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Mazlan, Nur Amirah Binti Haji (2024) The Role of Gender in the Career of Female Chefs “That’s How We [Are] Biologically Born.”. In: 6th Global Conference on Women's Studies, 05-07 Jul 2024, Zurich, Switzerland. (Unpublished)

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The Role of Gender in the Career of Female Chefs:

“That’s How We [Are] Biologically Born.”

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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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

Keywords: Menstrual, narrative, physical ability, stereotypes, women