuals prefer to set their career aims as compatible with their abilities, expectation

and potential external support that influence their self-efficacy (Lent and Brown, 2006; Inda et al., 2013).

Prior studies have discovered the advantages of self-efficacy in looking at various aspects of careers such as career intention, commitment, satisfaction, barriers and support (Aymans et al., 2020; Wang, 2021; Hiranhat et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2022). High or low levels of self-efficacy could positively or negatively affect people's careers (Chae and Park, 2020) as they depend on individuals' career situations and personalities. Research by Liu and Gumah (2020) found that feedback as external support to an individual has negatively impacted their research participants' self-efficacy levels. They found that feedback controls a person's work, based on the time, method and reason for the feedback given. The importance of attitude in giving and receiving feedback is also crucial, in order for the feedback to be effective.

Research by Chae and Park (2020) stated that as self-efficacy is considered as a personal belief in one's own abilities, individuals also might consider how they want to utilise their skills and willingness to share their knowledge. This could have a negative impact on the high level of self-efficacy as people might tend to not help those who have a lower level of self-efficacy but prefer to perform better at an individual level or with those who are at the same efficacy level. This is supported by Chen et al. (2004) who state that even though a high self-efficacy person can perform better as an individual, they are less dedicated to share knowledge. This reflects the research by Chae and Park (2020) that the level of self-efficacy can positively and negatively impact careers and job tasks. This contradicts the view by Hattie and Timperley (2007) that feedback is one of the most influential aspects in a person's self-efficacy as it positively affects performance and increases motivation. Self-efficacy can influence confidence and attitudes, and it makes people more resilient towards negative work environments.

However, a person with a high level of self-efficacy might believe that organisational support is not as important because they will assume that they perform better in their current state without the need to improve, compared to those who possess a lower level of self-efficacy (Beattie et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2017). The limitation that Beattie et al. (2015) also advocates is that when people feel confident in their abilities (or self-

efficacy), it can sometimes be problematic, as in setting difficult goals. In contrast, if people think they're doing better than needed to reach those goals, people's effort might be lower, leading to a potential of drop in performance. Beattie et al. (2015) thus suggest that with regular feedback, self-efficacy can be maintained, thus influencing performance. In addition to that, the limitation arises where the individual's belief in their ability to perform specific tasks or achieve particular goals, may neglect any external factors that may influence behaviour, as advocated by Liu et al. (2017). The author mentioned that organisational support can play a crucial role in shaping individuals' opportunities and choices. To overcome this limitation, it would be useful to adopt an approach that considers the broader context of how people construct their self-efficacy, for example by adopting the narrative approach used in this research to examine female chefs' careers. This can address different factors that influence career experiences, in a way that enhances the theory's application in a diverse career setting like Malaysia and that better captures the intricacies of behaviour.

It is also interesting that Kardong-Edgren (2013) argues that self-efficacy might not fully support people's belief in their competency, mainly because the process of constructing may stop once people achieve their goal. Hence, Kardong-Edgren emphasises the need for extensive and ongoing efforts to monitor and maintain competency to sustain self-efficacy. By ensuring that people maintain their confidence and motivation over time, self-efficacy theory remains relevant and useful. In addition to this, different people will react differently according to their self-efficacy level, and this shows that it is crucial to see how female chefs in this study interpret their self-efficacy in a professional kitchen. As different factors can determine a person's self-efficacy, further exploration can be done to understand how the self-efficacy levels of female chefs' impact on their career experiences.

Furthermore, self-efficacy is crucial in determining female chefs' behaviour and this is viewed via the four factors mentioned in the theory. Different factors were illustrated (Diagram 3) as a contribution to the self-efficacy of a person. Female chefs' own experiences (performance accomplishment), seeing the experiences of others (vicarious experiences), feedback (verbal persuasion) and emotions/perceptions

(psychological cues) are assessed to determine the self-efficacy of female chefs in this study, especially to see its influences towards their career experiences.

Self-efficacy theory therefore brings valuable insights to the exploration of female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia. It emphasises the importance of self-belief in one's abilities and confidence, which can be crucial for understanding how female chefs operate their careers in Malaysia. High self-efficacy may motivate, inspire them and help them to face challenges, in career decisions, and actively look for skill development. Furthermore, it can allow for further evaluation on the impact of support systems on female chefs' self-efficacy. In the context of Malaysia, where gender stereotypes and cultural norms may pose unique challenges for female chefs, self-efficacy theory can offer an understanding of their thoughts, perceptions, and emotional aspects within their careers.

### **3.5 Career Construction Theory**

The utmost challenges that people might face currently is the ability to keep up with career changes and adapt to maintaining competency in any job sector (Stoltz and Apodaca, 2017). In relation to that, understanding career experiences is important in determining a person's career progress across their career journey. Career Construction Theory (CCT) is one of the crucial theories that is fundamentally important in selecting, guiding, developing and building a person's career in many sectors of industries (Taylor et al., 2018; Rudolph et al., 2019; Blokker et al., 2019). This theory explains that individuals who are able to adapt and prepare to adjust to a new environment will respond better to changes and gain positive results from it (Perera and McIlveen, 2017). In relation to this theory, Savickas (2013) defined that careers are constructed through identities and refers to three different career situations. First is at the early stage of career-building where one may refer to previous role-models and behaviours. Second is a positive attitude in developing a career and third is the ability to create one's own career identity with the combination of one's previous experience and career goals. All three career situations will help a person to be successful in their chosen career.

Career construction theory investigates why and how an individual chooses a preferred career (Taylor et al., 2018) and defines the ability to adapt to career responses and support career choices (Šverko and Babarović, 2019). CCT is known to be a significant theory in career development (Rudolph et al., 2019) that is shaped by personal opinion, an individual's past and present experience, and future aspirations to recognise one's own career choices (Hancock and Hums, 2016; Savickas, 2005; Darvin et al., 2019). Stoltz and Apodaca (2017) suggest that career development happens throughout the life span, which, with experiences, can help to create favourable personal beliefs. The authors also suggest that career development is an ongoing process in combining an individual's personal and social needs (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; Rudolph et al., 2019). CCT also allows for different ways to build a career, develop career curiosity, increase determination and determine what can be done to have a successful career (Savickas, 2005; Darvin et al., 2019).

According to Šverko and Babarović (2019), CCT highlights a substantial relationship between an individual's characteristics, psychological ability and career attitude that will lead to greater career outcomes and better adaptation. It also assists individuals in managing their career changes and provides value and significance to their career progress (Taylor et al., 2018; Jannesari and Sullivan, 2019). CCT suggests how a person can achieve career success, possibly through job position and self-satisfaction, while explaining how people are prepared to adapt to uncertain career situations (Jannesari and Sullivan, 2019; Rudolph et al., 2019). It is also advocated that this theory explains a dynamic and flexible process of career progress, however, further research is needed to see to what extent it will be beneficial to people (Rudolph et al., 2019). Taylor et al. (2018) and Hancock and Hums (2016) outline how CCT covers three-factors - career adaptability, vocational personality, and life themes as illustrated in Diagram 4 below:



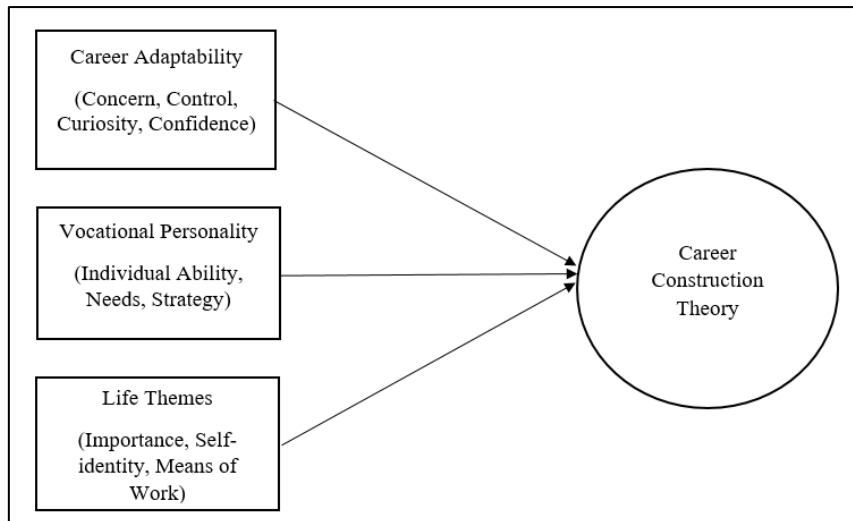


Diagram 4: Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005)

According to the theory, Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) define career adaptability as the ability of a person to control career changes in handling job tasks. Skills will practically increase as education and experiences are gained across time (Savickas, 1997; 2005; Brown et al., 2012) but they also may decrease when challenges and career transitions are faced (Johnston, 2018; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability as the main factor in CCT reflects a person's ability to manage and adapt to job tasks, changes, challenges, gaining skills and adjusting in a social context. This helps individuals to manage negative or positive things in relation to their job task (Savickas, 2005; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012; Taylor et al., 2018, Spurk et al., 2020). It suggests that adaptation towards career outcomes will become more significant with a person's willingness to adjust to a changing situation (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability stresses the importance of believing you can control your own career, increase interest in further career opportunities and develop positivity in achieving career goals, which are all correlated (Del Corso and Rehfuß, 2011). People's response or attitude is also crucial in determining the adaptability level of a person in constructing their career; hence it is suggested that organisations play an important role in increasing employees' adaptability to their career paths and in enabling them to understand their own value, skills, qualities, and the need for career engagement to achieve career goals (van der Horst and Klehe, 2019). Career adaptability represents the ability of a person to embrace changes and consists of four

factors which are (a) concern - attentiveness in continuing career development and strategies; (b) control - the ability to control one's own behaviour in career situations; (c) curiosity - how a person seeks future opportunities and (d) confidence - the person's expectation and self-efficacy in managing problems (Stoltz and Apodaca, 2017). Savickas (2005) further explores these four resources. The concern is the ability of a person to act and be aware of what they must do in career planning, especially developing specific skills to achieve career goals. Control is an ability to control behaviour, to take responsibility in your own career decisions and to enhance curiosity through developing your career interest.

In addition, for Savickas (2005), curiosity is consequent from control, that is, when a person believes they are in control of their career, this will lead to curiosity, interest and eagerness to gather more information on their preferred career. Finally, as in career development, people need to have the confidence and skills required in problem-solving. This can relate to having a level of self-efficacy to overcome a difficult situation. Throughout their career development, a person can build their confidence level by encountering various problematic career situations that encourage them in making a decision but the lack of these four adaptability resources (concern, control, curiosity and confidence) can affect their career pathway in achieving career goals. Šverko and Babarović (2019) state that these resources help the development of career construction and the person's adaptation level.

CCT proposes that individuals can control their career by adapting to the social aspect surrounding them to support their career expectation (Rudolph et al., 2019) and a willingness to adapt to changes or challenges in job tasks will also enable them to cope better (Šverko and Babarović, 2019). The importance of contextual factors in CCT is certain, as these affect a person's commitment towards their career objectives and their expectations (Taylor et al., 2018). But according to Darvin et al. (2019), the contextual factors that can affect a person's career adaptability are stereotypes, organisational culture, gender-based treatment and social interaction which are mostly related to women. Career adaptability significantly relates social and career interests with personal abilities (Hancock and Hums, 2016). The adaptability behaviour

supports a person's belief in a career, in discovering new career opportunities and also helps in decision making (Savickas et al., 2018).

The second factor in CCT, vocational personality, refers to career ability, needs, values, and interest (Savickas, 2005). In the research by Blokker et al. (2019), CCT has been adopted in examining the career construction of young employees and the results show that those with a high level of career abilities feel more connected to their work. Vocational personality is used to evaluate individual interest and what a person's expected working situations might be (Stoltz and Apodaca, 2017). Personality seems to be an important facet, as an individual's behaviour will influence how a person adapts to career changes (Savickas, 2005). Primarily, personal behaviour can be influenced by a positive attitude and high confidence level that helps people adjust to career changes (Savickas, 2005; Wehrle et al., 2019). However, it is proposed that the self-perspective towards job task can be different due to diverse types of personal characteristics which leads to different career adaptation results (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Because different people have different personalities and behaviours, their perception of a specific or the same job task can vary.

The third factor in CCT is life themes which offers individuals a target or motivation in making the right career decision that will be helpful towards their career choices (Savickas, 2005). Life themes are also beneficial to predict an individual's personal expectations from their career experiences (Rudolph et al., 2019). Understanding life themes allows people to reflect on why a career decision was made and how they can overcome career challenges and achieve a targeted career position, by monitoring career experiences and increasing career adaptability (Savickas, 2005; Del Corso and Rehfuß, 2011). It also allows people to reflect on their career stories and experiences that link their meaningful career moments (Wong, 2021).

Savickas (1997) highlighted that career adaptability will determine the ability of employees to succeed in their careers, as the adjustment towards career changes in terms of social and psychological factors is important. One interesting argument was on how the personality of individuals that could affect their career construction. Storme et al. (2020) argue that flexibility and variation of personality are important when accessing career adaptability and their research looks for the relationship between

these two factors. As career adaptability is considered an emotional factor in adjusting to career challenges (Rudolph et al., 2017), it is important to note the role of personality in this theory as each individual possesses a different personality that can affect their level of adaptability.

Despite increasing discussion of this theory, the ability of a person to behave and adapt according to their given career situation has arguably been overlooked. Those with more flexible personalities and the ability to change their behaviour according to a career situation, were predicted to adapt better compared to those who were not (Storme et al., 2020). Relatedly, Perera and McIlveen's (2014) research, focused on adaptivity in relation to adaptability in CCT, where it has a significant relationship with the psychology of a person through career expectation, positivity, and engagement. Their research finding stated that those who are optimists about their careers will adjust better to career changes. In regard to how people manage their careers, it is often overlooked how well someone can adapt and behave in different work situations. Some studies above focus on traits like flexibility and optimism, but they might not fully capture how people act in different job scenarios. To address this, closer attention should be paid to how individuals behave in different work situations (e.g. in professional kitchens) in addition to behaviour or personality.

In fact, career adaptability is important to strengthen career planning and to cope better with career demands (Nalis et al., 2022). Peng et al. (2021) also mentioned that to enable people to build career adaptability, they must know how to activate and encourage the correct career behaviour. Peng et al. (2021) further contended that job opportunities, advancement, and encouragement of participation in job related activities are crucial for career adaptability. In other words, career construction involves various areas where people need to be actively involved.

As this research focuses on careers in a professional kitchen, it is contended that further investigation is needed to see how such career are constructed, and particularly to investigate the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. However, as discussed in Chapter One, research about careers in the culinary profession is still limited, although similar careers in the wider hospitality and tourism industries have been referred to in the review of the literature. Career construction in

tourism and hospitality is supported in the study by Rasheed et al. (2020), where it was argued that the career adaptability of hospitality workers will increase when an employee's attitude is good, thus allowing employees to achieve their career goals and plan their career journey better. Rasheed et al. (2020) also suggested that career adaptability is a prominent reason for the turnover intention in hospitality and tourism, but this is still lacking in research contexts. Various other factors can potentially affect an individual when constructing a career, such as gender and ethnicity; investigation of these factors still seems to be underdeveloped, and no research has been applied in relation to the hospitality industry within various cultural settings (Mooney and Jameson, 2018). The research on hospitality and tourism, particularly in the culinary profession, needs more extensive study to explore the career experiences in this field, given that different people have different career experiences. This is because many studies have shown that a career can be constructed through career identity, where factors such as career situation, location, and passion seem to be important (Mooney and Jameson, 2018).

As the central focus of this thesis is on the career of female chefs, CCT is relevant in understanding their career journey and experiences. Their career journey is important in reflecting their experiences and this can be assessed by looking at the three factors of CCT. This allows us to see how female chefs' careers are constructed and are reflected in their experiences. First is the factor of career adaptability, which is their behaviour towards career changes, challenges, situations, and experiences as a chef. Second is their personality that is related to their skills, interest or strategy, and third is looking into how female chefs see the process in achieving the career goals and their career planning (life themes). All of these are adopted within the research framework to explore female chefs' process of career construction and how these constructions are reflected in their career experiences.

CCT provides a valuable lens for understanding the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia, allowing a closer investigation of how they interpret and construct their careers. It is this theory's emphasis on individual adaptability, personality, and life themes that helps to inform the study's exploration of how these chefs experiences

their careers, within a culturally diverse nation, with gender role expectations, as they progress.

### 3.6 Theoretical Framework

The theories discussed in this chapter have been used to develop the theoretical framework in Diagram 5 which underpins the exploration of female chefs' career experiences:

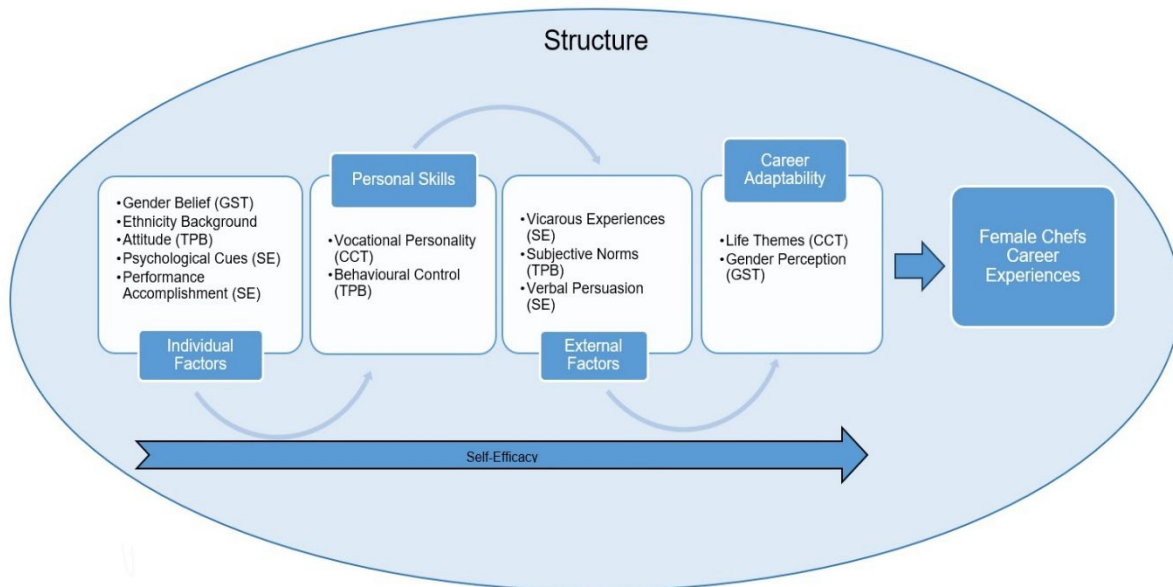


Diagram 5: Theoretical Framework

Each of the categories in Diagram 5 combines the theories discussed namely Gender Schema Theory (GST), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Self-Efficacy Theory (SE) and Career Construction Theory (CCT). The framework represents the factors that will guide the research.

First, are individual factors – these reflect the female chefs’ characteristics as individuals. These are based on gender beliefs about being a woman in the professional kitchen and the gender schema perception. Also, as the discussion on gender in Chapter Two highlighted, because gender is a socially constructed identity and it has various roles in understanding women’s behaviour and career, it is important to reflect on how female chefs see their gender and the gender issues that might play a part in their careers. The intersectionality between gender and ethnicity is a main

focus of this research, and so ethnicity is included in this category as it is about individual ethnic background and how the women perceive the impact of this on their careers. In addition, emotions, abilities, and the effort made to achieve career goals is included in this category as this will then help to understand Malaysian female chefs' career behaviour.

The second category is personal skills, and this refers to the female chefs' individual skills. That is, how female chefs' interests shaped their skills, confidence, and planning. Also, this will help to explain female chefs' behavioural control in reflecting on what they have experienced in a certain career situation.

The third category is external factors that will help to understand the roles of others or the support available to help the women such as from the social environment, and feedback. This is mostly reflected in the influence of others rather than the women's individual traits (behaviour, skills) that might be influencing their career experiences. This could also be interpreted from their observation of a career situation or advice that they might receive pertaining to their career.

The fourth category is career adaptability which reflects the achievement of career goals, career expectations or self-perspective. Gender-career perception after they have gone through their career journey can be understood through this category. This might influence their career experiences, and mirrors the current gender schema understanding that they might have as a chef.

Additionally, self-efficacy will be assessed throughout the participants career journeys. As self-efficacy as discussed above is influenced by various factors, it is important to understand whether the self- efficacy of these female chefs is affected by any other factors that relate to their experiences in the professional kitchen.

It is also important to note that the broader structural environment in Malaysia (society and organisational within the professional kitchen) present in the framework also are considered when exploring female chefs' career. These overarches of wider structures within which individual agency (the female chefs in this study) operates which are the main focus on this thesis, that sits in the structural context that play a role in women careers. This framework allows the exploration of the career experiences of female

chefs in Malaysia. GST allows for an investigation as to how societal gender norms shape the initial perceptions and expectations for female chefs in a predominantly male-dominated career; it also helps us to understand how these thoughts can influence their careers. The TPB helps this study in looking into the intentions and motivations of female chefs, via attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. Complimenting this, SE theory adds an important dimension to the framework that highlights the importance of self-belief, to assess how confident these female chefs in this study have been, and continue to be, within meeting various challenges that influence their experiences. Finally, CCT in addressing the ongoing processes of career construction in regard to adaptability, personality and life themes adds an important component to the theoretical framework in exploring the career of the participants. By combining these four theories, we can allow for a deeper exploration on the multifaceted understanding of the factors that influence the career narratives and experiences of female chefs in Malaysian professional kitchens.

On the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in women's career experiences, which is one of the central focuses in this study, this framework benefits from the discussion of GST, intersectionality and CCT as it allows for the exploration of how female chefs construct or adapt their career while considering the relationship between gender and ethnicity. The theoretical framework aligns with all three research objectives, offering an approach to explore the career experiences of women in the culinary profession in Malaysia.

Furthermore, this investigation is also influenced by the understanding of gender in Chapter Two. As gender was discussed as a social construction associated with behaviour, and the psychological attributes of a person, it is also correlated with careers where it has always been associated with masculine or feminine attributes (Westbrook and Schilt, 2014; Hotine, 2021). In addition, in exploring the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity, it was contended that the effect of this intersectionality on women's careers can vary depending on individual experiences (Mizrahi and Greenawalt, 2017; Kim and O'Brien, 2018; Mooney, 2020). Thus, the discussion of gender, ethnicity, and careers in Chapter Two enhanced the theoretical framework that was applied to guide the research.



Researchers suggest that gender is crucial an aspect in the workplace environment and employment (Gutek and Cohen, 1992 cited in Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). In fact, gender schema and stereotypes can be difficult to control thus having a negative impact on workplace behaviour (Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). The belief of individuals with gender schema thinking is evidenced, for example, the attitude of an employee who views women who are successful in a male-dominated sector as benefitting from luck rather than skills (Lemons and Parzinger, 2007). Such a view is very controversial and must be unpacked further to understand gender and careers. The gender situation in employment has made some women feel a lack of confidence, has created uncertainty in achieving career goals and hence it is possible that women choose jobs that do not pose such conflicts (Bandura, 1977; Dickerson and Taylor, 2000; Allen et al., 2016). Otherwise, some women lack confidence in their success because they rely heavily on the acceptance of others and thus pursue gender-based behaviour or roles (Fischlmayr, 2002), even though different women experience this differently. Heilman (2012) also suggests that gender stereotypes as external pressure may affect self-efficacy such as the assumption that women are not suitable to work in male-dominated jobs, thus negatively affecting women's career choice, confidence and career advancement.

Concerning gender, women face difficulties in their careers due to their personal and social environments; these possibilities can be categorised as 'life themes' or 'subjective norms' under the CCT and TPB components respectively (Taylor et al., 2018). Social influence in the workplace or personal life also impacts personal career decision-making (Del Corso and Rehfuss, 2011). According to Taylor et al. (2018), CCT suggests that career decision-making will be influenced by personal factors especially in balancing work and life commitment. This can be seen from family commitment often associated with women. Regarding gender, women's careers are particularly influenced by gender-expected roles and stereotypical norms (Taylor et al., 2018) that appear to be salient factors in women's career choices and their expectations particularly in a male-dominated careers (Darvin et al., 2019) such as professional kitchens. This research will thus further explore these issues in the Malaysian context especially in considering the structural conditions in the country

such as the expectation of careers by gender, social attitudes to gender more generally, and the socio ethnic composition of Malaysia (Mustapa et al., 2018; Ishak, 2020; Zahari et al., 2009) and how these structures constrain or facilitate individual agency (female chefs).

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter facilitates an understanding of the underpinning theories of gender, behaviour, and careers. The first theory discussed, Gender Schema Theory, stresses the importance of personal belief based on gender and how these beliefs influence gender information processes in the social context. Gender schema theory will help to investigate career behaviour, to see whether the gender beliefs of a person that may be associated with stereotypes and discrimination, determines career processes and experiences. The second theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, explains that the person's attitude forms behavioural intention, and that social pressure influences behaviour and perceived behavioural control. This can aid us in exploring a person's ability to control and predict their career based on several social aspects, which are viewed through the lens of women, in the ways they understand their career experiences.

Self-efficacy also is one of the important theories in this research. Related to behaviour, a few factors influence self-efficacy, including the personal accomplishment of an individual - either they can do well in their career or *vice versa*. Besides, the contextual factors that they received as external support will be investigated and analysed as to whether they helped in building self-efficacy towards achieving career goals. Finally, Career Construction Theory helps us to understand how a person adapts to changes in their career experiences that encourage career interest and influence a person's life themes and gender perception. In this theory, career adaptability mirrors the importance of people's behaviour in reacting to career changes or challenges, that also might be affected by other factors depending on an individual's personality or career experiences.

To conclude, these four theories are shown to be related to one another in shaping people's experiences and have been used to develop a theoretical framework to

explore the career experiences of female chefs. The arguments that gender, ethnicity, behaviour and careers are socially constructed, call for further investigation about career experiences for women in a professional kitchen in the Malaysian context as well as recognising the structure and agency to comprehend the challenges and experiences that female chefs encounter in their careers. The next chapter will outline the underpinning philosophical and methodological perspectives which are aligned with the narrative approach taken in this study.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the philosophical approach of this research which mirrors the research direction epistemologically and ontologically. The methodology is a process that involves various stages and tasks (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005), which comprises theories and the philosophical position taken by the researcher (Slevitch, 2011). The researcher's perspective towards knowledge and reality is crucial in demonstrating the methodological approach (Kim, 2016) from the outset, before engaging with the specific methods used to conduct the research. The research aim and objectives are consistent with interpretivism, and social constructivism underpinned by a feminist epistemology. The research method is qualitative and in this regard this chapter also presents the narrative approach deployed to collect in-depth data. To ensure that the researcher's position in this thesis is explicit, the chapter concludes with a reflexive section which explains her positionality.

### **4.2 Philosophy of Research**

To determine the philosophies of this research, the definition of knowledge needs to be established. Knowledge can exist in multiple forms, and the researcher functions as an investigator seeking to understand how the participants build their knowledge (Killion and Fisher, 2018). Knowledge is the central understanding of what epistemology is (Al-Ababneh, 2020) and is considered as the anchor of any research project. In other words, the research foundation lies in the epistemology which is the theory of knowledge, and it is the adoption of a particular epistemological position that allows the researcher to distinguish what is legitimate knowledge or not (Thayer-Bacon, 2002). Thayer-Bacon (2002) further states that the philosophy of research depends on the epistemology, which does not focus on what people believe or how they generate knowledge but rather questions what people think is a piece of real knowledge and seeks evidence when claiming knowledge is true. This is despite the belief that what is true knowledge can be different based on people's perspective. A clear understanding of what is defined by epistemology is crucial to enable the

researcher to fully understand the methodological position that will shape the whole research.

Ontology, while related to epistemology, is focused on the nature of reality. It can be seen as objective or constructed from multiple aspects (Bryman, 2012). Killam (2013) emphasised that ontology, the researcher's central belief about reality, always includes questions of what is considered real, what is known to be real, what exists, and how reality can be categorised. Interpretivism and social constructivism are the research philosophies underpinning this study and within this epistemological approach is a feminist conception of knowledge, as will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **4.2.1 Interpretivism**

Perspectives on knowledge (epistemology) are based on two main philosophies: positivism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2012). Positivism regards knowledge through the lens of facts or laws while interpretivism considers knowledge as constructed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Yanow, 2015a; 2015b). Epistemologically, positivists believe that knowledge is independent of the researcher, in other words knowledge is objectively derived (Bryman, 2012; Al-Ababneh, 2020). On the other hand, interpretivists believe that knowledge is developed via experiences, constructed through the social. Bryman (2012) indicates that when a positivist stance is supported, reality has an independent existence, is not influenced by others, and research into that reality closely follows a structured method, including empirical testing of theories, to avoid biases. In other words, positivists claim that knowledge without confirmed sources or empiricism is not verifiable (Westmarland, 2001; Weber, 2004, Slevitch, 2011; Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Interpretivism emerged as a counter to positivism, and is explained by the idea that social reality is multiple, socially constructed, and depends on how persons interpret it (Slevitch, 2011) and this considers peoples' differences. Thus, reality is relative (Bryman, 2012). Yanow (2015a) suggests that interpretivism is significantly important in determining how a researcher views the world. In interpretivism, the world is socially constructed, is driven by multiple realities, and is thus ontologically relativist. In short,

relativism suggests that knowledge is subjective and heavily constructed, and reality consists of multiple truths (Charmaz, 2014). On the contrary, positivists are realists who perceive that there is only a single truth that can only be known objectively, and it exists independently from the researcher (Bryman, 2012; Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Importantly, Yanow (2015a) believes that interpretivism highlights the significance of reflexivity and the relationship between the knower and what can be known. Positivists and interpretivists hold a different perspective on relationships in research. Caton (2013) indicates that positivists urge the researcher not to be involved in close contact with participants to maintain ethical standards. In other words, the role of the researcher is only to obtain data, which is contrary to the interpretivist who believes the researcher acts as the instrument of research and the researcher's behaviours will influence the situation or subject they are researching and vice versa (Weber, 2004).

Bryman (2012) advocates that a deductive or inductive approach influences and connects the relationship between theory and research. Positivists work in a structured method which is deductive – that is, theories and hypotheses are developed before the research findings. In this approach the research findings either confirm or refute the already established theories and hypotheses – a top-down method (Bryman, 2012; Altinay et al., 2016). Inductive research works the opposite way – from the bottom up, where theory emerges from the data collected (Bryman, 2012; Altinay et al., 2016).

Killion and Fisher (2018) and Altinay et al. (2016) outline a distinct research situation between both epistemological approaches. The authors advocate that because positivists use objectivity and structured methodology through a deductive approach, the focus is primarily on facts, and the engagement between the researcher and researched material is lesser. However, interpretivists take a subjectivist perspective and use an inductive approach, engaging closely with the researched context and allowing the researcher and the participants to be flexible. Primarily, interpretivist research relies on the participants' information, which becomes the interpretation's starting point. In terms of confirming the truth of research, positivists believe that truth can only be validated when there is a direct relation between the existing reality and the data collected, meaning the data must correspond to the theory. However, interpretivists claim that truth can be confirmed by the resemblance of preliminary

interpretation with the collected lived experience of participants in a particular situation (Weber, 2004).

Interpretivism has attracted criticism as it is said to be self-centred, unstructured and to use small sample sizes which cannot be generalised (Yanow, 2015a). Despite that, interpretivists have overcome this critique by establishing the criteria of trustworthiness in their research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Trustworthiness establishes the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and this will be discussed further in Chapter Five. In addition, because social phenomena in the interpretive understanding are very subjective, each social situation can only be understood through the involvement of persons who have been in that position (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004; Suryani, 2013).

Concerning this research context, interpretivism as an approach can reveal that people's behaviour is unpredictable and can change depending on the construction of people's understanding. It is an interpretivist approach that enables the researcher to understand further the meaning behind behaviours. This study's research philosophy adopts an interpretivist stance, which believes that the knowledge about female chefs' career experiences is constructed and that every female chef possesses different experiences and different interpretations of reality.

#### **4.2.2 Social Constructivism**

Andrews (2012) stated that interpretivism influenced the emergence of social constructivism, and both share similar philosophies such as the belief that meanings are constructed, and both aim to understand individuals' social contexts and experiences (Schwandt, 2003). Interpretivism has also been used in conjunction with constructivism and both utilise qualitative research (Dean, 2018). Constructivism represents more than an explanation of what and how knowledge is constructed within the social context (Young and Collin, 2004). In understanding human behaviour, Faubert (2020) states that constructivism is crucial in supporting knowledge by offering a deeper understanding of humans' complexity and social situations. Charmaz (2014) suggests that constructivists aim to study the meanings and reasons of individual acts by exploring the different characteristics among individuals and Burr (2015) suggests

knowledge itself is derived from culture and history, where various social aspects can produce multiple social experiences. Constructivists see individuals as rooted in the social world where the realm of knowledge is complex and that knowledge should be seen through multiple perspectives rather than through an 'objective' lens (Charmaz, 2014; Burr, 2015).

Charmaz (2000) revealed that via constructivism, the researcher sees the research context through subjectivist epistemological lenses. Constructivists look beyond the experiences and meanings given and look further at individuals' connections with social interaction as part of constructivists ideology (Young and Collin, 2004). Charmaz (2014) also advocates that constructivists can develop several views, but for social constructivism, subjectivity and reflexivity are most prominent and connect the spheres of knowledge and social life. Constructivism and social constructivism share a similar perspective, still, it is social constructivism that looks closely at interaction within the social context of reality. According to Kang et al. (2017), knowledge in social constructivism sees it closely connected to cultural identities. Social constructivism views knowledge through the lens of intersectionality of different categories in people, mainly as social perception aligned with biological perception (such as gender, ethnicity/race), making the experiences people have, in any given society, often unpredictable and varied (Kang et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, social constructivism has faced criticism of its approach. Research by Ahmed (2019) contended that thinking based on just knowledge is not sufficient. In addition, social constructivism can neglect individual opinion, especially in a group learning context. However, this argument is denied by Amineh and Asl (2015) who stated that personal experiences are important in interpreting the meaning of knowledge because it is a social process. In other words, because constructivists believe that learning is an active process (Amineh and Asl, 2015; Ahmed, 2019), a person must be involved in acquiring knowledge rather than depending on instruction. The constructivist approach is significant because it encourages an active knowledge construction. Despite this criticism, this thesis adopts social constructivism as an important approach because career experiences are seen as an active learning process which depends on a contextualised environment and social situation.



The discussion above is significantly related to hospitality and tourism studies. Knowledge is an active process involving interaction, and thus social constructivism has a strong relationship with tourism's overall context (Paris, 2011). Paris further advocated that the social constructivism approach is suitable for real-world knowledge and experiences in understanding tourism. This is because tourism and its experiences are considered unique and can be interpreted differently; this approach can thus enable up-to-date understanding of the latest tourism experiences (Jennings et al., 2009).

The adoption of social constructivism in tourism is also evidenced by the understanding of smart tourism experiences (Hunter et al., 2015), tourist social construction of experience in terms of the authenticity of destinations (Teng and Chen, 2020), and constructive authenticity on tourist enjoyment and loyalty (Park et al., 2019). The social constructivism approach also can be seen in the tourism context in terms of social relationships. For example, Paris (2011) mentioned that social constructivism is relevant for tourism education which is a social experience. Mooney et al. (2016) have also adopted a social constructivist approach in seeking employees' interpretations of their hospitality careers, though their stories and experiences that demonstrate the importance of social relations in the profession. Moreover, Yıldırım (2020) also emphasised that the social constructivist approach used to understand social interactions in the tourism workplace revealed more profound understanding between an individual, an organisation, and the tourism industry itself.

Social constructivism has adopted interpretivist approaches and epistemologically and ontologically they both share a similar understanding of the social world. Social constructivism is the key approach adopted in this study as it is the most appropriate philosophy that will help to elicit people's behaviour in the construction of knowledge. Social constructivism is also consistent with the feminist epistemology outlined in the section below, which supports the perspective that women face a more significant social impact on their lives due to their gender, and which perceives knowledge as socially constructed.

### **4.2.3 Feminist Epistemology**

A feminist epistemological stance also underpins this thesis, and so it is crucial to define this epistemological approach. Feminist epistemology strongly highlights that knowledge, like gender, is socially constructed, and thus seeks to unfold multiple aspects of gendered relationships (Gremillion, 2004). Previously, feminists struggled to make themselves heard in academic works in the 1960s and 1970s, especially towards the production of knowledge and the second wave of feminism critically queried the process of knowledge production (Ring, 1987; Harding, 1991; Westmarland, 2001). This questioning of knowledge production by feminists generated feminist epistemology which developed as a critique against mainstream epistemology, and which emphasised that gender has a significant impact on knowledge production (Hidayat, 2018).

Feminist studies became one of the paradigms under the umbrella of interpretivism (Yanow, 2015a), and because feminist epistemology developed as a rebellious act against mainstream epistemology, it centred gender as a part of knowledge construction where before it was said to be extraneous to traditional (positivist) epistemology (Tanesini, 1999). Feminists argued that the mainstream epistemological ideas could be a disadvantage to women; thus, feminist epistemology sought to create a more profound and equal understanding of women's points of view (Schumann, 2016). Feminist research was said to be slightly different to the mainstream research as it focused on women's experiences and perspectives, keenly balancing the power between researcher, participants, or researched context. Feminist epistemology seeks to transform the social equality between men and women (Kumar, 2019) because it is said that masculinity bias exists in the mainstream epistemology (Tanesini, 1999). It is advocated that feminists challenge the idea that knowledge that is claimed to be general, and instead argue that epistemology is represented from male perspective; thus, feminists attempt to reconstruct the traditional epistemology (Thayer-Bacon, 2002).

Feminist standpoint theory, which is central to feminist epistemology, points out that knowledge must be viewed through multiple lenses (Harding, 2003) and that reality can be interpreted differently according to experiences (Tanesini, 1999). For example,

a researcher with a food and beverage background that only experiences a career at the domestic level is limited in an interpretation of a career at the international level. Their expertise or range of knowledge and experiences is different. Thus, seeing knowledge from an objective point of view is inappropriate to study social knowledge (Stanley et al., 1993). Adopting a feminist standpoint helps women understand and adapt to their challenging situations and experiences (Harding, 1986).

Most importantly, Caton (2013) stated that the feminist researcher believes in the rapport of researcher and participants that goes beyond a method; instead, identifying the meaning of experiences in people's lives, reflects the rationale behind reflexivity in qualitative research. Researchers have power to generate knowledge while their background influences the questions, participants, and the interpretation of findings (Barber and Haney, 2016). Researchers, also impact the research process through their characteristics, experiences, and social background (race, gender, class), which reflect the need for researcher reflexivity (Olesen, 2003). Emotions and the researcher's experiences produce a significant point of view that contributes to knowledge, primarily when the researcher's background is closely related to the researched subject, as argued by Barber and Haney (2016). That is, considering the researcher's personal experiences and social factors being shared with those participants who have a similar background can result in a deeper understanding of what happened in a particular situation – it can connect the knower and the known (Barber and Haney, 2016).

The study by Barber and Haney (2016) is focused on the influence of insider/outsider research on a disaster event adopting feminist standpoint epistemology, and here they argue that the close association of the researcher to the shock of a disaster can produce in-depth literature on social effects that leads to new knowledge, and enhanced trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants. Most importantly, such an approach can nullify the masculinity in research that might ignore emotions as well as neglecting the researcher who may be the insider in the researched subject. Moreover, feminists believe that the experiences of people are too complex to be understood fully because there are multiple factors underlying them (Barber and Haney, 2016).

Feminist researchers are often misunderstood as only focusing on women as the primary subject matter of their research, and are thus pitted against men (Kim, 2016). However, feminists strive to emphasise the experiences and opinions of women within their social situations, and their experiences are epistemically crucial to be understood (Tanesini, 1999). Since experiences are often considered private to one's life, this can help people understand what women have experienced. Thus, it is unfair to deny that feminist studies also offer an extensive advantage for several research fields. Opinions from women in a specific situation can help to highlight the underlying reality that might be hidden, and feminist studies can also assist in understanding women's lives and the complexities of their identities including gender, race, and class (Olesen, 2003). Concerning intersectionality, which underpins this research, Kim (2016) contends that the contribution of intersectionality within feminist studies needs further attention beyond gender alone, and, incorporating multiple identities, refutes the argument that feminist studies only examine a particular group of women. Intersectionality is certainly consistent with feminist's emphasis on an interrogation of diversity including the influence of gender, race, and class in women's experiences (Kim, 2016).

In relation to hospitality and tourism studies, gender and feminist-related research have significantly contributed to the discussion in the literature review chapter. For example, discussion included research on feminist analysis of social media usage in tourism (Wijesinghe et al., 2020), feminist tourism studies (Aitchison, 2005a), a feminist study of tourism careers (Liu et al., 2020), and gender in hospitality and tourism management (Mooney, 2020). Feminist scholarship in tourism/hospitality has focused on various fields and has explored women's experiences, both social and managerial (Olesen, 2003); it has also highlighted the differences between people, and here intersectionality can enable us to recognise a more dynamic tourism context especially when studying human interaction (Swain, 2004). Intersectionality can provide a better interpretation of feminist research, where studies of people are more valued (Bryman, 2012).

A variety of feminist studies are evident in different fields of tourism. For example, in the study by Chambers et al. (2017), feminist epistemology seeks to question the issues of masculinity and gender equality in tourism academia. Further, embracing

feminism and reflexivity can highlight the significance of gender research itself. In addition, Mansfield's (2007) research that adopted a feminist approach in sport tourism, revealed that the understanding of experience, and gender is crucial in determining one's attitude to sport tourism. This is further supported by Hamington and Hamington (2010) who suggest that adopting a feminist approach to hospitality is significant where the relationship between host and guest differ between male and female, socially, politically and experientially.

Pritchard (2014) advocated that adopting feminist epistemologies changes the approach to tourism research. Feminist epistemologies can highlight the unique contributions of feminist perspectives in tourism research and can make significant contributions to discussions about gender inequalities - particularly given the clear gender disparities in the tourism industry. Feminist research, utilising post-structuralist approaches can unpack the dynamics of gender and power in tourism, creating an advanced research area that plays a significant role in the evolving fields of tourism studies (Aitchison, 2005b).

Feminist approaches have made significant contributions to the field of social sciences by challenging traditional paradigms. Poststructuralist approaches allows research to escape from traditional thinking, especially in understanding gender (Carvalho, 2022). Feminist standpoint theory as previously discussed in Chapter Two has highlighted the importance of considering dynamic, distinct obstacles faced by individuals from marginalised social positions. It focuses on gender differences and situations (Harding, 1991). Intersectionality, another important feminist framework, highlights the interconnectedness of various social categories, such as gender and ethnicity in shaping experiences. Additionally, feminist empiricism promotes the critical examination of empirical data and the role of gender in knowledge production. Feminist empiricism aims to bring about improvements within existing scientific systems, focuses on changing the design and methods of research to ensure full inclusion of women in the research, both for the researchers and the subjects (Aitchison, 2005b). These approaches collectively contribute to more inclusive understanding in this study in addition to the narrative approach utilised in the present

work that also aligns with feminist empiricism in exploring the lived experiences of women.

### **4.3 Qualitative Research**

According to Phillimore and Goodson (2004), qualitative research is an investigation of an incidence, or behaviour and problems, in a social context, with the purpose to understand and explain a particular situation. The choice of qualitative research is determined by the philosophical stance taken by the researcher, and that will shape the rest of the study design (Kumar, 2019). Qualitative research aims to recognise human experience in how people construct their worlds of meaning; thus, it becomes a fundamental way in which researchers collect social data (Merriam, 2015) and is appropriate in seeking the social aspect of life (Kumar, 2019). As this research context is looking at female chefs' career development from different perspectives, this is the most appropriate approach, underpinned by the philosophical stances of the researcher discussed previously.

There are three core aspects of qualitative research; the first is to understand how individuals elucidate their experiences, the second is the way individuals build their worlds, and, thirdly, is the meaning that they bring to their experiences. These properties lead to the conclusion that the idea of qualitative research is to fully recognise the way people understand their experiences (Merriam, 2015). The explanation of qualitative research significantly mirrors the philosophical approach of this research, where it looks at how knowledge is constructed, and that reality exists in multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2015). Subjectivity has been mentioned in the discussion of interpretivism, thus what qualitative research aims for cannot be separated from the subjectivity of data that will be collected, as the meanings of an experience are varied, multiple, and complex. Epistemologically and ontologically, knowledge and reality are not objective to one truth. This understanding is also fundamental to feminist epistemology that emphasises subjective analysis in women's experiences (Olesen, 2003).

Expanding on the above, Merriam (2015) suggests four distinctive points in understanding qualitative research. First, research concentrates on the meaning and

understanding of an experience and belief. Second, the centre of research lies in the researcher collecting and analysing data. This is due to the nature of humans: being able to understand verbal or nonverbal interaction while at the same time monitoring the data collected for precise analysis. Third, the process of qualitative research is primarily inductive, which means that the researcher develops concepts and theories via their observations or understanding of the data. Fourth, the study will produce descriptive results through the participants' interviews, including quotes and documentation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) advocate that qualitative studies highlight the intricate relationship between multiple concepts and ideas where the researcher's position is crucial in examining a particular situation, which is subject to the social construction of reality. Moreover, it emphasises the social aspect that connects with the researcher's background, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or age (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Again, the central understanding here is the researcher's reflexivity and the subjective construction of knowledge which complements the aim of this research, as well as being consistent with what feminism seeks: the multiple experiences of women. Indeed, feminist epistemology favours qualitative research because it enables a more in-depth investigation of women in social life, and research has shown that qualitative research has been adopted extensively in various feminist studies such as in the areas of teaching and education (Globerman and Chan, 2000; Schumann, 2016), disaster (Barber and Haney, 2016), technological design (Foster, 2019) and cultural activities (Fullagar et al., 2019b).

The adoption of qualitative research in tourism and hospitality is evidenced via multiple studies and interests. For example, studies into the educational benefits of field trips on tourism students (Goh, 2011), tourism internship programmes and careers (Farmaki, 2018), medical stakeholder opinions of medical tourism (Yusof and Rosnan, 2020), culinary tourism's impact on the economy and socio-cultural development (Wondirad et al., 2021) and the roles of a photography in visual tourism (Winter and Adu-Ampong, 2021) have all utilised qualitative inquiry. Many modern approaches to research in the tourism and hospitality field also often include a combination of methods, creating measurement scales, using psychophysiological tools, archival

materials, online databases, text mining, scientific investigations, and incorporating photo elicitation (Okumus et al., 2023). Although mixed methods research isn't common in feminist studies, it also can help us to have a more influential presence in policy discussions, ultimately aiding feminist objectives (Carvalho, 2022). In addition to that, research by Whalen (2018) that previously compared ethnography and netnography in hospitality and tourism research, offers future researchers the chance to thoroughly investigate various online content using qualitative methods.

Research by Wilson et al. (2020) investigated qualitative research in the tourism field. They suggested that qualitative studies have increased, but reflexivity is still limited, and methods such as interviews and observation still dominate. In light of that, Wilson et al. (2020) concluded that qualitative tourism research while supporting multiple views, research into eco-tourism, cultural and feminist approaches, still retained positivist philosophy with a limited researcher's voice. The nature of tourism is that it is strongly linked to human interaction and experiences, and this makes qualitative research more crucial to capture richer data in terms of the social realities of the industry (Killion and Fisher, 2018).

Further criticism of qualitative research includes Rahman (2017) who suggested that qualitative research inevitably concentrates more on experiences and that reduces its credibility. Issues of sample size are also concerning and there are debates about the need to ensure that research questions are accurate enough (Silverman, 2016). Besides involving unsystematic views, the data derived from qualitative research is also difficult to replicate because of the nature of its subjectiveness that relies heavily on the researcher as the primary research instrument (Bryman, 2012). The latter author further contends that the generalisation of data extracted from a small sample size makes the findings tenuous. However, qualitative research still provides significant advantages because the sample size does not represent the population; it is generalised based on criteria or theory to strengthen the research focus (Bryman, 2012). A deeper understanding of interpretation, behaviour, influences can be gained through qualitative research because the study is conducted through multiple perspectives that answer the research question at hand (Bryman, 2012; Rahman, 2017).



Overall, feminists also agreed that qualitative research is the most compatible with the feminist epistemology. Qualitative research can highlight women's voices and subjectivity rather than searching for social objectivity (Bryman, 2012) even though some feminist studies also adopt quantitative methods (Westmarland, 2001). Olesen (2003) further advocates that feminists believe that women's subjective knowledge can be collected via qualitative research and Eagly and Riger (2014) in their study on psychology found that feminist psychologists find qualitative research more appealing as it is relatively coherent with what feminists are looking for, demonstrates greater flexibility, and the importance of a relationships. Bryman (2012) advocates that qualitative research enables the showcasing of women's opinions, reduces women's manipulation in the research fieldwork, and is an essential contribution to research procedures. Hence, in addressing the research questions of this study, qualitative research, underpinned by interpretivist, social constructivist, and feminist epistemologies was adopted. Narrative analysis is part of qualitative research (Kim, 2016) and helps us to unfold the particular stories (Bryman, 2012) of women in professional kitchens. This approach is used in feminist studies due to its ability to create a vital understanding of gender, identities, and behaviours (Gremillion, 2004). Moreover, Kim (2016) suggests that feminist theory and philosophy strongly influence this qualitative technique. In this study a narrative approach, via interviews with female chefs, is used to collect in-depth data that can add to our knowledge about the career experiences of these women, using their own voices.

#### **4.4 Narrative Approach**

Qualitative studies and narratives are often closely associated (Lieblich et al., 1998; Bruce et al., 2016). A narrative approach becomes an evolving methodology to collect in-depth stories as themes, and data can be constructed, deconstructed, and co-constructed, which allows for greater flexibility in how such narrated stories can be interpreted and presented (Bruce et al., 2016). While the term 'narrative' is also used interchangeably with stories, life history, or biography that represent experiences (Merriam, 2015), O'Toole (2018) suggests that a narrative approach consists of various points to be understood - the way the story is being told, the content of the story and the situation of the story background.

A statement by Labov and Waletzky in 1997 (cited in Minnaert, 2020) mentioned that a narrative should emphasise six characteristics for it to be well designed. First is the abstract, which comes from the narrated stories' details; the second is an orientation that refers to the venue, time, or participants. The third is to what has happened to gain more information to the experience. While the meaning behind the experience is the fourth characteristic, followed by the fifth, which is the outcome of the reality that happened, and lastly is the coda, referring to the participants' perspective at the current point of their narrative. In a narrative, the researcher is in the same position or understanding with the participants, and the approach is conducted via social interaction such as through interviews, at the same time considering the researcher's responses (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000 - cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010). This is also to ensure participants' actual reality and experiences can be collected. Investigations using a narrative approach can be achieved through communication and interviewing in a conversational style (Hillman and Radell, 2018).

Bochner and Riggs (2014) advocate that through narrative, researchers seek to understand how people reflect what has happened in their lives that make them what they are today. The narrative focuses on understanding events in chronological order where individuals stimulate subjectivity in their narrative stories. Narrative data can be collected through interviews, literature, or field notes (Lieblich et al., 1998) and interpreted through texts (Merriam, 2015). In other words, the narrative is a way of stories being told, and this justifies why a narrative approach has been adopted in this study using interviews as the data collection method: to ensure in-depth chronological experiences can be extracted through stories that enable the researcher to study the women's identity and behaviour in their career experiences. The fundamental reason for narrative being adopted in research is that it highlights behaviours, it explores the inner side of people in their constructed world, and this can be achieved through verbal or nonverbal ways. Feminist epistemologies view narratives as significant, because this establishes the subjectivity in people's personal stories as central to knowledge construction and that in turn avoids epistemic injustice (Lieblich et al., 1998; Abu Bakr, 2014).

Kim (2016) advocates that the narrative approach is crucial in understanding human life experiences that include challenges, changes, a snapshot of specific events that happen in a particular situation (time, place) that involve feelings, opinions and aspirations, making a narrative approach a complex and detailed process. Wijesinghe et al. (2020) claim that the narrative approach emphasises stories that symbolise realities and represents a cycle of stories to enable the researcher to understand each stage of an event and how it is connected in the social context (Elliott, 2005). A plot as a narrative approach is the predominant way to understanding stories or, in other words, through chronology to establish a sequence or connection between the different phases of stories (O'Toole, 2018). Thus, by adopting narrative analysis in this research, it does not only support the research purpose in investigating female chef's career experiences, but it also helps the researcher to collect more in-depth data because the central narrative focus is to understand the experience of a specific event as supported by the justification above. This approach is certainly compatible to understanding participants' career experiences from the start of their careers and throughout their career development. A narrative approach enables this research to reveal women's career experiences by breaking down the collected information through different stages to explore relationships and meanings.

The narrative is not a mere storytelling process of personal experience, but it also considers various situational aspects such as culture and social context (O'Toole, 2018). Elliot (2005) also declared that individuals from a different culture might have other narrative stories so that this approach encourages openness of communication within or beyond the culture itself and affects how people see experience, thus making it possible for each individual to have different stories (Wijesinghe et al., 2020). The narrative describing an individual's experience, interpreting identities, and reasoning about an event that is occurring (O'Toole, 2018) should be an ongoing process, while the data collection process can include transcribing and pre-analysing (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

Narrative approaches are applied in various areas of study. Concerning this current research's context in tourism and gender studies, a few examples have adopted this approach to collect extensive knowledge behind people's experience. In tourism, for

instance, Pasquinelli and Trunfio (2020) have used a narrative approach in accessing the narrative stories from online media context in regards to the issues of over-tourism; Minnaert (2020) investigated the stories from the internal and external network between stakeholders in the context of social tourism management; Smith and Weed (2007) used this approach to interpret sport tourism; Dimmock et al. (2019) used this approach to collect educators' experiences in teaching tourism courses. Narratives can also be collected from within the corporate world, as shown by Im et al. (2021) whose research used narrative strategies to explain how hospitality organisations overcame the COVID-19 crisis.

Further examples of the use of narratives in tourism include research by Derrien and Stokowski (2020) who explored the experiences of tourists via memories, imagination, and emotion, while Prince's (2021) research found that narratives can be used in ancestral tourism to promote identity, experiences and gain meaningful memories. This shows that narratives can highlight the meaningful experiences that are closely related to a person gained by recalling memories. While concerning feminism-gender studies, research, for example, has utilised a narrative approach from students involved in community engagement through feminist pedagogy (Clark-Taylor, 2017), or about personal stories on religion and cultural experience (Abu Bakr, 2014). Narrative techniques are mostly used in feminist-gender research to understand specific personal experiences of women in relation to a particular event or historical occurrence (Smith and Weed, 2007).

A narrative approach not only highlights the importance of the relationship between researcher and participants but also requires detailed observation, communication, and reflexivity of the researcher throughout the process in various social settings (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The social connection between researcher and participants is vital for the stories to be interpreted most comfortably for the participant (Charmaz, 2000).

#### **4.5 Reflexivity**

According to Probst (2015), being reflexive is an "action that directs attention back to the self and fosters a circular relationship between subject and object" (pp. 37).

Reflexivity analyses the researcher's identity that affects knowledge construction, findings, and research context and is a practice that is fundamental in qualitative research (Hsiung, 2008; Davis 2020). The journey I have experienced as a culinary graduate provides a background that reflects my opinions and position as both an insider and an outsider in this current research. A researcher must consider how being reflexive in research can be achieved by accessing the role of an insider or outsider (Couture et al., 2012). This practice of reflexivity can be expressed by including and constructing my position in this research from the lens of insider, outsider, a female chef, a woman, a Malay and Malaysian (Wickramasinghe, 2014).

My position as female, a chef, and a Malaysian was similar to my participants. Differences between us exist as well, where some of my participants come from different ethnic groups. Sometimes, I needed to portray both characters, as insider and outsider. When it comes to Chinese and Indian ethnicities, I am an outsider, but I hold a similar position in my career background to the participants, so, in relation to these facets, I may have been viewed as an insider. In this research, being Malaysian has given me the advantage to access my participants through a broad shared understanding of our country's culture; my knowledge about specificities of other non-Malay ethnic group's culture might be limited. However, I have a clear picture of their working environments and the nature of being a chef in a commercial kitchen was beneficial to me as an insider to build a closer relationship. I must say that my insider and outsider positions in this research were flexible depending on the participants, and the role of my identity (Couture et al., 2012) led interviews in an unpredictable way but in essence, this was vital in gaining complete narrative stories from members of multiple ethnic groups.

My culinary experiences from my education through to a professional background helped me to reflect on my position in this research; it helped me to develop more understanding of the realities of this career as a student and professional. Nevertheless, this was an ongoing development process for me as I continued to learn and thus adapt my identity while bringing my own perspective to the research (Butler-Kisber, 2010). I began my diploma course in 2008, when I was 18 years old and I started with a good impression regarding gender composition when I noticed that the

culinary course was dominated by female students. However, my first internship experience started with scepticism when I noted that most of the chefs were male. I felt we were subject to a 'male gaze' when a number of female culinary students walked into the kitchen: as if this was not the place for us. However, my second internship experience in a different hotel provided an equal work environment, maybe because of the growth of culinary courses, or the hotel's location in a capital city. This time, I was given a more difficult task, enabling me to expose myself to broader job tasks, which definitely boosted my confidence. One distinct point is that most female chefs in that particular hotel were employed in pastry and bakery, all associated with feminine cooking skills, while male chefs dominated the main kitchen production section.

My observations revealed that most Chinese female chefs worked in the pastry kitchen department compared to other departments, where there was some clustering of different ethnicities. In 2014, I decided to choose a food and beverages department in a medical centre for my bachelor's internship program, which contradicted what I experienced before: surprisingly it was female dominated. It provided an extensive training opportunity, and equal job tasks for both men and women, even though men still occupied the managerial positions. A medical centre's food and beverages department is more slow-paced, food is served based on schedule and structure. Nine years as a culinary student exposed me to different career experiences as a female chef, and I can clearly remember the situations that occurred and events that happened to me, which reflects my position in this research.

Thus, this reflection on my experiences in particular situations as a female chef in Malaysia plays a vital reflexive role in my research philosophy (Probst, 2015). To pinpoint each experience would require lengthy stories, but I must say that I continue to have a sceptical view about what female chefs can offer to the industry due to their limited experiences which I believed to be related to discrimination and gender issues. It is a difficult job being in a kitchen: for me it is not the amount of work that you need to do, it is the schedule of work. Although I was not married during the time I worked in the kitchen, from what I could see, it was difficult especially for married women. Later in my professional career as a lecturer in higher education in Malaysia, I

observed the growing trend of female students enrolling in a culinary and hospitality-related course, driven by their enthusiasm and inspired by celebrity chefs' popularity and cooking. But, during my years in academia, these female students showed no interest in joining commercial kitchens be it in a hotel, restaurant and so on, where there were limited female chefs working as professionals. I began to reflect on my position in this research, where my various experiences helped me shape the direction of this research, enabling me to understand situations better from the participants' point of view.

The researcher's position affects the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Davis, 2020) because the researcher attempts to view a subject simultaneously within their perspective and through the participants' perspective (Probst, 2015). This is because reflexivity not only affects the researcher-participant relationship but because it covers the whole process of research design, data collection, analysis, and findings; thus, the ability of the researcher to be able to understand their research role is vital (Hsiung, 2008; Probst, 2015). This will also help the researcher take note of their influence on the whole research process from the beginning to the end, which enables the construction of knowledge throughout a thesis, for example (Davis, 2020). On that note, reflexivity recognises the researcher's position that contributes to the findings of a project rather than just viewing the researcher as a neutral observer (Patnaik, 2013).

On that note, being an insider or outsider has its advantages and disadvantages. Still, Couture et al. (2012) believes that either insider or outsider status is complicated; it is unique, based on interviews and the participants' perceptions. The advantages of being an insider include that cultural awareness can be gained, the similarity in terms of character or experiences is evidenced, closer relationships with openness can be established, and there can be high levels of understanding about other's experiences and realities (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Kelly, 2014). Being an insider is also significant to the social construction of knowledge; this is because there are many aspects that are constructed as an insider, such as attitude, interpretation, knowledge, and interaction, that change during an interview, especially in qualitative research, that highlight the position of a researcher as a vital contributor to meaning-making (Helps,

2017). However, being an insider also can trigger issues for the researcher and the research. When an insider is too familiar with the research context, limited and repetitive interpretation can happen as participants might miss covering some information because they think that the researcher knows what they are thinking; conversely participants may do the same, when believing outsiders are not able to understand the experiences of an event (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Barber and Haney, 2016).

While as an outsider, the advantages are that there are limited biases or preconceptions which in turn enable new perspectives that might be initially overlooked by the insider (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Moreover, as the outsider usually sees themselves as having limited knowledge, they tend to examine the information or issues in more detail rather than looking them through a lens of 'common sense' thus probably building more interest and reflection on a topic (Liu and Burnett, 2022). In the case of this research, being an outsider to the Chinese and Indian communities allowed for more interesting discussions from these groups of women, especially when it came to their ethnic experiences. Nevertheless, being an outsider also poses some disadvantages such as limited understanding or access to information, and there might be challenges in gaining trust or building rapport as compared to being an insider, especially when studying a community or sensitive issues pertaining to culture (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This also might result in limitations in interpreting and understanding experiences (Liu and Burnett, 2022). The probability that my understanding about how Chinese and Indian female chefs go through their career experiences in Malaysia might be a limitation is quite high. However, my biography and national background suit the participant's background, which is Malaysian, making my research position and participants selection more reliable and accurate (Brunero et al., 2015; Davis, 2020).

As a Malay woman, I am aware of my experiences from different points of view. Malay culture is very patriarchal, and, in a household, men are still required to be the main breadwinners, and it is normally permissible for them to return late from work, but it is different when it comes to women. Whatever the career situation, household responsibilities for women (as a daughter, wife and mother) are still engrained within



Malay society. And, as mentioned above in my own reflexive observations of working in such a role, this conflicts with the nature of work for female chefs. I believe that other women's experiences from different ethnicities also are further influenced by a social structure that creates multiple narrative stories. The intersection of ethnic background in this research will influence the discussion, interviews, and even the data analysis (Couture et al., 2012). My self-reflection could not represent other female chefs' experiences, especially those from the Chinese and Indian participants, in addition to their career situations. I know that working in a multiethnic situation might have its own advantages and disadvantages. I have experienced both as a Malay where I needed to try harder to mingle or communicate with the Chinese, although there were times where my colleagues tried to talk in English rather than Chinese. I experienced feelings of being a minority, but at the same time a sense of familiarisation: to live and communicate with different ethnic groups on a day-to-day basis meant that this multicultural situation was not bizarre for me. As a lecturer, I've been 'in' the academic side of the culinary sector, which has further informed my feminist perspective. My position has allowed me to observe how culinary studies, within academia, is taught and understood. This perspective has deepened my commitment to empowering female culinary students and female chefs. It has also increased my awareness of the need for a feminist approach into culinary education whether in research or teaching, to address the traditional norms. My experiences as a chef also have informed me on the practical challenges faced by female chefs especially in Malaysia's professional kitchens, further emphasising the importance of my research.

In my role as a researcher, chef, and lecturer, I have had the unique opportunity to experience different stages or phases within the culinary world. Now, 15 years since I started in this career, I've experienced the challenges and successes in many ways which provides a valuable insight into the industry. Finally, being a female chef has positioned me as an insider in my research, allowing me to connect more fully with the experiences of other female chefs. My ethnicity as a Malay woman further influences my perspective, as it brings forth the intersectionality of my identity in the diverse Malaysian context. These personal and professional experiences shape my feminist belief by strengthening the importance of highlighting the voices and experiences of

women in this career journey. As Pillow and Mayo (2012) suggest, in feminist research, I must be reflexive. My belief is grounded in the pursuit of gender equality, increasing the opportunities for women within the culinary industry and also in academia, and my research aims to contribute to this ongoing pursuit.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has presented an overview of the philosophies and approaches taken— an outline of critical features that shape this research's direction. Interpretivism and social constructivism were introduced to illustrate how knowledge and reality are socially constructed and to discuss the perspective that views experiences as evolving via multiple aspects. The significance of feminist epistemology was covered to discuss its purpose of highlighting female knowledge and ensuring that women's voices are heard. This research adopts a qualitative method, driven by the abovementioned philosophies, that investigates female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia.

Criticisms of qualitative philosophies were also highlighted but these did not deny the significance of these approaches to achieving the study's research objectives. Despite the critiques, it is advocated that interpretivism and social constructivism, via the lenses of feminist epistemology, are well suited to this research context which seeks to investigate the career experiences of female chefs from the multi-ethnic context of Malaysia. This research was developed with the most appropriate methodology - a narrative approach that enabled the researcher to collect in-depth stories and experiences from the participants on their career experiences. The researcher's reflexivity as an insider and outsider also facilitated data collection and interpretation of participant's experiences to maximise the findings from the interviews. The next chapter will outline the method adopted in this research in more precise detail.

## **Chapter 5 Method**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the method of data collection taken in this research as Walliman (2005) suggests that collecting information for research will produce research outcomes. As this research adopts a narrative, qualitative approach, interviews were chosen to collect stories from the participants. The sample of participants, which comprised Malaysian female chefs, was determined by several criteria established via purposive sampling and the snowballing technique, to ensure data credibility. At the same time, the research questions developed were guided by the literature review. The data analysis method via thematic analysis is explained with utilisation of NVivo. Finally, this chapter also explains how rigor has been established in this research and considers research ethics and the limitations of the data collection.

### **5.2 Research Background**

Previously, in Chapter One, information on the crucial themes of gender, ethnicity and employment in the Malaysian context were discussed extensively (see Section 1.4, page 14) providing a detailed overview of the research background in the country. Accordingly, this study was carried out by recruiting participants from Malaysia, focusing on female chefs who were working within an area called Klang Valley. Klang Valley is located on the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia and consists of a number of major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam, Subang Jaya, Klang and Ampang Jaya (Rashid and Ghani, 2009). The location chosen is significant as it is considered as an ongoing development area in the country (Rashid and Ghani, 2009) which, in turn, has facilitated the recruitment of participants who work in professional kitchens in the area. This study targeted a number of diverse work settings instead of choosing only one: this was to avoid generic representation of a particular work setting. Concerning the research purpose of investigating the role of ethnicity in female chef's careers, narratives were collected from three leading ethnic groups in Malaysia - Malay, Chinese, and Indian. This hope was to achieve understanding of multiple experiences by participants that come from different ethnicities, and who possibly have various working experiences.

The food and beverage sector in Malaysia is a diverse and thriving industry encompassing a wide range of culinary traditions and flavours. It plays a significant role in the country's economy, with a strong emphasis on street food culture. Malaysia's food and beverage sector is a dynamic and integral part of its multicultural society, catering to both locals and tourists. The services sector in Malaysia contributes RM 1.17 trillion or GBP 196 billion to the total of RM 3.21 trillion or GBP 539 billion of the country's gross output, and this includes food and beverage services (The Star, 2023). As per the 2021 figures from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023) on the Annual Economic Statistics for Food and Beverages Services, the composition of the country's food and beverage services contributes more than RM 78 million or GBP 13 million employing 968, 717 workers. Further details of the sector's importance are outlined below, in Table 3:

<b>Food and Beverages Activities</b>	<b>Amount (RM)</b>	<b>Total Employed Workers</b>
Food services	RM 65, 795, 069	771, 259
Event catering services	RM 4, 043, 381	101, 087
Beverages services	RM 8, 645,687	96, 371

Table 3: Overall Food and Beverages Activities Gross Output and Workers

Specifically, in the areas of Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Putrajaya) where this study took place, the gross output contributions and the number of workers employed were also significant, as indicated in Table 4:

<b>State</b>	<b>Amount (RM)</b>	<b>Total Employed Workers</b>
Kuala Lumpur	RM 16, 809, 033	151, 891
Selangor	RM 20,964,570	245, 455
Putrajaya	RM 362, 912	2732

Table 4: Food and Beverages Activities Breakdown by State

According to research by Globaldata for 2022, the Malaysian foodservice industry earning around RM 80.9 billion in revenue. The primary profitable sectors in the Malaysian foodservice market encompass FSR (full services restaurants), QSR (quick services restaurants), accommodation, bars, clubs, pubs, leisure establishment, travel, retail, workplaces, coffee and tea shops, ice cream parlours, and mobile operators. FSR held the top position in terms of the profit, for the sector in 2022, reflecting the preference of Malaysian customers for fine-dining experiences. QSR ranked as the second-largest category in 2022, as consumers visited them for convenient and cheaper meal options (Malaysia Foodservice Market Size and Trends by Profit and Cost Sector Channels, Players and Forecast to 2027, 2023). The increasing income levels and the normal practice of dining out among the working Malaysian population has also driven the development of restaurants in the country (Rashid et al., 2019). An understanding of the restaurant sector, one of the hospitality sectors that operates strongly in the country, is crucial in understanding the career opportunities available to people in Malaysia. The restaurant industry contains many workplaces where women can utilise their culinary skills and, navigate their careers, offerings insights into the opportunities within different career choices or paths.

### **5.3 Interview Process**

As this research adopts a narrative approach, interviews were used to collect data. Interviewing is a systematic method for collecting research data via research questions that demand in-depth listening and transcribing (Kim, 2016). As Bryman (2012) mentioned, qualitative research interviews are mostly centred around either unstructured or semi-structured interviews. This research used a semi-structured in-depth interview technique that is consistent with the narrative approach, with informal interviews, more akin to conversations, being utilised to enable the participants to be more comfortable in telling their stories. Such an approach can assist the researcher in investigating the area of interest where the participant's response will determine the interview style (Saunders et al., 2007) and allow the participants to give their judgment without any restriction (Scott and Usher, 1999). Building rapport and interaction between researcher and participants to gain trust are central to this method.

Open-ended questions can encourage participants to speak freely within the guided research questions and key themes. As supported by Kim (2016), the way an unstructured interview is conducted will encourage more flexible sharing between researcher and participants, with room to explore any underlying issues that might be relevant or not mentioned in the research questions. The interviews were carried out individually with female chefs through online face-to-face techniques with the aid of audio recording with the participant's consent to assist the interpreting process of the collected data.

To support the narrative approach in this study, interview questions were asked according to the specific career phase of the participants, hence an interview guide was developed (Table 5, also attached in Appendix 7). The interviews and questions were outlined in relation to three phases: the early, middle, and mature career phases to gather in-depth career experiences from the participants. The definition and time frame of each career phase was flexible as this depended on the individual participants years of experience, but this nevertheless served as a guide to make the interview questions flow well and enabled the female chefs to reflect on their career experiences throughout their career journeys. This approach of career stages as categories is often used to understand career related studies, for example as utilised by Mello et al. (2023) that label the career stages, according to the ages of the participants, with references to 'early', 'mid' and 'late'. This is similarly to what this study did, by outlining three career phases to be explored in the interviews. The career phases acted as a crucial outline for understanding the experiences of female chefs in this study as they served as the guide for an analysis of the narrative stories that women in this profession encounter. By shaping the study or interview process around these career phases, it became possible to assess the unique situations and factors that influenced female chefs' career experiences, in helping participants to share their experiences chronologically. This chronology was also important in supporting the narrative approach adopted, that aligns with the participants' career progression. The different phases are described below.

### **5.3.1 Early Career Phase**

This phase focuses on understanding the individual factors such as gender and ethnicity, at the early stages of a chef's career. This is when the participants took their first steps in their careers as chefs in a professional kitchen. The key themes of questions were around why a chef career was chosen, the perspective towards gender in careers, emotion, behaviour, and the role of ethnicity. This phase was essential in setting the stage for further discussion, and shaped the entire interview process, aiming for openness, flexibility in sharing stories and encouraging a comfortable interview tone to enhance closer interaction.

### **5.3.2 Middle Career Phase**

The middle career phase focused on understanding career *progress*. This marks the career phase from at least three to five years in a professional kitchen. This stage is when the participants are more comfortable with their career and how they see their progress compared to the early phase. It also focuses on the personal skills of the female chefs and any external factors that might affect them. The key themes of questions concentrated on the female chefs' skills and strategies to excel in their careers, while understanding their behaviour regardless of any career situation that they faced.

### **5.3.3 Mature Career Phase**

The final phase determined female chefs' career adaptability after they had a stable career and considerable job experience. This was probably after at least five years of being in the profession. The key questions asked focused on whether their career goals were affected or achieved, and how going through their careers affected their self-efficacy level. Foremost, the female chefs' self-perception based on gender was questioned as this is what the researcher asked about at the beginning of this career phase; thus, overall, the focus in this phase was to determine the career experiences of female chefs and their current or future career prospects.

### 5.3.4 Research Questions

This research is guided by three main research questions to achieve the research aim and objectives. The questions sought to determine the career experiences of female chefs through a narrative approach and are outlined below:

Research questions:

- 1) What are the factors that influenced women's career behaviours and perceptions?
- 2) How does the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity impact women's career experiences?
- 3) How do women view their future career prospects?

The interview guide was based on the three career phases described above, the early phase of the interview consisted of demographic questions as an informal way to develop a connection with the participants. In this phase, my knowledge and experiences as a chef were demonstrated to put the participants in a comfortable position and develop trust to encourage a more relaxed and in-depth conversation. Following this, several key themes were developed based on the research questions and the theoretical framework. The key themes and scope of questions are outlined in Table 5 as the interview guide:

<b>Career Phase</b>	<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>Scope of Questions</b>
Early Phase (Individual Factors)	Gender belief	Gender perception towards chef careers.
	Ethnicity	The factor of ethnic background towards their career.
	Performance accomplishment (experiences)	The experience that female chefs have before starting their career will determine their confidence or effort.
	Attitude	Attitude and behaviour that is important as a chef and how others' attitudes affect them.



	Psychological cues	The emotion and perception as a chef that might influence self-efficacy and their career.
Middle Phase (Personal Skills and External Factors)	Vocational personality	The ability and skills possessed, alongside strategy imposed to succeed in their chef careers and their career interests.
	Behavioural control	Ability to control own behaviour regardless of career situation.
	Vicarious experiences	Monitoring others' experiences to see career possibilities such as challenges or success.
	Subjective norms	The effect of others social behaviour within the career situation towards their own behaviour.
	Verbal persuasion	Influences of responses received that affects career and self-efficacy.
Mature Phase (Career Experiences)	Career adaptability	Adaptability in chef careers towards changes, challenges, situations, and experiences.
	Life themes	Motivation on the career decision to achieve career goals and reflection of career experiences to personal life. This include gender, ethnic perspectives and how career experiences reflect future planning.
	Self-efficacy	The overall aspect of career experiences that influence self-efficacy as a female chef.

Table 5: Key Themes and Scope of Questions

The scope of questions and key themes will help to encourage detailed answers from the three main research questions on career perception, behaviours, gender, ethnicity,

and future career prospects. This also helped to clarify the topic discussed within theories and literature, while gaining information via interview questions that can contribute to any possible gap in the research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012).

### **5.3.5 Sampling**

Kim (2016) suggests that a sample represents a large community relevant to a research study, making the research more manageable and accurate. This research adopted a purposive sampling technique to gather research participants. According to Bryman (2012), purposive sampling sets the criteria needed from participants but still has variance of respondents relevant to the research context or questions. To execute this, the selection of participants was determined, based on two main criteria - their educational background and working experiences. Participants must have at least one certificate in any food and beverages related area before starting their chef career. Education will determine their belief, perception, and skills before beginning their chef career. At the same time, they should possess at least five years of experience working in a professional kitchen setting. Five years of experience is an appropriate period in shaping their career progress, within that time, participants can monitor their career progress and look forward, for future career planning.

Participants were contacted via two methods, through email and social media such as Instagram and Facebook. First, information based on personal contacts as a chef and former lecturer in Malaysia helped the recruitment process and was supported by a snowballing technique. Second, social media, using hashtags such as #malaysianfemalechefs or #femalechefs in malaysia was used to look for available participants, including the Malaysian Chef Association Facebook group to look for female chefs. Following the information from personal contacts in the culinary industry, the snowballing technique was useful and extended the reach to gather participants, as the participants further recommended their contacts who shared similar criteria needed for the research. In other words, this involved using a referral from current participants in the researcher's network (Bryman, 2012; Altinay et al., 2016). This research method of adopting a purposive and snowballing technique is quite common in qualitative research methods (Bryman, 2012). Contact was also made with possible

participants from organisations with experience working in professional kitchens, such as hotels, restaurants, and chef lecturers. A summary of the selection criteria is below:

1. At least one certificate in any related food and beverages background, including undergraduate or postgraduate programmes.
2. At least five years of working experience in any professional kitchen, business, or job position. The professional kitchen could be in a hotel, restaurant, café, catering company, education environment or any food and beverages establishment.

Once the participants were selected, an informed consent letter with the research details was sent to each participant via email as an introduction, before further arrangement of the interview schedule was decided. Due to the challenges of determining the fixed number of samples, as there is limited access to statistics of female chefs in Malaysia, the research began with a sample of at least fifteen female chefs, with at least five from each ethnic group. The sample size also depends on how convincing the findings are that can be drawn from the selected sample; this will vary based on the research situation (Bryman, 2012). Still, the number of participants also depends on data saturation which is an ongoing process of selecting more and more interviewees and analysing the data produced simultaneously until no new information is discovered.

In this study, the selection of female chefs from the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) was purposefully targeted to provide a diverse perspective on the careers of women chefs within the Malaysian culinary industry. This approach aimed to capture the detailed, variety of experiences of female chefs from different ethnic backgrounds. This targeted selection ensured that the study include a wide reach of voices and experiences, allowing for a more complete understanding of the career journeys of female chefs.

### **5.3.6 Access to Research Participants**

Participants in this research were approached via personal contacts and snowballing techniques. Personal contacts and the snowballing technique helped to recruit Malay

and Chinese participants, but it was difficult to recruit Indian female chefs. The personal contacts were from my previous workplace such as hotels and university, all of whom worked in the culinary profession either in academia or industry. From my personal contacts, the snowballing technique helped to recruit more participants. Social media was used to access Indian female chefs, but there was a lack of response from the prospective participants. The personal contact and snowballing technique play an important role in accessing the participants of a study, particularly in the context of privilege and disadvantage. As the use of personal contacts involves recruiting participants from the researcher's existing network, this leads to a sample that is gathered from within the social circles and backgrounds of the researcher (Joseph et al., 2016). This may be a disadvantage, in that it that unintentionally favours individuals with similar backgrounds or perspectives to the researcher. On the other hand, snowballing can help mitigate this, based on referrals from initial participants, to identify further participants (Ritchie et al., 2013). It can help ensure a more diverse sample, allowing for a fuller understanding of the experiences of individuals from wider backgrounds.

In total, eighteen female chefs were recruited for this study, with ages ranging between 23 to 65 years old. The interviews were semi-structured interviews and collected the narrative stories from each female chef on their career experiences. Among the participants, seven were Malay, seven were Chinese and four were Indian. According to the demographic profile, these female chefs worked in professional kitchens and are still active in the industry. Even though some of the participants ventured into different employment such as in food and beverage business, education and consultancy, they were all participating in various culinary related activities as chefs at the time of the interview. All of them had a range of 5 to 31 years of industrial experience. Two female chefs had multiple food and culinary related certificates, five graduated with diplomas, the majority graduated with degrees, four participants had graduated from master's programmes and three were doing their PhDs at the time of the interviews.

Table 6 below summarises the profile of the eighteen participants. The participants are identified with pseudonyms with the relevant demographic details.

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Years of Experiences	Education Background	Job Position
Fiza	31	Malay	Single	12 years	Master	Chef Lecturer
Farah	33	Malay	Married with children	13 years	Master	Chef Lecturer
Dila	35	Malay	Single	18 years	Degree	Head Chef & Chef Owner
Aini	42	Malay	Single	27 years	Diploma	Private Chef & Consultant
Ina	59	Malay	Married with children	30 years	Certificate	Chef Lecturer / Cookbook Writer / Celebrity Chef
Zah	60	Malay	Single	25 years	Degree	Chef Advisor & Motivator
Laila	65	Malay	Married with children	31 years	Certificates	Chef Lecturer / Celebrity Chef
Ling	27	Chinese	Single	9 years	Degree	Pastry Chef & Chef Owner
Yuen	29	Chinese	Single	7 years	Master	Head Chef
Huan	30	Chinese	Single	9 years	Master	Chef Lecturer
Susie	31	Chinese	Single	9 years	Advance Diploma	Chef & Treasurer for a Chef Association
Mei	31	Chinese	Single	13 years	Degree	Pastry Chef & Consultant
Cheng	34	Chinese	Married with no children	16 years	Diploma	Pastry Chef & Chef Owner
Jia	36	Chinese	Single	15 years	Degree	Head Chef
Esha	23	Indian	Single	5 years	Degree	Pastry Chef
Darshini	23	Indian	Single	5 years	Diploma	Chef
Kamala	29	Indian	Married with no children	11 years	Degree	Chef Owner
Priya	36	Indian	Single	17 years	Diploma	Pastry Chef

Table 6: Participants' Background

### **5.3.7 Pilot Study and Interviews**

In May 2021, a pilot study was conducted. This was to determine whether it would be possible to conduct online interviews due to COVID-19 travel risks, if the initial plans to conduct face to face interviews in Malaysia were to be cancelled. Three interview sessions were conducted with three female chefs, each from one of the three ethnic groups. In this pilot study, a few issues were taken into consideration to assess the feasibility of online interviews. First, the length of the online interviews was recorded, second, to see if the process of gathering information through online interviews was suitable, and third, to explore the experiences of scheduling of the interviews within different time zones between Malaysia and the United Kingdom. This was carefully considered to ensure that the rest of the interviews could be conducted smoothly.

The online interview took on average 40 minutes via the Zoom platform, with a separate device for audio recording. From the pilot study, it was decided that online interviews were possible given that the interview length was suitable, internet connection was relatively good, and the interviews could be conducted following the participants suitable time zone. Hence, online interviews were conducted throughout the data collection phase to minimise the issue of travel risk. Interview questions were also simplified to maximise participants understanding, but still following the interview guide. Following the pilot study, the online interviews were conducted from May 2021 until August 2021. Each interview took an average of 45 minutes and was conducted via multiple online meeting platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet according to the participants' availability.

### **5.4 Data Saturation**

The purpose of data saturation is to determine the adequate sampling number and to identify that the data emerging from analysis do not produce new data, produce repeated data or similar data (Saunders et al., 2018). The exact sample size needed in qualitative interviews is challenging to determine; it depends on the research context and the contribution to findings (Becker, 2014). Becker (2014) also mentioned that knowing how many interviews are sufficient is determined through analysing the data,

starting from the data collection phase until a concrete conclusion is made; thus, the number of samples or interviews needed will change based on the analysis.

Bryman (2012) suggested that sample size can be influenced by the theoretical underpinning of the research, as he mentioned that life stories and interpretive analysis could involve smaller samples due to the nature of the in-depth data gathered, or it could involve a simple straightforward question (Charmaz, 2012). To be definite about how many interviews were needed in this research was challenging to determine especially when the interviews had not yet started. However, Warren (2002) suggested that twenty to thirty can be considered adequate, even though again this can vary depending on data saturation and it is not a definite number. When the data collection begins, analysis is continuous to determine the sufficient sample size that can contribute to the research findings. Because this research looks at the career experiences of female chefs, from different ethnic groups, it is crucial to see whether there are similarities and differences between their career experiences and how key themes emerge from the data analysis.

## **5.5 Trustworthiness**

It needs to be emphasised that research findings from this study cannot be generalised to female chefs' careers throughout Malaysia. Nevertheless, the in-depth stories and experiences via narrative interviews from female chefs working in different professional kitchen backgrounds can capture rich data that mirror the female chefs' career experiences. Research can always be questionable on its quality and findings: rigor needs to be established. Daniel (2019) advocated that rigor in qualitative research is crucial in retaining research integrity and assessing quality.

Rigor also helps to justify the complexity of the research process as the researcher is the main research instrument that can either enhance or hinder the entire research project (Goodman et al., 2020). In other words, as researchers are preoccupied by their own understandings and perspectives, rigor allows the researcher to review and interpret meaning from different lenses and is beneficial in establishing consistency and accuracy (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). Trustworthiness is a vital concept that speaks to the quality of qualitative research. It enhances the research findings,

interpretations and increases the level of quality and confidence towards the research outcome (Daniel, 2019). In determining the trustworthiness of a qualitative research project, Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### **5.5.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the method that helps to confirm that the research findings are true, which can be achieved via prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Polit and Beck, 2022). According to Maher et al. (2018), this criterion is measured via reflection on the participants' attributes and through the accuracy of describing the research participants (Goodman et al., 2020). Throughout this thesis, the participants' demographic details have been outlined, including their narrative stories and experiences following the themes emerging from the data.

The interview transcripts were assessed in detail through the NVivo software and analysed in terms of the extent of similarity or difference amongst responses taking account of the different backgrounds of the participants. Credibility also allowed the researcher to acknowledge the participants' experiences (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). In this research, the researcher included her own reflexivity during the research process to continuously review the career experiences of female chefs against her own experiences and knowledge. In addition, in the discussion of findings in Chapters Six and Seven, the verbatim quotes from participants are used to enhance the discussion.

### **5.5.2 Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the ability of research to be available in other potential research settings other than the original research context. Polit and Beck (2022) suggest that transferability ensures the research is useful in various settings, which means that this study can be applied and extended to further study on female chefs' career experiences. In this sense, transferability focuses on the individual opinions from participants, containing in-depth description about the research context (Connelly, 2016). According to Thomas and Magilvy



(2011), one way to establish transferability is via describing the demographics or geography in this study.

This research involved female chefs from Malaysia, which gathered participants from the Klang Valley from the three main ethnic groups. Further research using the similar context and understanding might be transferred into different geographical areas outside Klang Valley, or for a specific ethnic group. Careers in a professional kitchen for women in different geographical areas can be interpreted from different points of view. As the research also has established detailed understanding of women's careers, the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity, particularly for female chefs, the research can be applicable to various settings specially to understand women in professional kitchens, not to mention the narrative approach taken in this research in highlighting individuals career experiences.

### **5.5.3 Dependability**

According to Goodman et al. (2020), dependability can be confirmed via the consistency of data. The strength of data across time and conditions can be achieved via producing an audit trail and detailed notes on the activities that are involved in the interviews (Polit and Beck, 2022; Connelly, 2016). Supporting this, Thomas and Magilvy (2011) advocated that dependability is achieved through the detailed justification of research purpose, participants, data collection method and length, data analysis and findings. Detailed description about research can enable future researchers to replicate, continue or advance the research in the future (Maher et al., 2018).

The details of the current study's research process were explained throughout Chapter One, Three and Four which has helped to establish consistency in the research. A detailed description of the research aim, objectives, and questions was outlined which was guided by the theoretical framework in understanding female chefs' career experiences. The participants' details, criteria and how the data collection was conducted with the career stages guiding the interview questions, has also been explained. In addition, as the interviews were transcribed, the analysis of the data following the emerging themes will be explain further in this chapter.

#### **5.5.4 Confirmability**

Thomas and Magilvy (2011) suggest that research can achieve confirmability once credibility, transferability and dependability are justified. Confirmability entails the research meaning, neutrality, openness and reflexivity of the researcher (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011; Goodman et al., 2020). Confirmability also can be achieved via audit trail and field notes as interviews and data collection occur (Connelly, 2016). The main goal of confirmability is to reduce bias by recognising the researcher's opinions or giving a full reflection on their role in research (Maher et al., 2018).

Throughout the data collection process, the reflections, feelings and interpretations of interviews were recorded, that helped me to understand the narrative experiences of the female chefs. As the research adopted semi-structured interviews with the main focus to highlight individual career experiences, the interviews and questions followed the participants' stories rather than leading questions, as participants experienced their careers differently. This further helped me to understand the participants feelings and perspectives, correlated to the understanding of gender and career as socially constructed phenomena.

#### **5.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis requires several fundamental processes of reduction and tightening of the data gathered (Bryman, 2012). Lambert (2012) suggests that after data has been collected, the familiar keywords need to be organised to ensure the patterns and new information can be assembled, which reveals the findings. Thomas (2013) contends that data must be analysed several times by appraising its contents before a conclusion is made. An extensive process of data collection via qualitative methods can produce detailed analysis because it is derived from words or audio forms (e.g., transcripts, recordings, documents), thus making a precise and detailed procedure of analysis important (Bryman, 2012). This research used interviews with a narrative approach, which means that the data involved rich and in-depth information from participants in each of three career phases (early, middle, mature). The answers and perspectives of female chefs were used to determine their career experiences. Audio-recorded answers were transcribed alongside fieldnotes which included details of

language, and voice intonation to ensure a thorough understanding before coding and the thematic analysis process. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, only a few were done in Malay or a mixture between Malay and English. Following the interview, each was transcribed individually and translated (if needed) into English.

To ensure the accuracy of translations from the Malay language interviews, the researcher, who is proficient in Malay, adopted a thorough approach. After conducting interviews in Malay that were audio recorded, they were then reviewed and translated into English, paying detailed attention to maintain the context of what had been said, including the specific answers and cultural overtones. This detailed approach helped to guarantee that the translations accurately transferred the meaning of the participants' words. Self-translation is a common practice in qualitative research (Abfalter et al., 2021). This happens when a bilingual author (the researcher) translates the work from one language to other, the author is proficient in both languages (English and Malay), and they possess a bilingual identity that maintains distinct connections with each language (Bandín, 2004). This is also an approach where translation concentrates on the 'real meaning' or the closest as possible meaning that was intended, in the original language (Chidlow et al., 2014).

As the data analysis was conducted alongside the data collection, the interview questions were further simplified to enhance better understanding by the participants. The transcript was coded and cross-checked against the question guide to see the emerging themes before data saturation was achieved. From the eighteen interviews, seven interview transcripts needed to be translated into English before coding. Some slight adjustments were made to ensure the meanings delivered by the participants were clear, however this did not affect the interview focus of looking at career experiences. The other eleven interview transcripts were directly transcribed and coded.

Coding is a necessary procedure in assessing qualitative data, examining the interview transcripts and categorising data into significant themes (Bryman, 2012). To assist the data analysis process, this study utilised NVivo 12 plus software. The

software is a helpful tool in organising data based on themes developed by the researcher from the coding process in each of the transcripts. The interview transcripts were coded based on the similarity or differences in the discussion. The themes were determined by the answers given by the participants, focusing on their significance to the research questions and framework.

This thesis therefore adopted thematic analysis as a method for analysing the data collected. Thematic analysis is a common analytical process that is used in qualitative research, for example in understanding the narratives from individuals in specific social contexts, where such research follows a multistage process of analysis (Bradford et al., 2020). It has been used in the study of genderqueer identity (Bradford et al., 2020), on managers perspectives about gender equality in tourism (Costa et al., 2016), and specifically in Walters' (2016) study that outlined the guide in implementing each of the stages of multistage thematic analysis to understand tourism research with its value and its application to various related context.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 79), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". Thematic analysis is closely related to the coding process, and it groups similar understandings and statement from participants to help analyse data in a more organised manner (Bryman, 2012). In other words, thematic analysis discovers any agreement in the data before allocating it to a relevant theme. Themes depend on the research's analytical context; as Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest, to identify a theme, several aspects need to be assessed. The most common aspect that is always adopted in this is repetition because it helps the analysis in creating a data pattern among the participants, requiring the researcher to investigate any links between them (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

Braun and Clarke (2006) have, furthermore, outlined the six phases in thematic analysis which was adopted in this thesis. The first phase is the familiarisation with the data from the interview transcripts, via repetition of reading and note taking which was done before the coding process started. During the analysis, the eighteen interview transcripts were uploaded to the NVivo software package by allocating one interview

file per participant, with the participant code (see Appendix 6). This acted as the basis of the original information before it was categorised further into codes and themes. There were two stages of analysis in the software, which were done repeatedly to ensure that correct coding, theming and analysis of data could be done efficiently.

The second phase was generating the codes from the data collected, to identify emerging and repeated patterns from the entire transcripts. This consisted of copying data from the individual transcripts and renaming the data according to the emerging codes. Particularly in this thesis, the coding process consisted of two stages. In the first stage, the codes were categorised according to the career phase (early, middle and mature) of the participant, and the answers from the transcripts were organised accordingly. However, as the narrative stories from the participants were different, their experiences and situations varied in different career phases, thus this was not expressing or outlining the data efficiently. Thus, a second stage of coding was developed. The second stage categorised the codes according to the similarity of the answers from the original transcripts. It classified the answers based on codes of the similar discussions about gender, ethnicity, career, and behaviour, which were called 'Nodes' in the software before the themes were further discussed. In other words, the first codes identified from the interview transcripts formed the foundation upon which subsequent codes were constructed. First codes represented the initial level of data categorisation based on similar discussions from the transcripts which were the participants perspectives on gender, ethnicity, career, and behaviour which served as the basis for second order codes and themes. Second order codes emerged through a more interpretive lens, as they were grouped into overarching themes. These overarching codes helped to reveal deeper insights and connections within the data, contributing to a more detailed understanding of the research topics. Diagram 6 below summarises the process of coding in the NVivo software while Diagram 7 summarises the emerging codes in detail:

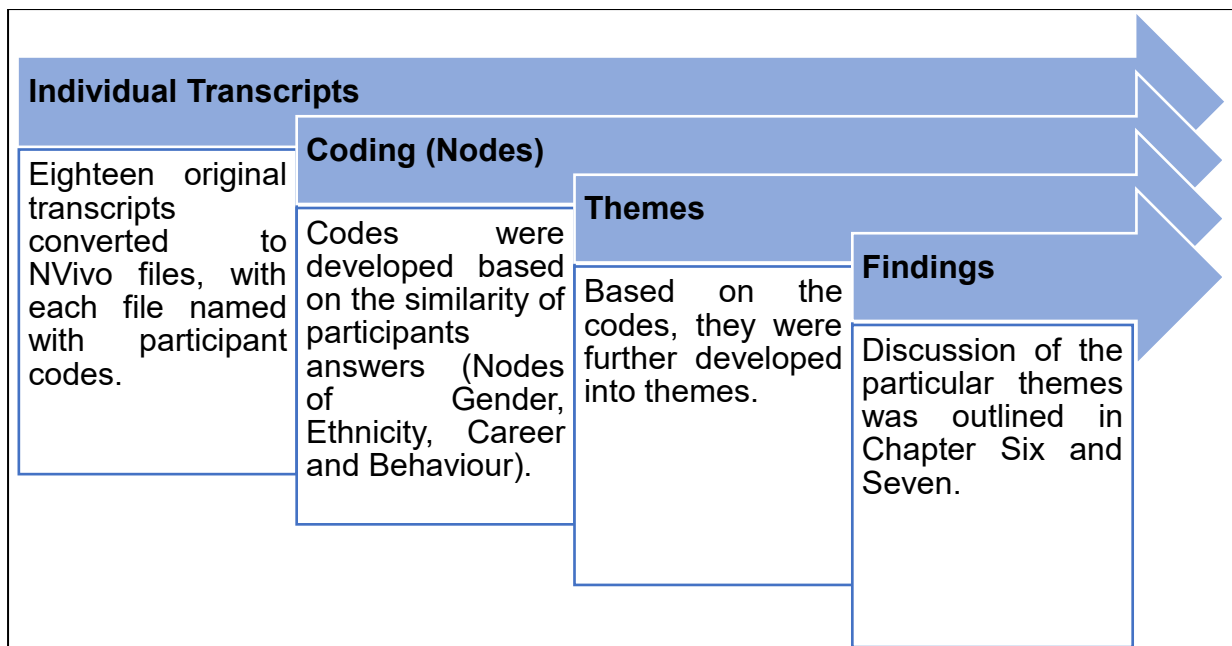


Diagram 6: Summary of Coding Process in NVivo software

The third phase was developing the themes based on the initial codes. Further analysis was conducted for each of the codes (nodes) to look for emerging themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) also justified themes as something significant, and this phase involved organising the codes into potential themes where the codes may be grouped, regrouped or removed. Particularly, the discussions that directly related to the main codes were gathered under one theme, before further analysis of each of the themes to look for any similarity or differences in the discussion was undertaken. In detail, Diagram 7 below summarises the process of the data analysis for the emerging themes.

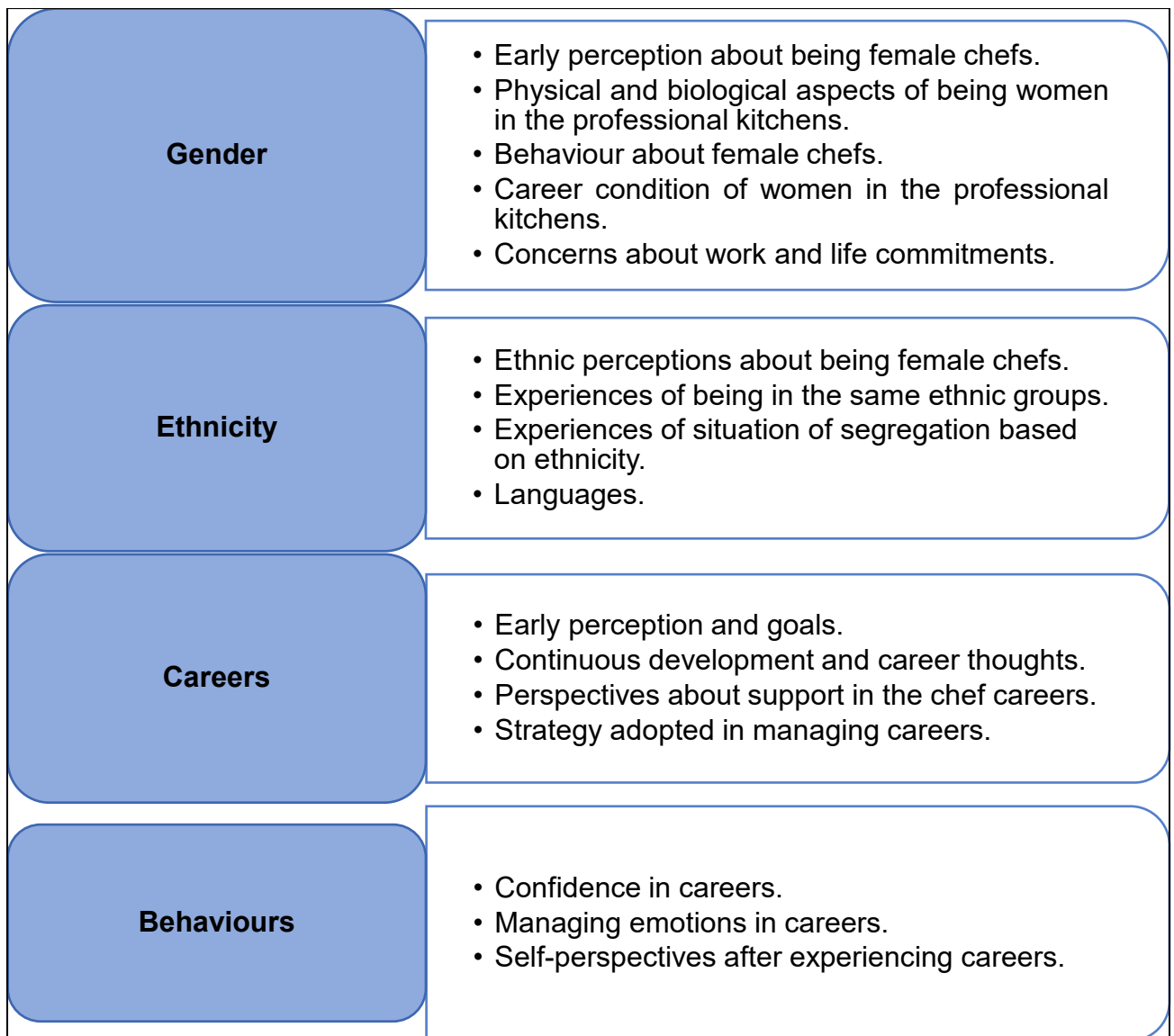


Diagram 7: Themes emerged based on the Codes

The fourth phase was to review the themes, mainly to refine and cross check the themes with the codes specially to identify any overlapping themes, or to see whether there were any problematic themes, before synthesising them into a coherent discussion. The fifth phase followed the process of categorising the main themes in Diagram 7, which involved the definition and analysis of the data in each of the themes. This was done following each of the themes, and was an ongoing process to identify main discussions, looking at the content of the data, and how it fitted within the themes. At this phase, the impactful direct quotes from participants were selected as the headings of the theme that mirrored the discussion.

The sixth and final phase was to develop a report, a detailed discussion based on the final themes. This provided a thorough discussion and evidence from the data which was divided into two separate chapters, Chapter Six regarding gender and ethnicity for female chefs' careers and Chapter Seven related to career choices and developments. These two findings chapters also included the direct quotes from the participants that make up the justification of the narrative stories and how they relate to the theoretical framework. The six-stage thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) as described above was helpful in ensuring the narrative stories from the participants were organised coherently and contributed to a detailed understanding of female chefs' career experiences.

## **5.7 Ethics**

According to Bos (2020), research ethics are related to the issues or challenges that involve the research participants, with the main aim being to protect their interests, rights, confidentiality, and looking at any potential risks that exist within the research context. This also encompasses the concern of how the researcher is able to protect the rights of people involved in the study while accessing what can be or cannot be done within the research context (Bryman, 2012). To address this and to ensure that this research was being conducted ethically, ethical approval from the University of Sunderland was obtained before the data collection was undertaken. The Research Ethics Committee approved the study, following the questions and information given for the data collection as attached in Appendix 1 (approval date 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021, reference number 008950). Research information and an informed consent form was sent to each participant through email as this is the foremost important aspect of ethics in relation to participants (Moriña, 2020). Informed consent not only gave the participants the awareness of, and information about, the research context, but also awareness about any implications from their participation (Bryman, 2012).

Particularly in this study, the information in the consent form included the requirement for the participants to ensure they were above 18 years of age, that they read the study information, understood that they had the right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time, and had the right to change their mind about participating in the study. The form is attached in Appendix 2. Further, Moriña (2020) also



advocates that informed consent can be altered alongside the research process if there is new information or the need to revise the questions, participants, and method of the research itself. Participants' participation was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study if they thought it was necessary. Throughout the data collection process, none of the eighteen participants withdrew from the interviews. As this research ensured confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymised, and no participant could be related to any of the professional kitchens that they worked within.

## **5.8 Limitations**

As the data collection was conducted, several challenges arose from the research method and process that can be further examined. First, the challenges were to ensure an equal number of participants from the three different ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian). As there was no preliminary data or statistics on the number of female chefs in the Klang Valley area, and limited information on their availability except for the participants from personal contacts, this posed a limitation in ensuring equal numbers of participants from the three ethnic groups. Thus, the snowballing technique was used to gather participants and data saturation achieved as the interviews and data collection proceeded. Second, the snowballing technique was time consuming. That is, it took a lot of time to identify female participants who met the main criteria around the research area, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation in Malaysia during the data collection period. Finally, it was difficult to ensure the participants' years of experiences was broad enough to determine their career phase and to enable them to share detailed career experiences. As the narrative approach taken in this research allows for detailed investigation about experiences, the participants' years of experience would determine whether they were able to provide detailed information on their career experiences. The selection of participants followed the minimum requirement of five years of experience as one of the main criteria in determining the female chefs suitable for interview in this study.

## **5.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented an outline of the detailed data collection method used in the current study, to explore female chefs career experiences in Malaysia. The

research approach was selected to fit the research aim and objectives in looking at the narrative stories of participants in this study. In particular, the key themes and questions that guided the interview and data collection to support the narrative approach in this study were outlined. The researcher approached the participants, initially, through personal contacts, and then used a snowballing technique, resulting in the recruitment of eighteen female chefs from the three main ethnic groups across the Klang Valley in Malaysia. Participants were approached and cross-checked with the main criteria to ensure credible information was gathered from the interviews.

However, the research method still presented some challenges. Due to the travel risk of COVID-19 in collecting data in Malaysia, this research pivoted from face to face to online interviews via multiple online meeting platforms, following the participants availability and differences in time zone. Setting up online interviews was challenging given the distanced communication and demanded that the researcher control the interview style to avoid unnecessary or misleading questions. Data analysis was conducted alongside the data collection phase until data saturation was reached. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and NVivo software was used to assist the data analysis. Finally, the limitations of the method have been presented and ethical considerations discussed. The following chapter is the first of two findings chapters which presents an extensive discussion of the factors involved in the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia focusing on the role of gender and ethnicity.

## Chapter 6 The Careers of Female Chefs: The Role of Gender, the Body, the Family and Ethnicity

### 6.1 Introduction

The findings for this research are divided into two discussion chapters, to establish a detailed analysis and present the key themes from the interviews. The headings in these two findings chapter also have used the direct quotes from the participants narratives. This first finding chapter aims to bring together the narrative stories of female chefs in Malaysia regarding the role of gender and ethnicity in their career experiences. Chapter Seven, later, will discuss the factors involved in the women's career choices and development that have shaped their career experiences. On the role concerning the body – *“That's How We [Are] Biologically Born”*, two themes will be outlined including the discussions of menstruation, physical abilities of female chefs, followed by *“You Have to Be and Act Like a Man”* which emphasises stereotypes towards female chefs. On the role of the family, the theme named *“We Can't Just Leave the House Like That”* focuses on female chefs' concerns about family commitment. While on the role of ethnicity, two themes will be further discussed around diversity and language – the first is *“The Race Card”* that explains how female chefs consider ethnicity in their careers. Secondly, *“Language Between Us”* focuses on language concerns in the workplace setting.

The themes mentioned above are categorised based on participants' opinions that emerged from the main research questions of how female chefs see gender and ethnicity in their careers. It is worth mentioning that not all participants gave the same answer, and, as the focus of this research is on the narrative stories of their personal career experiences. Differences were present. Participants' perceptions were influenced by various factors such as their social and working environment, personal experiences, and acceptance of other ethnicities within their work setting.

## **6.2 The Role of The Body: “That’s How We [Are] Biologically Born”.**

The research aims to highlight female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia based on their personal narratives. The first question asked during the interviews was how does being a female play a role in a chef's career? Regardless of their ethnic background, all participants said that being a female is not a concern. Even when they decided to become chefs or throughout their career experience, there was no indication that being female was influential. Despite that, participants still voiced their opinions and things that they experienced as females, some of which reflected their experiences of being women in the professional kitchen; one of the key issues was that of biology. That is, participants reflected on factors that they believed they could not change and how these biological factors affected their careers.

### **6.2.1 The Effects of Menstruation**

In relation to the role of body, five participants mentioned that their menstrual cycle affects their work. This could be an inevitable situation for women (Motro et al., 2019) and may influence their work experience (Hennegan et al., 2020), making them feel less confident. Fiza, a Malay chef working as a chef lecturer quoted that “people don't understand you” especially during the menstruation phase:

Especially for female chefs who always having menstrual...(feeling) very low [in] confidence, like you really need help, but people don't understand! (Fiza)

While Susie, a Chinese chef also mentioned it is “normal” for her to feel and be tired:

Maybe because it's our hormones and in one month you will have your period...we will feel more tired than males. Normally in my time, I keep it silent and continue to work because the thing is, you already know every month you will face it (menstrual) (Susie)

Often women want to keep their menstrual challenges to themselves. As it is a part of a female's biology, they can experience different menstrual symptoms that can affect their thinking, feelings, and daily activities (Kolić et al., 2021). Many symptoms have

been associated with menstruation, such as sweating, headache, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea, leading to psychological effects that affect attitude, emotion, and abilities (Marván et al., 2014; László et al., 2008 - citing Stenchever et al., 2001). Women on their period feel unfit, tired, unmotivated, and unable to perform physical activities (Kolić et al., 2021). In other words, they don't have the same energy as when they are not menstruating. They can either minimise the work that they need to do as much as possible, or just endure the pain.

Menstruating is also synonymous with being dirty, often being viewed as shameful (Hennegan et al., 2020), making this a kind of social taboo and too private to be shared, especially within career situations (Marathe and Raj, 2020). It remains a silent stigma for women in many social situation (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013). This is probably the reason why most participants in this study did not voice out their menstrual challenges because it feels like a normal part of being biologically female, even though it can be a challenging situation for them.

Other research also investigates the impact of menstruation on women in the workplace. This finding is consistent with research by Yu et al. (2021), who suggested that in the case of female nurses, working in shift schedules, they are likely to be affected by physical menstrual syndrome (e.g., headache), which then affects their work performance. Hennegan et al. (2020) argue that menstruation does affect women in their work, but the effect can vary depending on the level of pain suffered, the access to medical help available and how the workplace responds to menstrual issues. The abovementioned factors play a vital role in mitigating the impact of menstruation on women's confidence and work performance.

Nevertheless, not all women encounter severe premenstrual and menstrual syndrome, and severity of symptoms depend on the individual (Hardy and Hunter, 2021). In the current study, only Dila who is a Malay that operates her own food business, believed that the menstrual cycle should not be used by women as an excuse:

So, if let's say you have menstrual pain every month and want to take a leave, that will make the chef angry. Men can say it if I know that I will get menstrual every month; why you don't just plan your off day on that day? If you want to come to work, then you give an excuse you can't do it, you already know the dates, so there's no reason! (Dila)

Dila's opinion can be closely related to whether menstrual leave is necessary. Her statement suggests that women should be used to the menstrual cycle that happens most of their lives. Taking menstrual leave might only make women intentionally skip work when they are not menstruating (Barnack-Tavlaris et al., 2019; Hardie, 1997). While the menstrual leaves debate is quite common, there is a chance that this particular type of leave will continue to create stereotypes for women (Belliappa, 2018). Due to that, women still feel hesitant to take menstrual leave (Hardy and Hunter, 2021) because being absent from work due to menstruation is considered inappropriate (Hennegan et al., 2020).

However, only Dila argues that the menstrual issue should not be an excuse used by female chefs. This is probably because only those who suffer moderate (or severe) symptoms feel that menstruation is affecting their work performance compared to those who don't have any symptoms (Hardy and Hunter, 2021). Furthermore, some women think that menstruation has less impact on their working life because they have less painful periods (Hennegan et al., 2020). It is also worth noting that women can feel differently during each menstrual cycle because these cycles can be influenced by many factors such as hormones, stress or diet (Belliappa, 2018).

It is arguable that female chefs can plan their menstrual leave following their menstrual dates as has been contended by Dila, because these period can change. Especially when they work in shift schedules, the cycle can be irregular (Dean, 2021). Menstruation dates can be predicted only when there are no medical concerns or other factors that directly affect the menstrual cycle (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013), but this is also not always the case. Thus, it is unfair to expect that women can overcome these issues easily, as different women react differently in their menstrual

phase (Hennegan et al., 2020). While there is an opinion that women can have a rest during this period, this also can be argued because each woman needs a different amount of rest depending on how severe their symptoms are (Belliappa, 2018). The nature of work, such as in the professional kitchen, does not align with the amount of rest needed by female chefs.

Apart from physical and emotional side effects, the menstrual cycle has also been associated with numerous stereotypes. For example, Huan, a lecturer, felt that:

People always have that stereotypes that 'Ooo female always have to have a lot of leave' and then you cannot work long hours and then you have...like...so many problems, you have menstrual issues...I admit that's how we are biologically born with (Huan)

Ina who also works as a chef lecturer felt that menstruation could potentially be one of the issues for the male chefs when working with women in the kitchen. Similarly, Aini, who was experienced in the food consultation business, also agreed about the typical stereotype of women “being too sensitive” when they are having menses, which had become an annoying issue for her.

The statement above suggests that women need to “accept that's how they are biologically born”: that menstruation is a requirement for being a woman (Hennegan et al., 2020). This could be especially so, as this is closely related to their biology as female, but this statement can be critiqued because not all females will face the same menstrual symptoms. In fact, ‘female’ (as a sex category) cannot be determined solely by biology (Hotine, 2021). However, for the purpose of this discussion, these female chefs appear to view and accept that menstruation is important for them as females, and it has an effect on their work. Besides that, working as a chef demands additional physical ability, and so chefs must maintain their fitness levels when working in the kitchen (Suhairom et al., 2019). This makes it harder for female chefs to overcome menstrual challenges due to their work commitment, especially when working in a

physically challenging work environment; in this case they are more likely to be affected by menstrual pain (Motro et al., 2019).

Other stereotypes associated with the menstrual cycle include about how women behave. For example, when menstruating, they are easily feeling angry, depressed, and emotionally weak, which contradicts the traditional behavioural stereotypes associated with women which are embedded in people's thinking, such as being kind, soft, and approachable (Marván et al., 2014). This negative stigma can threaten women's confidence in how they perceive themselves (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013). It appears to demonstrate that what Huan mentioned above is true – that women who take menstrual leave have more issues and can create workplace problems. This was shown previously by Marathe and Raj (2020) and Hardy and Hunter (2021) in that women still feel ashamed, are afraid of being judged, discriminated against, and that taking menstrual leave threatens their “good worker” image.

While not many participants discussed their views on menstruation, it was brought up by a number of Malay and Chinese participants. The way people view menstruation is shaped by the culture, society, and family they grow up in. Women's opinions about menstruation may be influenced by both their body's internal factors and external factors from their cultural and social surroundings (Wong, 2011). In certain societies, discussing menstruation might not be forbidden, but their social environment might make them feel hesitant to talk about it and each culture has its own traditions and restrictions regarding menstruation, and how menstruation is perceived and handled can differ from one culture to another (Sugita, 2022). This might support why only a few of the participants in this study choose to share their menstruation issues at work.

Much research has focused on menstrual issues for women, such as menstrual health and hygiene (Krusz et al., 2019), menstrual education (Wong and Khoo, 2011), menstrual affects in sportswomen (Armour et al., 2020) and menstruation stigma (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013). However, the findings of this study, that the menstrual cycle affect female chefs, has not been discussed before in research on



women's career experiences in the hospitality-tourism sector. Even though there is research about how menstruation affects women in the workplace outside of a tourism/hospitality context, as discussed above, research into menstruation and its effect on work is still considered minimal. According to the research participants, menstruation does not fully affect their careers, but, at the very least, it can affect female chefs' career performance. This finding surrounding the effects of menstrual issues has shed a light on the career experiences of female chefs, and further exploration can be made on how this affects female chefs and other women in different tourism/hospitality workplace contexts.

### **6.2.2 The Role of Physical Ability**

The second focus under the role of the body in the professional kitchen, also relates to physical ability, mentioned by most of the participants when they were asked about being female in their cheffing careers. Even though participants said that being female is not a concern, they still voiced their opinions about physical issues associated with being female. There was a mixture of views; some about body size and physical limitations. There was also a balanced opinion about physical capabilities, seeing this as both disadvantageous and advantageous. For example, two participants were concerned about their body size and how this impacted their work and the treatment they received from other colleagues. Fiza, a Malay chef lecturer emphasised that:

It's more about a physical issue, not about gender. Because as a female chef...people always said that 'Oh okay because you are bigger than your friend, so maybe you can lift the heavy things alone without any help'. So, they won't offer any help to you...you will feel very disappointed, and you feel like okay, only that physical (small) really can get help from another person. Meaning especially from a male chef. (They) give everything to the bigger person compared to the tiny person (Fiza)

The experience of being judged by body size was also expressed by Farah who is also a chef lecturer:

...If female chef...and she is pretty the treatment is totally different. I was among the chubby at that time, so I need to work like a man. They see me capable of doing things and I work hard so they don't care. I can see it's about physical bias. They don't rely on the pretty chef to do work, but they asked me to do it because I can do work. I can feel the difference when a pretty chef came in compared to me, I mean the treatment. When I get the situation, I ignore it, as long as I finish my work, but it is quite annoying because I need to do extra work like to teach her. The kitchen is busy, so I don't have time to relax (Farah)

The above quotes point to a difficult situation for these participants who felt they had been unfairly treated especially as being in the kitchen requires long hours of work, and they received limited support or help because they appeared capable of doing anything, based on their body size. Viewing someone based on physical abilities can also be considered a stereotype (Coleman, 2020). Stigmas around weight have become considered as a form of social discrimination (Puhl and Brownell, 2001) and also a concern in workplace discrimination (Randle, 2012). Participants said they were given more tasks because of their physical size; this had an impact on how these female chefs felt about themselves and threatened the women's confidence (Randle, 2012). The situation experienced by participants Fiza and Farah was possible, based on the perception that plus-sized women have more strength to do things because of their physical size. Fiza received verbal comments on her physical size that suggested she was a victim of stereotypes, but when Farah said she was asked to help other chefs, this could be interpreted differently. It might be that her colleagues trusted Farah's skills to teach others, or it could also be interpreted that there are stereotypes towards skinnier female chefs: that they can't do such physical work because they are petite. Such perceptions could mean skinny and/or petite female chefs can be viewed as physically weak, are not given certain tasks, and need help from others.

Nevertheless, Dila said it was not a problem for her even though she had a larger body size. In fact, it made her feel that she stood out compared to other chefs and this enabled her to have more opportunities to do more tasks. Being plus-sized can be a positive thing for women to show that they are capable physically; however, it can also

be manipulated as people can give more work to them, which is unfair. Although weight discrimination can happen, not all overweight people are affected by discriminatory behaviour about their body like Dila, because they are confident about themselves (Randle, 2012). This finding is consistent with that of Carr and Friedman (2005) and Puls et al. (2021) who argued that women are affected mainly by weight discrimination, and are bullied because of their weight, thus impacting their psychological wellbeing. Not only can this decrease their self-acceptance (Carr and Friedman, 2005), but such biases can create further inequality in the workplace (Puhl and Brownell, 2001).

In contrast to being overweight or having a physically large body size, some participants said that their petite figure was advantageous, even though they did sometimes feel that being small was often seen as being weak or pitiful. For example, for Huan:

When there is a female inside the kitchen, we will become the one that people are...like how to say...concentrating to like 'Aaaa we got female chef coming in'. You become the popular one, everyone will take extra care or say 'Ooo you want to do this I can teach you'...Actually, I feel privileged because being a female inside a kitchen, you know when the male chef sees you need to carry heavy stuff, they tend to come and help you. Actually, I can carry a lot of heavy things, I can do the job myself, so unless I really need help. I mean I admit sometimes, I mean certain things because of our height or because of our size we couldn't carry then of course I will ask for the male to help (Huan)

Huan not only suggested that being petite can occasionally be advantageous for her, but being a female chef itself was a good thing. Even though she might need to ask for help because of her petite body, it was just something normal and did not concern her. This was similar to Mei who worked as a pastry chef, she did feel she was treated differently because of her small body size, both in a negative and positive way:

They help me (because I am female) and also because I am very tiny. Only I feel that it makes a big difference when you are female, you are tiny, I realise size also (matters). Yaa because I am tiny, so I feel the difference because when you are tiny people will think that you are very pitiful, then they will help you (Mei)

There are different interpretations here when comparing the answers from the perspective of having oversized and petite body sizes. While those plus-sized women felt stereotyped or discriminated against, this also happened to petite women. In fact, Cheng who also works as a pastry chef felt frustrated with her petite physical size because it limits the tasks she receives:

I am the only girl to be left behind. Always. Always. So, my chefs like to bring always the boys out...So there is one day I ask my chef, I say 'can you bring me, I really wish to go, I would like to see'. You know I never experienced what and how does outside catering. So, he said (head chef) not that I don't want to bring you, but you are so small, you don't have the energy to help me to carry things (Cheng)

Even though previously Huan said she could ask for help, it did not mean she necessarily took advantage of it. The perception of being tiny and weak was also evidenced by Mei, but she tried to show her skills rather than thinking that her physical size could be a disadvantage. From the discussion above, stereotypes happen regardless of body size. But still, overweight women face more significant social and work discrimination than those who are thinner or smaller (Carr and Friedman, 2005). It is either that plus-sized chefs are expected to have more physical strength and hence are expected to do more work, or those skinny, petite chefs can't do much work because they are seen to be weak. Research on women's weight discrimination in the workplace is evidenced (e.g., Puhl and Brownell, 2001; Randle, 2012; Puls et al., 2021), supporting this research finding regarding participants' body size. But there is still limited research investigating the stigma of being petite, as mentioned by participants, which can be investigated further.

Participants also admitted that their physical strength as females has its limitation, as compared to males. Ling felt that the capability to lift heavy things and not be as strong as men can be a disadvantage from her point of view as a pastry chef. Priya said she admits that females and males are physically different, especially in terms of strength and ability, but that's the only factor that makes her think females potentially can be weaker than men. She contended that otherwise, the skills and abilities of chefs are similar regardless of gender, and this shows in her background as a pastry chef. Concerning physical ability, other participants made the following comments:

Of course, you can't do things on your own, (about physical) you just have to accept the fact that you are female, tiny and certain things that I can't do on my own...I ask for help because I notice it when I do things on my own, actually it hurts my back (Mei)

The difference that females need to accept is that we can't do heavy work such as lifting things. We can't deny it. But for me, what men can do, we also can do it but much better...but when it comes to lifting heavy things, that's the limitation (Laila)

Research about women acknowledging their physical differences is still limited, not to mention in hospitality settings or specifically chef careers. But one study similar to this view is by Allison (2021) who investigated gender differences for women in soccer. Participants in the research admitted that biological differences between men and women exist and that men have exceptional physical ability. However, the participants in this research by Allison (2021) were still confident about their commitment to soccer and did not believe that their biological factors impacted on their enthusiasm for the game. Similarly, female chefs in this research admitted their physical limitations as females, but these did not make them stop being chefs. Participants in this study did accept the fact that being a female chef has its limitations but only in terms of physical ability and strength. They believed that the skills of a chef are not determined by

gender categories but rather the hard work and commitment that is shown in the kitchen.

Interestingly, Jia, who is a head chef for her own restaurant argued that female chefs can still lift heavy things and do physically-demanding job tasks in the kitchen if they are determined to do so; because such tasks often depend on how they think about themselves as weak or strong.

I can't carry a 10kg pot? For sure you can, okay, you can! If you *wanna* make yourself weak like that, then you don't deserve to be at the top. Because you *wanna*, you can't have your cake and eat it, you can't have people to be nice and carry pots for you and then complain that you are not moving up the ranks. Just like fair is fair (Jia)

While Esha, an Indian pastry chef also shared the same thoughts:

I am not like very girly girl, you know...I do have friends that are like super girly you know, like they can't really carry something, and then they like 'oh can you help me carry?' I'm not like that, even I cannot carry I still carry (Esha)

The answers from Jia and Esha show that personality and belief about one's own abilities is important to determine the way they carry out their jobs. It shows that different participants have different perceptions about their physical abilities as a chef thus affecting their self-determination at work. It was found that women can still do things as equally good as men, and that men and women have their own ways of working. Still, the challenges are that formed by gender schema and stereotypes are still firmly embedded in many career contexts, especially in jobs that are considered masculine and are male dominated: like cheffing. It is not possible to determine one's physical ability and strength as this is mainly influenced by how a person views themselves, so it can be that women are able to do work typically considered as masculine. For example, female chefs can work in a hot kitchen which is occupied and said to be mostly suitable for male chefs, and male chefs can also work in pastry

kitchens that are often associated with soft, relaxing and tedious work that is said to be suitable for female chefs. This is because talent, skills, and passion differ and should not be determined by gender in a professional kitchen.

### **6.2.3 The Role of The Body: A Summary**

To summarise this section, concerning the menstrual effect, only six participants mentioned this, including one participant who thought it should not be an excuse for female chefs. In contrast, other participants did not mention a menstrual effect at all. Although the findings suggest that menstrual leave makes a strong impression on female chefs' careers, there hasn't been conclusive evidence provided by the interviews. On physical ability and strength, most participants (twelve) mentioned these issues. Six participants viewed this as a positive thing, and a further six believed that their physical size and capabilities negatively affected their career experiences. Another six participants did not mention physical issues. This shows that physical ability plays a role in female chefs' careers, at least in terms of whether they perceive it as an advantage or disadvantage.

Even though menstrual issues and women's physical abilities were not specifically highlighted in the literature review, these findings are consistent with the gender schema theory discussed in Chapter Three. That is, that the gender schema is still embedded in people's thinking, especially in the workplace scenario. Indeed, participants in this study were still influenced by gendered attributes as females and as women, even though different participants felt differently about their biological body. It was evidenced that research about how menstruation affects women in the workplace is gaining attention, but none of it has been done in the hospitality and tourism area, including careers in a professional kitchen. The discussion on menstruation as highlighted by some participants adds a layer of complexity to their narratives. In general, Howe et al. (2023) indicate that research to understand women's experiences in managing their menstrual symptoms, and the influence of these symptoms on their careers are increasing. For example, the most recent study by Mbongo et al. (2023) focused on women's workplace experiences in relation to

menstruation, and concluded that women's work performance and productivity were influenced by the menstruation phase and the menstrual symptom. Motro et al. (2019) conclude that during menstruation, women's motivation in seeking for help and the effect of menstruation on their mood can be significant which in turn affects their behaviour at work. In addition to that, Sang et al. (2021) also found out that menstruation-related issues such as toleration of pain, stigma, workload and support do have an effect on their work. However, as previously discussed, not all women will experience the same menstrual effect thus calls for further investigation, not to mention the arguments about the need for menstrual support at the organisational level. This is supported by Howe et al. (2023) in that limited research exists in looking into related policies, especially on how women can be supported in managing menstrual symptoms in the workplace, notwithstanding much scientific research that has been done on menstruation and health.

The findings also reveal that female chefs, through their own experiences and perceptions, consider physical ability as a factor that can influence their careers. This adds a crucial dimension to the discourse on gender dynamics in the culinary industry, as it goes beyond conventional discussions on equality and stereotypes as proposed by another research such as Haddaji et al., (2017a). It also adds to the literature on women's biological differences to men that often focus on sporting careers (e.g. Allison, 2021; Samariniotis et al., 2016), other physically demanding careers such as mining, and construction etc. (e.g. Heimann and Johansson, 2023), and studies of differences of body size and weight (e.g. Puls et al., 2021). No studies have focused on women's physicality in relation to their careers as chefs, however. This study thus not only contributes to the literature by expanding the understanding of the challenges faced by female chefs from the role of the body itself as the one they are biologically born with, but also calls for a broader conversation about the need for a more supportive workplace environment.



#### **6.2.4 “You Have to Be and Act Like a Man”**

This theme discusses the participants' views about the stereotypes associated with being a female chef. The majority of the participants mentioned stereotypes in the professional kitchen. This mainly involved the view that women are always treated as secondary employees, and were thought not to have a high work commitment because through the lens of the Malaysian gender schema they were expected to be more focused on family care (von Hippel et al., 2015). This is not to mention other stereotypes that have always been associated with being a woman, either within the social division of labour, the expression of femininity, or in expected domestic roles. This has led to the stigma and perception of female chefs as not being serious and committed to their careers because being a chef requires long working hours. The participants had mixed opinions about their own and other female chefs' behaviour at work, but they were mainly concerned about people's perceptions. For example:

Like now, you are being judged before you prove, so that's the difference, the guys have to prove they are terrible, the girl has to prove that she is good. So that's the inequality like you are not starting on the level ground already. It might not really affect your job, but these are the things that might affect the chances of you getting a job or a job opportunity, or a pay raise (Jia)

The situation faced by Jia is not uncommon. Mei also argued that she had seen 'the kind of impression' when she tried to explain her work to other male chefs, but often her questions were answered with a laugh. She also noticed that when a male colleague argues with the head chef, their argument was acknowledged instantly compared to hers. For Huan who works as a culinary lecturer, she believes she is often seen as “not being serious” in the kitchen. Even when she display a tough (masculine) image like raising her voice or showing a serious face when teaching, “for them (the students), it's just something very funny”. This shows that when women display anger or any expression that is contradictory to how women are expected to behave, this is considered as challenging gendered attributes embedded in people's minds (Block et al., 2022).

Stereotypes can negatively impact job tasks, threaten women's confidence, devotion to achieve career goals, and risk future career advancement (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016). Not only that, but stereotypes are also proven to affect memory, raising stress levels and women's self-perception (Cadaret et al., 2017). This happened to Jia and made her realise how people doubted her skills:

You see doubt over their eyes like 'I don't know if she is spending 12 hours in the kitchen, she doesn't look like she can put in hard work', you know 'doesn't look like particularly strong, do you think she's like actually spending time in the kitchen?'...So you could see that sometimes in people's head, they kind of reflect in their face, they kind of have a look where...'Does she even know the ranking of the top 50 restaurants in the world? Does she know what I am talking about, saying like I've been to this restaurant...Does she know her traits?'...Very condescending way like 'Hey, I am not stupid!'. Well, it might just be me playing in my head, but sometimes you feel that enough, you kind of recognised the pattern that obviously these people are not *gonna* to admit it, and they not *gonna* say, it might just be in my head, but I have seen this look enough (Jia)

It is also the same for Esha; she noticed people's impressions toward her career as a chef – “I do feel...like ‘*ooh* she is a girl’”, meaning that she can't be successful because she is a girl. This type of gender bias can happen unconsciously, such as in evaluating work and being viewed based on gender first before skills (Parmer, 2021) as happened to these participants.

In addition, being a female chef means they need to survive in a male-dominated career, worsened by a limited number of leaders who are female (Allen and Mac Con lomaire, 2016). Participants shared how they felt about their careers – “It is male-dominated, high pressure, high intensity and really stressful” (Aini); “I need to do it extra hard compared to male” (Priya); and “I get a lot of like looking down like girl should not be in the kitchen because it is like heavy-duty job” (Yuen). The women acknowledge the challenges that exist:

The challenges because you know it's mostly male-dominated, right, and well, there aren't the nicest people. I now know that you know, as a female, I am expected to do more than the male, to be like you know equal as them (Esha)

The perspective that female chefs are suitable for work in the pastry kitchen is also evidenced. Pastry production is probably a synonym for what females are viewed as being able to do, or what they usually do, and involves feminine tasks such as baking and, decorating, in a cold relaxed kitchen environment. Mei said she also thought that female chefs often chose to be in pastry. For example, when Kamala shared her early career experience, she said she was not interested in the pastry department when she spoke to her male chef colleague. Still, the response she received was that she would be okay doing pastry-related jobs because “you are girl, so it is easy at pastry, don't have to do all the heavy things in the hot kitchen”. These kinds of attitudes contribute to the stereotypes and labelling of gender-suitable careers and they influence career choices, reduce women's confidence, and makes women hesitate and think about what kind of job is suitable for them (Ismail et al., 2017; Martiarena, 2022).

Another discussion emerging from the interviews concerns leadership, and this was mentioned by six participants. Being a leader in the kitchen is challenging; in fact, women without higher or important positions receive less respect, as Susie experienced. She said – “until I have a position and then I found that they (male chef) are suddenly very friendly to you”. Despite that, Jia believed that being a female chef would not be a problem in the absence of a high leadership position:

For a mid-level position in the kitchen brigade, I don't think that much a problem...But I think the problem would surface somewhere when you start to have a managing or leadership role...then it gets tougher when your position is higher...This may or may not be alright depending on the person who you are managing and themselves and mentality and how they cope with it (Jia)

This situation can be changed if people have experience working with women leaders, but it can still happen in a male-dominated workplace (Boyol Ngan and Litwin, 2019).

Yuen also admitted that this situation was challenging because people easily noticed females' mistakes or weaknesses, so female chefs needed to be firm about the decisions they made for their teams. Further, Susie said she must explain and spend more time with her colleagues to ensure her message and image as a leader is accepted; while doing that, she believed that having a strong attitude was crucial to show that she was capable of being a leader. Other participants also had some thoughts about working with male colleagues:

Working with men, they will always think that they are right, but you as a head chef, you need to understand what is right and wrong. So, you need to tell them whenever they are wrong, and you need to praise them when they do something right (Dila)

If you are a leader and your staff is men, you need to look outstanding, have your own voice...so nobody will belittle you. Be prepared, men when it comes to women being on the top, their reaction is different (Zah)

This shows that female chefs must be aware of other people's reactions, and accept these and adapt themselves to the situation. The reality is, even though women show that they are capable, people's doubt still exists. For example, when Fiza led her team during a catering event:

...We go to outside catering and then you are the only chef in charge of the event. And then let's say something happens, other staffs they will say that problem happen because of female chef (in charge in the event), that's why we cannot let the female chef take care of an event. People always think that if there is a male chef there, everything *gonna* be okay. So, on the power of female leaders, it is still a bit of judgemental about their ability and confidence that we can't do that. They have that kind of perception that female chefs cannot do (Fiza)

This reveals that the typical perception that males are more suitable to be leaders is still strong (Soares and Sidun, 2021), resulting in the perception that women do not

have the traits to be in a leadership position (Heilman, 2012). This is probably because the phrase 'think manager, think male' is still significant (Bergeron et al., 2006), even in chef careers. This masculine environment in the kitchen is a barrier to female chefs (Haddaji et al., 2018). Despite that women try to show that they are capable and serious about their work, they are still thought to be not fully committed to their careers. Furthermore, if women show masculinity, they will be labelled as aggressive; if they show femininity, they are considered inadequate (Coleman, 2020). The situation is challenging for women as leaders because they believe they need to have masculine traits to be a good leader (Denizci et al., 2019a). These issues are still controversial because women are still expected to behave like women, but this contradicts the schema of a leader who is still considered to have masculine traits (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

The topic of women as leaders is still gaining attention in many areas of study. For example, the need for female leadership planning (Denizci et al., 2019b), attitudes towards women managers (Boyol Ngan and Litwin, 2019), the barrier of the glass ceiling for female leaders (Remington and Kitterlin-Lynch, 2018), the importance of women's associations for women leaders (Freund and Hernandez-Maskivker, 2021), women leader prejudice (Koburtay and Syed, 2020) and women leader challenges (Carvalho et al., 2018c). But the majority of these studies still suggest that challenges as women leaders are unavoidable. Similarly, these research findings indicate that female chefs also face similar barriers in leadership, and this affects their careers. When barriers happen, they produce negative self-perception that can affect women's career planning, making them hesitant to change their perceptions and unwilling to do anything to overcome this (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

In addition, nine participants believed that female chefs must know how to behave and conduct themselves in the kitchen. In that case, Dila, as a head chef, strongly encouraged female chefs to act like men when working in the kitchen:

When I entered the kitchen, I set my mind that I am a man. So, when you are a female chef, you can't enter the kitchen as a woman because you will be too girlish or create chances for sexual harassment. So, when you are woman in the kitchen, you have to be and act like a man... It's different when you set your line, then they will respect you. If you maintain to be a woman in the kitchen, you can't! Yes, you can have that female kind of touch but attitude wise or the way you talk and everything, you must follow the rhythm of the kitchen. If your kitchen full of male chef, it's no way that you can be girlish every time, people will be annoyed with you. So, you have to toughen up, you cannot cry in the kitchen, you cannot argue like a woman in the kitchen, you have to be a man, you cannot survive as a woman out there in the kitchen. No way! So, when people say you need to be a woman in the kitchen, I will say you will not make it. People step over you like crazy! (Dila)

How female chefs present themselves in the kitchen is crucial because it can make them more acceptable in the workplace. This means they probably even need to sacrifice their feminine traits in order to blend into a team. Supporting this opinion, Aini who also works as a freelance private chef, said that female chefs should avoid having a typical female attitude in the kitchen:

I never complained...One thing about me that I think is an example of gender, but I am not saying that it should be, because sometimes males can be a whiner. But the typical female behaviour like whining and so, I don't have that behaviour because I believe whining does not get you anywhere. You have to be a problem solver, so I never complain, but they see the extra work I had to do (Aini)

Having a strong personality and firm behaviour are perceived to be helpful for these female chefs to ensure they have better career experiences through reducing the gendered labelling in the kitchen. While for Jia, even though she supported the feminist ideas and gender equality in the kitchen, she still thought that:

I can't deny that there are advantages as well. Because it just unfair if you keep, we keep saying that 'oh you know, we having hard time being the minority in this industry'. You know, victimising ourselves and feeling sorry... I mean I advocate for feminism and female right and all that, that's all and good and great but don't manipulate people with that. Don't always put yourself in victimised position like 'oh female, and I am weaker than my male colleague' (Jia)

For these participants, self-belief and working hard to break the bias in the professional kitchen as a female is necessary, particularly as one's mindset will be crucial in determining one's career passion and commitment. Further, Aini suggested that her femininity is essential for her while working in the kitchen and she does not portray the typical tough or masculine image that is often associated with chefs. Still, she was able to gain respect through her hard work, and she still remembered an experience when she had worked as a private chef for a motorsports event previously:

I arrived with my dress...I don't wear any jeans or boyish at all. I was as feminine as I can. You can use your charm...negotiate with them, be cool about it...like me I am very secure with my femininity, that's why I can go and wear my dress and I still have the high confidence that I can deliver. I don't have to dress tough so that they know I am tough in the kitchen, they see I am tough in the kitchen when I deliver...if you can handle that with ease and not like so offended and whatever, then it's actually nothing. People will even respect you more, so it's all about attitude (Aini)

These participants acknowledge various stereotypes about female chefs, but they believed that it was more important to have positive thinking about their femininity as mostly reflected in their behaviour and attitude. They were confident that female chefs had their advantages, and that men and women work differently. For example:

Female and male works differently...I admit that we have weaknesses so it's not that I want to have like fair or unfairness like whether I am male or female, but in other way yes, I admit but I also have capability on doing what male can do. I would not mind if let say oh male chef says like I am weak, yes, I am weak, but I can do much more detail...soft touch (work) that the male cannot do (Huan)

It is contended here that male and female chefs work differently as both have their own advantages and disadvantages. Jia felt that the advantage existed when people tended to remember if a restaurant had a female chef, and this could result in more business and publicity. Zah who has been in the culinary industry for 25 years as a career advisor also suggested:

Don't take them as something that hinders you for reaching your dreams and in fact... we are very much versatile in skills, mind...creativity. I think both (gender) have their ways of doing things... (Zah)

Research also supports this opinion of women having advantages in the workplace. Encouraging a feminine leadership style can break stereotypes (Denizci et al., 2019b). Even though research by Hill et al. (2015) confirms that women (as surgeons) think masculinity is needed to be recognised, they believe that continuing to implement feminine traits in their career can change the stigma. Similar to what the participants have mentioned about hard work and personality, Coleman (2020) suggested that women's continuous efforts and hard work can be a significant reason for them to achieve career success. This indicates that a more positive side of being a female chef can be gained and as such women can show positivity and pride about their job and skills. These gender differences can be seen as something encouraging, as supported by Khilji and Pumroy (2019), and they argue that women should feel proud about their careers and developed their own strategies in coping with their jobs. In other words, probably women can see stereotypes as a constructive encouragement.

Stereotypes are not a new topic of concern for women, either in the workplace or in the broader social context, and they are known to be a barrier to women's careers.



Previously, Bergeron et al. (2006) confirmed these findings that stereotypes still affect women in the workplace as compared to men, with evidence of a strong ideology of masculinity being present in these environments. The finding of this study confirms that stereotypes for female chefs are evident, and this is similar to other research about women in other careers like engineering (Cadaret et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2017), entrepreneurship (Martiarena, 2022), surgeons (Hill et al., 2011) and in the art of heavy metals music (Rogers and Deflem, 2022). In hospitality/tourism studies, several publications have discussed this, for example, Coleman (2020), Segovia-Pérez et al. (2019) and Denizci et al. (2019a, 2019b).

Still, while research on female chefs is still limited, several studies have supported the findings of this research. For example, Haddaji et al. (2018) investigated female chefs' career progression, and Albors-Garrigos et al. (2020a; 2020b) noticed gender differences in the kitchen. Both support the idea that female chefs face challenges in stereotypical masculine work cultures. Kitchen jobs need physical labour and are skills-based, and hence chefs must show that they have appropriate skills regardless of gender. If a female chef needs to act like a man but does not have the required skills, it may not help the female chefs in their careers. The view that female chefs must show different skills or abilities to gain people's confidence is arguable. Furthermore, being tough in the kitchen might not always be necessary, especially when the kitchen environment is different, such as being a female chef in a pastry or cold kitchen.

The majority (fourteen) participants mentioned that they were aware of stereotypes of women in the kitchen, which strongly suggests that this creates challenges. Stereotypes have a profound effect on female chefs' career experiences. The stereotypes of how women should behave, and the high expectations people have of them, as leaders, can make it challenging for them but interestingly these concerns have not weakened their career enthusiasm as chefs. Despite some of the participants' opinion that being a woman has its disadvantages, it is undeniable that there is still a positive side. Nine participants see being female in the professional kitchen as an advantage and that women need to know how to conduct themselves in

the kitchen to help them to progress further; the participants suggest that, this is a vital mindset that women should have (Hill et al., 2011).

Further analysis of the above discussions suggests that women may choose to hide or downplay their femininity to avoid biases, stereotypes or to be included (Rogers and Deflem, 2022). The reasons for doing so can vary, but it can be that the participants in this study were driven by a desire to be taken seriously and to be evaluated based on their skills and competencies rather than their gender, especially in the career of a chef in a professional kitchen. Looking at masculine traits through the lens of women is a complex understanding which is related to the context in which such traits are displayed. The use of masculine behaviours is often found, especially when women encounter difficulties in male spaces (Ainsworth et al., 2014). For example, women may develop their own tactics to deal with harassment by adjusting their behaviour: by portraying toughness and, masculinity to feel more included in masculine environment (Bonnes, 2020). de Padua Carrieri et al. (2013) suggest that women have both masculine and feminine qualities, thus displaying these qualities may lead to a better prospect for acceptance and career advancement. This is especially true when women have a leadership position as supported by Mavin and Grandy (2016). They mentioned that women as leaders go through a complex process and negotiate with their status, leadership styles, and the social expectations of femininity that they must balance. For example, a study by Bonnes (2020) on women in military workplaces shows that some women choose to show masculinity to survive and overcome sexual harassment. Similarly, for female police officers in Bloksgaard's (2011) study, women reduce their femininity but are also cautious not to appear overly masculine. Furthermore, women executives recognised that some male characteristics could be both positive and negative attributes in terms of job performance (de Padua Carrieri, et al., 2013) and Ainsworth et al. (2014) also illustrate how women volunteers in firefighting create a gender hierarchy characterised by masculinity and femininity that is linked with their living and working environment. Ng and Pine's (2003) study advocated that female hotel managers in Hong Kong admit to the challenges women face in a male-dominated field, but they choose to downplay these challenges and focus on personal strategies to combat them. The study found that rather than advocating for changes in

the system women instead emphasised that their inability to compete and persist, rather than organisational factors, is what held back their career progress, as compared to men. This fact, that some women hesitate to use terms like barriers to describe gender-related challenges in their careers, and that they might downplay these difficulties to avoid portraying themselves as victims and highlight personal strategies is also highlighted by Carvalho et al. (2018a). These findings mean that women's occupational choices can place them in a dilemma (Bloksgaard, 2011) as most participants, in this current research at least still demonstrate that they are concerned about stereotypes as a negative thing which mirrors the existing challenges in the workplace.

Discussion of this theme makes a noteworthy contribution to the existing literature on female chefs by revealing the ways in which stereotypes may vary depending on the position they hold within the career including their perception. The findings highlight that female chefs navigate challenges shaped by stereotypes. The study also emphasises on the importance of self-belief that can be a determining factor for success which covers beyond traditional gender norms, allowing female chefs agency to express themselves.

### **6.3 The Role of the Family: “We Can’t Just Leave the House Like That”**

The final theme related to gender is when the majority of participants voiced issues about marriage and having children. Competing commitments to work and family can be the antecedent of conflict, notably for women but also for men, and specifically for married employees (Stier and Lewin-Epstein, 2003). It is challenging to balance one's commitment as a mother and wife within a hospitality career that demands long working hours, limited social time and heavy workloads (Okumus et al., 2010); these issues are relatively similar for chefs too. Some single participants mentioned that while they could now fully commit to their chef careers, they were concerned about how future family commitments might affect their careers:

The reason why I survived is because I don't have a child. I am not married. I don't have a life, so if you see most of the already married people, they can't. If you ask me where the female chef is, because all of them are already married, already have a child, most of them do online business, and can't really do anything...The reason I am at this stage is because I don't have child (Dila)

Participants thought about their future and how they observed colleagues taking career breaks or changing working patterns due to family commitments. They knew that it was difficult for female chef to commit "because they want to get married and have kids" (Aini). For Zah, family commitments make it harder to manage both work and family unless the female chefs are single, while Fiza suggested:

So, I have few friends that married, so they have their own kids. So sometimes they always come to me and told me that 'this is very hard, I try to apply for leave but I can't because busy time'. So sometimes I feel that this going to happen to me. The same thing if I am still in the industry (Fiza)

Even though work-family conflict is often discussed for married women, it does not mean this issue does not impact single women. In fact, single women also face the same problem (Sidani and Al Hakim, 2012; Kim and Kim, 2017) or at least they have the same perceptions of such problems. Limited research has focused on what single women think about their careers. Most studies discussed single women's opinions about the fairness of work-life balance policies towards single women (Culpepper et al., 2020; Pan and Li, 2021; Denson and Szelényi, 2022) but research is still inadequate on how single women see their careers as being affected by having a family. A few early research publications discussed this concern and support the current argument made by single female chefs in this study. For example, Greenglass and Devins (1982) mention that family is one-factor affecting women's career planning, while Houseknecht et al. (1987) contended that singlehood impacts women's career development. But to date, research into this topic is still limited, as argued by Kim and Kim (2017).

Another point about family concerns is when participants thought of changing careers because of family care, which hinders female chefs from advancing in their careers. Participants agreed that female chefs quit working in hotels, choosing nine to five jobs, having their own business, or becoming lecturers to suit their married life. The commitments of family became one of the reasons for Cheng, that made her quit from working in the hotel sector. Other participants agreed that this is why they quit from the hectic professional kitchen business and chose more family-friendly culinary careers such as having their own businesses or joining academia. For example, Ina who works in academia, and who is, at the same time, an active cookbook writer strongly emphasised that:

Once they have kids, that's another thing. I see it somehow you know those are the things today, hinder them from going up to the top. After they graduate, they go into hotels, the industry. When you come to have children, you will become a lecturer and some open restaurants and café, do homebased business especially now and maybe they work 9 to 5 with food production companies, they will eventually venture in that because of the fixed hours supposed. If you have two female and male chefs, let's see they get married, the male chef will stay  
(Ina)

Although men and women have the same responsibilities at work, family commitment generally demands more time for women and affects job commitment (Devi and Rani, 2016). Not that men do not face family difficulties, but the pressure is more found in women. Mei felt that women, feel the need to have a family and:

I feel I get slower (being female) ...because for male, (they) don't have to carry the baby. I am not saying men not having difficulty, they also have it but I still think...it's tough (Mei)

Laila, as a lecturer and also a famous celebrity chef in Malaysia, also acknowledged that family commitment has become the limitation for her:

As a female chef, the challenge is we can't be like men, we can't just leave the house like that. Firstly, is our commitment when we are married...if you got children, that's another thing. There is some limitation about it. We can't really do anything about it, if we force it maybe there is an upcoming problem that can happen like divorce or else (Laila)

When women find it impossible to balance these commitments, it can lead to career breaks and worsen the stereotypes that women are assumed to face a career conflict because of family responsibilities (Michailidis et al., 2012) at any point of their married life. This conflict also creates uncertainty about women's career paths, and doubts about whether women can commit to both. This also worsens when they decide to have children (Ahmed and Ambreen, 2021), which further potentially creates turnover of women in the workplace (Chen et al., 2018).

Not only that, employers also might hesitate to hire married female chefs as the expectation is that these female chefs will have a challenging work-life balance, and this will hinder their promotion chances. For example:

When you give birth, you can go for 60 days, and you know that's when the hotel or for all the places where you work might feel the pinch if you are not around. So, what happens if this female chef gives birth every year? (Ina)

Even me, my kitchen is all men. There is no female send a resume to me. So, I think the female chef will have a lot of problems...job is going to be very limited...married and have children. If they are single, I don't really worry because I know they can survive but those who already give birth, I am sorry, maybe your career might be over after this (Dila)

Chaudhary and Gupta (2010) also previously supported the view that it is unmarried and young women who are often favoured in the hotel industry, while married women with children might face discrimination, as the prospective employer might inquire about their ability to manage domestic responsibilities alongside a job role. The

participants' views above might be difficult to accept, for them, and probably for many other women, especially as such issues can affect women's career planning or can even impact them to the extent that, they may need to sacrifice their dream job. In fact, these findings are consistent with research across many disciplines. In hospitality, research has shown that this conflict can create a high turnover intention for hotel employees regardless of gender and marital status (Chen et al., 2018) and create a high level of stress to remain at work in tourism/hospitality (Vong and Tang, 2017). Particularly for women in hospitality, many find it hard to commit to family responsibilities as it may create career problems (Okumus et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2021; Kumari, 2021) in addition to high job pressures that do not help women balance both family and work commitments (Yang and Peng, 2018). Many women in other career contexts in Malaysia, such as for doctors, nurses (Dousin et al., 2021), accountants (Wendy Teoh Ming Yen et al., 2021) and in education (Achour et al., 2014) equally suggest the negative impact of family commitment on women's careers.

The majority of participants (eleven) mentioned concerns about family commitment affecting their chef careers. Interestingly, the majority of the female chefs recruited in this study were single (at the time of the interviews). Which means family commitment and work-life balance are significant issues for female chefs' careers regardless of their marital status. Even though single chefs did not yet have family commitments, the future prospect of these was an issue, and thinking about such future commitments was still visible in the interviews. In addition, only the Malay and Chinese participants mentioned family and work concerns, as a chef. This might be due to the cultural and patriarchal beliefs in Malaysia that are still significant for these participants. Malaysians come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their strong beliefs and cultural norms have shaped their mindsets, especially when it comes to work-family issues (Jacob et al., 2017). It is also a common belief that men should primarily provide for the family, while women are expected to mainly take care of the home and children (Aziz and Chang, 2013). Particularly among the Chinese population, there's a noteworthy conflict between traditional Confucian values and more modern Western ideas; alongside persistent patriarchal norms, and could lead to gender inequality in Malaysian women (Ng et al., 2009). This is similarly for Malay Muslims women who

typically stayed at home to care for their families in the past (Ali, 2014), although the situation has changed. A study in Malaysia found that many women who work as teachers think work-family balance means being able to fulfil their duties at work and home which shows the concept of work-family balance can differ between Western and non-Western Malaysian society (Aziz and Chang, 2013). However, Noor's (1999) study previously found several important findings on Malaysian women. Firstly, many of the challenges Malaysian women face when juggling work and family responsibilities are similar to what has been discussed in the Western context. However, these women don't seem to express higher levels of distress, possibly because Malaysian society discourages such expressions, which might be seen as a personal failure. They may also benefit from other factors like religion, support from family members, and affordable household help, which could protect their mental well-being. Secondly, even though these women work full-time, they still primarily take care of their homes and children. Thirdly, despite spending less time at home due to employment, most of them consider family more important than work, emphasising the significance of family in their lives. Fourth, the availability of suitable childcare is crucial for these women to be able to work. Additionally, the study also found that having the support of their spouse also contributed to their happiness. This indicates that such situations, including work conditions, available resources, and cultural values, plays a significant role when studying work-family issues (Aziz and Chang, 2013). This view is also supported by Jacob et al.'s (2017) study where gender-role ideology is prevalent in Malaysian society. The ideology is based on traditional gender stereotypes influenced by religion, culture, and norms, and also centered on the 'mother's mindset', where Malaysian women feel they must be responsible for childcare.

Although work-life issues for women have already been an extensive research area, these findings have added a new explorative context about women's careers as chefs in professional kitchens in Malaysia, which has not previously been the subject of research. The opinions from unmarried female chefs contemplating their future commitment to their careers post-marriage adds a fresh dimension to the discussion on work-life balance within the culinary industry. The findings suggest that even before entering into marriage, female chefs are considering the potential impact of it on their



career. Previous research has mainly focused on work-life issues for married female chefs (e.g. Okumus et al., 2010) but often overlooks how single women view this conflict, although some research has investigated this theme in general (e.g. Houseknecht et al., 1987; Kim and Kim, 2017). Furthermore, the emphasis on the awareness of commitment among married female chefs towards both their careers and families found in the current research, contributes significantly to the existing literature, where this factor is often the central focus.

## **6.4 The Role of Ethnicity**

Another central focus in this discussion of gender is its intersection with ethnicity. The main question asked is how ethnicity plays a role in female chefs' careers in Malaysia, specifically to look whether intersectionality of gender and ethnicity have impacted the career experiences of female chefs in this study. As previously stated, this study conceptualised intersectionality as a multidimensional context that prompts further investigation of a female chef's career by looking at gender and ethnicity, and considering the ways in which gender and ethnicity intersect to shape their careers, perceptions, and behaviour. From participants' narrative stories, discussions that emerge in relation to ethnicity are around diversity and language, which stem from the participants' narratives on ethnicity. Most participants highlighted that their ethnicity does not play any significant role in their career as a female chef, even though occasionally they face some challenges pertaining to ethnicity. They also shared their stories about their ethnicity and what role it has played in their careers. Most of the participants believed that Malaysia's diversity and multicultural practices had helped this situation mainly because Malaysians have lived and worked in a diverse work environment involving various cultural values (Rashid and Ho, 2003; Ghani and Awang, 2017).

### **6.4.1 "The Race Card"**

The responses from the participants reflected various experiences related to ethnicity, especially in the kitchen where there is a mixture of different ethnic groups. Farah, a Malay chef mentioned that it depended on the type of professional kitchen. In her

experience, Malays would mostly be found in one kitchen while Chinese would be in another. In other words, it depended on the expertise in the category of the cuisine itself. If it is Malay cuisine, more Malay chefs would be employed and so on. Mei who is a Chinese pastry chef also mentioned similar opinions when she was asked about the role of ethnicity in a chefs' career:

Aaa no...I don't...actually it depends where you stay. It is like if a Chinese kitchen, then there will probably be more Chinese...If you are in Malay kitchen, will have more Malay...but I don't think it's a problem even if a Chinese chef work in there (Malay kitchen) ...I went to cold kitchen, normally only Malay is there...no problem (Mei)

Even where there was a mixture of ethnic groups working in one kitchen, this rarely created any problems because participants believed everyone could socialise in a diverse working environment. For Huan:

I don't see any problem...mostly if there is Malay chef and Chinese chef, they all tend to mingle around and there is no problem with me being a Chinese or anything. I think because our environment is very diverse so hardly you will see a kitchen is just full of Malay. Probably a section in a kitchen will have more Malay but there are no big issues with any discrimination being a Chinese or being a Malay...no big problem because we all Malaysian, we understand what they practice and what they don't practice so we also wouldn't go and offend them (Huan)

Huan said that as in Malaysia, people are aware of other ethnic practices, ethnicity related problems are minimal, at least from her perspective as a Chinese Malaysian. Other participants also believed that "everything is equal" (Farah), "it was never a topic" (Priya), while "no matter its Malay, Chinese, Indian", Susie still felt comfortable. For Kamala, it was undeniable that issues associated with ethnicity occurred, but her mindset of not using ethnicity or race as a reason for difference, made it easier for her when working:

In terms of being Indian, I think all Malaysians are treated the same. I don't see myself like to be Indian, but Malaysian. That mindset helps me, yes. Not to play the race card. Like compared to people I know, sometimes they always play the race card, saying that it's because 'I am Indian', I don't think that (Kamala)

Esha as an Indian who worked at a pastry kitchen also suggested the same thing. She was brought up in a diverse environment as a child, she had been to a Chinese-speaking school. Always being a minority as an Indian, her ethnic background or her position as a minority never discouraged her. Even though Malays are the majority ethnic group and priority is given to the Malays by law, other ethnic rights are still appreciated as people are allowed to practice their religion and culture (Ghani and Awang, 2017), making it easier for them to live in co-existence in the country. The statements above suggest why participants believed that their ethnic background was not a problem when working in the industry. Participants also positively believed that each ethnic group has its uniqueness, and being a chef does not require a specific ethnic background. As Malays, both Aini and Zah do not see ethnicity or one's ethnic background as something to be concerned with:

I think you have to ditch that...because opportunity, life challenges, they don't see whether you are Muslim, Chinese, Indian, or they don't see whether you are male or female. You know challenges come regardless...gender or ethnic, it's an issue or as an excuse? (Aini)

I think no, that's not an issue. It's your strength...diverse in ethnic, culture. So, when people said Chinese or Indian are better than Malay and stuff, I don't believe much because for me it's how you develop yourself... don't feel down because you have your own mind and thoughts (Zah)

Most participants believe that being a successful chef is not related to ethnicity. Rather, being a chef depends on the possession of skills and competency. In fact, ethnic diversity was perceived as something positive because a diverse kitchen background can encourage a better workplace environment and the unique nature of

ethnicities can be highlighted through the food produced. For Cheng, as a Chinese Malaysian who converted to Islam, what she thought before about ethnic conflict was not true:

No difference. Since before I revert to Muslim, I thought it is a big difference. Chinese business and you know, Muslim business. Actually, after I revert, I married to my husband, staying together with my in laws, I think there is actually no difference. It's how we think about it (Cheng)

It is contended that mindset and behaviour was again crucial for these female chefs and their positive attitudes towards ethnic differences enhanced their experiences, especially at work. Similarly, these findings align with other research in the Malaysian workplace context where ethnicity is not perceived as a substantial issue. Verkuyten and Khan (2012), in their study, showed that their participants saw the Malaysian community as one across the three ethnic groups, and they saw themselves as one nationality. Also, sharing an ethnic identity creates cultural awareness, commitment and enhances positivity in a multi-ethnic society as in the Malaysian workplace (Abu and Connaughton, 2019). This perhaps explains, why female chefs in this research did not see ethnicity as a concern for them. People who work in a multi-ethnic workplace will likely be more open to differences (Nguyen, 2019) mainly because they are used to the multicultural situation.

Nevertheless, nine of the participants shared their experiences about ethnic-related issues from what they observed in their career environments. Farah said that discriminatory situations did not mainly happen to her, but she had observed that there was a different of salary when working with other ethnic groups. For Priya, she did feel unfairly treated as a minority (as an Indian), especially in terms of her opportunities for promotion at work:

Basically, I had a Chinese pastry chef, so all of the opportunity will be given prioritise to Chinese...I felt that I was able to hold that position and the position

was given to someone who couldn't hold it, I straight away ask my chef why I didn't get that promotion? And my chef couldn't answer me and 2 months later I got the promotion. I will not accept if things happen like that. I want an answer, if you cannot give the answer, you only show me that you are being bias or racist or something, if I can't do the job, you tell me I am doing it wrong or not have enough experience then I will work on that (Priya)

Being a minority and working with different ethnic groups also required female chefs to work harder to blend with the majority ethnicity. It is undeniable that women, especially from a minority, are often excluded from the majority group (Dainty et al., 2004). Thus, it can create more ethnic barriers and more segregation at work: as Darshini suggested "for me, there is a perception that oh you are Indian you can't do this and that. I can see like that from the expression".

In addition, Dila raised concerns about working in a multi-ethnic country, where diversity possibly creates more issues around ethnicity:

When we look at the cooking itself...food come from different races, so in a way everything involves races. If you are in the hotel its worst, because they divide the kitchen. Multiracial country there is pro and cons, you know it can create racism at work. Malaysia there is a lot of immigrants from Bangladesh, Indonesia, everyone can grab our job! Because you could see the salary from Bangladesh it's different, if you compared to local also is different. So, it creates that kind of separation especially in Malaysia because we are the melting pot, we have all sorts of races here (Dila)

She further continued that work inequality can also happen in rural or urban areas (Saari et al., 2015). She also admitted to her own discriminatory behaviour when it came to job opportunities, and this happened when she was compared to other nationalities:

Of course, there is a segregation, it depends...Based on race, based on everything, if a Malay boy from KL (Kuala Lumpur) it's different price (salary), if

from North is different. For example, when I was asking for a job...I went in with a Myanmar guy that wanted the job too, so after two weeks, the chef called me in, and they would like to offer me a job with RM5 an hour for both of us. So, I said why my salary is the same with this guy? See even me, I start to question why I got the same pay as this guy? I have a diploma, and he doesn't have it (Dila)

Based on Dila's view that food is the indicator of ethnic segregation, this is perhaps unavoidable as Malaysia, as a multicultural country, needs to practice different food-based cultures, cooking techniques, and religious needs (Asraf et al., 2014). This is considered unique (Memon et al., 2019) and a good symbol of ethnic integration (Asraf et al., 2014). Mostly food production and kitchens in Malaysia, especially in hotels, are divided according to the country's cuisine such as Malay, Chinese, and Indian. As Dila said, this already creates segregation because one kitchen may have a chef from a suitable ethnic background to the cuisine, but it could be the case that only the chef who is familiar with a particular ethnic cuisine will be hired. For example, a Malay chef will cook Malay food and so on. Also, what Dila mentioned can be the main concern for Malaysians being in a multi-ethnic country because there can be unequal socioeconomic conditions between ethnic groups that can create racial conflict (Banna et al., 2020). A high level of competition can also occur, apart from ethnic favouritism, especially in a multicultural country. Concerning salary differences based on where a person comes from, this can only happen if the workplace does not have a standardised salary, which rarely happens unless it is a small café or food stall.

There were also some opinions about working within a similar ethnic group that four participants voiced. One participant mentioned that it would be more comfortable for her to work with the same ethnic group, and this would also make it easier to deal with problems. Huan mainly worked with her own ethnic group (Chinese), so ethnic issues did not affect her. This is probably the reason why Huan mentioned previously that ethnicity was not a concern for her, because she mostly works with her own ethnic group, meaning she probably does not encounter ethnic issues in her workplace.

However, some participants saw challenges working with similar ethnic groups. As one participant experienced – “when you put Indian working with Indian, the competition level becomes unhealthy” (Priya). Even working with her ethnic group, similarly, Darshini still felt unwelcome. Priya felt that as a pastry chef, she preferred working in a diverse environment:

Actually, I feel it better to work with diverse people compared to work with just Malay or just Chinese. When you put one Indian with 10 Chinese, you sure going to get push aside, not to say discriminated...you won't feel like you are part of the group. There will be a language barrier, there will be a culture barrier, very minimal maybe but you won't be accepted 100%. Same as to when you are working with a group of Malays, Malays are more accepting from my experience. But their mindset in working maybe different, so maybe you know the segregation of work may not be fair, may not be equal. So, things like this as compared to working with the diverse people, everybody has their position and their role and their tasks. So, you are not in a group of your own. You are mixed, you all come from different culture and different mindset, so we follow the company culture. We don't follow our culture and our mindset (Priya)

Priya's view is supported by Verkuyten and Martinovic (2006) that people from minority ethnic groups prefer to be in a more multi-ethnic environment because it can create better social connections. This is probably because, as mentioned by Priya, when working in a multi-ethnic context, the situation is more “balanced” and that is what made her feel more comfortable.

Also, when asked about ethnicity issues, three participants also thought about ethnic-based family perceptions about their careers as chefs. Participants mentioned that the typical Asian-Chinese family sees a chef's career as not professional enough. Particularly for Jia and Yuen that came from a Chinese ethnic background:

...Manual labour it just something new to me...it felt a little degrading...That's really a very bad thing to say and I should like really to change the mind set of people nowadays. Because that's what traditionally especially Asian family

thought of being a chef and that stereotyping is something that... So, it's like a bit of humiliate (Jia)

If being a chef in a Chinese culture, it's a perception that you don't know how to study. You are not good in anything, that's why you go into a kitchen job. Because if you are well educated, then you are not going into a kitchen job. Because to them in Chinese culture, it's a lower income pay (Yuen)

A similar view was also voiced by Priya about her Indian family's perception of a chef career:

I can say the Indian mindset isn't drawn to chef as a professional career...parents will bring up the child...to be professional, doctor, lawyer...This is the mindset of our parents, my generation parents (Priya)

Participants' opinions show that work stereotypes probably happen within the Malaysian perspective. The public may be sceptical about chef careers, and view them as involving low income, long working hours and only requiring experience and minimal or low skills, rather than being academically promising. Participants' families also possessed ethnically-based perceptions about chef careers which mirror the social status of careers in hospitality where the sector is said to have a poor reputation because of its low pay, long working hours, boring work and limited job opportunities (Penny Wan et al., 2014).

Research on the negative issues encountered in a multicultural or multi-ethnic workplace is evidenced by previous research (Sia and Chauhan, 2015; Laurence et al., 2018; Nguyen and Velayutham, 2018, Plaut et al., 2014; Pasca and Wagner, 2011). This includes various sectors such as construction (Dainty et al., 2004) and counselling (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). However, instead of looking at a multi-ethnic or multicultural workplace as a substantial problem, more research about how people in a multi-ethnic workplace create positive relationships needs to be done, and this is still limited (Nguyen, 2019). Interestingly, some research supports the findings that



ethnicity diversity is not a problem (Verkuyten and Khan, 2012; Abu and Connaughton, 2019; Nguyen, 2019), at least within the Malaysian context. But still, in relation to a female pursuing a chef's career, none have investigated the positive side of working in a multicultural environment. This study shows that most participants agreed that their ethnic background did not play a negative role. Despite nine participants having shared their experiences related to ethnic challenges, their negative ethnic experiences did not affect their career progress but amounted only to one challenging episode in their career experiences as female chefs in Malaysia. This finding supports the idea that the norm of multi-ethnic practices in the Malaysian community has facilitated this situation and encourages a positive work environment.

The Malay female chefs interviewed were quite positive regarding their ethnic background, probably as they are the majority ethnic group in Malaysia. This is similar for the Chinese participants, but, for the latter group, this could be due to their working background or environment that is mostly dominated by their own ethnic group, thus reducing the impact or issues of ethnicity at work. Interestingly, Indian participants' stories shows that they are concerned more than the other groups about ethnicity, either when working with the same ethnic group or receiving negative family perspectives that are influenced by their ethnic perceptions on cheffing careers. From the participants' narrative stories of ethnicity, it can be concluded that the relationship between ethnic background and the careers of female chefs in Malaysia is a multifaceted issue. While some participants contend that their ethnic background does not have any direct impact on their career, it is essential to recognise that this might not be the case for everyone. The experiences of female chefs from various ethnic backgrounds can differ significantly due to factors like cultural expectations, career background, networks, and opportunities. Additionally, it is important to consider that biases may still exist, influencing the perceptions and opportunities available to female chefs from different ethnic backgrounds. Thus, it becomes evident that the impact of ethnicity on chef careers for these female chefs in this study is a complex interplay of individual experiences and societal norms.

This theme's discussion contributes to the existing literature by presenting a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity within the culinary industry in Malaysia. The fact that vast majority of female chefs interviewed in this study intimated that ethnicity does not play a substantial role in their career experiences challenges traditional narratives on ethnicity that often-mention negative issues in the workplace (e.g. Laurence et al., 2018; Nguyen and Velayutham, 2018). This different insight extends the literature by highlighting the individual variation in how female chefs perceive the influence of ethnicity in their careers. Also, the participants' opinions that ethnic tension could exist within the *same*, or different, ethnic groups based on their situations and awareness, add depth to the discussions found in the existing literature. By recognising that people's perceptions about ethnicity and career outcomes can vary, the study prompts a re-evaluation or new context of study to address diversity, especially in a multiethnic country like Malaysia.

#### **6.4.2 "Language Between Us"**

The second theme about ethnicity also focuses on language. While participants mentioned that there are no substantial issues surrounding ethnicity, seven participants mentioned language concerns in the workplace. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country; hence it is not uncommon for other ethnicities to speak or at least understand the Malay language as it is a national language. However, working with a different ethnic group can create a communication barrier, and speaking another language can be uncomfortable. This is the reality of living in a multilingual society, especially for those from minority ethnic groups who need to think about code switching and which language to use, when communicating (Mei et al., 2016). This is not only relevant for people from different ethnic backgrounds, but those within the same ethnic group can also face these challenges as research participants mentioned and this is mainly because of different dialects or jargon, as Huan has experienced from her perspective as a Chinese Malaysian:

...Although I am a Malaysian...I don't really have a good comprehension in Malay. Sometimes the chef talks about a lot of thing or ingredients in Malay, probably I would not know. I was brought up in very strong Chinese culture, later

at the stage of my education or in the industrial experience, all is in English. So, when it comes to the Malay language, that something that I couldn't comprehend much. So, I have to be like extra harder to like to try to figure out what the chef is talking about (Huan)

It is interesting that Huan suggested that the language or terms used in the kitchen is a mixture of Malay and English, mainly as it is in the work situation she is in. So, the mixture of language with which she is unfamiliar became a challenge for her. This is similar to Mei where some of her colleagues can understand English and that made it easier for her rather than using Malay language. But the concern also comes from those in the same ethnic group which use different Chinese dialects, such as for Mei and Ling:

I don't practice Malay language that much. Sometimes when I want to convey the message it is more difficult for me, or I have to speak like a bit of Malay and a bit of English. Sometimes Malay, they understand Chinese, you know so it's easy....sometimes also they try to converse in English. When they speak fully in Malay then I will be like *mmmm*... Also, for Chinese, we got a lot of dialect...I can't speak (the other dialect) but I can understand (Mei)

Like Chinese, we also have many other dialects. We have Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, some will be more comfortable speaking English, some will be more comfortable speaking Cantonese...Sometimes it be kind of barrier in communication (Ling)

Not only are participants concerned about the differences or usage of foreign language, but this is also related to other languages or dialects in other Malaysian states. In Malaysia, a strong state accent can be a barrier. Cheng who worked in Sarawak (East Malaysia) before, where her colleagues spoke mostly in their own language (Sarawak language), rather than the national Malay language, commented:

...My chef finds it an issue when I don't understand *Bahasa* (language) Sarawak. I don't feel difficult while I am working because they just speak English (while working). I feel it's the right things (to not speak in Sarawak language) because I don't listen to gossips. Because they gossip in *Bahasa* Sarawak...Whatever I need to know, for Chinese I will speak in Chinese, the other race, I will speak in English or with my broken *Bahasa* Malaysia. My friends, my staff, my chefs they are not Chinese, they are all from indigenous ethnicity. They do understand that I don't speak *Bahasa* Sarawak, my *Bahasa* is not good, but I still try my best to talk to them sometimes. Sometimes we laugh because of you know, the words that I used, things like that but I think I enjoyed, I enjoyed that (learning) and it also helps to loosen up the stress while working (Cheng)

Although Cheng said that her colleagues laughed at how bad she was at speaking the Bahasa Sarawak, it's actually not something that bothered her because it added humour to the interactions. This shows a positive side in that language differences can be a sign of people getting along in a social context (Wise and Velayutham, 2020). This is especially so in a country like Malaysia, which possesses different languages and dialects. With fourteen states across the country, the majority of states have a strong dialect or accent, and the usage of words can also be different. This can also create language barriers, but it is worth noting that these issues do not affect female chefs' careers but rather, add different ethnic experiences.

However, some participants from minority groups did feel unfairly treated, especially when communicating. Priya, of Indian ethnic minority heritage, remembered her experience when she was in the kitchen where the job briefing was done in the majority language (in Chinese) even though her colleagues knew that she didn't understand the language. Farah also said that even though she had no issue working with Chinese, she realised that when other ethnic groups would speak about something else in their own language it was an uncomfortable situation for her: it made her think that her colleagues were speaking negatively about her or did not want to include her in the conversation. This situation is perhaps unavoidable especially because those in

majority ethnicities prefer to speak in their native languages as this is more comfortable for them.

Despite that, two participants were optimistic about language issues because there are many languages to choose from when communicating. As Ling said:

I think one thing good about Malaysia is that we got many languages. So, if English and Mandarin are not the kind of language between us, we still have like *Bahasa Malaysia*. Yaa, I think that's one thing good about Malaysia... (Ling)

Malaysians mostly are bilingual or multilingual because Malay as the primary language, coexists with other “community languages such as English, Mandarin, Tamil, Hokkien and some others” (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013, pp. 185). Those from the Chinese ethnicity also use numerous languages in addition to Mandarin and Hokkien such as Cantonese, Hakka, Foochow, Teochew and Hainanese which depends on their specific heritage (Albury, 2017). While Malay is used as the national language and used in primary or secondary school, non-Malays also can choose to go to schools that use Chinese, Tamil or English (Mei et al., 2016). Hence, this explains why some non-Malay participants were concerned about the Malay language because they might not use it that much. Some participants emphasised that language was not a significant issue in their careers because they grew up or were educated in a multilingual environment, as supported by Hei and Mior Jaafar (2010) in that Malay or *Bahasa Melayu*, being the official language, was commonly spoken alongside other languages or dialects. In such cases, individuals may be fluent in Malay and capable of effective communication, eliminating language barriers in their work. Additionally, many Malaysians are known for their adaptability in using multiple languages or dialects as a part of their daily lives, which can be advantageous for them where interactions with diverse customers and co-workers are common. Therefore, for some participants, the ability to speak Malay fluently may have allowed them to go through their careers more easily than others, minimising language-related challenges. Another important point to highlight is that Malaysians also often might use English or a mix of English and Malay, known as Malaysian English (Hei and Mior Jaafar, 2010)

or *Manglish*. This is specifically explained by Albury's (2017) study in that *Manglish* or *Bahasa Rojak* (mixture language) are very unique mediums of communication, representing the diverse multiethnic dynamic and Malaysian identity, thus encouraging inclusiveness.

Nevertheless, only the Chinese and Indian participants expressed language concerns. This is probably because Malay is the majority ethnic group in Malaysia, and the Malay participants did not see language as a barrier because they also can speak basic English. This is consistent with the research by Yee Mun et al. (2015) that reveals the Chinese perceive language as an important attribute compared to Malays. Because the Malay language is widely used in the country, the Malays feel that the Malay language is not an ethnic symbol but a representation of the country itself. This possibly suggests why Malay participants in this research did not mention language as a concern. The issue of language concerns in the careers of female chefs in Malaysia, particularly among those from the Chinese and Indian communities, presents a challenging dynamic. While language can be a powerful tool for communication, it can also be a potential barrier for those who may not be proficient in the dominant language, which is often Malay. This language divide may affect their ability to participate in a diverse work environment. In Malaysia's multicultural context, where various languages and dialects are spoken, language proficiency can impact not only career opportunities but also self-confidence in communicating.

While language barriers have increasingly been a topic in research, such as language for non-English speakers (Madera et al., 2014), the language within social interaction in the multilingual workplace (Tange and Luring, 2009) and language in multicultural student groups (Eng et al., 2022), this is still limited in hospitality studies, not to mention the investigation of female chefs' careers. However, even though the issues of language emerged from the ethnicity question in this study, this was not an issue mentioned by all participants. Indeed, from the seven participants that mentioned language in the interviews, only five participants expressed the view that language is an issue in their chef careers. Hence, the evidence that language issues affect female

chefs' career experiences is inconclusive; however, it can be further extended in other research contexts.

Thus, this study makes a substantial contribution to the literature on female chefs by uncovering the role of language in their career experiences. Where some female chefs encountered language barriers or even looked at language differences as a positive point in their career when questions on ethnicity were being asked, this highlights an interesting point on diversity as well, and within the workplace context, especially with Malaysia being in a multilingual country. This can prompt further investigation on the underlying ethnic situation in the country, that adds a layer of complexity to discussions which have often been overlooked.

## **6.5 Summary**

This chapter has provided insight into the role of gender and ethnicity for female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia, specifically on the role of the body, stereotypes, family, diversity, and languages. Through the discussion of the themes, it is concluded that gender plays an important role in female chefs' career experiences. Even though most participants did not directly state that gender influenced their careers, unpacking their responses does point to the fact that gender does indeed play a role in their career experiences. There were only two simple questions posed to the interviewees: first, how being female plays a role in a chef's career, and second, does ethnic background influence a chef's career? From these direct questions, participants were able to share various narrative stories.

Some of the discussions in this chapter are based on evidence from the majority of the participants, while some are not conclusive. This is because the focus of the research is on participants' opinions about gender and ethnicity. Thus, resulting in different perceptions being expressed by the participants. The majority mentioned that their physical capabilities were a dominant influence on their career experiences as women and this could either be an advantage or a disadvantage. For some women, imitations in physical abilities and body size discrimination were positive for them as this allowed them to get more help at work. The evidence on the effects of women's

menstrual cycle was inconclusive, as only six participants mentioned this, although for them it was a significant issue. The majority of participants agreed that stereotypes towards female chefs are still firmly embedded, especially when female chefs are in leadership positions, which demands that they to prove their ability. Nevertheless, female chefs also mentioned that women and men work differently, which should be seen as an advantage to increase career motivation. Similar views about family commitment were also evidenced by the majority of the participants. Again, this factor can influence how female chefs plan their careers in the future. Single participants also foresaw challenges after married life.

Most female chefs revealed that their ethnic background was not a concern as a chef, and that they were used to working in a multi-ethnic environment and believed that ethnic background should not be an issue. Despite that, some participants still voiced their opinions regarding negative experiences concerning ethnicity, especially those from minority ethnic groups, and these participants also stated that their family perceive a chef's career on the basis of ethnically held viewpoints also. However, this did not necessarily affect their careers as chefs. Apart from that, language was also seen as a possible barrier to communication, but only five participants mentioned this as something that could potentially be an issue, while the other two participants mentioned language as a positive factor, so again this is inconclusive. Overall, ethnicity plays a fundamental role in shaping the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia, where diversity and language that were discussed above are significant contributing factors, going beyond the initial focus of intersectionality in this study. While diversity was found to assist female chefs in this study to have a more comfortable career experience, it was also found to pose challenges. Language, particularly Malay, can be both a bridge and a barrier in this context. Participants proficiency in Malay often found it helped their communication process, however, for those not well-versed in the language, it could be a problem. Therefore, ethnicity in Malaysia's female chef career experiences represents a complex relationship, presenting both opportunities and challenges that require further and deeper understanding.



The discussions in this chapter were derived from female chefs' perspectives on being women in professional kitchens, and the data gathered has contributed to a detailed exploration of gender issues and ethnicity as outlined. In relation to the theoretical framework adopted in this study, it has emphasised that the gender belief and gender schema thinking of these female chefs are still strongly embedded. Even though it is not directly influencing their career as a chef, there are various gender-related experiences that show that these participants possess gender schema thinking. For example, participants mentioned the stereotypes of being women in the kitchen associated with masculine and feminine attributes, and that family responsibilities are still embedded in the female chefs' thinking associated with their careers. This was consistent with the understanding of gender schema theory discussed in the literature review. In addition, the discussion on the physicality or body size of the participants was found to advance the understanding of this theory, as it was associated with schematic thinking about female bodies, and the limitations of, or differences between female and male physical strength. In other words, there is evidence that the perception of what was expected from the typical physical strength of females and males, also correlated to masculine and feminine attributes. As the gender schema theory revealed, schematic thinking can be illustrated through behaviour, thinking and characteristics (Lemons and Parzinger, 2007) and this study has found that gender schema is also associated with careers. That is, that a chef's career relates to a strong masculine image as it is a male dominated career. Therefore, the gender schema was proven to be related with the gender stereotypes in female chefs' careers.

This discussion also unpacks different views on the career construction theory through the experiences of female chefs from diverse ethnic backgrounds. It enhances the understanding of vocational personality and life themes within the context of female chefs' careers. Biological factors reveal the physiological aspects that may align with vocational personality (needs and strategy) as personal health considerations can influence career choices. Stereotypes on gender and their self-belief, provides valuable information on how personality and self-perceptions shape the experiences of female chefs. Not only that, the balance between work-life commitments highlighted in this chapter contribute to understanding how individual life themes and personal

priorities intersect with career, and align with personal and social needs as contended by Savickas et al. (2009) and Rudolph et al. (2019).

It is undeniable that some of the findings in this chapter are consistent with those of other research, such as the effect of menstruation on women (e.g. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013; Krusz et al., 2019), women and weight discrimination (e.g. Puls et al., 2021; Randle, 2012), women leaders and stereotypes (e.g. Carvalho et al., 2018c; Denizci et al. 2019a; Koburtay and Syed, 2020), and women's work-life conflict (e.g. Liu et al., 2021; Kumari, 2021). However, none of these issues have focused on women who work as chefs in professional kitchens, even though issues of leadership, stereotypes and work-life balance were evidenced in relation to such careers in Chapter One. With regards to ethnicity, previous research has also investigated the role of ethnicity in the workplace (e.g., Abu and Connaughton, 2019; Nguyen, 2019) and language barriers at work (e.g., Tange and Luring, 2009) but again, no previous research has focused on how **women** experience these in their workplace, not to mention women in a specific career. Thus, these findings have addressed a knowledge gap in gender and hospitality research, also particularly in the Malaysian context. While other research on women in hospitality, such as in Chapter Two, investigated women's career advancement or progression such as Santero-Sanchez et al. (2015) and Pizam (2017), this research suggests a different perspective in our understanding of women's career experiences in the culinary industry. That is, this research demonstrates that female chefs do not see gender and ethnicity as barriers in their careers as chefs, although these issues do contribute to their career experiences on a daily basis.

In essence, this chapter's findings have offered new perspectives in understanding the role of gender and ethnicity for literature that explores the often-overlooked aspects of the female chef's career, especially in Malaysian contexts. It addresses the role of the body or the biological aspect (menstruation and physical differences) on female chefs, going beyond common discussions on the careers of female chefs on discrimination, glass ceilings, and advancement (e.g. Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020a; De Silva and Thulemark, 2022; Md Mubin et al., 2021). As this chapter also focuses on stereotypes,

it reveals the varying impact of perceptions of female chefs with the crucial role of self-belief. While the discussion also explores work-life issues (e.g. Md Mubin et al., 2021) regardless of their marital status, this can shed light on single female chefs' considerations before marriage, adding a valuable perspective often overlooked in previous research. The present research into the Malaysian culinary industry also challenges negative narratives of ethnic diversity in the workplace (e.g. Nguyen and Velayutham, 2018), and highlights differing individual perceptions. Similarly, the language discussion offers interesting insights into workplace diversity, especially in multilingual settings. Thus, the research collectively contributes freshness to existing theories and encourages a re-evaluation of different gender-ethnicity discussions in the female chef's career context.

In praxis, the findings of this chapter offer the acknowledgment of menstruation as a factor influencing female chefs' career experiences that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges that women face in the workplace. The identification of self-belief as a crucial factor in the experiences of female chefs in this study highlights the importance of building confidence and self-efficacy for women in patriarchal workplaces. The insights from single female chefs highlight the need for workplace policies to accommodate and understand that single female chefs may have their own considerations regarding work-life balance and commitments. Hospitality organisations can use this insight to promote a more inclusive approach to work-life balance that considers the diverse status and backgrounds of the female chefs in their employ.

Key findings in this chapter therefore are that female chefs' careers are affected by their physical body size and abilities, stereotypes, and work-family commitments. Moreover, findings also suggest that ethnicity plays a complex role in female chefs' career experiences, which mainly varies depending on the female chefs' experiences, careers and social situations. This is similar to the study by Alberti and Iannuzzi (2020), where they discovered different perspectives of intersectionality of gender, migrant and race biasness that are experienced by hotel workers on daily basis. Even though some discussion highlighted in this chapter has already been explored, limited

research has focused on female chefs' careers. In addition, to date, none has focused on female chefs from different ethnic backgrounds, a topic which is still underdeveloped, especially within the Malaysian hospitality context. Chapter Seven, which follows, presents additional findings and analysis, this time focusing on the factors influencing the career choice and career development of these female chefs.

## Chapter 7 Factors Influencing the Career Choices and Development of Female Chefs

### 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a discussion on the role of gender and ethnicity, particularly on the body, the family and ethnicity in the career experiences of female chefs was established. It was concluded that gender plays an essential role while ethnicity positively influences interviewees career experiences. This second findings chapter uncovers the factors influencing female chefs' career choices and development, that shape their career experiences. From the narrative stories shared by the 18 female chefs, and the analysis of the findings, four themes emerged that mirror these participants' career choices and development.

The first theme is 'Personal and Family Influences: *"What About Being a Chef?"*'. This theme focused on the factors affecting the participants' personal career choices and the role of family influences. Second, is 'Changes in Career Journey: *"Going with the Flow"*', which discusses female chefs' career goal development from the early stages of their careers to how they plan their future goals. The third is 'The Influence of Emotions: *"I Have These Boxes in My Mind"*', focused on female chefs' behaviour and emotions. Finally, 'The Need for Continuous Professional Development: *"I Don't Want to be Left Behind"*' explains the strategy and effort made by female chefs to excel in their careers. These areas are also accompanied with vignettes of a number of the participants' narratives to provide representation of their career experiences suited to the discussion. It is worth noting that due to approaches taken in this research that highlight the personal narratives of female chefs, the answers given by participants may differ; however, the discussions reflect the similarities in the participants' understandings of the factors influencing their career choices and development.

## 7.2 Personal and Family Influences: “What About Being a Chef?”

“My family is a very big in cooking, so I think because of the upbringing...my family surrounding encourage me to cook. And I actually enjoy cooking, since I was young, since I was a child...I don't know why my mum make me cook but that was fun! I start to cook when I was 5, because our family is poor...so what happened was my mum had to go to work, so I always have to cook for my brother, just a simple meal...for kids because our parents are very busy with work. So, because of that and then my grandma does it also, she gives me my first frying pan when I was 5, so those kind of encourage me to cook and started my passion for cooking...But my family is very strict, my mum was against me cooking. So, my mum was like ‘no you are not going to cook, it's not going to be an easy life, but if you do want to cook, you need to give me all A (in the college)”

(Dila, Malay, a chef entrepreneur)

### Vignette 1

In order to understand the career experiences of female chefs specifically on the emerging themes about career experiences, the discussion begins with the exploration of female chefs' career choices. The reason behind their early career decisions was the first question asked of the participants; this acted as an introduction to the interview while allowing for an initial look into the career narrative stories of female chefs. Interestingly, most female chefs mentioned that being involved seriously in a chef career was not their initial plan; the opportunity of becoming a chef came after they were exposed to the career based on a then-current aspect of their lives, such as a hobby, family, university exposure or part-time work.

For some participants, cooking was part of their daily life without them considering a potential profession, at least after finishing high school. For Ling, she only thought about cooking as something fun for her even though, at first, she was interested in medical courses; only then did culinary arts excite her. For others, part-time work triggered their interest. Esha started her part-time job in the kitchen, and her passion

for food increased despite her lack of experience; eventually, she enrolled in culinary courses:

Only after like working...I started liking it, that's when I started cooking at home and like trying everything. And then when I did start my diploma (culinary), I was kind of blurred a bit because everything was so new to me...it was kind of difficult at first, but I think I am a pretty fast learner, so I got the hang of it (Esha)

While for Ina, she had been interested in cooking since she was young although at the start, she did not have any formal culinary education and had not trained to be a chef. She shared her journey back in the 1990s where she accidentally joined a cooking competition that brought her to the industry that became her steppingstone into a chef's career:

I was very interested in cooking since school days... I collected so many cookbooks, it's my passion...Then in the 90s... I enter a cooking competition...was sponsored by a cereal company together with a well-known women's magazine in Malaysia at that time...I didn't win the first or second prize but from that moment, the magazine gave me a chance to contribute with them...For almost 15 years, I work with them (Ina)

Interestingly, other participants shared that they happened to enrol in a culinary-related course at university that led them to their career. Whether they enrolled in the study of culinary arts on purpose or not, early education in this area became the starting point for their careers. For example, Mei took a hotel management course at first but her interest in culinary skills grew while she was doing volunteer work:

After I completed (hotel management course), I wasn't expert in baking. I was just helping out because there are opportunities to learn...when I did the pastry class, the chef asked me whether I want to join competition or not...everything was so unplanned (Mei)

Similarly, Huan was not on a culinary course at first, but by helping out, she gained more interest in cooking:

During my study, I've been like got very interested to baking and then cooking...So I even volunteer myself to help out during the events, doing extra work to sharpen up my skills and I enjoyed working in a kitchen. Time passed very fast because I'm doing what I like, although it is very tiring, but I feel that's the place that I wanted to be (Huan)

At the point where Huan spent her time in the kitchen, she felt that she liked to be in such an environment learning how to manage various processes; that feeling increased when she finished her internships. Time at university exposed students to many activities; for these participants, doing extra work outside of their academic interests eventually led them to a career that was not part of their plan. When people are exposed to new things and perform a task daily, this potentially creates more interest in it, as experienced by these participants. This is important, especially at the start of a career, where the participants build their interest while learning. The study by Horng and Lee (2009) found that their participants, who enrolled in culinary courses, believed learning in such an environment garnered more creativeness, interest, and passion in culinary arts, thus nurturing fresh ideas. This, supports the findings of the current study.

Following the above, Jia was offered a scholarship at university on a different course, and only found culinary arts interesting during her internship:

I haven't thought of being a chef at all! It wasn't something that I dreamt of being since four years old or something like that. It wasn't anything that I wanted to do but it was just because I so happen to get... I so happened to be granted a free scholarship for hospitality management... I have internship in hotels and various department, and that got me exposed to working in the kitchen...and I thought out of all of the departments of the hotel, that was the least boring. It wasn't even



exciting for me, it was the least boring and I said okay, let's just try...after graduation, I got my first job...starting of as a junior apprentice chef (Jia)

These unexpected career opportunities were the reason behind her career decision of becoming a chef, even though only after that did Jia learn about culinary arts, during her internship. She mentioned that being in the kitchen was the least boring department for her; this shows that tasks involved in a job or workplace can also be a factor that causes an interest in a given career. Similarly, Zah was offered a culinary course as a second choice and found it suited her interests:

Actually, I am a very artistic person... I wanted to go into either kind of design, whatever designing related course. So, I was wanting to have go for a fashion design course, but they only take six students. Then I think about what are the other option that I got, I want something which makes me use my creative mind...Then the university call me and offer to the culinary course...so I said yes...When I join, I think that's quite good and then I start looking at books at the library, what about being a chef? (Zah)

Zah was aware of her interests in creativity and already had a mindset of doing what she was good at without targeting a specific career. This shows that knowing your interests can lead to a career choice or at least guide you to what you want to do in the future. Also, for those who possess self-awareness about their own interests and potential, it can direct them to be more alert to career opportunities (Othman and Tengku, 2018). This also reflects the career journey that Laila has experienced, and that she revealed in her interview through her narrative stories:

I follow my mother to the kitchen, cook with the villagers, help my sister....My mum was very strict, if I cook badly, she will scold us! When I grew up, I got an interview for a catering course, my mom doesn't really like it because to work in a hotel...not for her, she refuses to let me go but my interest was there. I continue to collect cookbooks, newspapers, until now. Before I was married, I do wish one

day I could be a pastry chef. I pray hard but I don't get that opportunity because I was working as a teacher. But I always cook for my colleagues at school. Then I got married early at 21 years old and my husband...boost my interest (Laila)

Career choices or decisions made by female chefs can happen for any reason, such as what the participants above experienced. Mostly it involved interests, skills, experiences, and situations (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019). People need to know what they want and need to understand their personality, especially in a career, to make better career decisions (Ullah and Yahya, 2021). Interestingly, as the female chefs quoted above suggest, it was not their initial plan to be seriously involved in a chef career, it was unplanned, but they were willing to try it and follow their interests. Believing in their abilities increased their self-efficacy in choosing a career (Kodagoda and Jayawardhana, 2022), which become a factor in career decision making. In other words, participants unconsciously had the creative skills, whether it is in art or specifically in culinary arts, and this was further encouraged by the opportunities they encountered at the early stage of their careers.

Family influences on female chefs' careers choices also emerged from the interviews. It was found that most participants mentioned family or parents that either directly or indirectly influenced their career choices. This is because family roles in a woman's career choices are deemed as crucial in shaping their career decisions because the family is among the first points of reference for them; this also could include other significant people from their social environment (Troy, 2022).

Participants also mentioned how family played a role in their careers and shared their experiences concerning their family influence in shaping their interest in food or the profession of a chef. Even when they had not yet started their careers, their families had a significant impact. This is supported by McKillop and Moorosi (2017) in that family values impact career choices at the early stages, such as in childhood. The childhood phase in the case of these participants is when they were given cooking-related tasks; they had been interested in cooking since they were young and were shown how to cook by their parents, as they grew up. Cooking or preparing a family

meal is closely related to women as it is often one of their main domestic tasks and responsibilities (Flagg et al., 2014), as participants experienced.

For example, Farah was exposed to the food business by helping her family since she was in school and was trusted to manage food orders for the business. The same went for Dila, where her family upbringing and surroundings encouraged her to cook. The family business also shaped Aini's interest including cooking responsibilities given to her, which became her inspiration:

My dad owned a catering service. He did restaurant, canteen, everything that has to do with food and beverages and my mum is an amazing cook. She always been called to do food for bride and groom, so I think that's how my plating skill comes from because my mum is very good in decoration. So that's how I developed my skills...It starts very early, and it starts because of responsibility, I have to cook for my family, my parents are working...so that's how I develop the skills in the kitchen naturally (Aini)

Aini also mentioned that her father enrolled her on a short cooking course at the age of 15 years old:

He was working in a hotel at that time and purposely did this...That's the perk of having your dad working in a hotel! I learn how to do pastry making, cakes...My dad wanted me to be an international pastry chef...My dad wanted me to continue brushing my skills, I enrolled myself in a vocational school (bakery and confectionary). After that I continue in diploma in culinary arts (Aini)

The above demonstrates how family involvement in cooking sparked participants' interest in starting their professions as chefs. Here, this shows that family activities, a family business, and upbringing can potentially shape a person's career interests. In addition, participants viewed their parents as role models who used to cook and were involved in the food business, which triggered their interest in becoming a chef. This also aligns with a study by Horng and Lee (2009) that suggests family is an essential

factor behind a person's culinary talent and passion, particularly when the family is involved in the same field. How a family values and is informed by certain professions can also be a source of career knowledge, especially in the childhood phase (Paloş and Drobot, 2010).

Concerning the influence of family, it affected the female chefs' career choices, interests, and careers as a whole. Even though, for some, at the beginning of their careers, participants admitted that they did not receive enough support from their families; only as they moved up the career ladder did the support improve along the way when their career success was proven. There were many factors involved when there was negative family support; in this case, it was caused by negative career perceptions or stereotypes, and a lack of career information. Even with direct parental support, when these female chefs enrolled in culinary courses, their extended families doubted the need to study food or cooking; viewing it negatively as it wasn't seen as a white-collar career. Kamala, who now operates her bakery business shared her experience, when:

My cousin who was actually traditionally Indian...she was asking what I study in, because my cousin are doing physiotherapy, and the older brother doing doctor...and she ask my mum...her reply make my mum face expression changed...they speak in Tamil but I can get what she said...she (my cousin) said I can cook at home and why I need to go to school and learn to cook?...the perception is so different...there are also people who said '*oh* chef' but questioning why you need to go to school? (Kamala)

While Darshini, mentioned that because her parents and siblings did not further their studies, their perception of the need for her to further her studies in culinary arts created uncertainty:

When I start studying, my parent like doubting...now that I am working, they see high on me...because my parents don't study, I am the only that study after high school...I think after I work, my family support is there...but my other side of

family got a reaction like 'oh just a chef?'...like comparing me to my mum who also can cook this and that (Darshini)

Darshini mentioned that because her parents did not go further in their studies, this meant that they did not have experience advancing their education levels. This suggests that parents' educational backgrounds and knowledge about a particular career is significant to the support given to their children (Rutledge and Madi, 2017). Even in the case of female entrepreneurs, they view parental support differently, because their parents' education and career background can influence the support given (Vadnjaj, 2018). Also, familial perceptions about the industry or the job can be another factor which influences if support is given. Perceptions of low social status associated with a particular job influences how family can support one's career and whether the job chosen is considered reputable in the public perception (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000). Unsupportive parents can create challenges for women due to the career perceptions or stereotypes of working an industry, such as hospitality, with limited career development (Kodagoda and Jayawardhana, 2022). This is what happened to some of the participants when their parents doubted their chef careers. Zah still remembered when:

At first, they disapprove. Because the perception of hotel, a lot of not good things happens at the hotel, so the impression was not good. But I said never mind, I told my father not to worry, you would just need to give me the license (trust), I will go, and I come back in one piece...now my family they know what I am doing, and they are very proud with what I am doing (Zah)

Trust, and the need to prove that the career chosen was the right decision are essential to encourage family support. While a family may continue to worry about the career challenges that their daughters might face, female chefs continue to convince them through their hard work. Career doubt can also affect parents' perceptions about how their children can succeed in a career. Jia's parents did not expect their daughter to excel in what she does because of the career stereotype that working as a chef is challenging:

My parents were like 'ooo okay let see, she's not *gonna* last for three months then she's *gonna* come home crying, coming running back to us and say she want to do something else '...so that became a challenge (Jia)

Jia took the negative perceptions about her ability as a challenge, and showed her parents that she could do well. This shows that sometimes negative support can be a factor of success when a person is devoted to proving their ability, meaning that these female chefs were determined about their career choices and trying hard to break stereotypes about women in the kitchen. Horng and Lee (2009) support the idea that passion for a culinary career motivates chefs to ignore family objections, believing that later success can help them gain further support.

In some cases, even if family support were there, for example for Susie, she mentioned that it did not mean they (her family) would understand the problems she faced in the kitchen. Again, this was because career information was lacking. Similarly, Mei stated that:

My family, sometimes they don't understand...they will be like 'how do you work so long?'...they think this since I started my study until now, they used to say 'why can't you finish your work early?'...they will have those kind of thoughts, comments...when female working in the kitchen...because as a chef or cook, it's very low kind of job...obviously they compare like those who get education...the perception is there because there is not a lot of awareness (Mei)

Despite the family's negative perception of a career as a chef, the participants did not give up and continued to work hard to prove that they could be successful despite the stigma. This shows that career information and determination about career decisions are crucial to give a sense of motivation for female chefs. The findings of this research about the culinary profession contradict Eren and Aydin's study (2020) which mentioned that participants believed a chef's career was an impressive job, highly paid and with high social status at least in Turkish society. In the current study, stigma about culinary education was evidenced in the belief that those who work as chefs are

uneducated. This shows that the participants' family concerns, casting doubt on the necessity of studying culinary arts, is still embedded and reflected in people's perceptions.

Despite challenging starts for these female chefs, some participants still received full support from their families. Even though the career challenges still existed, family support was a source of motivation. Support can increase women's beliefs about their abilities and interests, and it can encourage them to overcome career barriers (Tino et al., 2022). Considering Ina for example, her husband was willing to take care of their children when she needed to spend extra time in the kitchen. Similarly, for Laila, her chef career only began after she resigned from being a teacher; her husband continued to support her ambition to be a chef after they got married:

After I graduate at the college (different course), I got married...my husband also like to eat so that's boost my interest even more... I was still a teacher at that time, I took long unpaid leaves, I left my children with my husband and let my sister to take care, then I went overseas (Laila)

The support given by families can be one of the sources of encouragement to women's career success, giving them more chances to look for career opportunities. Even though Laila started her career late, only after she was married, the encouragement and support from family was still crucial for her despite her age and different career background.

In the early section of this discussion, female chefs mentioned that it was not their initial plan to venture seriously into the professional kitchen. Even though for some, they only realised that they had the skills and only realised their career interest in culinary arts when unexpected opportunities came, these opportunities led them to careers as chefs. Despite that, the majority of participants mentioned family influences in their career choices. For some, their career choice was due to hobbies or career opportunities, all participants shared their stories about family influence on their career choice, whether it was from a negative or positive aspect. The role of the family in a

woman's career choice is crucial, especially in determining women's motivation and career planning.

Typically, career choice is driven by interests and skills, but for women, these two cannot be the only factor, notably when many social barriers exist, such as gender discrimination or family, that may complicate their career path (Troy, 2022). Research by McKillop and Moorosi (2017) also showed that women were influenced by their families, and how they were brought up affected their career choices, development and leadership character. Most participants in this study also shared similar stories about the influences of their families on their career choices.

For women to choose the career they wanted, the ability to acknowledge their skills and the support they received was essential in determining success. For example, a study by Kodagoda and Jayawardhana (2022) shows that women have a strong belief that they can be successful to work in the hotel industry despite of many complicated barriers of social factors. This shows that when participants decide to start their career as a chef and believe in what they are doing, this can be a positive start to their career. Women can choose their career based on a firm belief in their capability, knowing what they want to achieve, with exceptional support from family or other social support systems (Mozahem et al., 2019). Despite various families' perceptions, the female chefs who participated in this study showed that they were determined with their career choice and worked hard to prove this was the right decision.

However, even though participants in this study followed their interests in choosing a chef's career despite some negative family responses, this contradicts a study by Li and Kerpelman (2007). The authors mentioned that young females who receive parents' career objections are prepared to change their career choices because of the feeling of connectedness to their parents. Also, women in banking do not see parents' educational background, family, friends and marital status as an influencer in their career choice (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019). Among the studies about women's career choices, some factors were not mentioned by the participants in this research. For example, women in their early careers in construction believe that their career choice was influenced by opportunities, salary, and confidence in skills (Oo et al., 2019). While for women in banking, factors influencing their career choices were



opportunities, skills, qualifications, education, environment, and personal development (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019). However, some of the above-mentioned factors were not cited by participants in this study.

This research finding about the role of family influences on women's careers was, however, consistent with some studies. Troy's (2022) study mentioned that women see family and parents' role as something that motivates their career choice, boosts their confidence and self-development. The author further suggests that parents were the most significant influence on women's careers and that support received is one-factor determining women's career success. Studies on family influences on women's career also can be found, such as parent influences on young women (Li and Kerpelman, 2007), parent influences on women entrepreneurs (Vadnjal, 2018), and parents' influences on women's careers in the Arabian Gulf (Rutledge and Madi, 2017). As seen above, in career choice research, some focus on career choices for women in banking (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019), women in construction (Oo et al., 2019) and women in IT (Adya and Kaiser, 2005) can be found. Despite that, none of these studies have focused on a career in the hospitality industry, and lesser so on female cheffing careers. Thus, this discussion has covered new research ground in suggesting that family has a substantial influence on the career choices of female chefs, particularly in this study context.

The family as a form of societal structure, can either strengthen or hinder a woman's career journey into the professional kitchen. Positive influences, such as family support and encouragement, may serve as a supporting foundation, encouraging confidence and a sense of agency in female chefs. On the contrary, negative influences, like stereotypes or family discouragement, may present structural barriers that challenge their agency. Despite that, female chefs demonstrate resilience and self-belief, positioning themselves as agents that are capable of navigating and surpassing the structural constraints within the professional kitchen. Their determination and confidence become the driving force behind their success, challenging societal expectations and reshaping the narrative of what it means to be a chef.

In addition, the structure of a professional kitchen itself holds a profound influence over career choices and the career journey. The hierarchical nature of kitchen brigades as discussed in Chapter One, can significantly impact a chef's career. This structured environment can foster skill development but the demanding nature of a professional kitchen with the norm of long hours can also put off individuals venturing into the industry. The structural issues engrained within the professional kitchen influence some of the female chefs' career choice, where the experiences they had in the industry had an influence in their decision whether to continue climbing the ladder, such as to the position of executive chef, or if deciding to venture into business. For the female chefs in this study, becoming an entrepreneur and, having their own restaurants or catering services could, in their view, allow for creative and personal expression; for those who remain in the mainstream industry (working in established restaurants, hotels, etc.), they may focus more on sharpening their culinary skills within established structures. Both offer distinct perspectives and challenges, shaping a chef's career in unique ways and influencing how they perceive their role.

For the Malay participants, the majority of them mentioned how their family had shaped their cooking interests via household responsibilities, family businesses and family support. These factors had probably encouraged their career interest in cheffing. Similarly for the Chinese participants, they also mentioned that their families encouraged their interests in becoming a chef, but also some faced criticisms or negative perspectives from family members about being a chef, Indian participants also had a mixed response from their families. A female chef from a family with a strong food knowledge may feel the pressure to pursue a career in cooking, or those who grew up in a strong patriarchal family structure where the daughter is the one who are responsible for household task also might be influenced with this thinking, which leads them to build an interest in cooking. Understanding how these personal and family influences affected their career ambitions is essential to appreciate the experiences and career trajectories of these female chefs.

This discussion on female chefs makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by highlighting the relationship between family influence and the career choices of chefs. It showcases both positive and negative impacts of family support,

where on the positive side, the findings reveal the crucial role families play in nurturing the passion for cooking from a young age. Many female chefs reported receiving encouragement and exposure to cooking responsibilities early on, either through family traditions or involvement in family businesses that can foster passion for cooking and can also be the foundation for a career as chef. Although this theme was found to be discussed in various career domains, as previously discussed, some further research focus on hospitality and tourism careers is also evidenced. A previous study by Wong and Liu (2010) investigates the parental support for hospitality and tourism students about their future career, and found out that the parental support, parent's concerns of the career's image and benefits as well as the parent's negative response become a barrier to the career and do influence their career choice. This is similar to a study by Lee et al. (2019) that suggests career choice in the hospitality industry is still greatly influenced by students' mentors, their university experiences and their parents. As contended by Wong and Liu (2010), a parent's reaction could be a barrier to their children's career choice; similarly this theme has been uncovered in this research by the challenges female chefs face from their families' negative reactions, including the stereotypes associated with the chef profession and a lack of understanding of the role from family members. Despite these hurdles, the findings emphasise the resilience of female chefs, highlighting their firm belief in their passion which adds a valuable dimension to the literature, showcasing how female chefs navigate and overcome familial obstacles.

### 7.3 Changes in Career Journeys: “It Changed Along the Way”.

One of my best friends, their company decided to open a French bistro in Singapore, and he recommend me to a chef. They have a female chef from Russia (other candidate), so I said *okay* I will come over and you can interview me...I do like a probation period like a for month and to see whether I am capable or not. It is very small kitchen, so small that if I were to go and cross, we have to like that touch each other. Thank God she is a female, but the test was ‘this is your kitchen, this is your equipment, this is the size, what menu can you produce and where are the equipment that can fit in the space?’ I am able to...almost instantly like quickly, I already know okay, this is the kind of equipment that we can fit in the space, with this equipment this a kind of menu that would sell and easy to produce. Within the limitation! The other female chef was complaining and talk about the kitchen is so small, I *cannot* do this and that, so obviously I got the position, and they wanted me to work right away.

I got the position...trying to move to Singapore. I got another offer to become a private chef for Audi R8 racing team! I have to tell you; the offer was so good! I compete with a German male chef (experienced in motorsports catering) and I won because my quotation was cheaper...the menu that I presented...I proposed varieties spread from every country. So, I quickly quite my job in Singapore and I cannot say no this is a chance of a lifetime! So, I was with Audi for a year, then Asian road racing champion for another 2 years.

(Aini, Malay, a private chef)

#### Vignette 2

While participants shared how they ventured into the chef career, questions about their career goals were also asked. Findings suggest that most female chefs in this study show adaptability in planning their career goals. Most participants began their careers with early goal-setting or expectation and acknowledge that some of their goals changed along the way. Female chefs in this study decided to plan their goals according to the stages of their careers and positions. Together with the skills and

experience gathered, they were more aware, more realistic and knew what they could achieve in the future.

Even though participants' career goals differed from one another, it was contended that the similarity found between them is that these female chefs showed adaptability in career goal planning. As female chefs began their careers, most participants were determined about their goal of becoming a chef or at least venturing into something that involved the food and beverages business, even though they did not have a specific position to achieve. Fiza only knew about the hierarchy of chef positions when she started working and wanted to climb the career ladder in stages, while Mei and Huan said that they wanted to be multitalented chefs and not focus only on one cuisine:

Actually, I never really look forward like a very long career advancement, in the sense I want to move stage by stage to become an executive chef. I actually don't have that long vision. I mean very simple for me is I just want to do what I like to do. I don't have to go like high as long as I still dealing with cooking and what I like to do (Huan)

Enjoying the current career stage was necessary for these participants. They saw the development of careers and skills as an important experience that was a way for them to become better chefs. For Jia, the dream of being an executive chef was in her imagination when she decided to become a chef:

It changed along the way...but when I started as a fresh graduate, I had only hotel exposure...so I think I aspire to be like an executive chef wearing a tall hat with white chef jacket and holding a clipboard and walking around...and not just cooking...so that was the pinnacle, the highest that I wanted to achieve at that point (Jia)

When Jia said she already imagined herself as an executive chef, this shows that her career imagination could be one of the influences towards her achieving her career

goal. Career imagination can provide a better career route and the criteria needed for a successful career (Cohen and Duberley, 2021).

Other participants aimed at owning their own food and beverages businesses by having their “signature things” (Susie). For Dila, it was “a typical goal of opening a restaurant”. Applying their chef skills in producing food could be a source of income, with the business becoming their career image. Whereas Aini wanted to become a chef at first, after realising the kitchen's hard work, she decided to own a restaurant instead of working in a hotel establishment. Only when a person experiences the reality behind a career, do they become more aware of the future career situation, thus enabling them to plan their goal more realistically. Going through challenging work experiences can be the best teacher and this is sometimes beneficial for a chef in developing adaptability (Horng and Lee, 2009). In another way, when a person has the correct career information, this can give more realistic career expectations, reducing negative career behaviour because they are already aware of the reality behind the food and beverages industry (Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000).

Meanwhile, participants' answers also reflected that their goals changed along with their careers. Farah wanted to “go with the flow”, and for Priya:

I didn't know about the hierarchy in the kitchen and all that...after studying then only I got to know all the level...so every promotion that I got, there will be a new goal...when I entered it was *Commis* level...when I reach first *Commis*, the next aim was *CDP* (Chef de *Partie*) ...it just keep going (Priya)

Developing goals stage by stage helps female chefs be aware of their career needs and to know what to do to achieve their goals. Even though there is no guarantee of a smooth process in achieving goals, the female chefs in the study were willing to make an effort and give full commitment to work towards them. When complicated challenges were experienced towards achieving a goal, more effort was given to overcome these obstacles; this can give women the satisfaction of achievement (Hassan et al., 2020). It also prepared female chefs to be more adaptable in their goal

setting, helping them achieve what they can and plan what they need to do. For example:

“My goal changed depends on the situation” (Fiza), “to plan what is achievable” (Huan), “I achieved, changed, achieved and changed” (Priya) and “it was different when you reach certain age or stage” (Mei)

For most participants, continuous goal planning helped them be more aware of their career needs and to cope with changes. For some career achievement was not part of the initial goal plan, the opportunities came by chance, and the female chefs were determined to utilise the opportunities that they came across. For example, Aini had been involved in various culinary related jobs which she had not imagined as opportunities or planned for, and because of that she looked forward for more opportunities.

Even though some of the job positions were unplanned, the female chefs showed that being adaptable helped in future career planning and enabled them to adjust themselves better to upcoming opportunities. Such behaviour allows people to be more prepared for career demands and tasks, positively affecting their career development (Ibrahim and Amari, 2018). The participants also shared how they looked forward to their future career goals. Even though their future planning varied, depending on their career standpoints and situations, most female chefs interviewed wanted to do something that utilised their skills and experiences to benefit the community or the public. For instance, they looked forward to “contribute more to the society...work with kids on the street and teach them this life skill (cooking)” (Aini) and “perhaps to do more cookbook for more people to enjoy good food” (Ina). They looked forward to contributing to others so that their skills could be beneficial beyond being a chef. In detail, some female chefs had already started their projects and foreseen their next goals. For example:

Back to the society and the community...educating the school to provide nutritional lunches for students...contribute to change the way our kids eat...make the entire industry more sustainable...sustainable in a sense that I mean not just by using resources like ingredients, produces, but sustainable in terms of...for the people in the industry...because...the hospitality industry has never been the healthiest of job for people. We work long hours, we have high stress level, pay are not in proportion and a lot of people have mental issues and problem...how can we have a sustainable industry when people who work in that industry are facing all these problems, and they are supposed to smile and provide the best service for people? (Jia)

Being in the industry provided more information to the participants about the reality behind a chef's career, and the factors involved. When Jia became aware of the issues in the industry, she then developed a goal to contribute to something that she did not think about when she began her chef's career. This is similar to Zah, in when she voluntarily taught cooking skills so that they could be a source of income for her students. Based on stories from participants, career experience helped them continuously plan career goals that were beneficial for themselves and others. Findings suggest that female chefs developed adaptability skills in guiding them through their goal planning. As they went through multiple career experiences, they planned what was achievable according to the career stages they had encountered: they were aware of challenges, and were more prepared. According to Khilji and Pumroy (2019), women who are continuously aware of their career strategy can adapt better to career situations and overcome challenges.

It is concluded from this section that the female chefs in this research developed adaptability, and continuously reflected on their career goals as they went along despite their different goals. Khilji and Pumroy (2019) again suggest that women agree that a career is an unexpected process, which changes based on the situation; the same goes for their goals and strategies, that can change based on experience, which is similar to what participants in this research mentioned. This proves that women who plan their career goals in the long term or short-term utilise career opportunities by



taking action and knowing how such opportunities can be taken advantage of to reach their goals (Hassan et al., 2020). The participants in the current research employed coping strategies and actively searched for solutions to challenges, built up their resources, developed positive emotions, and, as a result, strengthened their career choices, goal and plans. This corresponds with previous research by Tsauro et al. (2016) on successful career strategising. As some participants did not have the goals of being at the top of the hierarchy in the kitchen, they chose to adapt goal close to their values such as community education. This is supported by Carvalho et al.'s (2018a) study that suggests moving between organisations was considered important for career growth, and this doesn't always have to mean moving up the career ladder.

In this study, female chefs showed adaptability in many ways. For example, they "learned from different people in different environments" (Huan), adapted and continuously developed "new goal" (Priya) and they followed "trends" (Dila). Most of the participants showed that they developed adaptability by monitoring their career situation (Fiza), especially when it involved a career decision based on family responsibilities. This can be seen when Cheng quit her hotel job for a more family-friendly job after she got married, and adapted, using her pastry skills in her business, and Laila who had a career break and adjusted her working style due to family commitments. As most of the participants still wanted to venture into the culinary profession regardless of whether this was in a mainstream hotel kitchen or a restaurant, they continuously planned and thought about what they could do about their chef careers.

Even though there is some research that focuses on adaptability for women, such as that by Ibrahim and Amari (2018) that demonstrated that psychological, and organisational, support for career success helped adaptability in careers in the Saudi Arabian academic context, focus on career adaptability for older women (McMahon et al., 2012) and career adaptability for female students in tourism faculties (Çizel, 2018), is still limited in relation to women's career development. Further, research that focuses on adaptability for female chefs is still lacking. The findings of this research demonstrate that although many barriers can hinder female chefs' careers and goal achievement, participants still progressed their careers by adapting their goals to their

career situations. Thus, the present research contributes to the existing literature on women in the culinary profession and in career contexts in general, and serves as a valuable addition to the literature, shedding light on the adaptive strategies employed by female chefs.

In relation to the participants' career background, it can be concluded that the structure (the professional kitchen) did have an impact towards their career choice, as previously discussed, and also to their goals. Some participants chose to work as an entrepreneur by having their own business or products, and this could be influenced by their personal situations such as having families, desiring career breaks, gaining awareness of the career's challenges and how much they still valued their chef's career. As discussed previously, in Chapter Six, participants like Cheng chose different career paths (agency) after they got married, some also changed their career path due to the structural issues of being in the kitchen (long hours, work life balance, etc). Thus, the interview data can't deny the influence of structural issues behind women's careers and social structure has had an impact on how these female chefs navigated their career goals and choices. In a way, this also encouraged them to be adaptable in the face of the many possible challenges, barriers, or changes that these female chefs might encounter in their career experiences. Career goals and adaptability among female chefs are closely linked with the concept of intersectionality, as they reflect the relationship between social factors. For instance, a female chef's career goals may be influenced by her cultural background, economic status, and societal expectations. Adaptability in pursuing these goals may also depend on how they navigate the intersections of being a woman in a male-dominated field or a person from a minority group. This can result in unique challenges and opportunities. Through intersectionality, we can recognise that the adaptability of female chefs is influenced not just by their gender but also by other factors like their ethnicity. Understanding the link between career goals and adaptability is vital for addressing the experiences and challenges that female chefs' have encountered.

#### 7.4 The Influence of Behaviour and Emotions: “I Have These Boxes in My Mind”.

I am rarely emotional in that sense...in work...and I think emotion is not a great thing to bring into a kitchen environment...regardless of what your rank is, what your gender is. So, it's very hard and fast! If you are wrong, you are wrong. If you burn the fish, you burn the fish. So, I tend to try and be...well I am but I try to train my staff to be like 'look you need to understand that this is the mistake you made, and I am holding you for this mistake and not because of you'. Like I couldn't care less who make that mistake, but it is that mistake that was made...that's the problem...I couldn't care less if you screw up the fish or someone else screw up the fish, the point is the fish is screwed up. So, this is something that maybe some people would get used to it than others, but it is the way it is in the kitchen.

(Jia, Chinese, an executive chef)

#### Vignette 3

Participants' answers to the questions about self-efficacy, self-changes and emotions contribute to this theme's discussion, determining the influence of behaviour and emotions at work. Female chefs shared their opinions about how their behaviour and emotions had influenced their career experiences. Participants were mainly aware of their confidence and self-efficacy as a chef, which increased as they gained more experience. It was agreed that confidence helps in their career experiences when it relates to skills and facing challenging job tasks. Through their career journeys, female chefs admitted that they felt confident about themselves, confidence has never (almost) been an issue, they avoided overthinking, and believed that improving skills is part of the development process.

For example, “I am a person with high level of confidence” (Fiza) and “never thought it was something I couldn't do” (Jia). Also, working within different job scopes and part-time jobs have helped these female chefs build confidence; it is part of their strength as a chef, believing that they can survive “because of that kind of mentality” (Dila). Being confident in one's own ability and skills can help to determine one's success (Barron and Gravert, 2022) despite challenging or unknown career situations.

However, for some, despite fluctuations in confidence levels as they went through their career journey, previous and current work experiences kept them motivated:

While doing the diploma I can say pretty much no confidence, but as soon as you start doing industrial training and then you get reassurance from the chefs there who are already senior and experienced, that you are doing a good job and doing it right, then the confidence starts to build (Priya)

Confidence levels in a career will gradually increase as people gain experience. It is developed via the learning process within a career environment (Amilin, 2016). Not only that, when a person has a strong personality, it can influence their career motivation, bringing success and helping them cope with challenging tasks. For example, in McKillop and Moorosi's (2017) research on women headteachers, it was agreed that when they became experts in their job tasks, their confidence levels increased, their perception of their careers changed, and their tolerance towards career challenges also improved.

The interviewees were aware of their self-changes after they had gone through career experiences, especially in terms of increasing their career confidence. Behaviours of resilience, along with experience helped them to cope with career changes, changed their mindset and guided them to perform better as a chef. Participants believed that experiences made their careers as chefs more meaningful and valuable as they saw themselves becoming more mature at work and this was reflected in their behaviour at work. Huan saw the "meaning behind food". Kamala stated that "there is a lot of responsibility" and for her, her expectations of work before and after experiencing a chef's career was different, especially when she became a leader. A similar sentiment was expressed by Jia:

I've understood what it means to have a team under me...a chef is not really just like what you see on TV...we are professional, and we should do our job in the most professional and efficient setting possible, maintain consistency day in and

day out and never forget that... now I hope for me at least it's meant a lot more (Jia)

After years of experience, the female chefs were aware of the value behind a chef's career, which was not as simple as cooking, or knowing what it takes to be a good chef. This shows that experience is crucial in shaping career behaviours and adds more career value to a person who takes what they are doing seriously. Responsibilities increase as they move up to higher positions and, in a way, boost their motivation to perform better. Also, the female chefs saw the changes in their behaviour compared to when they started their career, such as realising how naïve she was (Mei), Cheng's temper having toned down and Zah becoming more "vocal and brave".

Working in a kitchen involves not only controlling one's own behaviour but a high toleration of emotional stress, as chefs constantly work under pressure and busy schedules (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007; Othman and Tengku, 2018). As chefs, participants shared their approaches to overcoming emotional stress and to keep this from affecting their work performance. This is important, as when a person can control their emotions, this will enable them to control their behaviour (Othman and Tengku, 2018). The majority of the respondents thought that communication could help to overcome negative emotions and stress. They suggested "talk to someone" (Yuen) and "ask your colleague" (Mei). While others believe that being honest about the problem was helpful when in a stressful situation:

I would ask for advice, I will talk about the problem, not from who the problem came from, but with someone else and to get their opinion and feedback...it doesn't have to be someone in the industry, because emotion is about people, so you just talk to anybody (Priya)

For these participants, communicating and speaking to someone can relieve stress, especially regarding work. This enables participants to be aware when they need to

speak up about their concerns and shows that they acknowledge their negative feelings. For some, acting on a problem and knowing what they need to do to calm themselves also helped them:

Go back to praying... I have these boxes in my mind... don't carry that burden anywhere else...I think disciplines...you have plans, you know the things to do...in the month and things to do in two months. I have my own deadlines (Ina)

The opinion shared by Ina above shows that an individual needs to know what works for themselves, to be aware of work responsibilities and to have good time management so that the burden or stress of work can be reduced. In other words, knowing yourself, your abilities, reactions, and emotions will be beneficial (Behera and Pani, 2014), especially in knowing what needs to be done to overcome stress. Kamala also shared her experience where she faced a situation that challenged her emotions in handling work and staff; this reflects that she is mindful of her emotions in a stressful situation but still needs to prioritise her work:

...So we were doing back to back work and it's like too much, I was actually yelling at the part time staff, I don't know how to manage and in the end what happen I stay back, and I say (to the colleagues) 'if you want to go back, you all go back, we have to finish this and get it done for next morning'...I think that was the worst that I had...so I mean in my own way I just like if you all don't want I will just get it done by myself...well who want to stay just stay...whatever you want to do! (Kamala)

Despite being emotional, participants tried their best to finish their work tasks even in a demanding situation. Only gradually did they know what they needed to do to cope with their emotional stress. People with emotional self-awareness are better at guiding their own behaviour (Behera and Pani, 2014). Knowing how to control emotions and stress levels can prepare women better in the workplace. When women are aware of their emotions, it can be considered a part of the self-development process, making

them reflect on their actions better and know what they need to do (Singh and Suri, 2021). For example, Dila shared her approaches when leading her team in the kitchen:

In the kitchen...I learn stress control...learn how to take problems with solution because...every problem has a solution...you have to be very quick in solving problem...if you can do that, then you become less stress...outside of the kitchen...if it really bends the kitchen, I will be like 'everybody need to take breaks'. So, everybody will go out and sit down, just chill and have a coffee and when we sit, we don't talk about work...Never talk about work outside work, then you will bring the stress everywhere and you are not going to be a forgiving chef (Dila)

A person's mindset, such as what participants shared, can be helpful, at least to calm oneself down before further action is taken, especially as a member, or even leader, of a team. Remarkably, some female chefs agreed that their personalities are the factor that helps them avoid being emotionally stressed at work. Jia admitted that she was "rarely emotional". Also, Zah shared that:

I have tough personality...if about being angry definitely is there but not until being stress because most important things is the control of yourself...I said to myself if I have to work this way, I have to work this way...it makes you really strong...if you are tired you rest, if you hungry you eat, if you upset you cry yourself...I would say if I'm tired, I will sit alone and I think what I did wrong, how I can make it better...I tell myself, I want this job so I take it, whatever challenges that comes to me I have to face it (Zah)

Participant's answers show that when people are determined about their thinking and mindsets at work, stress at least can be reduced even though challenges can't be avoided. They agreed that people need to be able to acknowledge mistakes in the workplace, as this can help in creating positivity at work especially when it involves how a person feels about themselves. These skills help them manage stressful work

situations (Amilin, 2016). While some participants do admit that they will be emotional, they recognised these feelings and took the time they needed to be alone such as “closed the door...open some soft music and relax” (Susie) and “cry for a while... correct your mistake” (Esha). For Farah, she accepted her sad or negative feelings at work, and embraced or channelled her feelings in her own way:

When I was young, maybe I will post on social media but right now not so often...But when it comes to certain issue I will voiced out and I still will be sad and be mad. I will become moody and wanted to be alone, but time will heal me (Farah)

Admitting stress and negative feelings can be a positive thing, making people aware of themselves and helping them plan better in managing stress. Whether the female chefs feel emotionally stressed at work or not, they know what they can do to overcome these challenges.

The way participants in this research perceive feedback and colleagues' responses also possibly influenced their behaviour. However, they mentioned that they needed to be selective in looking at feedback to avoid this negatively influencing their behaviour, emotions and work. This was mentioned by Mei where she only considered comments from those who knew her work or who were within her job's scope:

Actually it depends who...I mean like if it's from someone that doesn't understand how I work, of course I will feel very...mmm...normally I will feel, be very stubborn...but if it's a chef, if they tell me that I am slow, or it's not good then I will understand...if it's very technical side then I will try to work into it (Mei)

In addition, being able to differentiate feedback determined the behaviour of these participants and how they perceived their work:



There are people who just want to give you constructive criticism and there are people out there who just want to make their opinion heard...by all means read through it, agree or don't agree, but don't dwell on it...if you agree with it work on it, if you don't let it go...because you can't have all the criticism get to you, all the feedback get to you...so we *gonna* go crazy if you do that (Jia)

Despite that, positive feedback was still helpful especially in motivating and increasing these participants' confidence and self-efficacy at work. For example, "it helped to improve confidence" (Huan), "it was encouraging" (Kamala) and made them feel that they could go far in the industry (Priya). This can be a source of motivation and can improve their career behaviour, like Farah recounted what she feels like when she works:

I am the type of person who like to work very hard and see the results. If it's good, it really makes me happy and motivates me (Farah)

Responses by the participants' colleagues is also crucial in motivating their career behaviours and emotions. However, because of the fact that these female chefs do not have any role models or female chefs as colleagues at their workplace, this point might not be considered as important for them in terms of helping their careers. Only a few participants elaborated on this but only by quoting direct support from customers, or colleagues that worked at the same level as them. Some also said the level of support they were offered depended on the workplace:

Normally it's the direct (support), it's not really from the head chef. To me it depends on the environment...if you are in very...*mmm*...if you are in restaurant, I mean kitchen mainly...if you are in a kitchen let say those from the same line of work as you...they will support (Mei)

This shows that the influence of others (feedback from colleagues) in these female chefs' career behaviour and experiences is not that significant. This is possibly

because the interviewees' work teams are relatively small, and having direct support from female chefs as colleagues is relatively unlikely, due to their limited number. Women's career behaviour and emotions were evident in many research contexts. For example, research by Mayer et al. (2017) on women leaders in education suggest similarities to the issues the participants mentioned. Being able to overcome anger can be a way of controlling emotion; when people are aware of their emotions, this will create more positive behaviour.

Furthermore, Hall et al.'s (2012) study also shows that black women acknowledge their emotions at work and focus on the problems facing them as a way of managing stress, while Bojar et al. (2011) studied women's stress and its effect on health. One study on chefs' stress by Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007) stated that there were many things that can create stress in this profession such as high workload, communication issues or workplace mistreatment. However, the authors argued that even though people can predict their sources of stress, it is hard to control one's behaviour when the real stressful situation happens probably as emotion and behaviour can vary depending on the situation itself. From this discussion, it has been concluded that female chefs have the ability to control their behaviours and emotions in their own way, knowing themselves better throughout their career journey.

Research on women's behaviours and emotions has focused on various topics in the workplace context such as workplace bully (Brotheridge and Lee, 2010), emotional adaptation and self-efficacy with career outcomes (Urquijo et al., 2019), career paths in economic crisis (Simosi et al., 2015) and career networking behaviour (Forret and Dougherty, 2004). Within a tourism, hospitality and leisure context, Ulker-Demirel and Ciftci (2020) mentioned that generally, the concept of behaviour, such as in the TPB model, was studied from the perspective of consumers; few studies focus on career-related behaviour in the sector, and fewer still on the behaviour of women employees. The female chefs in this study actively engaged in managing their emotions, demonstrating awareness on their emotional state's influence on their behaviour (Behera and Pani, 2014) and professional performance, which in turn enhanced their ability to manage themselves in their career environments. This also extended to their

confidence levels and self-efficacy, providing a different perspective on how these internal factors play a fundamental role in shaping their careers as chefs. The issues raised in this theme of the discussion opens up new areas for research as the literature has often overlooked the psychological aspects of being a chef, especially for female chefs, which could be investigated further. This insight into their thoughts and emotions also enriches the literature, adding depth to the understanding of women in careers in professional kitchens.

### **7.5 The Need for Continuous Professional Development: “I Don't Want to be Left Behind”.**

They are few hotels that I work and as usual the constraint is the cost...they don't have tools, this and that. So, when I hold any position at the hotel, I will invest my money on buying my own craft tools, because I want to show something good, I want to show something worthy about myself. If I just take what they have...I think it's not fair for me. Because I said I can do many things, I want to upgrade myself, I want a good testimony from this place if I leave, then I want my customer to know who is the chef here. So, I always come out with something, and I will buy...my house now is like a pastry workshop, and kitchen workshop. I used to open a studio, I have everything from something...I don't mind buying books for references because at that time there is no internet, so I keep on learning, and we are the bosses, meet with suppliers, I keep in touch with the chefs.

(Zah, Malay, a chef advisor & motivator)

#### Vignette 4

In the interviews, when women were asked about the approaches they adopted to be successful as female chefs in the Malaysian culinary industry, the majority gave a similar answer: to continuously develop themselves in terms of skills and knowledge. Although the approaches taken by these participants differed, the similarity of their effort shows that they are aware of the importance of elevating their skills to gain

success as a chef. Being committed to what they are doing is helpful, and they constantly sought chances to develop themselves further. The development of skills has been shown to help women to increase their motivation, be more focused, enthusiastic, helped them overcome career challenges and determined their career success (Hassan et al., 2020). Participants shared what they did at the workplace, Susie “spend more time...stay back”, Mei focused on “helping out the chefs”, and Huan trying to “adapt to the new environment”. Gaining more experience helped female chefs in the kitchen; this was one of their strategies such as for Jia:

Well no shortcut...you put in the hard work...it doesn't matter if you graduated from...all these really prestige culinary school...you come out and just because you held a knife for five lesson a week in school of nine months or three semester, that's not make you a chef...you come to kitchen, you start from the bottom and you learn to work day in and day out consistently under pressure, no matter what circumstances and that becomes your blood... that's becomes your system (Jia)

Jia's opinions show that female chefs need to be aware of the reality behind a chef's career: it requires high commitment. Being realistic and career conscious will be helpful as this will increase motivation and performance. It is also essential to consider the negative aspects rather than only expecting a positive outcome from one's career, as this can lead to career frustration (Baruch and Vardi, 2016). Further, the female chefs were also always looking for opportunities to improve themselves by doing different things. This was shown by most of the participants where they were ready to develop new skills and gain new knowledge, even by their own initiative. Being up to date with “the knowledge and trends” (Farah) will be helpful, and “explore what other things” she can add to her portfolio to build confidence (Aini). Meanwhile, as a cookbook writer and a chef, Ina shared her approach to gaining new ideas and knowledge:

I will be reading cookery books to get inspired and then sometimes I would look at three or four cookbooks at one time...and when I see this presentation, this picture, photograph of a recipe, I will glance at the other books with other recipes.

Then I get inspired to create a different recipe from the three photos that I have seen, that's how I create recipes (Ina)

Approaches taken by these female chefs may have been different, however, they were all willing to make an extra effort. The strategy for gaining new skills and knowledge works differently depending on an individual; awareness of the career situation and needs is important to ensure they do not miss any career opportunities. Even though the effort made to upskill was something that needed additional financial resources, female chefs were willing to do it at their own cost if it was beneficial for their careers. For example, Zah was willing to spend her own money to buy pastry tools she needed to complete her products, and to purchase books for additional references. At the same time, some participants spent their time travelling to increase their knowledge and skills about food, as the following two participants mentioned. Laila used to travel abroad to learn and attend courses (despite the need to bring her children along with her), maintain good networking, and continuously highlight her profile as a chef. Similarly, Dila stated:

You always have to travel because actually by travelling is the one that can open up the chef's mind...just to go see the culture, how they cook...And I don't travel and live in hotel, I travel and live with someone...I will go and work somewhere for two weeks...As simple as I plan my travels according to food... Because food is based on countries and culture (Dila)

Gaining opportunities to meet new people and being exposed to different environments helped them gain more experiences. Horng and Lee (2009) also agree that travelling and gaining experiences can stimulate creativity, especially for chefs, to gain new ideas and elevate their profile.

In addition, most participants also shared their advice to future female chefs that suggested the need for continuous development, either from developing career behaviour, or gaining new knowledge and continuously learning. Participants indicated to “never stop learning and developing skills and yourself” (Zah) and “find knowledge

and experience, make friends” (Laila). Before joining the industry, female chefs must also prepare themselves with industry knowledge. Knowledge of the industry and the career challenges of the kitchen helps female chefs be much more prepared for career choices, needs and skills. Preparing oneself for knowledge and skills is essential, especially at the early stages in culinary hospitality, to ensure new workers sustain themselves in the industry (Ko, 2010).

Behaviour-wise, female chefs must be firm in their ambition and not give up, as advised by the participants. Having the correct career attitude will prepare female chefs better. Participants hoped that future female chefs possessed a strong career attitude, “know what you want to do” (Priya), “work through it and don't give up” (Yuen), “don't be shy...feel confidence with knowledge...stand out” (Zah), and “have passion...love your career” (Laila). The study by Cosentino et al. (2021) also suggested that women should elevate themselves, have their own voices, be confident and take risks that will definitely benefit their careers. Other participants pointed to planning one's career wisely:

Don't be a chef (laugh). Well, you have to have the goal of your own...find what you like. Don't be a young chef that want to do everything...you really have to narrow down to one (Dila)

The need to plan according to what is achievable is important for the career development of chefs, and Ina suggested that preparing for career changes can help control emotions:

Forsee where they will be in the next maybe 5 years or 10 years...always have plan B...these are the things that will make you emotionally stable...negotiate with your own self, you choose this work, if you want to be successful, you have to go through all the obstacles (Ina)

Planning and having career guidelines can be helpful so that people will be able to know the options that they have in a career. People knowing what they want to do is

crucial in avoiding future career conflicts, such as when students change careers after they experience difficulty at the workplace:

Before you want to enrol to culinary school, please work for one year. See if you like the life, like the stress (Dila)

The opinions above represent the situations that can occur when female chefs do not prepare themselves with the correct knowledge and skills for a cheffing career; developing passion for the role, and career planning are beneficial. As gaining more experience is crucial, the interviewees emphasised the need to expand knowledge about different job tasks to ensure future female chefs can adapt to any career situation. For example, “to take another degree...start working after diploma or maybe take a degree in other course like business” (Kamala). This will give female chefs more opportunities to learn new things and expand their career paths.

Based on the discussion above, it was concluded that female chefs seek to continuously develop knowledge and skills following their career needs and plans. Preparing women with knowledge about their work enhances their career success (Hassan et al., 2020). Similarly, the research participants provided multiple advice to future female chefs to continuously learn about the industry and be enthusiastic about their career. Even though their strategies of self-development were based on their own efforts rather than organisational support, by doing this, women showed self-leadership, built up passion, actively controlled the progression of their careers and showed resilience (Khilji and Pumroy, 2019).

There is evidence from research about women's career strategies. For example, in Veiga's (1976) study, more than a third of the participants agreed that their hard work acted as a strategy for them, and more than half of them urged the maintenance of a quality job as evidence of their capability. Besides that, Hassan et al. (2020) advocated that women entrepreneurs with experience, face challenges better with the knowledge they gain through their academic background or working experience acting as a basis of future success in their career. Women have different strategies based on their

experience, which can vary depending on what they think works for them (Khilji and Pumroy, 2019).

Interestingly, studies have focused on the role of mentoring in women's careers (Cosentino et al., 2021; Orser et al., 2012). However, none of the participants mentioned the importance of mentoring or role models. The female chefs in this study were highly individual in developing their career strategies without mentioning the influences of others in their career development and experiences. This is probably due to the lack of female chefs in Malaysia which does not encourage a greater support system for other female chefs. Despite that, participants showed that they can plan and take action about their careers according to their experiences, situations and needs, which indicates that female chefs in Malaysia are committed to their careers, which is a positive sign for the industry.

Thus, the current research highlights the ongoing efforts of female chefs to enhance their skills and knowledge, and has challenged the stereotypes and perceptions of women in such roles, which often portray female chefs as being at a disadvantage (e.g. Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020a; De Silva and Thulemark, 2022). The current study has also pointed to the interviewees as individuals who engaged in a continuous process of elevating their skills and knowledge, as seen in other research (e.g. Haddaji et al., 2017a). The literature gains depth through this discussion by recognising that the strategies employed by female chefs for self-development are diverse, and dependent upon various factors such as career situations, personality traits, and individual needs.

## **7.6 Summary**

This chapter has provided insights into the factors involved in the career choices and development of female chefs in Malaysia that influenced their career experiences including vignettes of the participants' narratives. It is worth noting that even though the stories shared by the participants are not the same, the themes discussed in this chapter emerged from the findings. There are four conclusions that emerged from the findings. First, even though the career choices of the female chefs interviewed started



with a hobby, part-time work and career exposure, and the female chefs unconsciously had the skills and passion for culinary arts, the findings demonstrated that families significantly influenced their career choices. All participants shared their stories about the role of the family in their careers, whether it was positive or negative. Participants were influenced by their family upbringing, such as having cooking responsibilities or being involved in family businesses. As they ventured into a chef career, even though the family's support was not entirely positive, the participating female chefs believed they could be successful, which was shown through their hard work.

Second, the female chefs developed adaptability skills in their goals and career development. Despite different goals being set at the early stages of their careers, and the goals changing along the way, the female chefs were aware of the challenges that they could face in their careers and were ready to change their goals and plan according to their career stages and unique situations.

Third, female chefs demonstrated an ability to control their own behaviours and to monitor their emotions, and this enabled them to know themselves better throughout their careers. Despite the fact that participants in this study faced multiple challenging experiences, they were aware of their behaviour, and knew what they wanted to achieve and what they needed to do to overcome the workplace's stressful environment.

Fourth, the interviewees continuously developed their skills and knowledge to maintain their profile as a chef. Various strategies and efforts were applied in their careers according to their job positions and situations, showing that the female chefs in the current study were fully committed to succeed.

These findings are consistent with previous research. For example, studies of family influence on women's careers (e.g., Troy, 2022; Md Mubin et al., 2021; Vadnjal, 2018; McKillop and Moorosi, 2017), women's career choices (e.g., Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019; Oo et al., 2019; Adya and Kaiser, 2005), women's career goals (e.g., Hassan et al., 2020; Khilji and Pumroy, 2019), women's career adaptability (e.g., Ibrahim and Amari, 2018; Çizel, 2018; McMahan et al., 2012), women's emotional intelligence in a career (Hassan and Ayub, 2019; Mayer et al., 2017) and women's career strategy

(e.g., Hassan et al., 2020). However, to date none of the research stated above has discovered all these issues in one study.

In more specific relation to hospitality and tourism, previous research has focused on various topics such as women managers in hospitality (Boyol Ngan and Litwin, 2019), female executives in hospitality (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019) and feminine leadership in the hospitality industry (Denizci et al., 2019a). However, again, existing research has revealed limited focus on the findings highlighted in this research.

Further related literature can be seen in the study by Li and Kerpelman (2007) which found that, particularly in the United States, women at a young age were willing to change their career decisions if their family showed objection. This was influenced by the closeness of a woman's relationship with her family. Their research also advocated that although their participants showed sadness over parents' objection to their preferred careers, they still chose to follow their parents or families' career choice. This contradicts the current study where female chefs were not affected by negative family responses to their career choice as chefs. While female chefs in this study did not mention how close their relationships were with their families, it would appear nevertheless that participants in this research differed from Li and Kerpelman's participants. Relatedly, Orbih and Imhonopi's (2019) study of women in the banking sector in Nigeria concluded that family and parents do not have an impact on women's career choices. In fact, their career choice involved factors such as available opportunities, skills, qualifications, education, personal development, salary and confidence (Oo et al., 2019; Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019). None of these factors were directly mentioned by participants in the current research. Rather, the female chef's career choice was based on their perceived and unconscious culinary skills.

Mentoring was also cited as an essential factor in women's careers, such as in Cosentino et al. (2021) and Orser et al. (2012). However, this was absent from the female chefs' narrative career stories. Female chefs career behaviour and response to challenges is slightly influenced by how they perceive feedback and how they respond to others' opinions about their careers. However, in this study on female chefs, this had very limited influence compared with other factors, and indeed most of the female chefs interviewed appeared to rely and depend heavily upon themselves.

The findings in this chapter also make significant contributions to the existing theories about female chef careers (e.g. Harris and Giuffre, 2010b) by uncovering insights into the experiences of female chefs. It has explored the influence of family on career choices (e.g. McKillop and Moorosi, 2017), revealing both positive and negative aspects and emphasising the crucial role families play in nurturing a passion for cooking. Also, the chapter highlights the adaptability of female chefs in goal planning, revealing how this shapes realistic career-planning, while emotional and behaviour awareness among female chefs influence their careers, especially in regards to their confidence and self-efficacy. Not only that, but this chapter has also emphasised the ongoing efforts of female chefs to enhance their skills and knowledge to provide better understanding of women in culinary careers by recognising various strategies they adopt to pursue success (Haddaji et al., 2017a); this in turn provides fresh perspectives to the literature.

Additionally, this findings chapter has also provided valuable insights for praxis within the culinary industry that can inform and guide actions. The findings of family influence and various reasons behind career choices for female chefs suggests the need for targeted initiatives, especially at women, promoting a positive career image. This may include educational outreach to families or parents to increase their understanding of cheffing careers and strategies, especially in encouraging and supporting female chefs from an early age. Moreover, the recognition of adaptability in goal planning among female chefs stresses the importance of encouraging resilience within education and professional development. Incorporating strategies into training or informative sessions can better prepare female chefs in their careers.

The discussions above also represent the relationship between structure and agency within the context of female chefs' careers in Malaysia. The structural factors such as family influence and stereotypical perceptions of the job, shape the overarching landscape within which female chefs pursue their careers. The positive and negative impacts of family views, paired with perceptions of the culinary profession, serve as the structural foundations influencing the choices and experiences of women in this field. However, the agency of female chefs becomes evident in their adaptive goal planning, behaviour, emotional regulation, and continuous development. Despite

structural constraints and challenges, these female chefs exercise agency by actively shaping their careers and demonstrating resilience. The recognition of different strategies employed by female chefs in their unique situations underlines the interaction between structural influences and individual agency, emphasising the need for a deeper understanding that accommodates both external situations and the active role that women play in the Malaysian culinary industry.

The theoretical framework adopted in this research was developed based on the discussion of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Career Construction Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory which then was classified into four different categories, that is individual factors, personal skills, external factors and career adaptability. The discussion about career choices and development of female chefs in this chapter has advanced the understanding of the framework through a different lens. First, female chefs in this study have shown a strong individual character that has helped them in constructing or influencing their behaviour. The confidence and belief they had about their chef career was important to the participants, and this then made them feel positive about their abilities. That in turn helped them to believe that they could be successful.

Second, the female chefs' behaviour also showed that personal skills were important in determining their behaviour, strategies and continuous advancement of the skills that they felt were important in their careers. Again, this made them feel confident about their ability to control their own career behaviour.

Third, the external factors have been interpreted in different ways. The female chefs' behaviour and career choices were found to be influenced only by their family, but the women did not rely on other people (such as colleagues). In particular, the women did not appear to have any strong opinions regarding the influence on their careers of feedback or comments from colleagues. This is because the female chefs in this study mostly depended on their individual efforts and made plans according to their career situation. Finally, female chefs in this study have shown a high level of career adaptability that also influences their behaviour and perceptions about themselves in their career situations.

In understanding how the findings discussed in this chapter reflected the theoretical framework, the findings are consistent with the framework adopted. In fact, the current research has advanced the understanding of how a person views their attitude, behaviour, skills and career through the lens of this framework. Interestingly, the findings have challenged one category in the framework, external factors. That is, in regard to the feedback about their work, female chefs in this study do not see other external influences or factors beside their own skills and behaviour as directly influencing their career. Even though family did influence their career choice, the influence of others on their career planning was not evidenced from the research findings.

The findings in this chapter have contributed to the overall understanding of female chefs' career choices and development. Female chefs in this study demonstrated that they are enthusiastic about what they aspire to be. They prepared themselves with career knowledge to enable them to face career challenges, potentially making their career progression, as women, more achievable. The next chapter presents the concluding comments and discussion of this research by summarising the thesis aim and objectives, followed by the contribution to knowledge that this research has offered. The practical implications and limitations of the study are also outlined with recommendations for future research before ending with a personal reflection on the research journey.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis by discussing how the research has addressed the aim and objectives of this project. This is done by considering the analysis from the two findings chapters and how these can be synthesised with the literature on gender, behaviour, and careers. This chapter also explicates the theoretical and methodological contributions of the research. Practical implication and limitations that stem from the study are then reviewed, and recommendations for future research proposed. A personal reflective note about the research progress and journey is provided to highlight the crucial moments that indirectly shaped this research. The chapter ends with final remarks on the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia.

### **8.2 Research Aim and Objectives**

As outlined in the introduction chapter, gender and careers have a significant relationship, and there are many ongoing discussions about the careers of women. Regarding the central focus of this research, Malaysia, a developing country and a growing tourism destination rich with ethnic diversity, has, in recent times, created more career opportunities for both men and women. Women's involvement in the tourism/hospitality industry has increased over the years, but their position and experiences are still under-explored. Accordingly, there is a need to investigate how women go through their careers in this sector in Malaysia, given that the industry is known to have multiple barriers that can affect women's careers.

This thesis began with discussions within two literature review chapters. The first literature review chapter focused on the context of gender studies, feminism's waves, and the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity; this was followed by discussion of intersectionality within careers generally before focusing on careers within the hospitality/tourism industry. The second literature review chapter focused on theories underpinning gender, behaviour, and careers, and this formed the basis of the thesis' theoretical framework. The framework was used as a guide for the main research

questions before it was further developed into sub-questions to support the narrative approach adopted in this project.

### **8.2.1 Aim**

The research aim was to explore the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. Participants from three main ethnic groups, Malay, Chinese and Indian, were gathered via online interviews from May 2021 until August 2021. Eighteen individual narratives were collected and analysed to investigate the factors involved in the career experiences of these women. Findings from the data analysis were then outlined in two separate chapters, each with their own focus. Chapter Six established the findings related to understanding the role of gender and ethnicity in female chefs' careers, including the discussion of the role of gender specifically the role of body (menstrual influences, physicality, stereotypes of being female), the family, the role of ethnicity including diversity and language. Following on from this, Chapter Seven focused mainly on the participants career choices, and experiences relating to personal and family influences, adaptability, behaviour and continuous development.

Regarding the aim of this research, it was concluded that female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia are influenced by gender-related issues such as their biology as females, stereotypes surrounding women in the kitchen and concern for family responsibilities. It was also contended that ethnicity does influence their career experiences mainly in a positive way, although the issue of language and diversity could potentially influence their experiences both positively and negatively. Families also influence their career experiences at different stages of their career. Female chefs also demonstrated their adaptability and awareness of the need for continuous development and these factors were influential to their career experiences. Findings of this study also reveal that structure (the career, society, ethnicity) and agency (the female chef) play a significant role in looking at the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. This broad aim was supported by three research objectives and the following sections will outline specifically how each objective was addressed through the research.

### 8.2.2 Objectives

**Research objective one: to explore the factors that influence women's career behaviours and perceptions.**

The findings identified a relationship between the factors influencing female chefs' career behaviours and perceptions. For participants, their behaviour shaped their career perception. Female chefs' behaviour was influenced by gender as they were aware of the possible gender-related issues that could affect them as chefs. The issues mentioned in the findings that influence them include their biology as females namely their physical strength, stereotypes of being women in the kitchen and work-family commitments stemming from being mothers and wives. This finding is similar to the existing literature which discusses female chefs' career barriers in relation to family commitment (e.g. Haddaji et al., 2017a; Harris and Giuffre, 2010a), however, the impact of biology represents a new finding from this research. Awareness of these gender issues helped the participants to better face gender challenges in their careers, thus enabling them to think or plan what they can and need to do when they are faced with challenging situations. The family was also an important influence on female chefs' behaviour, revealing similarities to the studies above. Negative responses from family about their career abilities increased the interviewees motivation to succeed, while positive responses boosted their confidence. Self-confidence was not an issue for the female chefs and continued to increase as they went through their career journeys, assisting them in career planning. The female chefs' self-awareness about their emotions and stress levels also influences their career behaviour, evidenced from the participants mindfulness about what they needed to do to overcome such situations in the workplace.

Female chefs' behaviour then affected their career perceptions. Gender, once again, was a substantial factor. Female chefs' narrative stories revealed that even though they did not acknowledge that being female restricted them from being a chef, their biology as females together with various gender related issues, still had an indirect effect on their career experiences. They viewed a chefs' career as a female to be potentially difficult because of body size discrimination, physical strength issues, stereotypes and work-life balance challenges. However, being female did not stop



them from progressing in their careers, it is just that they were aware of these gender issues, and this shaped their career perceptions. Adaptability also influenced career perception. The female chefs agreed that adaptability helped them go through a better career journey and improved their perceptions about further career planning, making the planning more feasible as they were ready for changes and challenges. Further, career perception was also influenced by the need for continuous development. The continuous effort made by the participating female chefs was essential in shaping better career perception, making them aware of the need to continuously seek knowledge and skills advancement.

Compared to the literature discussed in Chapter Three on the underpinning theories, this research found that the Gender Schema Theory, proposed by Bem (1993) was firmly embedded in female chefs' careers. According to Bem (1993), a schema begins to be formed in the childhood phase of an individual, and during the development of social identity a schema's attributes can continue to be shaped throughout a person's lifetime. This is what has been experienced by female chefs when they were given responsibilities for cooking tasks for families: this consequently, shaped their interest in cooking and also associated with a female role. Participants' families also showed different responses about the women's careers choices to be chefs. The fact that cultural differences, often found within ethnic differences, have an impact on gender-schema behaviour (Schmitt et al., 1988) explains the reason why some of the participants' families responded differently to their daughters' careers as chefs, and this was possibly created by their cultural surroundings or social judgement (Clément-Guillotin and Fontayne, 2011).

When female chefs show control over their behaviour, such as having a high level of self-confidence since the start of their career, this supports the Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen (1991) where belief in attitude and behavioural control helps to increase confidence. Concerning the role of subjective norms that include social pressure or other people's expectations, that are also, according to the TPB, said to influence an individual's behaviour, these are relevant for the female chefs also. Subjective norms in this research context refer to the female chefs' families as influential bearers of social expectations about their careers. Findings also suggested

that the female chefs' confidence levels greatly influenced their behaviour. Again, confidence was not an issue for them because they believed in their abilities, which was reflected in their behaviour. It also confirmed that self-efficacy and confidence levels increased when participants believed in their abilities and skills, which helped develop career interests. This supports previous research by Dickerson and Taylor (2000) and Sheu et al. (2010), and was especially apparent when the female chefs continuously sought skills and knowledge development. The confidence levels possessed by these female chefs shows that they also have high self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) previously suggested that a person's experiences and emotions can determine self-efficacy, which shows in the female chefs in this research: as they gained more experience, it gave them more control over their emotions.

However, the influences of others in Self-Efficacy theory which are manifested vicarious experiences (learning from others) and verbal persuasion (people's recommendations), were not evident in this study. This is because it was found that the female chefs' career behaviours were highly individual, and they did not appear to rely on learning from others or getting career advice from their colleagues, in order to advance their careers. This might be explained by the lack of other female chefs who could have formed their career reference-points; the lack of other female chef role models is arguably, especially true of Malaysia. Indeed, the participants mentioned the limited number of female chefs in their workplaces and social contexts. The interviewed chefs worked and developed their careers depending on their own skills and experiences; hence people's responses or comments did not affect their careers, especially in terms of skills and knowledge. In other words, the only people that could influence these participants' careers was family, not their colleagues, because they did not have any point of career reference on which to compare their own career progress, such as female role models in the kitchen.

The findings also showed that female chefs' careers were constructed through their identity since childhood as family influenced their passion for food, as discussed in Chapter Seven. Career Construction Theory by Savickas (2005) was firmly embedded in female chefs' careers. Especially when female chefs showed a high level of adaptability, they constructed their careers based on aspiration, interests and the

career situations they were in or aspired to be in the future. The theory highlight that changes in careers can be managed better with adaptability, which is strongly reflected in this study.

Nevertheless, there are two interpretations of 'life themes' that offers individuals a motivation on their career decision or, in other words, long-term career goals. First, it was not relevant as a motivation for the participants. This is because their goals were continuously adjusted depending on what their career situations may have been, at a given point. Career situations in this sense were explained by the conditions that can influence their careers, such as family responsibilities and job positions. This means that participants planned their goals according to where they were currently positioned in their careers and what type of job they could do. So, their life themes were not fixed as sources of encouragement because their career goals were viewed to be changeable. Second, life themes can also be interpreted as how they reflect their career experiences and how those experiences have shaped their behaviour after they have been through their career journey. Hence, for the first research objective, this study has concluded that, female chefs' behaviour is essential in shaping career perception and *vice versa*, meaning better career perception will produce better career behaviour. How female chefs view gender issues, manage family responses and their levels of confidence affected their behaviour. Adaptability and continuous development were important in shaping their career perceptions also.

The research highlights the influence of gender, family and confidence levels on the behaviour and perceptions of female chefs, providing an understanding of the complicated nature of their career experiences. This study also highlights the significance of adaptability and continuous development in shaping career perceptions, emphasising their role in the participants' career experiences. Although some of the findings addressing this objective were evidenced in the literature on female chefs' careers, this adds new perspectives specifically in looking at their behaviour and perception within a Malaysian context.

**Research objective two: to investigate whether intersectionality of gender and ethnicity have an impact on women's career experiences.**

The findings have justified that gender plays an essential role in female chefs' career experiences in this research context. Various gender-related experiences were recounted by the participants, as discussed in Chapter Six, showing that gender plays an essential role in their career experiences. Most participants highlighted issues pertaining to biological differences such as body size, with some highlighting menstrual issues and physical ability, which all mirror the challenges of being a woman in the workplace, not to mention being a chef in a professional kitchen. Masculine practices are still embedded in chefs' careers in Malaysia, where stereotypes affect women's experiences of the job role; the most prevalent barrier to a chef's career expressed by the participants was, however family commitments. Nearly all of the participants covered this issue as a potential barrier. This has confirmed that various gender issues still influence and affect female chefs' career experiences, and further efforts must be made to support women in this profession.

The findings also identified that the role of ethnicity in the researched female chefs' career experiences is quite positive. Most of the female chefs indicated that ethnic background does not affect their career at all, as they are used to working and living in a multi-ethnic environment. The answers the women gave were similar across the three ethnic groups; although some ethnicity-related challenges exist and are experienced by some female chefs; however, they did not influence their career progression. Instead, these only added some challenging situations to their daily career experiences. Opinions about ethnic experiences were highly individual, which explains why some participants experienced ethnic difficulties, but some did not experience any. This is probably because some participants may not have worked in a multi-ethnic environment, or they were from the majority ethnic group in the workplace, or it could just be that they are not sensitive about ethnic issues or practices. In fact, the women contended that ethnic background did not influence their career opportunities, and female chefs believed that being a chef was solely based on skills, with ethnicity not being a barrier. The explanation for this is possibly because Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, and living in such a society has helped with

participants' awareness and acceptance of multiple ethnic cultures and practices (Verkuyten and Khan, 2012). Opinions about language within career context also was mentioned by some of the participants, which was viewed as both positive and negative in their career experiences.

This research found that both gender and ethnicity had influenced the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. Ethnicity had no negative consequences (Nguyen, 2019) for women's careers, although some concerns were raised by a minority of the participants. Instead, the majority of female chefs in this study perceived both of their own ethnicity and ethnic diversity as something positive in their careers. In other words, although there is no intersection between gender and ethnicity, the interpretation of ethnicity can differ according to the career situation they are in, their ethnic experiences and perception. Thus, this finding significantly contributes to the literature on the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in women's career experiences, particularly within the context of female chefs in Malaysia. Although the main research question is to understand to which extent gender intersects with ethnicity, the narrative stories by the participants in study highlighted that there were other, more salient, intersects such as the participants' marital status that influenced their career experiences. On the other hand, the research sheds light on a more positive role of ethnicity in the career experiences of the sample of female chefs, indicating that ethnic background generally does not influence their careers negatively. The absence of negative consequences associated with ethnicity challenges existing thinking of intersectionality of ethnicity with gender and prompt further exploration. The study emphasises the importance of considering specific career situations, ethnic experiences, and individual perceptions that influence how female chefs interpret and navigate the intersections of gender and ethnicity within their professional journeys.

**Research objective three: To explore how women perceive their future career prospects.**

The findings suggests that continuous development is a significant factor for the interviewed female chefs in viewing their future career prospects. Continuous

development influences their goal planning, the type of job or tasks they want to explore or venture in, and the skills and knowledge needed; this is reflected in how they view their future as female chefs. In terms of gaining career experiences, multi-tasking, continually looking for career opportunities and expanding their knowledge and skills were all helpful. The female chefs in this study also developed strategies, plans and efforts to improve their self-knowledge and skills, which they believed must be continuously developed throughout their career journey. Awareness of continuous development needs influenced how the women viewed their future careers and prepared them for career changes and challenges, providing better career planning and development.

In viewing future career prospects, female chefs' responses strongly supported different factors found in the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Career Construction Theory. As the female chefs saw continuous development as essential for their future career prospects, their strategy was constructed through several factors, as both theories above have suggested. Female chefs' career strategies and prospects were planned according to the career situation they found themselves in at the present moment or what they foresaw in the future, such as family responsibilities, job positions, business situations or other things they wanted to achieve. Their future career aspirations were informed by their curiosity and what they wanted to add to their existing skills and knowledge, leading them to be more adaptable. Also, believing in their own abilities helped female chefs plan better for their future careers.

To interpret the above, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is useful as it suggests that a person is ready to be committed to any career-related activity (Anderson et al., 2017). Ajzen (1991) indicated that this would predict career intention. In other words, when female chefs are fully committed to their careers and willing to spend their effort on increasing skills and knowledge, this will lead to better career planning and strategy on their behalf. This study has also confirmed the relevance of adaptability in preparing a person for career changes (Savickas, 2005; Perera and McIlveen, 2017). When female chefs are ready to adapt, this helps them to engage better in future career planning. Consequently, this allows people to adjust better to a situation requiring them

to gain more skills and to fit into a more dynamic social context (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012) at work.

The findings explain the role of continuous development in shaping not only the career planning of the interviewees but also influencing their views on the future. This insight highlights the significance of continuous learning, and adaptability, as contributing to more strategic career-planning. Different career environments whether being in a hotel or restaurant, having their own business, or working in academia led female chefs to consider multiple career alternatives, and may be considered as stemming from the structural challenges that existed for the women in being female chefs, and specific kitchen situations that influenced their career decisions, leading to a focus on future prospects. This also highlights the importance of considering family situations such as having children or being married, that shape how female chefs foresee and prepare for their future career, including for the single female chefs. Overall, the study deepens the existing literature in career goals and planning such as in tourism (Carvalho et al., 2018a), for women post career-break (Arora and Kumari, 2021), and for female executives (Schulz and Enslin, 2014) by offering a fresh understanding about the factors that contribute to women's perceptions of their future career prospects. In an applied sense the findings provide valuable insights for career guidance, especially for female chefs.

### **8.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study has made several contributions to knowledge, theoretically and methodologically. Its originality lies in its combination of three ethnic groups in one research study that focuses on the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia. Aligned with the achievement of the research aim and objectives, findings have addressed new perspectives on gender, careers and ethnicity.

#### **8.3.1 Theoretical Contribution**

This research has made three theoretical contributions to our knowledge and understanding of women's careers, especially those of female chefs.

First, research findings have addressed a gap in intersectionality research which suggests negative consequences for women at the intersection between gender and

ethnicity/race (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Smith et al., 2019; Wang, 2019). In opposition to the aforementioned research, this study has found that gender and ethnicity are not negatively correlated in female chefs' perceptions of their career experiences in Malaysia. Ethnic experiences were varied for these women, supporting Dahl and Korg's (2018) arguments that intersectionality between gender and ethnicity can be interpreted differently depending on career context. In the career context of female chefs in multi-ethnic Malaysia, no negative intersectional effects were found between gender and ethnicity based on the participants' views in this study. Further, this research has discovered that ethnicity or ethnic diversity can be a positive factor for female chefs' careers in a Malaysian context. Focusing on Malaysia has offered a different perspective in viewing ethnicity, as the country's context has illustrated the positive aspects of being in a multi-ethnic society.

Research in tourism/hospitality on ethnicity has focused for example on ethnic and racial discrimination in hospitality careers (Wern-Yi and Kahl, 2014; Shum et al., 2019), the intercultural communication among hospitality employees (Vassou et al., 2017) and ethnic tourism (Lor et al., 2019). Gender research has focused on women's careers in the tourism sector (Carvalho, 2018b; 2018c), gender's relationship to risk in travel (Yang et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018) and career barriers for women in tourism employment (Hutchings et al., 2020; Alrwajfah et al., 2020). Research in tourism/hospitality on intersectionality is still limited and has further not focused on the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity in multi-ethnic societies such as Malaysia. This research therefore offers a new perspective on gender intersectionality by showing that there is a positive correlation between gender and ethnicity in female chefs' career experiences in the Malaysian context.

Second, this research has added to gender studies on the effect of women's body size and physical strength on their experiences in the workplace. Indeed, gender studies which focus on the effects of biology on women in the workplace are limited and this is even more so in the context of hospitality/tourism and specifically in professional kitchens. In this research, stigma associated with body size experienced by the female chefs, especially when working in a male-dominated workplace, where physical strength is required, has made their working environment more challenging. Similar



research has focused on women's weight discrimination in the workplace (e.g., Puhl and Brownell, 2001; Randle, 2012; Puls et al., 2021), but a focus on the body at work it is relatively new in hospitality and tourism. The problematic situation for female chefs regarding body size, either for those who are large or petite, has given this research a new perspective on viewing the challenges for women in the workplace. Participants in this research seemed to accept that their physical ability and strength have limitations, especially in comparison to male chefs, which was found to influence their motivation at some points. The biological bodily differences between women and men affected the participating female chefs' motivation at times in their careers: this has rarely been a focus in tourism and hospitality research. Recent research by Allison (2021) mentioned the differences to the physical strength (biologically) of women in professional soccer compared to men but at the time of writing there is still a dearth of research in tourism/hospitality settings which focus on women's biological differences that potentially affect how they feel about their bodies, and the effects of not being viewed to be as strong as men, on their motivation and morale at work.

Third, the narrative approach adopted by this study has enabled a new understanding of women as individuals. That is, findings have found that female chefs in this study are highly individual. They believe in what they can do based on their individual agency rather than seeing their careers as possessing structural or organisational barriers that negatively affect their progress. Even though the female chefs agreed that they might face challenging situations in the future regarding their gender, they did not believe that this would seriously affect their careers. The female chefs did not recognise any systemic barriers to their career progress, but instead believed that they could be successful by showing individual commitment and effort. The participants in the study all viewed their careers differently, and through a unique lens, thus offering an opportunity to view these issues in a broader context. The fortitude they possessed, and the belief in the power of their own agency, was demonstrated when the women were positive in facing negative career experiences.

Interestingly, the participants in this study challenge the collectivist practices of Malaysian society, which often sees the importance of community or group interest above individual interests (Ang and Liang, 2021). This collectivist culture has shaped

the values and practices in the country (Ramley et al., 2020), especially concerning marriage, family and children that are the most important factors within the society (Sumari et al., 2020). However, this research has found that female chefs are very individualistic when progressing their careers, and this has shed some light on Malaysian women in a professional kitchen. Despite being in a collectivist community with a strong perception of society, these women choose to draw on their individual strength, and career strategy and see femininity as an advantage. However, female chefs in this study might find themselves in situations where they need to downplay or ignore the structural barriers that exist. This provides a new perspective for research as it highlights the career strategies that are used to circumvent or even deny structural constraints to the individual; this is especially valuable in the current research as an understanding of the factors that lead to this behaviour, such as social expectations or stereotypes have also been explored in the Malaysian context. Despite the prevalent collectivist practices in Malaysia, the research also reveals a sense of individualism among female chefs. The embracing of individualism itself can be viewed as a challenge to the social norms of collectivist cultures, as found in Malaysia. Relatedly, the choice of these women to prioritise their individual strengths and career strategies in a collectivist setting also highlights their agency in making decisions. This further provides a different perspective on the intersection of agency and structure which also could be an area for further research.

### **8.3.2 Methodological Contribution**

The methodological contribution pertains to the narrative approach taken in this research, enabling female chefs in Malaysia to tell their stories about their career experiences. This narrative approach has seldom been applied in this context, although it has been used in research in gender studies before, for example, in relation to women's equality (LeRoux-Rutledge, 2019), women's careers in entrepreneurship and construction (Sinisalo and Komulainen, 2008; Modestino et al., 2019), women's immigration status and its effect on STEM education (Rahming, 2022) and women's employment (Shahan, 2021). Some research in hospitality has taken this approach in studying women's travelling behaviour (Yang et al., 2017; Laing and Frost, 2021) and

women executives' experiences in the industry (Fan et al., 2021), but it is still considered limited in that domain.

The narrative approach taken in this research is underpinned by interpretivism, social constructivism and feminist epistemology. This has allowed for the unpacking of diverse women's in-depth individual narratives expressed in three career phases - from the start of their career through the mid-stages and then on to the mature career stage. This approach enabled a deeper investigation of participants' experiences including personal feelings, what they needed to do to overcome various career challenges, their difficulties, passions, and even personal experiences with their families. These meaningful conversations which went beyond interviews, helped these female chefs, and me as the researcher, think about what we have been through as chefs, and allowed us to reflect on past experiences (McAlpine, 2016). Together with the feminist epistemological stand taken in this study that sought to highlight women's individual experiences (Tanesini, 1999), the contribution made by this study through the narrative approach, that compliments the feminist approach (Peter et al., 2008) can also be emphasised. In addition, the use of vignettes presented in the finding chapter that highlight the participants' personal experiences, also demonstrate a novel use of the interview data in relation to feminist epistemology. Throughout the data collection and analysis, my positionality as a woman, a chef and a Malaysian enabled a better understanding of these female chefs' career experiences. Using this methodological approach allowed for more in-depth discoveries and unpacking of issues regarding gender, ethnicity and careers for the participants.

#### **8.4 Practical Implication**

This research also contributes practical implication especially by enhancing and increasing the career pathway awareness for the female chefs' careers in Malaysia. By understanding the motivations and strategies of aspiring women to explore various opportunities whether in entrepreneurship, academia, or management, the research findings broaden the understanding and career possibilities for female chefs in the professional kitchen setting. Promoting the awareness of diverse career possibilities aims to inspire female chefs in Malaysia toward fulfilling varied paths of employment within the culinary industry.

## **8.5 Limitations of the Research**

Despite the achievements of the research aim and objectives, and the study's contributions, there are three limitations. The first limitation concerns the restricted access during the online interviews. The initial data collection plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews in Malaysia. However, online interviews were conducted due to the COVID-19 travel risk and restrictions in 2021. This posed several limitations in studying participants' body language, especially for a small number of participants that chose not to turn on their cameras. It made the process of building the interview tone, comfortability and building rapport more challenging. There were also a few issues with internet connection and background noise for both researcher and research participants that affected the smooth running of the interviews and the clarity of the conversations. The richness of the data was therefore impacted by the absence of non-verbal cues and the limitations of online communication. The absence of physical presence may lead to missed of facial expressions and body language, potentially affecting the depth of understanding and empathy in the interaction. However, these issues were somewhat overcome by the semi-structured and informal tone of the conversations in the interviews that helped tremendously, even though the informality would have been much easier to achieve if done face to face. On the positive side, online interviews can create a more comfortable and familiar environment for participants, potentially leading to increased openness and candidness in their responses.

The second limitation is the transcribing and translation process. In terms of transcribing, the unclear voices of some participants made the transcribing process slightly challenging, making it much longer. Even though most participants spoke in English, there were issues with the English proficiency of some of the participants. Their grammar was quite poor and mixed up with the Malay language, meaning the researcher needed to amend the answers to ensure messages were clear, without changing their meaning. Some participants also spoke in the Malay language, and the translation from Malay to English resulted in a more formal conversation, not exactly as discussed in the interview because some words could not be translated exactly as they do not fit the English language context.

The third limitation is the small sample size that is not representative of the diverse female chefs' backgrounds, career paths, and challenges. It may exclude voices and narratives that are essential to understanding the full scope of the broader population of such women's experiences. Moreover, certain female chefs, particularly those facing significant challenges or discrimination, may have been hesitant to participate, fearing potential stigma: the sample therefore may suffer from a certain self-selection bias. That said, a sample size does not affect the trustworthiness or credibility of the findings as qualitative narrative approaches normally work effectively with small sample sizes and do not claim to be representative of wider populations.

## **8.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

This research has revealed aspects of the participating female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia. However, the research has only offered a partial glimpse of career experiences in relation to gender, ethnicity and behaviour for these female chefs. There is undoubtedly more to discover regarding gender and careers in professional kitchens. Thus, six recommendations are offered for further research consideration.

The first recommendation is to study the intersectionality between gender and other factors. As this research found no intersection between gender and ethnicity, further research should be done to explore how gender intersects with factors such as age, class or religion. Some participants mentioned religious practices in the interviews and further research should be conducted to include the intersectionality between gender and religion to unpack the relationship between these two identifications. Gender can intersect with other identities and is a complex issue, especially in a social context (Crenshaw, 1991; Arifeen and Gatrell, 2013). Other than ethnicity, further research also can include cultural and, structural issues and behaviour (Smith et al., 2019) that probably intersect with gender. Further research also might consider focusing on various geographical locations to fit with the current multi-social context (Rosette et al., 2018) such as other areas of Malaysia.

The second recommendation is to conduct further research on menstrual symptoms affecting women in the workplace. Being a woman in a physically driven career can

be challenging as this requires physical strength, which impacts on how women feel about their bodies during menstruation, especially when women can feel more tired (Kolić et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021; Hennegan et al., 2020). Even though different women experience different menstrual symptoms - some may have severe pain compared to others - this could be investigated further. In terms of women managing their menstrual pain and symptoms, this also relates to how organisations and colleagues react to menstrual issues in the workplace. The argument about menstrual leave (Barnack-Tavlaris et al., 2019) and the stereotypes of women being emotionally and physically unstable during this phase can also be explored to see how this affects women in a chef's career context or in various aspects of the workplace.

The third recommendation is to focus on a more comprehensive sample of participants of Indian ethnicity in the Malaysian context. As Indians are considered a minority ethnicity in Malaysia, research can be conducted to discover deeper understandings of a chef's career, especially from this ethnic group's perception. Such research could investigate how the chef career, and career progression is interpreted by Indian female chefs as a minority group, not only in the country, but probably also, in professional kitchens. Indian female chefs in the study mentioned their family's cultural thinking that a chef career is not considered a professional job, and more in-depth investigation could focus on this issue and its impact on career experiences.

The fourth recommendation is to consider a possible quantitative study looking into female chefs' careers from different regions in Malaysia. From a quantitative methodological perspective, research can be extended to assess the number of female chefs working in professional kitchens and which job scopes or positions in food and beverage services most female chefs venture into. This could address the lack of statistics of women working in Malaysia's food and beverage services and specific details on the positions they hold, which was mentioned in Chapter One. Quantitative research could also enable comparative studies on the employment of female chefs in the country in different sectors or business contexts including hotels, restaurants, cafes, and catering.

The fifth recommendation is to consider looking at an investigation of transgender experiences in professional kitchens in a range of hospitality environments. That is, it

is possible to extend this research about career experiences to different gender identities including transgender persons who are often stereotyped and marginalised in many societies. This is especially relevant in the context of Malaysia's conservative society where its values are closely related to traditional religious aspects of social life.

Finally, further research using motivation theories to study female chefs' behaviour holds significant potential in enhancing the understanding of women's career experiences and their socio-psychological well-being in the profession. Specifically, exploring the motivational factors that drive or sustain women in pursuing careers as chefs may help to discover valuable insights in looking at the motivators of career choices, goal setting, and career determination. Additionally, the inclusion of motivation theories and theories of socio-psychological well-being can provide a holistic understanding of how motivational factors impact behaviour, emotions, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction among female chefs.

### **8.7 Reflective Note**

As a female chef, I have always wondered why there is a limited number of female chefs, especially in Malaysia. Although I realised that a chef's career needs a high commitment in the kitchen because of the long working hours and male-dominated workplace, which I believed to be some of the reasons for the limited female presence, I did not want to work in a hotel or food beverage establishment in the long term or at least until when it was time for me to start my own family. It was only after I had experienced the industry's challenges that I began to look forward to continuing my study in culinary arts, aiming to be in academia but still using my culinary skills. When I took my master's in culinary arts and started to learn about research, it sparked my interest in looking into the context relevant to female chefs' careers, primarily as it was closely related to what I was doing.

I enrolled in the PhD program in February 2020 with an initial research proposal about female chefs' careers in Malaysia, focused solely on the Malay ethnic group. At that time, I wanted to advance my research knowledge from my master's dissertation, which looked at career barriers for female chefs. I still remember one research participant in my master's dissertation mentioning the hurdle she faced when she was

a minority ethnic woman in the kitchen, which I had never thought of before. As I met my supervisors, the proposal was revised to make use of the diversity of ethnicities in Malaysia, which could add more interest and depth to my research. Also, I had experience working in multicultural environments in Malaysia and could access a range of women from different ethnic groups through my personal contacts in the industry and the university that I worked with previously.

The first few months before the research proposal approval was challenging. Having had two years of a research break from my master's and working as a chef lecturer distracted me from the research mode. Just two months after I arrived in the UK, the unexpected pandemic began; when COVID-19 cases peaked, the lockdown added more difficulty for me to focus, not to mention doing my research from my new home. My research knowledge on gender was also limited, and the terms used in gender research were quite difficult for me to understand. I began reading multiple gender-related journals and had to revisit some more than once as I struggled to understand the gender and feminist context, especially in relating it to female chefs' careers.

The initial data collection plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews back in Malaysia, but because of the risk of travelling during COVID-19 in the UK and Malaysia, I had to change my plan to online interviews. This was challenging as I needed to follow up with the participants continuously. Malaysia was also in lockdown; some chefs had already quit their jobs due to the pandemic and were in a low career mood, not to mention the time differences, building online rapport and communication barriers. It was challenging to recruit an equal number of female chefs of Indian ethnicity, although I used all my contacts and the snowballing technique. Even though I initially had several potential Indian participants, some ignored my invitation, which this can be investigated in the further about their lack of response as stated in the recommendation for further research. Compiling my research findings was also challenging because the narrative stories were highly individual; I had to revisit the interview transcripts several times to ensure I could gather the different answers into themes. Also, translation presented its own challenges. In interviews with Malay participants, they spoke what I (and Malaysians) call *Manglish* (a social term for the mixed language of Malay and English), and Chinese participants, used a lot of



additional expressions that could not be translated. I spent much time laughing during the transcribing; it also felt funny when I had to listen to my own voice repeatedly! Reflecting on what I have been through as a doctoral student keeps me motivated; the knowledge I gained along this process I never imagined before. One thing I noticed was the strange feeling I had at first sitting in front of a laptop instead of cooking for hours in the kitchen. The situation of dealing with pen, paper, and books rather than food and knives sometimes makes me miss the kitchen heat.

In concluding, stories from female chefs in this research varied and were highly individual. Some included things that I did not realise before this; only when I reflected on the participant's stories was I able to understand that I had experienced similar things, but had forgotten them. Their stories inspired me to believe that female chefs in Malaysia are really working hard to achieve what they want, despite the media in Malaysia only focusing on celebrity chefs or those Malaysian female chefs who are successful overseas. Locally, many other female chefs sacrificed their time and effort to become successful. I hope this study can be a steppingstone for me to continue my research in this area and help to highlight the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia that are not in the limelight.

## **8.8 Concluding Thoughts**

Considering the research aim to explore the career experiences of female chefs in Malaysia through a narrative approach, it can be concluded that this research aim was successfully achieved. In this study, female chefs' career experiences in Malaysia were influenced by five factors, namely gender, ethnicity, families, behaviour and the need for continuous development. Each of these factors has its own influence according to these female chefs' career stages. This research has confirmed that gender was still significant in the career experiences of female chefs and manifested itself as a challenging facet of their identity in relation to the job role. However, it was not seen as a barrier. Gender had influenced the interviewed female chefs' careers since the beginning and continued to play a role in their career planning. However, ethnicity was seen as a positive influence on their career experiences: working in a diverse workplace potentially created a more harmonised workplace, especially when a chef's career involves food and culture. Familiarity and sharing other ethnic and

cultural practices made the female chefs in this study more positive in working with multi-ethnic colleagues.

Notably, this research has revealed different perspectives about women and careers that were revealed via female chefs' career experiences. The female chefs in this study continue to believe in the power of individual strength and strategy to be successful. Remarkably, numerous gender issues were still found to be a significant factor in career experiences for the interviewees. Some of these stood apart from the themes of stereotypes and work-life balance that often became a popular focus when it comes to discussing women's careers. Surprisingly, body size discrimination and physical ability as a woman surfaced in the findings, which means that there are possible biological differences between men and women that can affect one's career. This also means that differences can be used to exclude women. In addition, families significantly influence women's careers as a whole. The emerging discussion about families and parents' roles in shaping female chefs' careers was intriguing, especially when the participants were able to carry on with their career plans despite multiple negative views expressed to them by family members. Alongside their career experiences, the participating female chefs have shown that adaptability and continuous development are substantial and beneficial strategies, that helped to ensure their career journeys were as rewarding as they could be.

The research has provided an understanding of the role of gender and ethnicity in women's careers, allowing an enhancement of studies about women's career experiences that can be an inspiration for others. It also has extended a different view about women's careers, showing that many possible individual factors probably have been overlooked. Women have been proactive in their careers and are becoming more resilient when it comes to career challenges. The gender-career issues discussed in this research have also uncovered a new context of understanding female chefs' careers, showing that the women interviewed have played an active role in their own career development, with the hope that with this effort, women will continue to progress in their careers. In fact, the research has also stressed the importance of the ongoing effort made from an individual level, such as being prepared for one's career and being knowledgeable, to ensure one can go through a better career journey.

Female chefs in Malaysia have already made a bold move in developing their careers in their own way. Skills and passion for culinary arts are the most crucial aspects in making what chefs are; hopefully, in the future female chefs will be viewed simply as chefs, without referring to their gender and/or ethnicity.

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## Appendix 1 Ethics Approval



Downloaded: 10/05/2021 Approved: 27/04/2021

Amirah Mazlan  
Sunderland Business School  
Programme: PhD Research Tourism Hospitality and Events

Dear Amirah

**PROJECT TITLE:** Exploring Female Chef Career Development in Malaysia: A Narrative Approach

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 008950

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 27/04/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 008950 (form submission date: 16/04/2021); (expected project end date: 20/08/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1015381 version 1 (30/03/2021).
- Participant consent form 1015382 version 1 (30/03/2021).

If during the course of the project, you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please email [ethics.review@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:ethics.review@sunderland.ac.uk)

For more information please visit:  
<https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/research/governan>

Yours sincerely

Veronique Laniel

Ethics Administrator

University of Sunderland

**Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form**



**Informed Consent Form**

**Study title: Exploring the Career  
Development of Female Chefs in  
Malaysia: A Narrative Approach**

Participant code:

I am over the age of 18	
I have read and understood the attached study information and, by signing below, I consent to participate in this study	
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time during the study itself.	
I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded.	

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

(Your name, along with your participant code is important to help match your data with the interview responses. It will not be used for any purpose other than this.)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet



# PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

## Study Title: Exploring the Career Development of Female Chefs in Malaysia: A Narrative Approach

### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the career development of female chefs in Malaysia. Questions on the career of female chefs during the career lifecycle – early, middle and mature phases be asked. This study will help to understand how career development as a female chef is affected by gender and ethnic perception and background, and personal skills development. The role of feedback and career challenges, career adaptability, and career goals will also be examined.

### Who can take part in the study?

The study participants will be female chefs in Malaysia from three main ethnic backgrounds: Malay, Chinese and Indian with at least five years of working experience in the commercial kitchen business and who possess at least a certificate in hospitality-related courses.

### Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you change your mind about taking part in the study, you can withdraw at any point during the session without giving a reason and without penalty.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

As the study only involves sharing the experience of your career as a female chef in Malaysia, your identity will be confidential and is not expected to be pose any risk.

### What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no possible disadvantages and risks from the study.

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation will help in the development of potential strategies than can contribute to the enhancement of the career development of female chefs. The study can also contribute to education and information and can encourage the productivity of female chefs including with regard to any differences due to ethnic background.

### What if something goes wrong?

If you change your mind about participation, please contact me by email at [bh66nt@research.sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:bh66nt@research.sunderland.ac.uk) to cancel your participation. If you feel unhappy about the conduct

of the study, please contact me immediately or the Chairperson of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group, whose contact details are given below.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Your confidentiality will be respected at all times; your identity will be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes.

**What will happen to the result of the research study?**

If suitable, the results may also be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This study is being organised and self-funded by the researcher with the approval and support of the Faculty of Business, Law and Tourism at the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group has reviewed and approved the study.

**Contacts for further information**

Doctor John Fulton  
Chair of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group  
University of Sunderland  
Email: [john.fulton@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:john.fulton@sunderland.ac.uk)  
Phone: 0191 515 2529

Professor Donna Chambers  
Director of Studies  
Faculty of Business, Law and Tourism  
Email: [donna.chambers@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:donna.chambers@sunderland.ac.uk)  
Phone: 0191 515 2994

## Appendix 4 Interview Invitation Letter



6<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Dear Chef,

I am delighted to invite you for an online interview as part of my PhD research thesis titled 'Female Chef Career Development in Malaysia: A Narrative Approach. I am inviting you to participate in this research, following your great profile in the industry's culinary arts and working experiences. This research investigates how female chefs develop their careers and by looking through the lenses of intersectionality between gender and ethnicity. This research gathers the opinions and narrative career experiences from the expert in the industry, which later with hope will contribute to the Malaysian context of culinary, tourism, and hospitality.

The procedure for the interview will be as follows:

- Face-to-face online interview that will last for approximately 1 hour.
- The interview will be conducted via an online platform (Zoom, Teams, Google Meets, etc.)
- All participants will be asked the same questions.
- The question is guided through stages of career development from the early phase, middle phase and mature career phase.
- The order of the questions may change as the interview goes along.
- 

Together with this letter, I have included a Participant Information Sheet that provides the study's details, a Consent form for you to sign and an interview questions guide. I would appreciate it if you could advise me of your available date and time for the interview. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any enquiries at [bh66nt@research.sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:bh66nt@research.sunderland.ac.uk)

I am thankful for your consideration.

Best regards

**Nur Amirah Binti Haji Mazlan**  
PhD Researcher in Tourism  
University of Sunderland

## Appendix 5 Sample Interview Transcript (Questions and Answers)

### PARTICIPANT CODE: DILA

Question 1: Why did you decide to be a chef?

Answer: My family is a very big in cooking, so I think because of the upbringing, I am in my family surrounding and stuff actually encourage me to cook, and I actually enjoy cooking. Because of that and then since I was young, I was a child. I started cooking when I was five years old since I was a very very young, I don't know why my mum make me cook but that was fun. I start to cook when I was five, because our family is poor so what happened was my mum had to go to work, so I always have to cook for my brother, just a simple meal, it was a simple food for kids because our parents are very busy with work. So, because of that and then my grandma do it also, she give me my first frying pan when I was five so those kind of encourage me to cook and started my passion for cooking.

Question 2: What is your initial goal when you started your career as a chef?

Answer: Well, I had a typical goal of opening a restaurant or opening a café. It's very typical but yeah that was my dream and actually I did it at 22 years old. I open my first café. I think I was pretty lucky because I know why I want it to do since I was really young because I heard, you known many people don't have that, they don't know where they are going but for me when it comes to vocational study I started early, but because of my family background it kind of make me want to cook and also TV shows! Cooking TV shows really encouraging.

Question 3: How about your confidence level?

Answer: I am an overconfident person! So, I always think that I can do so much. So, when I was 16, I asked for a job, I act that I am a head chef, the way I talk is kind of powerful you know. During my interview, even though the salary is just 500 *ringgits* (Malaysian Ringgit). I am a very overconfident and I know that time, I am hungry to learn. When I were young, I want to learn how to make chocolate cake, I want to learn everything. I was very young, and I am overconfident I like to challenge my boss (laugh) so it's kind of different. That's how I survived everywhere. I have been



everywhere, I work everywhere, Indonesia, in the UK, USA, that's how you can survive because of that kind of mentality.

Question 4: What is your perception about being a female when you first start your chef career? (The participant combines the answer with ethnicity experiences)

Answer: Okay so, I didn't know it was going to be challenging but I thought the cooking is just about cooking. It doesn't matter what race and stuff like that. But when we look at the cooking itself, all the food come from different races, so in a way everything involves races. So, for example, if you go to hotel there is Chinese kitchen, Indian kitchen, there is Malay kitchen. So, everything at the end is divided by race and then when I entered a college in Malaysia, and then there is a bit of racism in my school. So that's when I realised there is some problem with our colour. I thought so I went to college in KL (Kuala Lumpur), a culinary school and then I actually thought like I am in this class with 40 people that's from China, Iran and from everywhere, it's a private college. And then in that class, I was the only Malay, and there is only one Indian girl. There was about 30% of the student from mainland China, they can't speak not even a word of English. So to me it was not fair, I actually fought with my school because they allowed the Chinese students to bring dictionary, the digital dictionary. So, they allow Chinese students to bring dictionary, I feel like it's not fair because if I go to US, I don't get to bring dictionary to my exam and that's one. After year of enrolling to the class, a pretty racist chef, so he actually gives me and my Indian friend a C (for a subject). So, the thing is my chef, they know how I need my A, because my family is a very strict. My mum was against me cooking so my mum was like 'no you are not going to cook, it's not going to be an easy life, but if you do want to cook you need to give me all A'. So that was my challenge but then the chef that taught me knew that I needed that A, if not my pointer is going down. So, he gave me C, but I am not shocked because maybe I did something wrong, maybe my answer is wrong, so I requested to see my paper. So, we had to pay to see the marking, it's not easy. We had to fill some form and stuff like that but then the Chinese students got A, and then my friend (the Indian) got C! And how that is possible because she is a scholar student, she was the only one under scholarship, so she must be smart. So yeah, I actually fought for it in my head chef, the university call me in, and he was like 'look, I don't think you belong

here'. So, my head chef in that school was Indian, so he sat me and my friend down and say I don't think this school is for you because what you are aiming, you won't get it here. So, he was the one that actually open up our eyes like my friend, she is on the scholarship so she can't do anything. So, for me I still have hope, 1 1/2 year through the college in KL, my head chef got all the pamphlet because my mum don't let me go to study overseas but my head chef is the one who got me all the pamphlet from *LCB* (Le Cordon Bleu) London. He actually contacted *LCB* for me, organise the meeting with my mum and actually sit down with my mum and tell her like 'your daughter want to be a chef, so hospitality course it's not for her' and then he gave my mum the credit like I am one of the best student in here you know, but unfortunately she got C. He was the one who back me up because he knew how important this was to me, so because of him my mum actually send me to London and when I arrived in London, there were no racism at all, nobody look at your skin colour, your grades are your grades, you don't come to class you will fail, so it was fair. So that was a form of racism that I face during these thing. If you are in the hotel its worst! Because they divide the kitchen to a different kitchen, so it's actually worst. Multi-racial country there is pro and cons you know; it can create racism at work. Okay so I was big, I was really huge back then, like my body size was big and I am a big boy ish. So, when I entered my school, I automatically stand out and I always the top student in my class because I am like that. Whatever people ask me to do I will be the first want to volunteer. I will be the first one to do everything, so I had no problem with being a female and usually I always the only female and I love it! My team always like it so there is no problem with me being a female growing in the culinary industry.

Question 5: What is your strategy or effort at work as a female chef?

Answer: Oh, you always have to try different things, you always have to travel because actually by travelling is the one that can open up the chefs' mind...if the chef doesn't travel you can't really consider them chef because they don't really understand the roots. So, for me before this COVID I will be travelling maybe seven times a year, you know just to go see the culture. How they cook and I don't travel and live in hotel, I travel and live with someone you know. I will go and just knock on someone's house and say can I live with you, and the mother of the house will like you know take out

their coal and start teaching me how to grill. So, my...my way is different, so other chef I don't know...For me and my group of chefs we need to travel to actually open up to new trends new ideas, I know Internet is there but now... yes everything is on Internet, to see what is viral but for me I was French trained. So, I was both French and American trained, so two different technique and two different culture and everything is different you know, miles and kilometres even ounce and pounds, even the weight is different. So, when I moved from London to US, it was two different things so when you are French trained it's more on classic very very classic technique and cooking which teach you to go back to the roots. So, whenever I travel, I always have to find the roots of the whole country like where I need to learn this you know, or sometimes I would just go to overseas, I will go to holiday for three weeks and I will go and work somewhere for two weeks yeah...and I am that kind of backpacker. A simple as I plan my travels according to food, so for example when I was like 20, I wanted to learn how to make Pad Thai, so I went to Bangkok, I go to 5 different restaurant until I find restaurant that...can you give me a job and cook? so that's how I do it, I see I watch then I asked if I can try...then they will be like okay. I like it! Because food is based on countries and culture so if I want to learn French cuisine, I need to go to *LCB*, If I want to learn American, I will go to culinary institute of America you know, but yeah, I am more prone to French, I was learning the language learning the culture and everything.

Question 7: What about your colleague?

Answer: I only have not many, just one which is my ex-staff which just like me. But other than that, it's all male. Of course, my peer influences me, it's always influence, food is always influence. So, whenever someone come out with an idea or shared your story or share their recipe and whatever...it's like something new, it's always something new to me, from your colleague and from your peers. For me I am very choosy about my team, I want a team that productive, that's always come out with new thing. So, for my scene I am different. Since I came back from US, I have made up my mind I want to create my own team and my own scene. So, all my staff even they are 19, I find them and train them and come out with ideas. If they ask me questions, I will tell them how do you think? How do they think? I am not the type that, okay take this

and that. You need to make the brain works...so that's how my head chef did it for me when I was in the US. So that actually works very fast. Repeating things to be better and better than before, there is certain chef that only repeat but they don't improve, but my team I need them to be better and better every day.

Question 8: How do you overcome emotion challenge at work?

Answer: So, there is two worlds... you have two world of being a chef. You have your personality in the kitchen, and you have the personality outside of the kitchen...so in the kitchen like for me I learn stress control from the US, I learned it in the school, actually stress control in the kitchen as we had to be actually do psychology class. We had to take that course for three semester it was a basic psychology course. We had to learn how to take problems with solution because to us every problem has a solution. If there is no solution, there is no point stressing out about it. So, for example if a jelly doesn't set, so the whole team come and say 'Chef, jelly doesn't set, so what shall we do?' So if you can't solve that problem, so you just need to remake new one, that's it! You can't change anything. That's it. That's the answer. So, every problem must have a solution, that's the thing. So, if you can't find solution, you have to be very quick in solving problem, so if you can do that then you become less stressed. But I always stressed with simple things like using the dirty cloth to wipe the table and then wipe back the plate, *ahaaaa* (laugh) that's can me make stress! But other things like staff making mistake, I am not stress about it. So, personality, outside of the kitchen for example if it really bends the kitchen, I will be like everybody need to take breaks. So, everybody will go out and sit down just chill and have a coffee and when we said we don't talk about work. Never talk about work outside work, then you will bring stress everywhere and you are not going to be a forgiving chef. Meaning forever you will be keeping angry with your friends, with your team or with yesterdays or old problem and issue. So, I don't like that environment, so my chef taught me that way. When they are sometimes fighting or really stressed, I will put it them in my truck, go for a drive for a few minutes and have cigarettes then go back to work you know. I need to solve it fast; I can't make my staff drag the problem. I am very simple, I will tell them if you damage my food that cost 500 *ringgits*, I can forgive it! Why you can't forgive your friends who make a mistake? If you want to make it an issue, I will cut your salary then you can

pass your anger to me because it's me who cutting your salary. So, I used psychology, so they see if it's not fair. I can forgive you but if you can't forgive your friend? I am the boss here, so it depends on the head.

Question 9: How about the support from others?

Answer: Very very needed and you need to learn to throw the negative out. Because they will be some haters that will just bring you down with one word. So, you imagine if you cook for 18 hours catering and suddenly people comment about the food, so you will be like what? So, you need to learn to respond on how to fix it and just move on. It's there because I need their input, I need idea. So, every time we got a new product I will make it first, when I got the standard usually about two or three days, I will start train my staff and I will ask them which one is the best, from each of the staff and then I give chance. For each of the staff to try their own way each week, and we see which one is preferable. I am not a dictator who like 'do this!' You have to be flexible because when you are the boss, you think you have the most experience but no! This people have it in their head, they are actually the one who is giving me the drive, but they don't see it. So, the problem is they can't see them self as they are doing the same thing (in the kitchen).

Question 10: What do you think about feedback?

Answer: Very important, because I think feedback as research and development. So, when I study feedback, is what make the product. So, for example my product now different version, each version is completely different product. All because of the feedback that I get. I was very fortunate because the products became viral suddenly, so I wanted to try this, I never tried this before, none of my friends have tried this before. It's a bit crazy because I am selling my R&D product for feedback. So usually R&D is not sellable, it's free but my way is different. This time I sell my R&D products to get feedback, with so many supports from those who buy at normal price and give me the written feedback. So, within 1 to 2 months, I can finalise my product and there will be no more mistakes after this. So, this is a bit difficult to get. I never experienced this before but that's the case with me right now, so for me feedback is number one and the key. Because there is no point you think you are good. Yes, it's the same

about my skills because when I work with people from overseas, quite different because they always do evaluation every month, so we sit down and talk about it, what to improve like to lower down 'my voice', so they give me feedback. But in Malaysia, is not the case. So, I do that to my staff but if in Malaysia, you need to do once a week, it's quite sad because you need to constantly remind them because people forget.

Question 11: Any changes in you that you realize after have gone through the experiences as a female chef?

Answer: I became a morning person now! (laugh) I can't even wake up late! Actually, change me a lot, I became more responsible, very very responsible now for everything. It's weird because I was like don't care person by then, but now it's different, I became discipline, I became responsible because I have people to feed so I feel the difference. Maybe if I work with people, I will be different but because I am the boss now it's different.

Question 12: Do you achieve your goal and stay the same or has it change?

Answer: Of course, I got my goal failed and then I have to come out with a new goal. So, it's always new. Food is a trend, you always have to change you know your idea your concept and everything, you have to change constantly according to trends. So, whatever that I thought better, then to have one dream only that doesn't work. Because when I started my restaurant, I have to start six different other things because I can't focus to one. You cannot make money on one so it's different.

Question 13: How to see your future career planning?

Answer: For now, I am working from home, so I started I reset my life back because I have closed my restaurant during March 2020 when COVID starts so I took the decision to close my shop and then I am figuring out a lot of things. So suddenly I came out with this new product. Now it's been really really good on the response, so I am coming out with another product after this, so slowly I am building a product. But my goal now is product and no longer a restaurant. I think I will not have restaurant dream for the next 10 years. I have actually shut that dream down because it's impossible with COVID now. So, product is the way to go now.

Question 14: How about your gender and ethnic perception now after you have gone through your career?

Answer: It has changed a lot of course, because of my experience and what I have gone through yeah, we change a lot. There is separation in gender and race and knowledge especially, but gender and race makes a lot of difference in the culinary world here. Because now in Malaysia there is a lot of immigrants from Bangladesh Indonesia. Everyone can grab our job so it's really different. Because you can see the salary for Bangladesh it's different if you compared to local also is different. So, it creates that kind of separation especially in Malaysia because we are the melting pot, we have all sorts of races here so is based on race. So, it is a bit not good where are we heading to. Of course there is a segregation, it depends but people don't see this you know, because it is illegal but people do it. I witness so many people still do it based on race, based on everything. If Malay boy from KL it's different price (salary), if from North is different. For example, when I was asking a job after I came back from London, I had six months breaks, so I want to work in my dream hotel, so I went and they say I have to come in for two weeks probation. Which you work with no salary, to show your skills so I was excited. So, I went in with a Myanmar guy that wanted the job too. So, after two weeks, the chef called me in and they would like to offer me a job with 5 ringgit an hour to both of us. So I said why my salary is the same with this guy? see even me I start to question why I got the same Pay as this guy? You know I have a diploma; he doesn't have it and I will start questioning. I was young that time, so I am questioning the chef. So, the chef ask - where did I see myself in 5 years? So, I said I am in your shoes because I think that I am very capable of doing your job. This hotel is paying you in dollars, where you are paying me 1 dollar per hour. So sorry but my dream is to replace you and all the foreign staff that is here! So, it is not fair and he look at me and say, well we can't match your salary in the UK. And I said I am not asking you to match but 5 ringgit an hour chef? You are telling me to work two hours to buy a pack of cigarettes and he looked at me and he was like 'I did not count it like that' and I say, well, I am a human being, I need to count it like that. Then I say no I am going to reject this job, and then 5 years later, I send him a magazine that I was featured in because I was so pissed at him and he really change my life because of

that, my dream was shattered because when I came back I thought 'wow I finally can enter this hotel with pride and I have my skills now I have everything to prove' but then I receive that. Parking is more expensive! The salary doesn't even feed the minimum wages. In Malaysia if you want your staff to be loyal to you, you really need to take care of them and it's not only them but it's their family, their well-being.

And working with men, they will always think that are right but you as a head chef, you need to understand what is right and wrong. So, you need to tell them whenever they are wrong and you need to praise them when they do something right. And actually, working with men is the easiest thing because they come into the kitchen, they already know who is the boss and they don't argue. If my boss was a lady, it's up to me whether I want to work with her or not. With a female it will be a bit different. That's why you really see this, a lot of female chefs in one kitchen - usually there's only one female in one kitchen, because ladies are the hardest. I don't find it struggling because when I entered the kitchen, I set my mind that I am a man, so when you are a female chef, you can't enter the kitchen as a woman because you will be too girlish or create chances for sexual harassment. So, when you are woman in the kitchen, you have to be and act like a man. You have to talk like them, if they act harsh on you, you harsh back on them! You just have to be like them, don't take anything from them, so it's different when you set your line, then they will respect you. You maintain to be a woman in the kitchen *emmm* yes you have that female kind of touch, but attitude wise or the way you talk and everything, you must follow the rhythm of the kitchen. So, if your kitchen full with male chef, it's no way that you can be girlish every time, so people will be annoyed with you! So, you have to toughen up, you cannot cry in the kitchen, you cannot argue like a woman in the kitchen, you have to be a man! You cannot survive as a woman out there in the kitchen. No way! So, if let's say every month, you have menstrual pain, you want to take a leave, that will make the chef angry like every month? Men can say it if I know that I will get menstrual every month, why you don't just plan your off day on that day? Do you want to come to work, you give excuse you can't do it? You already know the dates so there's no reason. So, when people say to you and need to be a woman in the kitchen, I will say you will not make it. People step over you like crazy. If you imagine yourself being in the kitchen with Gordon Ramsay,



your voice *gonna* be lower than him, you can see all the female chef in the kitchen they are strong. You know cooking is a tough job, it's hands on, it's tough so it's usually for men. We can't run from. The best cook are still men because most chef are men; we cannot run from that. The reason why I survived is because I don't have a child, I am not married, I don't have a life, so if you see most of the people who are already married, they can't. If you ask me where is the female chef is because all of them already married, already have a child, most of them do online business, can't really do anything. The reason I am at this stage is because I don't have child, yeah maybe if you talk to married female chef, they will think differently, they have to be a woman in the kitchen because they have become mother. So, it's different if you speak to a single lady, it's different.

If it's in Malaysia now, every gender is having a problem, if it's about your job, hotels are closed F&B services closed, so I think it's going to be tougher for female chef because everybody is out there to find job. Even me my kitchen is all men, there is no female who send resume to me. So, I think the female chef will have a lot of problem because job is going to be very limited and then those who already married and have children. If they are single, I don't really worried because I know they can survive but those who already give birth...I am sorry maybe your career might be over after this. Hotel might not going to hire you, they might also want to hire single.

Question 15: Your concluding thoughts about a female chef career?

Answer: Don't be a chef! Haha (laugh) Well you have to have the goal of your own, that's number one. If your goal is to be the head chef somewhere, then that's all you're going to. So, for young female chef, for me you need to find what you like. For example, if you would like Italian cuisine, so you go push yourself on that cuisine, go to work in all Italian restaurant and learn everybody's technique. Focus on that. Don't be a young chef that want to do everything, now you cannot be too broad, no you really have to narrow down to one. I think after this education on culinary it's not going to be important anymore, it's experience! Yeah, for me if I can turn back the time, I won't ask my mum to spend money for my education. Seriously I will just go and work, that is what I should have do. That's why I advise to all students, I said before you want to enroll to culinary school, please work for one year. See if you like the life, you like the stress. The stress

is important, you have to love the stress because it is challenging. If you don't like it, then you can decide whether you want to proceed or not. If you go straight to culinary, I am sorry you are not going to make it. Don't waste money.

## Appendix 6 Example of NVivo Software Analysis

Second Data Analysis.nvp - NVivo 12 Plus

Name	Codes	References	Modified On	Modified By	Classification
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11(c)		22	44 10/1/2022 8:06 PM	NAHM	
12(c)		21	55 10/1/2022 8:06 PM	NAHM	
13(c)		19	27 10/1/2022 8:06 PM	NAHM	
14(c)		22	54 10/1/2022 8:06 PM	NAHM	
15(i)		20	35 18/11/2021 9:59 AM	NAHM	
16(i)		19	35 18/11/2021 9:58 AM	NAHM	
17(i)		20	37 18/11/2021 9:59 AM	NAHM	
18(i)		22	40 18/11/2021 9:48 AM	NAHM	
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3(m)		21	58 10/1/2022 7:17 PM	NAHM	
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7(m)		20	38 10/1/2022 7:17 PM	NAHM	
8(c)		21	29 23/1/2022 6:39 PM	NAHM	
9(c)		19	31 23/1/2022 6:39 PM	NAHM	

NAHM 18 Items

Second Data Analysis.nvp - NVivo 12 Plus

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Physical and Bi	15	30	11/11/2021 1:18 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Job Condition	15	42	15/11/2021 10:25 AM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Attitude	10	21	15/11/2021 10:25 AM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Early Perception	18	22	11/11/2021 1:18 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 6:39 PM	NAHM
Ethnicity	18	67	8/11/2021 12:15 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Language and Reli	10	21	11/11/2021 1:19 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Same Ethnic	7	13	11/11/2021 1:19 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM
Segregation	6	22	11/11/2021 1:19 PM	NAHM	12/1/2022 4:10 PM	NAHM
Ethnic Perception	13	28	15/11/2021 2:28 PM	NAHM	15/3/2022 11:01 AM	NAHM
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Support	0	0	11/11/2021 1:15 PM	NAHM	11/11/2021 1:15 PM	NAHM
Strategy	18	20	15/3/2022 10:44 AM	NAHM	15/3/2022 11:01 AM	NAHM
Behaviour	0	0	11/11/2021 1:13 PM	NAHM	5/5/2022 10:55 AM	NAHM
Confidence Level	18	33	8/11/2021 12:16 PM	NAHM	23/1/2022 8:53 PM	NAHM

NAHM 29 Items

## Appendix 7 Interview Guide

Career Phase	Key Themes	Scope of Questions
Early Phase (Individual Factors)	Gender belief	Gender perception towards chef career.
	Ethnicity	The factor of ethnic background towards the career.
	Performance accomplishment (experiences)	The experience that female chefs have before joining the career will determine their confidence or effort.
	Attitude	Attitude and behaviour that is important as a chef and how others attitude affect them.
	Psychological cues	The emotion and perception as a chef that might influence self-efficacy and career.
Middle Phase (Personal Skills and External Factors)	Vocational personality	The ability and skills possessed, strategy imposed to succeed in their chef career and the career interest.
	Behavioural control	Ability to control own behaviour regardless of career situation.
	Vicarious experiences	Monitoring others experiences to see career possibilities such as challenges or success.
	Subjective norms	The effect of others social behaviour within the career situation towards own behaviour.
	Verbal persuasion	Influences of responses received that affects career and self-efficacy.
Mature Phase (Career Experiences)	Career adaptability	Adaptability in chef careers towards changes, challenges, situations, and experiences.
	Life themes	Motivation on the career decision to achieve career goals and reflection of career experiences to personal life. This

		including gender, ethnic perspective and how the career experiences reflect future planning.
	Self-efficacy	The overall aspect of career experiences that influence self-efficacy as a female chef.