

Julie Lin

Glasgow-based chef and owner of Malaysian street-food restaurant Julie's Kopitiam

‘There is a culture of machismo and fear that still exists in the industry – that is normalised. I want to talk about it.’

The week prior to our interview, Julie Lin tells me, she hailed a cab and was picked up by a chatty 22-year-old who still lived with his Indian family. As he drove her across Glasgow, the young cabbie told her how, during the course of lockdown, he had learnt to cook with his mum. ‘He said his mother had this amazing wealth of knowledge, and that it did his head in that his dad did nothing in the kitchen. He realised that, going forward, he needed to be the change.’

‘It was like I’d got into a cab with an angel,’ Lin continues, laughing delightedly; for this vignette of a Glaswegian cab driver in many ways sums up her feelings around cooking and gender. Though she owes her own culinary skills to her mother – a Malaysian woman who emigrated by herself to

Scotland to work as a nurse in the 1970s, and cooked to feel connected to her homeland – her ambition going forward is to ‘get to the point where gender doesn’t matter. I am very happy to celebrate the skills women have handed down over the centuries; the maternal cooking that runs through so many societies; but I think if we are going to get rid of the more negative ideas around cooking and restaurants and gender, we need to ultimately disentangle the two.’

For a woman who has made her name cooking the homely Malaysian food of her mum and grandmother, and who has only ever worked under female chefs, this might seem surprising. Yet she is committed to ensuring anyone who wants to cook like she does, in the style of restaurant she

