



Negotiating Gendered Workplaces: Job Crafting Strategies of Women Chefs in Male-Dominated Kitchens in the UK

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Negotiating Gendered Workplaces: Job Crafting Strategies of Women Chefs in Male-Dominated Kitchens in the UK

Purpose

This study examines why and how female chefs in professional kitchens in the UK engage in job crafting to navigate, resist and reconfigure male-defined norms that structure competence and belonging in male-dominated occupational contexts.

Methodology

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 19 female chefs across 11 professional kitchens in London, data were analysed through feminist thematic analysis to illuminate how gendered structures shape women's everyday crafting practices.

Findings

Women chefs' job crafting is not a matter of personal choice but a contextual necessity shaped by structural inequalities, including entry barriers, exclusion from informal networks and hostile workplace cultures. Three forms emerge: normative crafting, through which women perform competence on masculine terms to secure legitimacy; transformative crafting, through which women contest macho endurance by embedding care, calm and collaboration; and strategic crafting, through which women selectively navigate between conformity and resistance. Together, these practices reveal job crafting as a gendered, relational and political process that simultaneously addresses and reproduces organisational inequalities.

Originality/Value

This study makes two contributions. First, it develops three typologies of gendered job crafting, demonstrating how crafting practices initiate pathways for cultural change beyond individual outcomes. Second, it advances understanding of why women engage in job crafting in male-dominated workplaces, revealing that crafting is not a product of individual

motivation or self-determination but a contextual necessity shaped by gendered constraints, expectations and structural negotiations.

Keywords:

Job Crafting, Gender, Male-Dominated Work, Women Workers

1. Introduction

Job crafting has drawn increasing attention in management and organisation studies as a bottom-up approach to individual-led job design. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) positioned job crafting as a proactive process through which employees reshape their tasks, relationships and perceptions to create greater meaning and alignment in their work, with subsequent research demonstrating its benefits for engagement, performance and well-being (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010; Rudolph et al., 2017; Clinton et al., 2025). However, despite its promising contributions, the literature on job crafting has not yet adequately addressed why people engage in job crafting and how they do so (Niessen, Weseler and Kostova, 2016). This is because existing job crafting research remains predominantly individualistic (Zhang and Parker, 2019; Tims et al., 2012), treating crafting as a tool to address psychological needs rather than as a practice shaped by broader social structures. In doing so, it overlooks how gendered structures, inequalities and power relations fundamentally shape both the motivation to craft and the forms that crafting takes in practice (Yu and Jyawali 2021).

Considering the prevalence of male-dominated norms in professional kitchen work (Fine, 1996; White, 2006; Bourdain, 2013; Harris, 2015), it is not difficult to see why female chefs might face more structural barriers and inequalities than their male colleagues (Acker, 1990). Bringing a gender lens into job crafting research is, therefore, essential for understanding how female chefs navigate exclusion and inequality within professional kitchen environments.

In doing so, this paper makes two contributions. First, by conceptualising job crafting through the lenses of doing gender, undoing gender and gender multiplicity (West and Zimmerman, 1987, 2009; Butler, 2004; Pullen and Simpson, 2009), it proposes three

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dimensions of gendered job crafting, namely Normative, Transformative and Strategic, and demonstrates how these practices carry implications beyond individual outcomes by initiating pathways for cultural change and challenging gendered inequalities in male-dominated workplaces. Second, bringing a gender lens into job crafting research illuminates what motivates female chefs to engage in job crafting in professional kitchens (Niessen, Weseler and Kostova, 2016).

Guided by these contributions, this study pursues two interrelated objectives. Firstly, it explores how women chefs craft their roles to navigate gendered structures and inequalities in professional kitchens. Secondly, it examines why women chefs engage in job crafting within male-dominated kitchen environments.

2. Literature review

2.1 Motivation for Job crafting and gender

Understanding what motivates individuals to engage in job crafting has been a central concern in the literature. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) position job crafting as driven by desires for greater meaning, autonomy and alignment between self and job, whilst Tims et al. (2012) suggest employees craft to maintain engagement and well-being, and Lichtenthaler and Fischbach (2019) distinguish between promotion-focused crafting, aimed at achieving gains, and prevention-focused crafting, aimed at avoiding losses. However, much of this literature treats job crafting as a gender-neutral practice, overlooking how gendered occupational cultures shape why someone engages in job crafting. Whilst Buche (2023), Ji and Chen (2024) and Silapurem et al. (2024) gesture towards gender as a relevant variable, they stop short of theorising how gendered structures fundamentally shape crafting motivations and practices. Yu and Jyawali (2021) extend this further, theorising job crafting as dynamic displays of gender identities.

Understanding why women engage in job crafting differently requires situating their experiences within the broader structural barriers they face in male-dominated occupations. Drawing on Kanter's tokenism framework, Whittock (2002) demonstrates that women in male-dominated trades experience heightened visibility, polarisation and assimilation, being subjected to excessive scrutiny, sexual innuendo, boundary heightening and role entrapment,

whilst being left to manage men's comfort at the expense of their own. These experiences are compounded by hostility and devaluation (Ainsworth, Batty and Burchielli, 2014; Heilman, 2012), outsider status (Prokos and Padavic, 2002), limited career progression opportunities (Glauber, 2012) and the absence of women mentors, role models and leaders (Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry, 2023). Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry (2023) caution that framing resilience as an individual responsibility shifts attention away from the structural inequalities that produce it. Women in male-dominated work are therefore not simply navigating task demands or resource gaps but negotiating deeply entrenched gender regimes that shape every aspect of their working lives. Consequently, women's motivations for job crafting in these contexts differ fundamentally from those of their male colleagues, yet this distinction has received limited attention in the literature (Rudolph et al., 2017; Lazazzara, Tims and de Gennaro, 2019; Silapurem, Slemp and Jarden, 2024).

Building on these insights, the following sections present a gendered analysis of job crafting, illustrating how women in male-dominated occupations engage in three forms of job crafting.

2.2 Conceptualising gendered dimensions of Job Crafting

Scholars have developed various typologies of job crafting to capture the diverse ways individuals modify their work. Since Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) seminal framework of task, relational and cognitive crafting, the field has expanded to include the JD-R framework (Tims and Bakker, 2010, 2012), promotion and prevention-oriented crafting (Lichtenthaler and Fischbach, 2019), approach versus avoidance strategies (Zhang and Parker, 2019) and relational job crafting (Harju et al., 2024). These job-crafting dimensions conceptualise crafting as an outcome of individual agency and self-regulation, while overlooking how gendered power relations shape these choices. Women in male-dominated occupations may craft their jobs not as acts of individual self-regulation but as strategies of survival and legitimacy, enabling them to negotiate, resist or reconfigure gendered hierarchies at work (Yu and Jyawali, 2021). Binary frameworks can therefore barely apprehend job crafting in gendered contexts, where power relations delimit what forms of crafting to enact or even imagine.

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Building on West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of doing gender, this paper conceptualises normative job crafting as the everyday adjustments women make to meet gendered expectations and secure survival. Such practices reinforce dominant workplace scripts, from caring roles in service settings (Hall, 1993; Tibbals, 2007) to emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Bhavé and Glomb, 2009; McDowell, 2009). In male-dominated contexts, women often adopt masculinised behaviours to gain acceptance and legitimacy (Kanter, 1977; Broadbridge, 2010; Chowdhury and Gupta, 2025). This dynamic is evident in Whittock (2002), who highlights the structural barriers women face in non-traditional occupations, showing how acceptance often depends on managing men's script and performing masculinity, making inclusion contingent on continuous self-adaptation. Building on this, Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry (2023) argue that such dynamics are often reframed as resilience, masking the organisational conditions that produce them. Framing these efforts as resilience risks celebrating individual adaptation while obscuring the structural inequalities that sustain masculinised organisational norms (Witmer, 2019). Normative job crafting is therefore less a freely chosen act than a survival strategy shaped by gendered structures, one that enables inclusion while reproducing inequality (Deutsch, 2007; Pecis, 2016; Thanem and Knights, 2019).

Addressing the limits of normative job crafting, and drawing on Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) theorisation of undoing gender, transformative job crafting in this study is described as everyday practices through which workers challenge normative expectations and aim to create alternative possibilities at work. In contexts shaped by sexism and harassment, such crafting becomes a structural necessity rather than a personal choice (Foley et al., 2020; Wright, 2016). Prior studies show how women undo gender across male-dominated settings (Pruitt, 2018; Powell et al., 2009; Bishu and Heckler, 2021). Extending this, transformative job crafting can be understood as challenging masculine norms, reshaping work relations, and reworking understandings of competence, with the potential to unsettle dominant norms and open space for more inclusive forms of work. Transformative job crafting thus operates as a generative form of resistance (Gherardi, 2019), not only disrupting but also reconstructing occupational norms.

Whether job crafting takes normative or transformative forms, women in male-dominated fields often remain entangled in reproducing the gender system (Denissen, 2010). Both approaches risk reinforcing the very binaries they seek to challenge. Pullen and Simpson's

(2009) concept of gender multiplicity offers an alternative, framing gender as fluid and situational, enabling workers to shift between and combine gendered repertoires. Building on this, strategic job crafting refers to the selective blending, adopting or downplaying of gendered practices to navigate male-dominated contexts (Good, Rattan and Dweck, 2012; Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry, 2023).

In sum, job crafting theory, without a gender lens, risks reproducing the very inequalities it seeks to explain. As with resilience, it individualises structural constraints, obscuring how women navigate entrenched gender regimes (Bridges et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

This study draws on a qualitative study with female chefs working in professional kitchens in London. Data were collected through 19 interviews conducted with female chefs from 11 different restaurants. Ten of them were white, while three identified as British African, four as British Asian and two as Arabic. Their ages ranged from 21 to 48, with an average of 33 years, and their experience ranged from 2 to 12 years. The variation in participants' years of experience reflects both the snowball sampling strategy and the hierarchical structure of professional kitchens, where senior chefs typically have longer tenure than junior staff. This diversity enables a more nuanced and broader understanding of how women navigate, adapt to, and challenge male-dominated environments.

The kitchens in which these women work are characterised by a *machismo* that remains an open secret in the industry (Meloury and Signal, 2014; Steno and Friche, 2015) and is rooted in the organisational logic of the brigade system of ranks, commands and drills in which women must establish space and legitimacy (Fine, 1996; White, 2006; Druckman, 2010). For example, women who enter professional kitchens are often pushed into the margins, sometimes working in the pastry section as a gendered niche with the claim that pastry work is 'better suited' to females (Lee, 2019). This is the reason why this study focuses on female chefs working in professional kitchens in London.

The hierarchy in the kitchen is still influenced by the 'brigade de cuisine' system conceived by the famous French chef Auguste Escoffier. Four of them were head chefs, while two also owned their restaurants. One of them was the Executive Chef. Three of them were sous

chefs, and eleven of the participants were Chef de Partie. Most of them were trained before working in the kitchen, while the rest received on-the-job training. Participants either identified as head chefs or stated that their head chefs were male. Interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, with an average of 35 minutes. To protect confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Table 1 summarises the demographic information about participants.

No	Pseudo Name	Position	Age	Years of work experience	Head Chef (Female or Male)
1	Layla	Head Chef	41	10	M
2	Chole	Head Chef	38	9	F
3	Sophie	Head chef & Co-owner	42	8	F
4	Isabelle	Sous Chef	36	8	F
5	Lucy	Chef de Partie	23	6	M
6	Ella	Chef de Partie	42	5	M
7	Maya	Chef de Partie	24	5	M
8	Chloe	Executive Chef	46	11	F
9	Abeda	Sous Chef	48	12	F
10	Sophie	Chef de Partie	41	7	M
11	Zanele	Chef de Partie	24	5	M
12	Grace	Chef de Partie	36	9	M
13	Abeda	Chef de Partie	25	6	M
14	Priya	Head Chef/Owner	42	11	F
15	Emma	Chef de Partie	31	2	M
16	Anima	Chef de Partie	25	3	M
17	Ayesha	Sous Chef	29	5	M
18	Freya	Chef de Partie	42	7	M
19	Nia	Chef de Partie	24	3	M

4. Data analysis

Data were analysed using a theory-informed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), guided by the framework for job crafting and gender performativity. The combination of

thematic and narrative interpretation set a foundation for analysis. I treated existing scholarship on job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and on gender as a theoretical lens, and, moving between data and theory, allowed categories to emerge, split and recombine (Riessman, 1993; Braun and Clarke, 2021). The analysis began by familiarising myself with the data and analysing them through a coding and recoding process that constantly compared interview data and considered how women navigate gendered demands over time (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Drawing on Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) three forms of job crafting, namely task, relational and cognitive, the data were organised to identify job crafting and analyse its forms in gendered contexts.

The themes were identified according to the participants' descriptions of their work experiences. First, descriptive coding (Wolcott, 1994) was employed to identify attributes such as age, position, and years of experience. Second, after revisiting the narration a number of times and also as informed by the literature review, the female chef's responses to work were identified. Then, the first order of coding began by identifying how she engaged in job crafting, referring to the task, relation and cognitive forms. Third, instead of limiting coding as a data simplification or reduction process, the second order of coding followed an analytic process of "expanding, transforming and reconceptualising data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities" (Coffey, 1996, p. 29). During this process, possible codes, colours and numbers were manually identified, then the data categories were explored with the concepts identified in the literature review. Third, by iterating between emergent themes and the theoretical lens-gender, the themes were re-interrogated and interpreted to explore the three forms of job crafting noted above.

Table 2: Structure for analysis

Form of Job Crafting	Description	Representative quotes	Analytical Insight
Normative Job Crafting	Job crafting that aligns with the masculine culture of the kitchen, where values such as toughness, speed, long hours and endurance are celebrated; reproduces dominant occupational norms.	<i>"In this kitchen you keep your head down, work hard and don't make a fuss—that's how you last. If you can't handle the pace, you don't belong here."</i> (Adoja, Head Chef)	This form of crafting reflects 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987)
Transformative Job Crafting	Job crafting that challenges and seek to alter masculine-engineered roles; aims not just to resist but to reshape oppressive structures.	<i>"When I first come in, it was all shoutin' and piss-take, lads sayin' I don't belong on the hot section. I weren't havin' it, I weren't just tryin' to prove I can lift heavy, I made sure we shared the jobs"</i>	Crafting here embodies 'undoing gender' (Butler, 1990, 2004; Deutsch, 2007; Pruitt, 2018)

		<i>proper, not just blokes on knives and women stuck on plating and pastry. Took a bit, but it eased up, people started showin' respect, and the kitchen felt more like a place I actually wanted to graft."</i> (Maria, Sous Chef)	
Strategic Job Crafting	Job crafting that fluidly combines or downplays masculine, feminine and ungended practices; adaptive and context-sensitive, oriented to survival and agency.	<i>"Some days I just try to fit in, swear and laugh with the lads, 'cause if I don't, they'll be on me. Other days I keep me head down, don't fancy hearing the crap. It depends how the day goes. End of it, I'm a chef, I'm here to cook, not make drama, just do good food, keep me head straight, and make sure the customers leave happy."</i> (Mei, Chef de Partie)	'Gender multiplicity' (Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Connell, 2010; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2014)

5. Findings

This section examines how female chefs craft their work in the gendered terrain of professional kitchens. The findings reveal that job crafting is never a neutral act of self-expression but rather a political negotiation shaped by entrenched gendered power relations. The inequalities that structure women chefs' working lives in this study are multiple and interconnected, including entry barriers rooted in physical stereotyping and assumptions of incompetence, the undervaluation and misattribution of women's creative contributions, exclusion from informal networks where rotas, shifts and professional opportunities are decided, preferential treatment of male colleagues in terms of recognition and advancement, and the pervasive presence of a hostile, macho workplace culture that demands bodily endurance as the price of belonging. These inequalities do not operate in isolation but cumulatively constrain women's agency, shaping not only what they do at work but how, when and why they craft their jobs. Three forms of job crafting emerge from the analysis, namely normative, transformative and strategic, each illustrating how women navigate the masculine ethos of the brigade, negotiate recognition and create spaces of resistance and belonging whilst simultaneously addressing these entrenched inequalities.

Normative Job Crafting

Normative job crafting refers to the mundane manoeuvres through which women accommodate the masculinised logics of the brigade to remain present, to learn and to endure. These activities include changes in the task, relational or cognitive dimensions of a

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3 job, subtle shifts in what gets done, how interactions unfold and how the work is made sense
4 of, so that credibility is earned and sanctions are avoided.
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8 "When I first walked into the kitchen, I knew I had to prove myself twice
9 over. So I took the heavy jobs — lifting stockpots, lifting sacks of flour,
10 running trays through the heat of service. I never wanted anyone to think
11 I needed special treatment" (Abeda, Sous Chef).
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17 Abeda's account illustrates how strength is the currency the brigade trusts. By taking the
18 hardest tasks, she buys legitimacy and protection from the assumption that women cannot
19 cope, directly addressing the entry barrier of physical stereotyping.
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23 "In kitchens, the rule was simple: if you couldn't take it, you didn't
24 belong. I moved faster, became louder and put myself on the hot section.
25 I continued to do what was needed, which kept me safe from being
26 pushed out" (Kesia, Chef de Partie).
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32 Kesia's crafting mixes task and relational moves, mirroring the brigade's pace and affect to
33 avoid being marked as weak or difficult.
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37 "Creating something new keeps customers happy and the business
38 thriving, that's the fun part. I've learned that pushing ideas can backfire,
39 seen as overstepping, so I work in the boundaries, finding little spaces
40 to keep the cooking interesting" (Priya, Chef de Partie).
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46 Priya faces a classic double bind: taking initiative risks criticism whilst playing safe loses
47 recognition. She reframes compliance as a shield, a form of cognitive crafting that responds
48 to the inequality of creative misattribution, where ideas generated by women are absorbed
49 into the collective without acknowledgement.
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54 Relational crafting is negotiated not just through hard work but through informal spaces
55 where trust and tomorrow's rota are quietly decided (Kanter, 1977).
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"I joined the after-shift drinks even when I was shattered. That's where you hear what the sous really thinks and where tomorrow's rota gets quietly negotiated. If you miss it, you're out of the loop" (Ayesha, Sous Chef).

"It's not just the work; it's the in-between moments, a quick chat during prep, a laugh after service, that builds trust and keeps you on the team" (Freya, Chef de Partie).

Both Ayesha and Freya's accounts reveal how exclusion from informal networks operates as a concrete inequality in professional kitchens, where rotas, favours and professional opportunities are decided outside formal working hours. Their relational crafting directly addresses this inequality by ensuring they remain visible and connected in the spaces where power is quietly exercised.

Taken together, these accounts show a clear pattern of normative job crafting, resembling the aligning job crafting strategy (Harju et al., 2024) yet illuminating its gendered rationale further. Whilst these choices help women maintain their station, receive training and secure good shifts, they carry significant costs: long hours become the primary measure of merit and recognition for ideas often remains with senior male staff. Normative job crafting thus directly addresses entry barriers and physical stereotyping by demonstrating competence on masculine terms, yet does so at the cost of reproducing the very inequalities it navigates, leaving the underlying gendered structure of the kitchen largely intact. I now turn to the shift from accommodation to contestation through transformative job crafting.

Transformative Job Crafting

In contrast to normative crafting which operates through accommodation, transformative job crafting operates through active resistance and reconfiguration of the masculine scripts that structure kitchen work, not necessarily through overt aggression or open resistance but by reimagining the unmanageable aspects of kitchen work through relational sensitivity, care and collaboration.

"I tell my junior chefs that the stupid game of silent endurance, masking pain and wearing injury as a badge, is over: we're not here to destroy our

bodies for the sake of proving a point. It's too much, we must say no"
(Chloe, Executive Chef).

"The noise gets inside your head. Some say you need to be harder, louder, meaner to survive. I don't. I won't wreck my body to prove I belong. We lift together or we don't lift. When someone barks in my face, I say, Use my name. Speak clearly. We're cooking, not fighting. We can be fast without shouting; we can be strong without hurting each other. I go home tired, but not broken" (Ella, Chef de Partie).

Chloe and Ella directly challenge the hostile workplace culture that demands bodily sacrifice and emotional suppression as the price of professional recognition, addressing one of the most pervasive inequalities in professional kitchens. By advocating for calm communication and the right to say no, they reframe authority as collaborative and relational rather than aggressive and hierarchical.

"When the kitchen's calm, no shouting, no chaos, you can breathe. It feels lighter, almost like a weight's been lifted, and in that moment, ideas just come. You see the ingredients differently, and suddenly you're creating without even thinking about it" (Layla, Head Chef).

Layla's account shows how transformative crafting creates space not only for physical well-being but for creative flourishing, directly challenging the devaluation of women's contributions in professional kitchens. These narratives unsettle the masculinist fiction of the chef as the solitary, tempestuous genius, reconfiguring authority as collective and relational, resonating with feminist theorising that positions attentiveness, collaboration and care as alternative epistemologies of work (Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem, 2017; Gherardi, 2019).

In these examples, unlike normative crafting, which responds to entry barriers, transformative crafting directly challenges the hostile workplace culture that demands endurance and aggression as the markers of professional competence (Butler, 2004). By refusing to validate macho ideals, advocating for sustainable working practices and reframing authority as collective and relational, women chefs do not merely adjust their

individual experience of work but begin to reshape the cultural norms that sustain gendered inequality in professional kitchens.

Strategic Job Crafting

Here, the emphasis is not only on resisting the macho order in the kitchen but also on repositioning themselves in relation to it, negotiating shifts, cultivating alliances and making deliberate choices about where and how to invest their labour.

"I've worked six or seven years in the kitchen and it's built my confidence.

I don't think of myself as a woman or a man; I just know I'm good at what I do" (Layla, Head Chef).

This echoes Kelan's (2010) account of women who adopt a gender-neutral professional stance to sidestep the limiting scripts attached to both femininity and masculinity.

"Some people genuinely want to help you and that's very different from those who are trying to undermine you. When it's real support, you don't have to keep saying no" (Ella, Chef de Partie).

Ella's account highlights the relational discernment that Martin (2003) identifies as central to the ongoing doing and undoing of gender at work, distinguishing between support that empowers and support that controls.

"After a few years on the line, I realised that proving myself by working endless doubles was breaking me down. My back hurt, my hands never healed and I was constantly exhausted. At first, I thought that was just the price you pay to be taken seriously. But over time, I started to be more deliberate: I negotiated shifts that gave me a day to recover, I rotated sections to protect my body and I learned to say no when the workload crossed a line. For me, that wasn't weakness — it was strategy. If you want to stay in this profession, you need to be strong. Otherwise, the kitchen eats you alive" (Sophie, Head Chef).

Sophie's account exemplifies situated practical wisdom (Gherardi, 2019), a knowing-in-practice attentive to context, power and future trajectories. Her deliberate negotiation of shifts and workload directly addresses the inequality of preferential treatment, whereby male colleagues are rarely required to prove physical endurance as the price of professional advancement, whilst women are expected to sacrifice their bodies simply to be taken seriously.

"In the kitchen, the guys talk about girls, who they're dating, even what happened the night before. I'm in the conversation, but it doesn't get to me. I just pick up on the funny side, ignore the rest and use it to keep the vibe light so the shift feels easier" (Isabelle, Sous Chef).

Isabelle's account illustrates how strategic manoeuvring allows her to remain part of the social fabric without being consumed by its gendered undertones, neither fully conforming nor fully withdrawing. Such practices resonate with feminist work on everyday resistance (Hemmings, 2012; Fotaki, Metcalfe and Harding, 2014; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019).

What emerges across these narratives is not a fixed rejection of gendered scripts but a fluid movement across feminine, masculine and ungendered positions depending on context and embodied experience. Strategic job crafting thus addresses a distinct dimension of workplace inequality, namely social exclusion and the preferential treatment of male colleagues in informal networks, shift allocations and professional advancement. By navigating selectively, women chefs neither fully conform nor fully resist but carve out a sustainable presence in an environment that was not designed to include them.

Taken together, the three forms of job crafting illuminate how women chefs engage with a complex, layered architecture of gendered inequality, from entry barriers and physical stereotyping to hostile workplace cultures and exclusion from informal power structures.

6. Discussion

This article set out to examine how female chefs in London's professional kitchens engage in job crafting within a deeply masculinised occupational context. Similar to earlier studies of women in masculinised occupations (Kanter, 1977; Denissen, 2010; Pecis, 2016; Whittock, 2002), women chefs craft their jobs not out of personal preference or proactive

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self-improvement but out of structural necessity. They lift heavy stockpots to prove they belong, show up to after-shift drinks when exhausted to stay in the loop on rotas, frame their creative contributions as helpfulness rather than authorship to avoid being seen as overstepping, and negotiate shifts around their physical wellbeing to sustain careers that would otherwise consume them. These are not individual choices freely made but structurally conditioned responses to a brigade culture that demands bodily endurance, emotional toughness and unquestioning compliance as the price of professional recognition (Kanter, 1977; Whittock, 2002; Acker, 1990). Yet, the findings show women chefs do not simply endure. Some refuse to validate macho endurance, insist on being addressed by name, advocate for lifting together rather than injury alone and reframe authority as calm and collaborative rather than aggressive and hierarchical. Others move fluidly between conformity and resistance, selectively navigating masculine culture to carve out a sustainable professional presence on their own terms (Pullen and Simpson, 2009; Kelan, 2010).

Together, these findings show that job crafting in gendered workplaces is not a neutral act of self-improvement but a political practice of survival, resistance and recalibration (Gherardi, 2019; Yu and Jyawali, 2021; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). This study contributes by illuminating the diverse ways women respond through job crafting, extending research beyond the rational, individualised models that dominate the literature (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012; Rudolph et al., 2017; Lazazzara, Tims and de Gennaro, 2019).

Contribution 1: Three Forms of Gendered Job Crafting: Normative, Transformative and Strategic Forms

Existing literature treats crafting as a product of individual agency and self-regulation (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001; Tims and Bakker, 2010), overlooking how gendered power relations shape what forms of crafting are available, possible or even imaginable. This study shows that in masculinised workplaces, job crafting is structurally constrained by gendered structures (Acker, 1990), and their responses are organised around three gendered dimensions of job crafting practices.

First, female chefs engage in normative job crafting by aligning with masculine norms to secure acceptance. This includes suppressing emotion, tolerating aggressive behaviours, and performing toughness to signal competence, while managing relationships to maintain

cohesion. Yet, these practices are compliance-oriented (Kanter, 1977; Whittock, 2002). Whittock (2002) demonstrates precisely what this looks like in practice: women are left to make the first move in gaining acceptance, managing men's comfort at the expense of their own and performing masculinity simply to be tolerated rather than welcomed, reflecting not autonomous choice but structural compulsion where the price of inclusion is continuous self-adaptation. Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry (2023) extend this insight further, cautioning that framing such efforts as resilience risks celebrating individual adaptation whilst obscuring the structural dysfunction that makes normative crafting necessary and sustains masculinised organisational norms (Witmer, 2019). This resonates with Pecis's (2016) findings that women in male-dominated settings perform masculinity as a condition of inclusion and with Denissen's (2010) observation that women remain entangled in reproducing the gender system even as they seek to navigate it. Crucially, normative crafting is not passive compliance but a calculated strategy (Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2003) that enables access and recognition in the short term, even as it reproduces the very inequalities it seeks to navigate, revealing that job crafting in gendered workplaces cannot be understood as freely chosen proactive behaviour but must be analysed as a structurally conditioned response to inequality (Kelan, 2010; Martin, 2003; Gherardi, 1994).

Second, transformative job crafting extends beyond existing studies of women contesting male norms (Pruitt, 2018; Powell et al., 2009) by actively embedding alternative values, namely care, calm and collaboration, into the fabric of kitchen work. In Butler's (2004) terms, these are acts of undoing gender that challenge the bodily acts through which the ideal chef performs. What is significant is that transformative crafting operates not merely as an individual act of resistance but as a collective and relational practice, as evidenced through Chloe's advocacy for collective lifting, Ella's insistence on respectful communication and Layla's reframing of kitchen authority as calm and creative, enacting what Gherardi (2019) calls generative resistance, a practice that does not simply oppose the dominant order but begins to create an alternative one.

Third, strategic job crafting advances Pullen and Simpson's (2009) concept of gender multiplicity by showing how women move fluidly across feminine, masculine and ungended positions depending on context. This resonates with Kelan's (2010) account of women adopting a gender-neutral professional stance and with Good, Rattan and Dweck's (2012) argument that women's retention in male-dominated domains relies fundamentally

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on sustaining a sense of belonging. Strategic crafting therefore reveals a dimension of job crafting that existing typologies have not theorised, namely the capacity to navigate gendered structures with an eye to longer-term sustainability, drawing on situated practical wisdom (Gherardi, 2019) that is simultaneously attentive to context, power and future trajectories.

Together, these three dimensions initiate pathways for cultural change, gradually loosening the grip of masculine logic (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019) and creating new relational norms around authority, strength and collaboration (Bouckennooghe et al., 2023; Harju et al., 2024). This is achieved through three cumulative processes. First, women chefs denaturalise masculine norms by demonstrating that kitchens can function effectively without aggression, challenging the deeply embedded assumption that culinary excellence requires bodily sacrifice (Acker, 1990; Witmer, 2019). Second, they create alternative relational scripts by modelling collaborative authority and sustainable working practices, offering junior chefs a different template for what professional kitchen work looks like (Bouckennooghe et al., 2023; Harju et al., 2024). Third, they redefine professional competence by insisting that creativity, care and wellbeing are strengths that enhance kitchen performance rather than weaknesses that undermine it (Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem, 2017; Gherardi, 2019). Over time, these acts accumulate into a reshaping of occupational norms, demonstrating that job crafting is not merely an individuated phenomenon of personal adjustment but a collectively and politically significant practice that carries genuine transformative potential for gendered workplaces (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Walk and Handy, 2018; Gherardi, 2019).

Contribution 2: Structural Necessity, Gender Inequality and the Motivation for Job Crafting

This study's second contribution is to illuminate why women engage in job crafting in male-dominated workplaces. Existing research theorises the motivation for job crafting in individualistic terms, as a product of self-determination (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), job satisfaction and engagement (Tims, Bakker and Derks, 2012), career growth (Masood et al., 2022), self-protection (Lin and Meng, 2024) and identity fit (Berg, Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2010), overlooking how structural conditions shape and constrain the motivations for job crafting in gendered work contexts.

This study demonstrates that for women chefs, job crafting is a contextual necessity shaped by three interlocking dimensions of gendered constraint. First, physical constraints, namely

the expectation to prove bodily competence on masculine terms simply to be taken seriously as legitimate kitchen workers. Second, relational expectations, namely the pressure to manage men's comfort at the expense of their own, to make the first move in gaining acceptance and to frame creative contributions as service rather than claiming authorship (Whittock, 2002; Kanter, 1977). Third, structural negotiations, namely, navigating informal power structures where rotas, training and shift allocations are decided outside formal working hours. In this context, crafting is not a proactive choice freely made but a survival strategy demanded by structural conditions (Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry, 2023; Yu and Jyawali, 2021).

Taken together, understanding why women craft requires recognising that their motivation operates on two simultaneous levels. At one level, women are motivated to craft as a coping mechanism, managing the immediate demands of a hostile work environment by absorbing the credibility tax of heavy lifting, showing up in informal spaces of power and framing creativity as helpfulness rather than authorship (Denissen, 2010; Kanter, 1977). These are not acts of agency in any straightforward sense but acts of endurance, motivated by the need to remain present in an environment where belonging must be continuously earned (Whittock, 2002; Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry, 2023). At another level, women are simultaneously motivated to craft as a site of resistance, seeking to renegotiate the gendered terms of kitchen work that constrain them (Gherardi, 2019; Fotaki and Pullen, 2023). When Ella insists on being addressed by name, when Chloe advocates for working together, and when Sophie negotiates shifts around her physical well-being, these are not merely personal adjustments but acts motivated by the desire to redefine what kitchen work demands of those who do it. Crucially, these acts of resistance move away from individualising experiences of inequality towards a more collective renegotiation of gendered norms (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor and Tienari, 2019). This distinction between coping and resisting is crucial: normative crafting tends towards coping, transformative crafting tends towards resistance and strategic crafting moves between both depending on context and consequence (Denissen, 2010; Kelan, 2010). Crucially, both functions are motivated not by individual preference but by the structural conditions of gendered kitchen work. This reveals job crafting as a situated, embodied, and politically significant understanding of why women engage in job crafting in male-dominated workplaces (Yu and Jyawali, 2021; Bridges, Wulff and Bamberry, 2023).

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Taken together, these two contributions reposition job crafting as a deeply gendered and political practice through which women simultaneously cope with, resist and begin to unsettle the gendered structures that would otherwise constrain them, advancing a more situated, embodied and gendered understanding of job crafting with implications for both theory and organisational practice.

7. Limitations and future research

Like all studies, this study is also marked by limitations that open interesting avenues for future research. In this paper, the conceptualisation of normative, transformative and strategic job crafting is grounded in rich qualitative narratives collected from London’s professional kitchens. Comparative studies across other male-dominated fields, such as finance, construction or technology, could examine how different occupational cultures shape the possibilities and limits of job crafting. Equally, while this article privileges gender as its primary analytic lens, it is recognised that job crafting opportunities are also shaped by intersections with race, class, age, sexuality and migration status. Intersectional approaches could reveal how multiple axes of inequality contour the forms and possibilities of job crafting. Whilst this study centres on individual accounts, it leaves open the question of how job crafting operates as a collective practice.

8. Conclusion:

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances job crafting research by situating it firmly in gendered organisational contexts, extending the concept beyond its individualistic, rationalist origins to reveal its embeddedness in power relations, embodied experiences and institutional logics (Acker, 1990). Clearly, job crafting, when viewed through a gender lens, is not just about reshaping work but about challenging the gendered inequalities that structure how work is organised and experienced.

The practical implications are equally significant. If job crafting is a feminist politics of work, organisations must recognise everyday crafting not as personal adjustment but as institutional labour that can reproduce or challenge inequality. In professional kitchens, this requires questioning macho endurance cultures, valuing collaboration and care as markers of competence and enabling careers that do not compromise health or dignity. More broadly,

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3 leaders and policymakers should support job crafting that protects well-being, reframes
4 creativity and fosters solidarity, creating more inclusive and sustainable workplaces.
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