

**A Cultural Framework of Lifestyle: Lived Meanings of Women's Everyday  
Consumption**

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**Thesis submitted to Lancaster University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(PhD)**

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## **Declaration**

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# **Cultural Framework of Lifestyle: Lived Meanings of Women's Everyday Consumption**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates women consumer's lifestyle through the meanings they give to their everyday consumption experience from an interpretivist researcher point of view. Nine women life stories are presented which were collected through in-depth phenomenological interviews. The emic cultural approach taken in conducting this research has uncovered rich and contextualised account of women's consumption experienced which elucidates the nuanced differences in women's lifestyle, they are Hands on Lifestyle, , Idealistic Lifestyle, Pragmatic Lifestyle, Prudent Lifestyle, Climber Lifestyle, Entrepreneur Lifestyle, Survivor Lifestyle, Easygoing Lifestyle and Devoted Lifestyle. These various genres of lifestyle reflect each woman's self-identity in relation to their existential concerns and social contexts. This is in stark contrast with many studies on (married) women lifestyle in consumer research which portrays women's lifestyle as only concentrating on the problematic concern of 'juggling' between their work and family (Casey & Martens, 2007; Thompson, 1996). This study has been able to empirically illustrate lifestyle as a concept and space for consumer's to construct their self-identity as was very much suggested conceptually in the consumer research literature (Featherstone, 2007 [1991]; Giddens, 1991; Slater, 1997). The study saw women consumer's creatively construct their identity by negotiating their way in the consumer

culture, for example consumption and non-consumption was important to the sense of being, life themes were significantly driving these women's construction of lifestyle and women were reflexively using lifestyle as a dynamic space in an effort to realize their personal goal for and also in relations to their significant others.

Three snapshots of lifestyle emerged from this study which further categorises these women's different genres of lifestyle into three patterns, they are Adapting Family into Lifestyle, Changing Lifestyle to fit Family's and Settled Lifestyle. These lifestyle snapshots demonstrate women's different dimensions of 'caring self' (Gilligan, 1982; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Stern, 1990) which differs from the unilateral information that currently informs the consumer literature (Casey & Martens, 2007; Thompson, 1996) with regard to this feminine identity. In addition the cultural framework established through this women's account which are the Caring Framework, Cultivating Piety Framework and Bilateralism Framework, further shed light on the contextual differences that may inform and influence consumer's consumption practice. This reinforces the need for consumer researchers to move away from the straitjacket of conducting lifestyle research using the 'behaviourist' or the 'universalist' model that is unable to capture the nuance differences underlying consumer's action. It also goes to show that by taking an emic approach; looking from the inside rather than relying on using universalise models to establish lifestyle framework in investigating consumer's lifestyle, contributes to much more thicker insights on the knowledge about consumer's consumption practices. Equally important is that this lifestyle studies have illuminated that being women and practicing the same religion doesn't mean applying the same monolithic consumption practices, instead these women consumers carry out creolised consumption practices - they carefully appropriate and select suitable consumption by juxtaposing from the traditional and modern, local and foreign sources in their daily lives to articulate their self-identities.

## Chapter 1: Background of the study

*Tell me your secrets and ask me your questions  
Oh, let's go back to the start  
Running in circles, coming up tails  
Heads on a science apart*

*Nobody said it was easy  
It's such a shame for us to part  
Nobody said it was easy  
No one ever said it would be this hard  
Oh, take me back to the start*

**Coldplay- 'The Scientist'**

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of the study. Attention is first focused on the overview of the consumer research lifestyle which reflects the gaps that needs to be addressed. Second is the introduction of the research questions and objectives. This is followed by the research design and finally the structure of the thesis is presented.

## 2.0 Overview of the consumer lifestyle research

Lifestyle analysis, a study of consumption patterns within consumer research, has received much attention in the literature for the purpose of market segmentation (e.g. S. Douglas & Urban, 1977; Kahle, 2000; Kahle & L., 1997; Rokeach, 1973; Rose & Shoham, 2000; Schwartz, 1992, , 1994). These research proliferated by the heightened consumerism during the post-Fordism era especially during the middle 1970's well towards 1980's, 1990's and are still being carried out today (e.g. Lawson & Todd, 2002; Vyncke, 2002; Zukin & Maguire, 2004) has indeed contributed insights into characteristics of consumption patterns of societies across all populations. However several issues will be raised points to the gap with regards to examining lifestyle in consumer research.

Firstly, most of the researches examining consumer lifestyle were carried out mainly by applying either; the 'behaviorist' model (conceptualizes consumption pattern as a buying behavior, consumers buying the same product will be categorized under the same lifestyle) (e.g. S. Douglas & Urban, 1977; Gunter & Furnham, 1992; Vyncke, 2002) or the 'universalist' model (conceptualizes consumption pattern as universal values ranking, consumers having the same values will be categorized under the same lifestyle) (e.g. Kahle, 2000; Rose & Shoham, 2000; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). This conceptualization grounded in psychology is unable to uncover differences in consumption patterns because the focused on universality and applicability of the frameworks abstracts away much of the cultural content which may be present in consumer's consumption (Craig & Douglas,

2006; Holt, 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002). Hence scholars have called for lifestyle research to be conducted using cultural analysis or the emic approach in order to explicate the layers of meaning that underlies consumer's action (Holt, 1994, , 1997; Thompson & Troester, 2002). This approach it is argued would capture the nuance differences and account for the contextual background structuring consumer's consumption pattern and thus producing a more meaningful lifestyle framework. Despite these calls, lifestyle research conducted using the emic cultural approach is still very limited when compared with other topics of consumer research conducted using the same approach (e.g. Cotte & Ratneshwar, 2003; Thompson, 2005).

Secondly, lifestyle research conducted in the non-Western context particularly the Southeast Asian societies is currently underrepresented. Most of the studies done in this region are usually tagged onto other Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan or China with totally different socio-historical context (e.g. economic, cultural, and ethnic) (Hashim & Woodruffe-Burton, 2006; Wong, 2007; Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010). Moreover most of the consumer lifestyle studies are conducted borrowing the typologies from the West (e.g. Tai & Tam, 1996).

Third, unlike the field of sociology which has advanced much knowledge with regards to women's life (e.g. Garey, 1999; Hattery, 2001), consumer researchers has particularly been slow in exploring consumer lifestyle and gender. Generally studies on (married) women's lifestyle in consumer research still portrays women's life as revolving around competing ideals of work and family (Casey & Martens, 2007; Thompson, 1996;

Thompson et al., 1990). Much of what we know about women consumers' lifestyle is still confined to the 'juggling lifestyle' which is portrayed as a problematic situation for women. Moreover the 'caring framework' (Thompson, 1996) that defines the feminine identity, is dominated by a unilateral understanding whereby women consumers' are seen as being in a conflict between balancing their own 'self indulgence' with their significant other's (e.g. parents, children or spouse) need for care.

### **3.0 Research question and objectives**

This thesis starting point in the quest to contribute to the understandings of lifestyle within consumer research departs from a question that asks 'What are (Malay) women consumer's lifestyles frameworks?

The objectives of the study following this research question are;

- To investigate consumer lifestyle through consumer's lived experience of everyday consumption
- To investigate the cultural framework or model that informs and influence women's lifestyle
- To investigate the nature of lifestyle as the site for consumer's identity project

## **4.0 Research Design**

I conduct this research from a theoretical stance of an interpretivist researcher with the worldview of a social constructionist to seek insights into Malay women's lifestyle phenomena through the meanings women give their everyday consumption experiences. Two crucial factors underlie this study, firstly, lifestyle is conceptualized as constructed by meaningful pattern of consumption articulated from women's life stories (see Section 2.5), secondly, culture is viewed as a system of meanings that informs as well as influences consumer's consumption practices (discussed in Section 3.3.1). Existential phenomenology as a methodology (see Chapter 5) was adopted in this study which focused on the lived experiences of women's consumption with phenomenological interviewing as a method to collect participant's life stories and phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis to interpret and analyse the data.

## **5.0 Structure of the thesis**

**Chapter 2** This Chapter discusses an overview of the lifestyle concept. It examines the literature relating to lifestyle from the sociological and consumer research perspectives. It brings into focus lifestyle as an important concept and space for the construction of self identity. Next it examines lifestyle from the perspective of consumer research; the relations between consumer culture and lifestyle are examined and consumption as an important resource for creating and sustaining lifestyle is identified. It further introduced the conceptualization of lifestyle that is adopted by the study at hand.

**Chapter 3** This Chapter offers discussion on the importance and application of the cultural concept in the field consumer research. The overview of the cultural concept is presented. This is followed by a review of the etic and emic cultural approaches utilized in consumer research with specific focused on the Lifestyle researches conducted using these approaches. The cognitive or contemporary cultural framework that is adopted by the study is further reviewed. As the focused of the study is on women's lifestyle, discussion is then focused on gendered consumption meanings and lifestyle. Finally the socially constructed self conception which are unique to the female experience –the 'ethics of care' are identified and the various women's experienced relating to work and family are discussed in relation to this.

**Chapter 4** In this Chapter an overview of Malaysia as a country is first offered. This is followed by discussions of the country's socio-cultural and economic progress in relation to gender such as economic development, participation in employment and the state's modernization project. Next, two important identity characteristics of the Malays in Malaysia –Islam and *adat* are discussed. Among the focus of discussion are on the historical path and appropriation of Islam in Malaysia and also the combination of *adat* and Islam which coexist as a dual structural principle guiding the social relations of the Malay society . Further to this the 'bilateralism framework' a specific form of *adat* which is argued to give prominence and autonomy to Malay women and in part forms the basis of the social construction and conceptualization of gender relationships are discussed. Finally the developments of Islam in contemporary Malaysia are reviewed. The

developments of Islamization (Islamic revivalism) is further discussed focusing on issues (re)presenting and (re)constructing the Malay Muslim womanhood (e.g. effects of Islamization on women's values and self conception, participation in intellectual Islamic activities and practices such as veiling and attending religious classes).

**Chapter 5** This Chapter presents a discussion on the research process and design of the study at hand. An overview of the philosophical and theoretical paradigm issues is first reviewed. This is followed by a discussion of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical position underpinning with the subject of the researcher's interpretation identified. Next, discussion is on the phenomenology methodology which looks at the specific strand of phenomenology adopted – existential phenomenology. This is then followed by a review on the methods applied in conducting the study such as the sample selection, the interview and data analysis.

**Chapter 6** This Chapter represents the nine lifestyles of women consumers I interviewed based on their interviews transcripts. Their lifestyles are revealed through their everyday consumption life stories which offer insights into the meaningful consumption experiences revolving around their everyday life and also the contextual background underlying these experiences. The lifestyle themes labelled for these women's lifestyle reflects the emergent themes surfacing from these women's own construction and point of view, similar to the style of (Thompson & Troester, 2002) and (Holt, 1994, , 1997). Therefore these women's lifestyle are articulated and revealed

through the stories they tell about their consumption experiences. It represents an emic meaning of women's lifestyle; women's own voice of what their lifestyle is about.

**Chapter 7** This Chapter presents a cross analysis of the emergent life themes/life goals of the nine women consumers as revealed throughout their life story. Life themes/life goals are a source of stress or concern in these women's life which appears time and time again in their life stories which these women attempts to resolve or achieve. They are rooted from their existing life world conditions which saw women creating strategies in order to resolve or overcome the existential theme which are of concerned to them in the current moment.

**Chapter 8** This chapter discusses the emergent lifestyle and life themes that emerged in the findings of this study and relates it to the relevant theories. First the genres of lifestyle that emerged as a result of looking at consumption meanings are presented. Next discussion focuses on how the findings capture lifestyle as concept and space for constructing women's self- identity. Following this is the discussion on the three lifestyle pattern that emerged from the study which viewed like a snapshot or picture of life. Finally the life theme or goals that emerged during the life stories of the women consumer's are then discussed.

**Chapter 9** In this chapter the 'cultural framework' or 'meaning systems' that the women consumers draw from to make sense, interpret and guide their everyday consumption and lifestyle are examined across life stories. Emergent cultural themes

under these cultural frameworks are then presented based on these women's own lived experienced of their everyday consumption stories and discussed in relation to the cultural frameworks outlined in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively.

**Chapter 10** This chapter presents the study's empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge. It also presents a discussion on the directions of future research.

## Chapter 2: Making Sense of Lifestyle

*'Lifestyle is currently one of the abused words of the English language. Social scientist, journalist and laymen use it to refer to almost anything of interest, be it fashion, Zen Buddhism or French cooking..'*

**(Sobel, 1981)**

*'At the same time the term lifestyle became part of our popular and professional idiom, its conceptual and operational imprecision was compounded by a semantic maze ....'*

**(Anderson & Golden, 1984)**

### 2.0 Introduction

This Chapter discusses an overview of the lifestyle concept. It examines the literature relating to lifestyle from the sociological and consumer research perspectives. It brings into focus lifestyle as an important concept and space for the construction of self identity. Next it examines lifestyle from the perspective of consumer research; the relations between consumer culture and lifestyle are examined and consumption as an important resource for creating and sustaining lifestyle is identified. It further introduced the conceptualization of lifestyle that is adopted by the study at hand.

## 2.1 Overview of the Lifestyle Concept

The two opening quotes summarize just how ambiguous the term lifestyle can be. The general definition of lifestyle understood as ‘*any distinctive and therefore recognizable mode of living*’ (S. Miles, 2000, , 2002; Sobel, 1981) and that these ‘style’ of living are achievable through consumption (Jagose, 2003) could be argued as one factor easing lifestyle widely into popular, layman and academic usage.

Within marketing, advertising and consumer research itself, lifestyle spans a wide area of subject of interest ranging from health and food related lifestyle research (Bolton et al., 2008; Kavak & Gumusluoglu, 2007), youth lifestyle (S. Miles, 2002; Reimer, 1995), media and lifestyle (Bell & Hollows, 2005; Gauntlett, 2002), technology and lifestyle (Swinyard & Smith, 2003) amongst many others.

Consequently though lifestyle research can be useful, theorists have urged for the concept and the term within the *academia* to be applied with a sounder and grounded theoretical base (Anderson & Golden, 1984; S. Miles, 2000, , 2002; Sobel, 1981). As it is possible to use the concept in a variety of ways, it is important to define the context in using the term lifestyle. Before proceeding to define the context of the term used in this particular research, it is pertinent to set the background by reviewing the trajectory that the concept of lifestyle has followed in the literature.

## 2.2 Lifestyle in the Wider Socio-Cultural Context

The notion of lifestyle can be traced from the early writings of classical sociologists such as (Veblen, 2007 [1899]), (Weber, 1946/1958, , 1947) and (Simmel (1903) cf. Bocoock, 1993). Veblen (2007 [1899]) in his book 'The Theory of the Leisure Class' discussed about lifestyle out of his main discussion on the conspicuous consumption of the wealthy. Although Veblen may have not use the exact word 'lifestyle' he informs the possibilities that various lifestyles exists (Trigg, 2001) by using very similar words such as 'changing styles' and 'schemes of life' in his work. He describes how the upper class flaunt their wealth and power through various consumption and leisure activities and avoiding work (e.g. consumption of clothes, personal adornments, expensive entertainment and sports) as a means for gaining and maintaining social status. In addition, Veblen points out that the lifestyle of the upper-classes is emulated by people from lower classes in their quest to gain status.

Simmel (1903) pointed out to the aspects of lifestyle through his discussion on the daily living patterns of people living in the rapidly expanding city in Berlin (cf. Bocoock, 1993). He observed that the emerging metropolis (e.g. development of shops and leisure facilities) affected the lifestyles of the people living there. As a result, modern patterns of consumption emerge as people adapt their lifestyle to the new urban environment e.g. consumption of '*clothes, personal adornments and expensive pleasurable pursuits was becoming central*' as means to express one's identities or status (Bocoock, 1993, p. 19).

Meanwhile (Weber, 1946/1958) referred to lifestyles in his discussion of status as one of the sources of inequalities in society. According to Weber status are expressed when people follow a certain 'style of life' so to differentiate themselves from others as well as to maintain their exclusivity. Weber emphasized that while class is determined purely by the ownership of economic resources, status groups are '*stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special 'styles of life''*' (Weber, 1946/1958, p. 140 emphasis are originals). Therefore Weber's work shows status as a base for social distinction, is achieved through lifestyle based on consumption.

The works of these sociologists provides different insights on how lifestyle was created and maintained by people who have access to power, wealth and the likes, subsequently class and social position – social stratification was usually the focused of their examination. However the common theme across the work of the three 'classical' sociologists is that; they did not discuss about lifestyle directly, instead the discussion about lifestyle was derived through and out of relations from their main work. Lifestyle was merely a reflection of the structural elements of wealth, urbanization, class or status as they '*picked up on certain aspects of lifestyles but without always referring to them directly*' (Johansson & Miegel, 1992; S. Miles, 2000, p. 17; Reimer, 1995). Nonetheless these theorists work are an exception as they point out to an early possibility of people using consumption as an important tool or strategy in constructing lifestyle and expressing their identity.

As society progresses and traditional framework of structures weakened e.g. decline of class communities, rising affluence, increasing social mobility, increasing importance of education and consumption (Beck, 1992; Clark & Lipset, 1996), the structural concerns viewed as influencing lifestyle in the works of the earlier sociologists are inadequate to analyse the contemporary society, as succinctly put forth by Johansson and Miegel (1992);

*'The concept of lifestyle was defined by the classics as basically being rooted in the access to power, in cultural and material goods, and the like. If different persons belonged to a particular class, they were regarded as having approximately the same lifestyle. In contemporary society, where individual variations in terms of lifestyle are supposedly much greater, this obviously provides an insufficient notion of lifestyle'* (p. 18).

In contemporary society, changes such as individualisation offers people a greater degree of freedom and choice to construct their self reflexively thus exerting agency in part of the society in fashioning their own lifestyles (Beck, 1992; Clark & Lipset, 1996; Giddens, 1991). Consequently the concept of lifestyle continued to be included in sociologist's research out of their main interest on stratification of society albeit with different emphasis<sup>1</sup>. Sociologists have proposed for a modified stratification analysis of society by introducing a cultural approach which emphasizes the development in economic, social

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologists in their research on social stratification and lifestyle, continues to debate whether structural influences e.g class identities have been displaced altogether by modernity, there are different opinions e.g some argue class identities still exist (Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992; E. O. Wright, 2000) others argue that in modernity class exists but only through individualisation of identities (Longhurst et al., 2000; Savage et al., 2001).

and cultural process as inextricably linked with social stratification (Devine, 1997; Devine et al., 2005; Savage, 2000) and putting '*lifestyle and taste at the heart of the reproduction of hierarchy and inequality*' (Bottero, 2005, p. 137).

In making sense of their lifestyle and expressing self identity, sociologists found that people's class identities are indeed generally weak. Studies by scholars such as (Longhurst et al., 2000; Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997) found people inclined to defined their own individualized identity by separating themselves ('dis-identification') from any class groupings. However a weakened class identity doesn't mean social inequality doesn't exist, instead people prefer not to be attached to forms of social groupings but to have an 'individualistic ethics' of self identity--an identity which they set in their own terms. This were demonstrated in the findings of both studies conducted by sociologists such as (Longhurst et al., 2000; Savage et al., 2001) who found that most of their participants (e.g. listeners of radio and residents of different housing estates) appear to reject or downplay any connection with any social groupings. Instead they prefer to define themselves based on individualized self concept and highlight their 'ordinariness'. This indirectly shows that people are not passively accepting labels unto them but react reflexively through redefinition of their self identity.

Beck (1992) extols the same view of individualization of self identity in the lifestyle of contemporary society in his work *The Risk Society*'. In his discussion, he argues that inequalities doesn't completely disappear in modern society, instead they are changing and being redefined according to the continual process of individualization;

‘...processes of individualization *deprive class distinctions of their social identity*. Social groups lose their distinctive traits, both in terms of their self-understanding and in relation to other groups....inequalities by no means disappears. They merely become redefined in terms of *individualization of social risks* (1992, p. 100; emphasis in original).

Gans (1999 [1975]) in his study of the popular culture and high culture of the American lifestyle put forth a discussion about social differences as an indivisible combination with economic, social and cultural process. Gans posits that people’s socioeconomic hierarchy or classes (e.g.; upper class, lower class) will reflect their cultures (e.g.; high culture, popular culture). Each culture has their own shared or common aesthetic values and standards of taste –which he analytically termed ‘*taste culture*’ (p. 6) . Different tastes leads to different lifestyle, for example people from low or moderate income having popular culture usually cannot afford or often feel uncomfortable going to places designed a for the more affluent classes (e.g. art museums, operas) (p. 8) .

It is impossible to determine exactly what factors affects cultural tastes but Gans argues that education usually is most significantly important if tastes requires skill/training (e.g. opera, ballet, arts), occupation when skill/training is less important (e.g. popular music, rock concert) and income is most important when the tastes involves a high cost (e.g. purchasing vintage cars, antiques). Consequently Gans sees culture and economic as complexly interconnected, and sees both as nonetheless influencing people’s lifestyle.

Although people usually occupy different places in socioeconomic hierarchy which reflects their cultural taste, Gans postulates that modernity offers people more freedom and choices (e.g. cultural mobility and declining of traditional tastes); thus it is not impossible this relation has changed where, *'people are free to roam across tastes, kinds of culture and media that were off-limits when there was a bit more prestige in being 'cultured' than there is today'* (p. viii)

People's cultural taste are becoming increasingly cultural mobile through (Gans, 1999 [1975], pp. 9-12);

- 1) **Omnivores-** as more people have the resources (time, money and education) they can make choices across more than one culture e.g. listening to wide range of music from classical to rap.
- 2) **Converging-** cultural tastes from different classes are converging thus making the taste or choice of people from different cultures more similar e.g. people from lower class who usually watch physical comedy now also watch sitcom, or people from higher class listening to rap music
- 3) **Diverging-** emergence of various new cultural tastes associated with class or other factors such as age, gender and race e.g. extreme sports, reality television.

Gans proposes that though societies can exist based across different socioeconomic hierarchy with tastes ranging from high taste culture to low taste culture, he enjoins for a view that all tastes are equal in their worth. For Gans people regardless of class should be entitled to their own cultural choice that sufficiently expresses their own values and taste, and these cultural tastes should be equally valid and desirable nonetheless as, *'both derive emotional and intellectual rewards from their choices, and both may add new ideas, feelings and insights to their lives'* (p. 169).

In this light, Gans's work shows that people are not passive receptors of the impact of their socio economic backgrounds on their cultural tastes; alternatively modernity enables people more freedom within which they can shape their lifestyles. In addition, people across different socioeconomic positions may have different cultural tastes but this doesn't make them more or less legitimate, what is more important is that these individual choices adds towards *'his or her previous experience and his or her effort toward self realization'* (p. 170)

Similar to Gans (1999 [1975]), the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) famously integrates culture, taste and lifestyle into his (re)conceptualisation of the social class framework (Bourdieu, 1984; Grenfell, 2008; Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu conceptualizes status groups as based on common lifestyles however rather than seeing economic (class) and status as two separate concept, he posits that *'economic and symbolic aspect (status) always coexist in reality' because symbolic differentiation always 'express' and 'transfigure' economic differences* (Swartz, 1997, p. 151). Therefore his framework shows a more complex relationship between class and culture compared to the 'economic-cause leading to social effects' model of traditional class theory, here 'culture is not an *effect* of class location but rather a central mechanism by which class positions are *constituted*' (Bottero, 2005, p. 137; emphasis in originals)

Bourdieu (1984) posits that differences in lifestyle and consumption patterns of people from different social positions are not merely a result of social structures (e.g. wealth or economic capital) but are also a result of our cultural disposition—habitus, cultural

capital and taste (Turner, 1988; Warde, 1997; Warde & Martens, 2000). Individuals use their habitus; a system of everyday knowledge or cultural capital that guides our lifestyle and consumption choices which are appropriate for us; producing different taste for different people (Harker et al., 1990; S. Miles, 1998; Reimer, 1995). Cultural capitals are forms of knowledge that we gain through our formal and informal socialization process that gives us a competitive advantage over other people such as upbringing in family, education and skills. Bourdieu's work (*Distinction*) suggest that these difference forms of capital results in different forms of consumption practices and claimed that these are used by consumers to create a distinction between themselves and others. Thus Bourdieu suggest that consumption practice is a performative process carried out in order to 'impress others'; consumption as directed externally to the outside audience (Longhurst & Savage, 1996).

Bourdieu's sees lifestyle as a dynamic space where people can exercise 'social mobility'; creatively combine their economic and cultural capital to shape their lifestyle in their quest to move to a more comfortable social position for example: a family with plenty of economic capital (money or assets) can channel their resources to fund for their own or their children's education in the quest for a more comfortable social position. In this sense, Bourdieu's framework shows a possibility for lifestyle to be determined by social structures as well as by the behaviours of individuals themselves (Bell & Hollows, 2005; Swartz, 1997; Trigg, 2001).

On an overall note, the works of sociologists has offered insights on how the notion of lifestyle has developed. In general the (re) centring of cultural factors (such as lifestyle, status and taste) associated with development of modernity serves an important repercussion towards the development of lifestyle concept; it highlights that through individualization strategies and habitus, individuals are continuously negotiating with structural factors in constructing and reproducing their lifestyle. Specifically the process of individualization has significantly increased the importance of lifestyle as individuals are deemed possible to reflexively (Beck, 1992) and creatively (Certeau, 2000 [1984]) shape their own lifestyles.

### **2.3 Lifestyle as Lived Culture**

The primacy of lifestyle it can be argued emerge as a significant concept for self definition and self representation in society as a result of reconfigurations and diminishing influence of traditional structures due to development of modernity or post traditional societies.

Previously prescribed and fixed social structures such as class, status and wealth (Baumeister, 1987; Beck, 1992; Clark & Lipset, 1996; Gergen, 1991) were among the frameworks that forms a basis of people's self-identity. However with the advent of modernity associated with capitalism (e.g. shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism and the centralization of consumer culture) and globalization (proliferation of media and information technology, individualization) we are no longer prescribed a fixed framework

as a basis to construct our self-identity; consequently *lifestyle* becomes an important site for people to express their identity (Chaney, 1996; Giddens, 1991; Slater, 1997).

A chorus of theorists put forward the discussion on declining of various traditional institutions such as (religious institutions, family lineage) (Baumeister, 1987), (collapse of traditional concepts of self, truth and social life) (Gergen, 1991), (breakdown of workplace and class identification) (Clark & Lipset, 1996), (decline of local communities and instability of family life) (Beck, 1992) in ascribing people a fixed framework as a basis to construct self-identity. According to these scholars these trends means that people are less influenced by external social commitments which established orders of life and guide the formation of self-identity within a relatively set channels. Alternatively people have to reflexively fashion their lifestyle and express their identity on the basis of individual choice.

The declining of traditional institution as an impetus of modernity (through rise of capitalism, proliferation of media and information technology, centralization of consumerism, increased individuality in place of collective identity and so forth ) (Bauman, 2000, , 2007; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Wilkinson, 1999) at the same time offers us with an array of complex sometimes confusing and contradictory choices within which we are obliged to choose in order to construct and maintain our sense of identity through lifestyle.

In modernity, lifestyle provide us the autonomous space to articulate and represent our identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Jagose, 2003) replacing previous diminishing traditional knowledge and structures. Giddens (1991) posits everyone in contemporary society have no choice but to select a lifestyle;

*'..in conditions of high modernity, we not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose. A lifestyle can be defined as more or less an integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity'* (p. 81)

Gauntlett (2002) acknowledges that everybody in contemporary society are entitled to make lifestyle choices, he further acknowledges that the possibilities for engaging and choosing lifestyle still somewhat depends on the resources that is at hand (e.g: having more money means we can pursue greater lifestyle choices). Similar to Giddens (1991) Gauntlett looks to lifestyle as a form of narrative of self-identity; he says lifestyles are like a *ready-made templates for a narrative of self* --people's lifestyle is like a *genre* where individuals act as 'directors' of their own life narratives thus can produce various types of life story such as 'rural lifestyle', 'clubbing lifestyle', workaholic lifestyle and so forth. Consequently the lifestyle choices which we make in modern society are still bound up with of tradition on the one hand, and a sense of relative freedom on the other.

In addition, Gauntlett (2002) using Foucault's work touches an important concept related with lifestyle which is 'ethics'. According to Gauntlett lifestyle or the choices that people need to make with regards to their lives and identities is bound with the individual's relationship with their own self or individual ethics. He posits that Foucault's concept of 'ethics' does not simply refer to a general moral code instead;

*...ethics here means a person's concern for and care about themselves; the standards they have for how they would like to be treated, and how they will treat themselves...the rules one sets for one's behaviour. These rules, although personal and subjective, are vitally important. A person's own ethics will usually relate to, but are unlikely to be exactly the same as, well known sets of morality codes (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 135).* Therefore an individual's 'ethics' is the individual's subjective and personal set of standards and justification for their chosen lifestyle which might be similar or totally deviate from the society's moral codes of ethic.

The processes of representing and fashioning our self identity which are articulated through lifestyle is a dynamic process involving affiliation, negotiation and integration of the individual and society which are continuously being reproduced through each other (Giddens, 1991; S. Miles, 2000) as Reimer (1995) succinctly points out in his definition of lifestyle;

*..the specific pattern of everyday activities that characterizes and individual. Each individual's lifestyle is unique: it is not identical to anyone else's. But at the same time,*

*lifestyles orient themselves towards the common and the social. We choose lifestyles in relation to other people. In this way, in any given society, a number of individuals will choose lifestyles that demonstrate great similarities and that distinguish them from other individuals, who in turn may have similar lifestyle* (pp. 124-125; emphasis are originals)

Lazer (1963) asserts this view of lifestyle as a dynamic process of social life as he says lifestyle;

*It embodies the patterns that develop and emerge from the dynamics of living in a society. Lifestyle, therefore is the result of such forces as culture, values, resources, symbols, license and sanction'* (Lazer, 1963, p. 130).

In this light then lifestyle can be viewed as a *lived culture* (S. Miles, 2000, , 2002). As an agent of social life we actively produce meaningful practices of lifestyle in relation to our dominant culture (society, modernity and consumer culture etc). Consequently Miles (2000) exhort for a lifestyle analysis to have a sociological value, we need to avoid making assumptions on what constitutes lifestyle or what lifestyle should be, instead we should look to finding the meanings of lifestyle from the people themselves in our course of investigation.

Therefore within this notion of lifestyle as meaningful *lived culture*, this research foremost concern is not to assume what constitutes lifestyle or what lifestyle should be;

instead we endeavour to investigate the meanings of lifestyle from the voice of the participants/consumer's themselves.

## **2.4 Lifestyle, Self-Identity and Consumer Culture**

Modernity brings to the fore lifestyle as a site for people to articulate their identities; most scholars (amongst others Beck, 1992; Chaney, 1996; Featherstone, 1987, , 2007 [1991]; Giddens, 1991) concurs that this is done with the tool ubiquitous in the life of people in contemporary societies which is—consumption. Featherstone (2007 [1991]) for example posits that 'lifestyle' within contemporary consumer culture '*connotes individuality, self expression, and a stylistic self consciousness. One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, home, car, choice of holidays, etc are to be regarded as indicators of individuality of taste and sense of style of the owner/consumer* (p. 81). While (Sobel, 1981) reinforces that consumption is 'the activity that best captures what is meant by lifestyle' (p. 47).

Slater (1997) and Featherstone (1987) discussion below, draws together the inextricable relation of lifestyle and consumption; individuals in the post traditional societies can be said to construct lifestyle through a plural maze of consumption choices such as; proliferation of goods and services, media and technologies and so forth in their attempt to negotiate and articulate their identities.

Slater (1997) outlines five themes (theme 1-4 are from the works of Giddens (1991)) in which the complex and plural choices confronts individuals in situations of late modernity. He says of late modernity;

- 1) *It is a post traditional order in which fixed identities are neither ascribed nor ambiguously indicated. It is increasingly unanchored in tradition, religion, law and so forth. Identity can only emerge from choice*
- 2) *Involves 'pluralisation of the lifeworld' in which each individual has to negotiate multiple and contradictory identities as they traverse different public spheres each with their different roles, norms etc*
- 3) *Truth is contextual, replaces traditional authority with 'methodological doubt'*
- 4) *Places 'mediated experience' at the centre of life through commerce, city, mobility, mass media 'lifeworlds' are made visible to us and becomes possible choices of identity.*
- 5) *Commercialization – consumption regulated by purchasing power allowing greater fluidity in the use of goods to construct identities and lifestyles and on the other, cultural values and meanings are renewable resources for economic competition as advertising indicates everyday.*(Slater, 1997)

Meanwhile Featherstone (1987) developing from Bourdieu's idea of lifestyle, points out the reflexive individual constructing lifestyle through consumption. He proposed that;

- 1) *People were not passive consumers (in the way suggested by mass society theorist) but were actively engaged in consumer practices)*
- 2) *that such forms of activism could be seen as related to class strategies and habituses (and hence they were not part of an undifferentiated 'mass' and*
- 3) *the term 'lifestyle' could be used to understand the dynamics of consumer culture (as individuals exercised agency to mould their consumer practices into distinct practices (Longhurst & Savage, 1996)*

Drawing from Slater's (1997) condition of late modernity and Featherstone's outline of consumer's lifestyle (1987), we can surmise that, the pluralized consumer culture

lifeworld offers both a solution to resolve our self identity crisis and at the same time intensifies it by offering us a bewildering varieties of material and symbolic resources. Although modernity allows liberalised and reflexive space for the project of self identity it also entails anxiety as every choice reflect the self (Baudrillard, 1988; Bauman, 2000, , 2007); *'all acts of purchase or consumption, clothing, eating , tourism, entertainment* (Slater, 1997, p. 85), *'are decisions not only about how to act but who to be'* (Warde, 1994, p. 81).

Consequently people negotiate, manage and resolve the anxieties of their modern identity through 'lifestyle'. Lifestyle can be seen as a way to create coherence and creating a sense of order or pattern to for people to function in life; this in turn is carried out by embracing or resisting commercialized commodities in the market (Chaney, 1996; Giddens, 1991; Slater, 1997; Thompson, 1996; Thompson & Troester, 2002). In our quest to construct and sustain our lifestyle we turn to consumption on the one hand to create, maintain and resolve our self-creation project for example; opting for organic or green products reflects our commitment to eco-friendly lifestyle (Dobscha & L.Ozanne, 2001), following advice of fashion 'experts' to enhance self presentation (Entwistle, 2000), reading self help books to improve or affirm the self (Cameron, 2000; Simonds, 1992), resolving health concern through natural health medicine or techniques (Thompson & Troester, 2002) and resorting to technological products as coping strategies (Mick & Fournier, 1998).

On the other hand what we avoid to consume is another important aspects of our sense of being and creation of the self-identity (Englis, 1997; Gould et al., 1997; Wilk, 1997),

Wilk (1997) denotes; *'as daily practice it (consumption) creates identity and social boundaries through practices of non-consumption, non-association, avoidance, and taboo. Consumption always carries the relations of non-consumption as a silent partner'*(p. 183). Consequently constructing a lifestyle for the self may involves us resisting or disassociating ourselves from a certain consumption or lifestyle for example; refusing to buy commercialize cleanser to avoid creating toxic waste (Dobscha, 1998), avoiding certain type of clothing to maintain preferable self appearance (Freitas et al., 1997) or avoiding certain brand or food to avoid being excluded from significant other (Auty & Elliot, 2001; Wilk, 1997).

Generally the importance of consumption in society's life as a consequence of modernization can be said to set the stage for lifestyle as a significant alternative site for people to articulate identity in the contemporary society. However the significance of lifestyle as a differentiation and identity strategy is argued to fully developed in the era of consumer culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where consumerism heightened (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Dittmar, 2008; Slater, 1997; Wattanasuwan, 2005) in which *'the relation between lived culture and social resources, between the meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend is mediated through markets'* (Slater, 1997, p. 8).

(Bell & Hollows, 2005; Bocoock, 1993; Chaney, 1996) put forth a discussion of the development of consumerism associated with modernity and shifting of production mode from Fordist to post-Fordist production as relating to the prominence of 'lifestyle'. Before

1960's, during the mass consumption period it is agreed that generally everyone is involved and exposed to consumption. Although this is the case, there were little need or space for lifestyle to be constructed through consumption as; people had very little choice due to goods being mass produced for them to consume. Furthermore during this period, marketers and sociologists still refer to people's consumption patterns as tightly bound and related with their occupational class (Bocock, 1993).

Meanwhile the advent to Post Fordism post 1960's which is associated with destabilization of traditional social structures coupled with improved and flexible mode of production and rapid changes in consumption taste is argued to surfaced 'lifestyle' as a prominent notion. During this period, flexible production and manufacturing was introduced to cater for consumers of niche market and rapidly changing consumers taste (M. J. Lee, 1993; Lury, 1995; Slater, 1997). Goods during this time are not produced for mass consumption instead they are targeted to lifestyle groupings (Bell & Hollows, 2005; M. J. Lee, 1993). This heightened consumer culture propels marketing organization, advertising and market researchers to segment and categorize consumers based on their consumption patterns. This could be one of the reason for the proliferation of lifestyle research during this period (e.g. S. Douglas & Urban, 1977; Venkatesh, 1980; Wells, 1974, , 1975).

Consequently scholars accentuates how consumer culture brought significant changes to people everyday lives as it increased freedom to construct lifestyle and to create and negotiate their identity through consumption regardless of their background;

Featherstone (2007 [1991]) asserts that;

*'rather than **unreflexively** adapting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new hero of consumer culture make lifestyle, a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily disposition they design together into lifestyle. The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, interior decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste....consumer culture publicity suggests that we all have room for self improvement and self-expression whatever our age or class origins'*(p. 84).

While Giddens (1991) concurs that;

*'lifestyle...is 'adopted' rather than 'handed down'. Lifestyle are routinised practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dressing, eating, modes of acting, favoured milieux for encountering others; but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity. Each of the small decisions a person makes everyday—what to wear, what to eat, how to conduct himself at work...contributes to such routines. All such choices....are decisions not only about how to act but who to be. The more post-traditional the settings...the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-*

*identity, its making and remaking* (p. 81).....*in the context of post-traditional order the self becomes a reflexive project* (p. 32)

In this sense Featherstone (2007 [1991]) and Giddens (1991) explanations suggests that in consumer culture, lifestyle becomes a site for individuals to actively construct-choose, negotiate and communicate their sense of self identity; through consumption we engage in constructing, refining and reworking of lifestyle ('life projects') to represent and articulate our self-identity ('projects of the self').

Consequently this puts lifestyle under the rubric of consumer's identity project (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Lifestyle then can be sum up as a goal driven project of seeking and making identity through the help of consumption; it is a process filled with anxiety, conflicts, internal contradictions and ambivalence (Dobscha & L.Ozanne, 2001; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Mick & Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990).

#### **2.4.1 Existential Life Themes/Life Goals and Lifestyle**

Life theme or personal life goal is an important concept that give an individual's life a certain coherence, unity, form and purpose<sup>2</sup> (Adler in Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956; Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). According to these scholars, as human beings our life is not solely determined by our social background instead it is a reflection or the determination of the goals or the life theme that we that we seek to achieve or resolve. Alfred Adler (in Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956) explained on the concept of life goal in

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<sup>2</sup> The term life theme and life goal will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis

his discussion on 'style of life'. According to Adler people's lifestyle are directed or determined by the personal goals that they construct to achieve. He says of lifestyle as *'goal directed movements, as the individual's effort to secure for himself what he interprets or misinterprets as success or as his way of overcoming a minus situation in order to attain a plus-situation'* (p. 181).

Along similar lines Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie (1979) addressed the life goal concept using the term life theme and put forth the significance of life theme in people's lifestyle. Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie outlines the definition of life theme as consists of *'a problem or set of problems which a person wishes to solve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve solution....focus on a problem may be accompanied by the belief that certain strategies of action are more suitable than others for solving it'* (p. 48).

Further to this life themes are claimed to be existential concern or a source of stress in a person's life (incorporating affective and cognitive and motivational elements) which are not only chosen by the individual for themselves but are also rooted in their socio cultural background and life experiences (e.g. childhood traumatic events, poverty, parents parenting style, family background (Alfred Adler in Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956; Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). In this light then life goals are existential concerns that trigger us to create strategies to resolve and overcome the stress/ problem which we might perceive consciously or unconsciously and affect the ways we interpret and manage our lifestyle.

Both scholars work are important as they explicitly relate their discussion of life theme with lifestyle. In contrast, although consumer researchers work give insights into the relation between life theme, consumption and identity they did not relate their discussion with the lifestyle concept.

(Mick & Buhl, 1992; Parker, 1998) found that life themes are not only important in giving meaning to consumer's everyday life and identity. Their findings reinforces earlier views that life themes create coherence in people's lives; they found life themes emerging repeatedly in consumers live and are reproduced in consumers experience and interpretation of product advertisements. Meanwhile (Fournier, 1998) in her investigation on women and their favourite brands, found that existential life themes were central in guiding the women's sense of self in their daily life. In addition these women found resolution of their life themes through their consumption relationship with their favourite brands.

The life theme studied by these scholars (Fournier, 1998; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Parker, 1998) have demonstrated that unresolved existential concern or life themes that a person faces in their life varies. There are life themes that reflects conflicting concerns (which give rise to existential dilemmas in choosing between fulfilling either concerns or achieving both identity) or life themes that doesn't reflect any conflicting concern (doesn't give rise to existential dilemmas and involves a more straightforward process to accomplish or resolve). Mick and Buhl's (1992) work on life theme demonstrates that his participants did have a concern that they wish to resolved but this wasn't a conflicting

existential concern (for example defining self vs not defining self). Meanwhile Parker's (1998) study demonstrated that her participant had various type of existential life concerns; ones which are conflicting (for example; being individual vs being part of a group) and also ones which are not (for example; having control vs not having control, independent vs not being independent).

Drawing from the work of all these scholars we can summarize that our existential life themes or life goals are highly central to our self identity and guides our lifestyle; it permeates our consumption and can be resolved through our relationship with consumption. Hence it can be argued that existential life themes or life goals are significant in driving the construction of our lifestyle.

## **2.5 Lifestyle and Consumer Culture: Beyond Purchasing Object**

As a disparate of scholars agrees that lifestyle is constructed through consumption, it is important to discuss just what constitutes 'consumption'. An understanding and clarification of the consumption concept plays a critical role in the way in which we attempt to research and understand consumer and their lifestyle.

Post modern discussion on consumption has progressively shifted from the traditional views of consumption as an essentially having an exchange/economic and use values. Numerous scholars (M. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Gabriel & Lang, 1995; M. J. Lee, 1993) agrees that relating consumption to the limited exchange and use values is an

underestimation of the active and prominent role that consumption play in our life. Miles (1998) assert that 'Instead of merely an act of purchasing or fulfilling concrete need, consumption '*potentially* play an important role in who we are and how we construct our social lives, in terms of how we use goods and services and how we relate to other people *through* such goods and services' (S. Miles, 1998, p. 3 emphasis are originals).

To be liberalised from consumption orthodoxy by acknowledging consumption as something beyond basic utility and economic value, places consumption as an active cultural and production process of creating meaning, self identities and values (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Baudrillard, 1988; Holt, 1995; S. Miles, 1998; Woodruffe-Burton, 1997). According to (McCracken, 1990);

*"They [consumers] use the meaning of consumer goods to express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideas, create and sustain lifestyles, construct notions of self, and create (and survive) social change." (McCracken, 1990, p. xi)*

In acquiring and sustaining lifestyle we employ consumption to carry out our cultural self-creation project--we create, sustain our sense of self and also locate our place in society through consumption (Elliot, 1994, , 1997; Kleine et al., 1995). As Wattanasuwan (2005) aptly puts, 'the products that we buy (e.g celebrities endorsed cosmetics, organic food, eco-house), the activities that we do (going to a family friendly mall, listening to storytelling etc) and philosophies or beliefs (religion, moral ideology) that we pursue tell stories about who we are and with whom we identify' (p. 179). Consequently

consumption an act beyond purchasing is central to the meaningful practices of articulating our self identity and constructing lifestyle as it permeates our everyday life (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Zukin & Maguire, 2004).

Consumption in the consumer culture then incorporates concern with the symbolic, experiential and socio-cultural meanings and functions of consumer good or services within the context of social relations and processes (Baudrillard, 1988; M. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Featherstone, 2007 [1991]; S. Miles, 1998; Slater, 1997). According to Slater (1997, pp. 193-194) a central theme associated with post modern consumer culture is the *dematerialization* of objects and commodities, the economy and the society as a whole. He outlines four social developments with regards to dematerialization;

- Non-material goods play a significantly greater role in the economy and in consumption. Consumption incorporates services as a widely saleable commodity e.g. information, advice and expertise, leisure events and activities, entertainment.
- Material commodities appear to have a greater non material composition-where a product is seen to be more of an extension of its design, package and advertising imagery, an obvious example; whereas previously we talked about consumption of goods and services, now we talk about product ‘experiences’
- Sign values in the market are widespread. We are exposed to objects, services, experiences and activities that have become objectified as commodities in the form of representations in advertising, in portrayal of lifestyles in films, TV, magazines and so forth
- The process of production is governed by non-material function such as knowledge, science, expertise, systems, planning and cybernetic skills.

Slater’s (1997) explanation of the ‘dematerialization’ of objects demonstrates that consumption in post modern consumer culture are unrestricted to tangible objects. Alternatively the proliferation flow of signs and images in everyday life provides

abundance of resources with which people can construct their lifestyles (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Giddens, 1991).

According to (Baudrillard, 1988) as consumers we no longer consume objects for its basic function or for our needs instead we consume for a 'logic of desire' (p. 44) or sign value; discussing washing machine he exemplify that people no longer buy washing machine because of its utility and function to clean clothing, instead people buy the meaning associated with having the machine such as 'comfort' and 'prestige'.

In a similar vein, Featherstone (2007 [1991]) postulates that in the postmodern world, people consume experiences; as consumers we consume 'dreams, images and pleasure' through the meanings of goods displayed and created through advertising and consumption spaces such as theme park, shopping malls, holiday resorts, museums and so forth. Instead of going to the shopping mall or theme park for the sake of purchasing or going on a roller coaster ride, we go there in order to consume sensual, pleasurable and the accessible experience offered to all. Accordingly in the consumer culture we actively seek meaning through 'sensorial experiences' that could be derived from our interaction with the products and services offered (Caru' & Cova, 2007) which makes consumption a lived experience.

In a further analysis, Caru and Cova (2007) reminds us that consuming experience is not only restricted to our relations with the market. Instead our consumption experiences are also influenced by other network of social relations which are part of our daily lives.

Expanding the work of (Edgell et al., 1997) on the four types of consumption provision produced socially (refer Table 1), they explain that besides consuming experience provided by market relations and exchange; consumer's can be potentially exposed to three other types of consuming experiences which is - family experiences through family ties; friendship experiences through communal ties and citizenship experience through relations with the state.

Consequently through our everyday social relations network and processes such as consuming a meal at a friend's or family's house which is outside the market link, we can still be exposed to the consuming experience because social relations are an equally important agent shaping our consuming experience besides the market. Similarly the work of (Holt, 1995; Joy, 2001; Longhurst & Savage, 1996; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991) reinforces that consumption is a complex process beyond our relations with the market. Their work demonstrates that consumption also involves processes driven by our network of relationship with others in our everyday life. Longhurst & Savage (1996) asserts that; *'consumption processes are driven by performative processes directed at impressing others, processes directed at reassuring oneself and also processes forming links and bonds with significant others'* (p. 296).

**Table 1: The Conditions of Consuming Experience**

<b>Mode of Provision</b>	<b>Access conditions/social relations</b>	<b>Manner of Delivery</b>	<b>Social Context</b>
Market	Price/Exchange	Managerial	Consumers with other consumers
State	Need/right	Professional	Citizens/ users with other citizens
Household	Family/Obligation	Family	Members of the family with other members
Communal	Network/Reciprocity	Volunteer	Friends or neighbours with other friends or neighbours

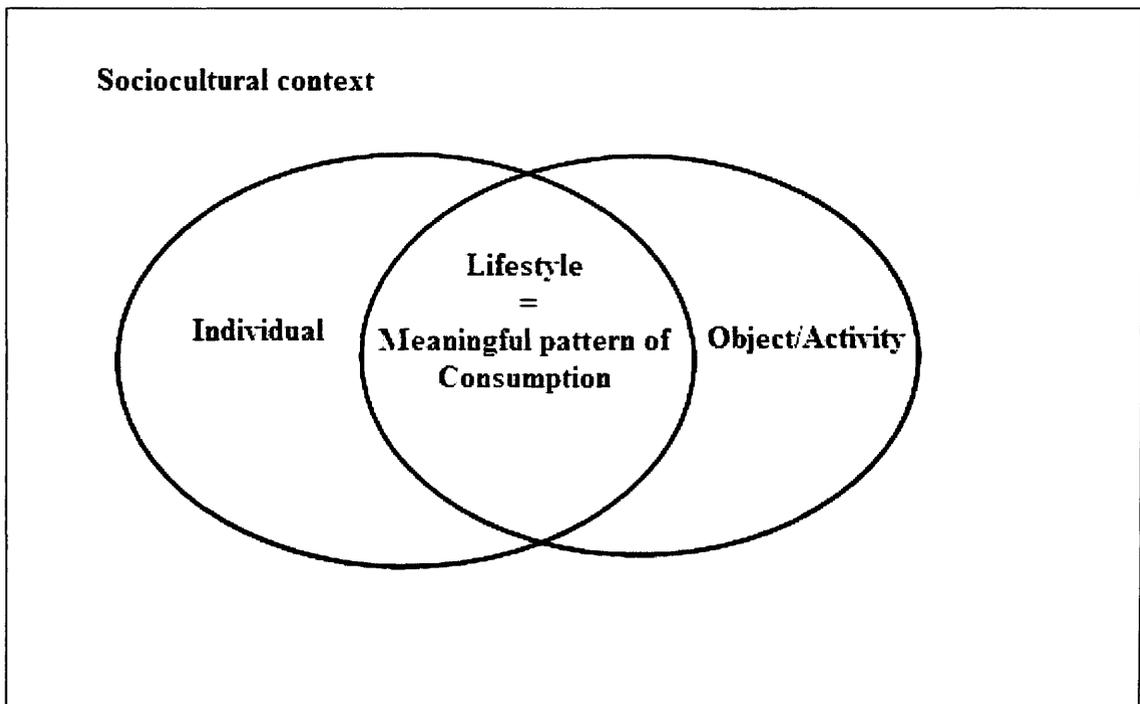
Source: Caru' and Cova (2007, p. 13)

In this light, these studies illustrates that consumption is a varied and complex action impossible to be interpreted as a merely straightforward process of purchasing and having use and exchange value. Alternatively consumption incorporates various ways individuals interact with objects, activities, images and others within social context. This broader notion of consumption is the essence of the idea of consumption as '*consumption practices*' - a type of social action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways (Holt, 1995, , 1997). The term 'practice' emphasizes that consumption are not merely physical behaviour instead are actions laden and imbued with meanings. Consequently although the term 'consumption practices' will not be adopted, nonetheless the essence of this term which refers to consumption as various meaningful ways of consuming will be adopted throughout this research.

Applying this to the study of consumer lifestyle, this research then adopt a view that lifestyle is not constructed by patterns of consumption objects (individual buying the same object or involve in the same activities—*what individual consume*), alternatively

lifestyle is taken to be constructed by meaningful patterns of consumption practices (the meanings individual's give to their various ways of consumption—*how and why individual consume*) (Holt, 1994, , 1997). This research proposed a framework which conceptualized the relationship between lifestyle and consumption (depicted in Figure 1). Lifestyle is constructed by meaningful patterns of consumption; consumption is taken to be the meaningful interaction between individual and objects, experience, activities or others within a social context. In other words lifestyle is conceptualized as consumer's meaningful patterns of everyday consumption within their socio-historical context.

Figure 1: Conceptualization of Consumer Lifestyle



## 2.6 Summary

This chapter has examined the lifestyle concept from a wider sociological and also consumer research perspectives. It has drawn attention to the primacy of lifestyle as a site for people to articulate their self identity in modernity. Consumption was discussed as an important resource or tool for people to construct their lifestyle and articulate their self identity. The notion of consumption as beyond the notion of purchasing object was introduced and adopted in the conceptual framework of consumer lifestyle proposed for this study. The significance of life themes/life goals in influencing lifestyle was also discussed. This understanding of the lifestyle concept as an articulation of self-identity, constructed through consumption and connected to life themes/life goals sets a theoretical scene for analysis in Chapter 6 and 7 and also for discussion of the research findings in Chapter 9.

## Chapter 3: Cultural Approaches in Consumer Research

### *VIII*

*I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.*

### *IX*

*When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.  
(Thirteen Ways of Looking At a BlackBird, Wallace Stevens)*

*How can you explain the workings of the human mind without a  
knowledge of the social setting which must have played so great a  
part in determining the sentiments and opinions of mankind?(pg 11)  
(Rivers, 1926)*

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter offers discussion on the importance and application of the cultural concept in the field consumer research. The overview of the cultural concept is presented. This is followed by a review of the etic and emic cultural approaches utilized in consumer research with specific focused on the Lifestyle researches conducted using these approaches. The cognitive or contemporary cultural framework that is adopted by the study is further reviewed As the focused of the study is on women's lifestyle, discussion

is then focused on gendered consumption meanings and lifestyle. Finally the socially constructed self conception which are unique to the female experience –the ‘ethics of care’ are identified and the various women’s experienced relating to work and family are discussed in relation to this.

### **3.1 Cultural Conception in Consumer Research**

Culture has been and continues to be identified as one of the core concepts that have profound influence on human behaviour (Geertz, 1973; , 1991; McCracken, 1986). Culture usually assumes the brunt in explaining the various differences in consumer’s consumption patterns as reflected in the plethora of cultural consumer investigations conducted and published in the consumer research domain (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; M. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1994; McCracken, 1990).

With the developments of modern society, rapid pace of ‘cultural globalization’ (Appadurai, 1990; Ger & Belk, 1996; Nijman, 1999) disseminated through various technological, social, economic and political forces have reconfigured the consumer markets and landscape across the globe—making them more complex, diffused and multicultural.

There are six dimensions; images, people, ideas, money, machinery and consumption, through which the flow of cultural are moving and transforming societies, geography and

culture across the world; (Appadurai, 1990; Ger & Belk, 1996). The first five are termed as; mediascapes (global flow/movement of information e.g. images and communication), ethnoscapes (global flow/movement of people e.g. tourists, foreign workers, tourists and immigrants that affects the politics of a nation), ideoscapes (global flow/movement of political ideas, terms or images), finanscape (global flow/movement of various forms of capital and money) and technoscape (global flow/movement of mechanical and informational technology) (Appadurai, 1990).

Meanwhile (Ger & Belk, 1996) adds consumption as another dimension which they termed consumptionscape (global flow/movement of consumer culture). Four interrelated ways in which global consumer culture moves are; through the proliferation of transnational companies producing and marketing consumer goods, proliferation and rise of global capitalism (demise of Communism in Eastern Europe and rise of capitalism in China), global consumerism or globalized consumption ethics (variety and high frequency of goods on offer, shopping becomes part of leisure, consumption desires and wants defines sense of well being, success and status) and global consumption homogenization (consumers all around the world are consuming the same products and services). Through this cultural diffusion, consumers everywhere in the world are confronted and exposed with various meanings and symbols from other culture. Consequently this situation results in a more complex local cultural context which significantly impact consumption patterns, identities and lifestyle (Craig & Douglas, 2006; S. P. Douglas & Craig, 1997; Ger & Belk, 1996; Holt, 1994; Luna & Gupta, 2001; Nijman, 1999).

In this light there is heightened importance of understanding culture and consumption as succinctly noted by (S. P. Douglas & Craig, 1997) *'..a complex of collage of culture and context is emerging in which no clear demarcation line identifies where one culture begins and another ends, and influences from one country or culture are constantly permeating others. At the same time, cultural influences are becoming all pervasive, further heightening the need to take into consideration and understand how they impact consumption'* (pp. 380-381).

In the quest to understand culture, consumption patterns and lifestyle there evinced two different ways in which culture have been approached and studied in the consumer research paradigm; the etic approach and the emic approach.

### **3.2 Etic Approaches of Cultural Consumer Research**

Etic approaches are research that are done using the academic or researcher conceptualization or understanding of culture (Holt, 1994; Luna & Gupta, 2001; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Overall the researchers' approaches focus on identifying universal culture theories or concepts (Craig & Douglas, 2006; Holt, 1994, , 1997; Luna & Gupta, 2001) which are then compared across different countries or societies to discover how those cultures are similar or different to each other.

The basic assumption of this approach is that culture is characterized and represented by universal values and beliefs systems of a society. These values are assumed to have a universal meaning across all contexts, to represent the collective pattern of cognition and are the underlying reasons for differences or similarities in pattern of behaviour (e.g. consumption, motivation, decision making etc) (Craig & Douglas, 2006; S. P. Douglas et al., 1994; Luna & Gupta, 2001).

In other words to understand culture, consumer researchers investigate how consumers at societal level prioritize certain list of values and then group consumers under the same categories based on these aggregated values. These aggregated values then are taken to be the reasons underlying their pattern of daily lives and consumption behaviours. This type of etic orientation in examining and defining culture is grounded in psychology which focuses on examining cognitive processes and universality of models and frameworks developed in one society or culture and compare and testing its applicability to another (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; J. G. Miller, 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002).

A salient example of this etic orientation in studying culture and consumption is the work of Hofstede (2001) and Rokeach (1973). Hofstede's (2001) schema on national culture orientation ('individualism vs collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs femininity, power distance and long term vs short term') and his definition of culture as the collective programming of the mind that differentiate a group of people to another, is one of the renowned schema of cultural orientation applied to study culture and its impact on consumer behaviours. A similar alternative schema widely applied is Rokeach values

survey (1973) which assumes that the same basic human values (e.g. family security, happiness, comfortable life, self respect, accomplishments) would be found in all cultures. These values are claimed to be central and enduring belief that guides people's action and judgement across all contexts.

On an overall note consumer researchers applying etic cultural framework can be found in abundance in cross cultural consumer research where 'country' is the main focus of analysis for gaining insights to cultural and consumption differences/similarities (Lee Y. M. Sin et al., 1999; Sojka & Tansuhaj, 1995; Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010) and in lifestyle research based on the Personality and Values Approach (Holt, 1997). Values in the lifestyle research are taken as representation of culture and as a foundation for consumption behaviour and lifestyle (Kahle & L., 1997; Rose & Shoham, 2000; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). The next section will further elaborate on the etic approaches carried out in conducting lifestyle research.

### **3.2.1 Etic Approaches to Lifestyle Analysis in Consumer Research**

Lifestyle analysis in marketing and consumer research has been largely popular and carried out to investigate consumption patterns for the purpose of market segmentation. Parallel with the heightened consumerism in the post Fordism era, lifestyle research using etic approaches proliferated especially during middle 1970, in the 1980's and 1990's and are still carried out in today's research<sup>3</sup>. Generally there are various etic approaches applied in Lifestyle analysis but they can be labelled under the Personality/Values

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to table 3.2.1 to see examples of the etic lifestyle studies carried out from 1971-2000

Lifestyle Research as they share the basic assumptions in conceptualizing lifestyle and consumption patterns (Holt, 1997).

There are two main models on lifestyle in this approach, first, lifestyle is conceptualized as patterns of consumer behaviour which is assumed to be either the common object/service consumed/bought, an expression of consumer's aggregated social behaviour and factors (e.g. the Activities, Interest and Opinion ratings) - I termed this the 'behaviourist model'. Secondly lifestyle is assumed to be consumption behaviour which is a reflection of universal values (in the Values Lifestyle Approach) – I termed this the 'universalist model'. In other words consumers buying the same product/brand, having the same Activities, Interest and Opinions, or having the same personality traits or universal values are assumed to share the same identity thus be under the same lifestyle category. Consumers will be categorised under the same lifestyle category based on their shared consumption pattern.

An example of an early approach in investigating lifestyle is based on the activities, interest and opinions (AIO) rating statements. In this approach, batteries of selected Activities, Interest and Opinion questions (also known as AIO inventory) measures people's activities in terms of; *1) how they spend their time; 2) their interests, what they place importance on in their immediate surroundings; 3) their opinions in terms of their view of themselves and the world around them; and 4) some basic characteristics such as stage in life cycle, income, education and where they live*'. (Plummer, 1974, p. 33) These AIO statements which aggregate various social factors (e.g. income, products bought,

demographic data and so forth) are factor analyzed to cluster respondent into common lifestyle categories.

Segmentation method in this approach range from simple sorting of AIO with social categories (S. Douglas, 1976; S. Douglas & Urban, 1977; Myers & Gutman, 1974) and other dimensions such as product or brand chosen (Cosmas, 1982) and shopping practices (Jackie.M. & H.C.Tai, 1998; Tai & Tam, 1996). However these AIO approach have been criticised by a number of scholars for being applied without theoretical and sociological grounding (S. P. Douglas et al., 1994; Wells, 1974, , 1975; Wind, 1978; Wind & Green, 1974). Subsequent studies then sought to integrate personality traits and theories in studying lifestyle (Lastovicka, 1982; Lastovicka et al., 1987). In the personality based lifestyle studies, personality traits are assumed to structure consumption behaviour and are reflections of consumer lifestyles.

Replacing the extensive AIO Ratings/Personality Traits with the Values Inventory is the Values approach to Lifestyle research. Lifestyle is constructed based on consumption pattern which is expressed by values, needs or motivation. In this approach, respondents are generally asked to rank or give weighting to values that are important in their lives. Respondents who have the same values thus share a lifestyle and categorized under the same lifestyle category. Value in this approach is considered an important lifestyle determinant and are broader in scope than attitudes or the type of variables contained in AIO measures (Grunert-Beckmann & Askegaard, 1997; Gunter & Furnham, 1992; Kahle,

2000) and is taken to be the fundamental reason for attitudes and behaviour (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Rose & Shoham, 2000).

Generally the Values lifestyle approach assumes the same basic assumption as the etic approaches in the cultural consumer research in Section 3.2. As a matter of fact most of the studies conducted are an extension or improvisation of the Rokeach (1973) values framework such as List Of Values Survey (LOV) developed by Kahl (1983) and the Theory of Value Contents developed by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992, , 1994; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995).

### **3.2.2 Review of the Etic Approaches in Consumer Research**

Overall etic approaches in the cultural consumer research which are largely drawn from cross cultural psychology contributes by giving insights into similarities of people across nations, an example is the work of (Schwartz, 1992, , 1994) that shows the existence of about ten different ‘motivational’ value types of people across twenty different countries (Holt, 1994).

However a chorus of researchers have agreed that these studies are less successful in describing the more nuanced consumption and lifestyle differences of society (Craig & Douglas, 2006; Hashim & Woodruffe-Burton, 2006; Holt, 1994, , 1997; Thompson & Troester, 2002) and ignores the important account of local context and meanings that may

influence consumer's action (Craig & Douglas, 2006; J. G. Miller, 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002; Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010).

A main focus in the etic approach is using a common or universal concept (e.g. buying behaviour, values). The first approach is that lifestyle is constructed based on people's consumption behavior or what I termed the 'behaviourist model'. Hence people buying the same products/services are taken to be an expression of a shared identity and consumption pattern on which lifestyle is constructed. This assumes that consumption is merely a purchasing behaviour and likens consumer's to a 'buying machine' (Holt, 1994, , 1997; Zukin & Maguire, 2004) and ignores the fact there may be diverse and wider meanings underlying people's consumption action --as consumption action is always a culturally meaningful act (M. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Holt, 1995; Slater, 1997; Thompson & Troester, 2002).

Another basic assumption is that lifestyle is constructed based on grouping people or consumers who accords the same importance of certain values under the same lifestyle category. Thus lifestyle and consumption patterns are reflected by consumer's aggregated value rankings which have universal meanings regardless of their background or what I termed the 'universalist model'. These assumptions undoubtedly draw from the research tradition in cross cultural psychology which is widely applied in the cross cultural consumer cultural research as discussed in Section 3.2. It downplays the importance of contextual background in driving people's understanding of values and the extent that these various contextual understanding may be the underlying reason for differences in

lifestyle and consumption actions (Briley et al., 2001; Holt, 1997; J. G. Miller, 2002; Oyserman et al., 2002; Thompson & Troester, 2002).

Further to this an ongoing tendency of the etic research is the concern in testing the universality of models or frameworks across various countries (S. P. Douglas & Craig, 1997; S. P. Douglas et al., 1994) using questionnaires or surveys as a tool for data collection with no or (only) minor adjustments (Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010). An implicit assumption of this focus is that the models developed in the U.S are universally applicable when researching other countries in the Europe or Asia (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Craig & Douglas, 2006; S. P. Douglas & Craig, 1997; Steenkamp, 2001; Venkatesh, 1995). Examples of the abundance of lifestyle research carried out across countries applying the Lifestyle Approach or Framework developed in the U.S are such as the AIO Approach, the Rokeach Value based frameworks or the Kahle (1983) List of Values (LOV) framework<sup>4</sup> with minor or no adjustments at all (Rose & Shoham, 2000; Schwartz, 1992; Tai & Tam, 1996; Tam & Tai, 1998; Vyncke, 2002).

While researchers can learn something by taking existing theories and measures from one culture into another, far more can be potentially gained if we first attempt to understand and identify the theoretical difference underlying a certain society, their consumption and lifestyle from the local context— through ‘culturally informed methods’ (J. G. Miller, 2002) rather than imposing our framework unto them (Bagozzi, 1994; Gorn, 1997)

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Table 2

Works on cultural consumer research has in the recent years discovered the benefits of moving away from the straitjacket of traditional approach and applying the emic approach which proved enlightening by providing richer and thicker insights into consumption and lifestyle. This will be discussed in the next section.

Year	Author(s)	Key Concepts / Findings	Methodology / Approach
1980	Sherry C. Ortner	Concept of "emic" vs "etic" approaches to cultural research.	Ethnographic fieldwork.
1985	Clifford Geertz	Thick description as a method for understanding cultural meaning.	Ethnography.
1990	Richard Price	Introduction of "emic" approach in consumer research.	Qualitative research.
1995	John W. Kim	Application of emic approach to understand cultural differences in consumption.	Cross-cultural research.
2000	Sherry C. Ortner & Richard Price	Further exploration of emic approach in consumer research.	Ethnographic fieldwork.
2005	John W. Kim & Richard Price	Development of a framework for emic consumer research.	Qualitative research.
2010	John W. Kim & Richard Price	Application of emic approach to understand cultural differences in consumption.	Cross-cultural research.
2015	John W. Kim & Richard Price	Further exploration of emic approach in consumer research.	Ethnographic fieldwork.
2020	John W. Kim & Richard Price	Application of emic approach to understand cultural differences in consumption.	Cross-cultural research.

**Table 2: Examples of Etic Lifestyle Research Conducted from 1971-2000**

Author(s)	Topic	Approach	Respondents	Method
Wells and Tigert (1971)	Activities, Interest and Opinions	AIO (300 items)	Homemaker	1000 Mail Questionnaire
Douglas and Urban(1977)	Life-style Analysis to Profile Women in International Markets	AIO (focused on gender roles)	Female	Mail Questionnaire
Venkatesh(1980)	Changing Roles of Women	AIO and feminism scale (AIO statement transformed from feminism issues)	Female(Age 18-45)	Mail Questionnaire
Cosmas (1982)	Lifestyles and Consumption Patterns	AIO (250 items)	1, 797 Female respondents	Mail Questionnaire
Lastovicka et.al (1987)	A Lifestyle Typology to Model Young Male Drinking and Driving	AIO (15 items)	Male(Age 18-240)	Telephone survey
Tai and Tam(1996)	A comparative study of Chinese consumers in Asian markets	AIO (35 items)	Male and female (Age 18-40)	500 Self administered questionnaire
Tam and Tai (1998)	The psychographic segmentation of the female market in Greater China	AIO	Female (Age 18-35)	Self administered questionnaire
Rokeach (1973)	Nature of Human Values	RVS Value Inventory	College students	Questionnaire
Vyncke (2002)	Values, aesthetic styles, life visions and media preferences	Improvised AIO	Students	Questionnaire

**Continued**

**Table 2: Examples of Etic Lifestyle Research Conducted from 1971-2000**

Author(s)	Topic	Approach	Respondents	Method
Kahle (1983)	Social Values and Social Change: Adaptation to Life in America	LOV	2,264 Americans	Face to face survey
Homer and Kahle (1988)	A structural equation analysis of the value – attitude-behavior hierarchy	LOV	Mix sample of female and male	Questionnaire
Rose and Shoham (2000)	The Values of American and Japanese Mothers: An Application of LOV in the U.S and Japan	LOV	Mothers with children age 3-8	Questionnaire & focus group (for Japan sample)
Schwartz (1994)	Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values?	Value Type	School teachers University students Mix sample of adults	Questionnaire

### 3.3 Emic Approaches of Cultural Consumer Research

In the emic approach, the concern is not of testing concepts/models or to compare two or more different cultures, alternatively it attempts to promote and understanding of culture from within - through 'thick descriptions' and to sought cultural-rich information of the system or society studied (Geertz, 1973; Luna & Gupta, 2001). Furthermore culture is not viewed as a homogenous system and unified values shared by members of a society, instead culture is conceptualized as 'the very fabric of experience, meaning and action' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Hence the emic approach views culture not as a single universal construct that can be directly compared across behaviour however culture is viewed as the 'lens' or meaning system an individual use to make sense, interpret and understand the world (Bourdieu, 1984; Geertz, 1973; Holt, 1994, , 1997). People's cultural meaning system—their local knowledge or understanding determines and influences their actions and how they interpret and perceive phenomena e.g. how s/he perceive, interpret and evaluate consumption, lifestyle, values, advertistments and so forth (Holt, 1994, , 1997; Hung et al., 2007; Jafari, 2007; Mick & Buhl, 1992; D. Miller, 1987).

Slater (1997) put forth a succinct example on how people use their cultural meaning system to make sense of their consumption , he says; when engaging in consumption practice we make sense of various objects, actions, resources using our cultural meaning systems (e.g. when we categorise food as something 'edible' or 'inedible'), the meanings we give to our consumption practices are formed within cultures and are necessarily shared meanings. Thus through our actions—our needs, rejection or reinterpretation of

consumption we draw on our cultural system to make meanings (e.g. our languages, values, habits, rituals and so forth) and, all our consumption practices are bounded within culture. We consume in a culturally specific meaningful ways (e.g. no one eat food; we eat a sandwich, kebab or 'nasi lemak' -a Malaysian breakfast, rice cooked in coconut cream with spicy anchovies, beef or chicken side dish and garnished with cucumber) or hunger are satisfied by eating with knife or fork, chopstick or even hands. Consequently through our cultural meaning system we define, create and categorize our environment,—we give it meaning (M. Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1990)—as in Slater's example through our culturally bounded consumption we (re) produce cultures, social relations and societies.

The study of cultural meaning system from the emic approach can be applied to a very broad domain with various theoretical approaches, thus it is important to acknowledged on the outset that the focus of this thesis is on 'cultural meaning system' or 'cultural framework' as it applies to consumption (or system of taste) and in relation to lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984; Gans, 1999 [1975]; Holt, 1994, , 1997). Consumer researchers applying the emic approach focused on understanding culture that structure consumers actions from the viewpoint of consumers themselves (e.g. Luna & Gupta, 2001; Thompson & Troester, 2002). These studies demonstrates that undertaking the emic approach --through exploring the 'experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption have been able to show the nuanced and complexity between cultural meanings, consumer actions and the marketplace (e.g. consumer stories in product and brand meaning, the symbolic

boundaries that structure personal and communal consumer identities, ritual practices and product symbolism) .

Various examples of consumer research can be found investigating how consumers apply their ‘cultural meaning system’ or cultural framework in relation to consumption e.g. (Holt, 1997; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Thompson & Troester, 2002). These researches focus on exploring meanings and gaining insights of various consumption through the cultural construction of consumer’s consumption practices—e.g. articulations, life stories and narratives.

Table 3 (not intended to be an exhaustive lists) show some examples of the research in Western and non-Western context that was carried out specifically to investigate consumer’s cultural consumption meanings. Various dimension of consumption have been explored from the consumer’s point of view such as meanings of experiential consumption (e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Holt, 1995; Kozinets, 2001; Thompson et al., 1990), meanings of consumption image, text and object (e.g. Mick & Buhl, 1992; Mick & Fournier, 1998; Thompson & Haytko, 1997) and meanings of consumption patterns in relation to lifestyle and values (Holt, 1994, , 1997; Thompson, 1996; Thompson & Troester, 2002).

**Table 3: Examples of Research Investigating Cultural Consumption Meanings**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Consumption Meaning Investigated</b>
Arnould & Price (1993)	River Magic: Extraordinary Experience and the Extended Service Encounter	Leisure service
Cotte et al. 2004	The Times of Their Lives: Phenomenological and Metaphorical Characteristics of Consumer Timestyles	Womens Timestyle
Fournier (1998)	Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research	Womens Favourite Brands
Holt (1997)	Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity	Various Consumption
Holt (1995)	How Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practices	Baseball Game
Holt (1994)	Consumers' Cultural Differences as Local Systems of Tastes: A Critique of the Personality/Values Approach and an Alternative Framework	Mc Cracken (1989) 'home' term
Kozinets (2001)	Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption	Popular Culture
Mick & Buhl (1992)	A Meaning-based Model of Advertising Experiences	Advertisements
Mick & Fournier (1998)	Paradoxes of Technology: Consumer Cognizance, Emotions and Coping Strategies	Technological Products
Thompson (1996)	Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle	Working Mothers
Thompson & Haytko (1997)	Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings	Fashion
Thompson, Locander & Pollio (1990)	The Lived Meaning of Free Choice: An Existential-Phenomenological Description of Everyday Consumer Experiences of Contemporary Married Women	Everyday Consumption
Thompson & Troester 2002	Consumer Value Systems in the Age of Postmodern Fragmentation: The Case of the Natural Health Microculture	Natural Health

**Continued:**

**Table 3: Examples of Research Investigating Cultural Consumption Meanings**

Ger & Belk* 1996	I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke: Consumptionscapes of the 'Less Affluent World'	Consumption meanings of consumers from Less Affluent World
Sandikci&Ger* 2002	In-Between Modernities and Postmodernities: Theorizing Turkish Consumptionscape	Various Turkish consumers
Wong 2007*	Market Cultures, the Middle Classes and Islam: Consuming the Market	Islam and Consumption

\* non-Western context

The handful of consumer research investigating non-western consumer culture exhibits rich, insightful and important information on the consumption practices of these consumers (e.g. Ger & Belk, 1996; Hung et al., 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2002; Wong, 2007). Although the consumptionscape have been reconfigured by cultural globalization (as discussed in Section 3.1) findings indicate that the local consumption practices does not merely replicates, wholly adopt nor totally reject the western consumption values and practices. Instead these local consumer's employ a pastiche form of response as a sense making strategies to negotiate the ambivalence and contradictions of global consumption which give rise to a plural form of local consumption meanings and practices.

Ger and Belk (1996) in their examination of the consumption in the Less Affluent World such as Romania, India, Turkey, Dominican Republic and etc. found that consumers adopted four strategies as they faced the global consumer culture. First is return to local roots (local consumer's buying products associated with religious identity as a snub to foreign products e.g. buying headscarves or turn to support home produced product e.g.

local coffee vs nescafe), local appropriation is a second strategy (act of appropriation and reconfiguration of consumer goods to fit local culture e.g. motor scooter as a family vehicle, oven to dry clothes), third is creolization (refers to ‘meeting and mingling of meanings and meaningful forms from disparate sources’ (p. 290), consuming a mixture of global and local products e.g. donning a headscarf with a Mickey Mouse jacket, English cushions decorated on a traditional handcrafted sofa as house decorations) and finally resistance to consumption which is very few to be adopted (e.g. rejecting tie and suit for a traditional attire, rejecting Coca-cola, Mc Donald’s).

Along the same line Sandikci & Ger (2002) in their examination of Turkish consumer’s consumption practices found that the postmodern forces of consumer culture did not lead to a hegemonic of Western consumption. Instead these consumers demonstrate a hybrid form of local consumption practices ranging drawn from foreign, traditional and religious sources such as spectacularist consumption (of the very wealthy consumers e.g. designer accessories, expensive cars, western style attire-dress or bikinis, plastic surgery), nationalists consumption (nationalist consumer e.g. books, key chains, t-shirt associated with Ataturk or local political party) faithful consumption (religious consumers e.g. Islamic media and magazines, vacation resorts, fashion attires) and historicists consumption (consumers loyal to traditional roots e.g. traditional dance, wedding, cookbooks coffee,)

Wong (2007) in his conceptual research examined how various interpretations of Islam in Malaysia as a result of economic, political and social role of the state, local political

parties coupled with class position, and consumer culture are played out and negotiated in the consumption practices of Malay Muslim consumers in Malaysia. They gave examples of consumer's with different interpretations of Islam and class background engaging in various consumption styles such as; consumers loyal to traditional Malay practices , the dakwahist consumers who adopt a creolised consumption practices that generally adheres to Islamic principles and the upper class Muslim consumers.

The emic cultural analyses can indeed offer various insights into consumer's consumption patterns. Despite this values of applying emic cultural approach, studies examining *consumer's lifestyle* based on this approach is very limited (Refer to Table 3). Only three studies from this table have been conducted examining consumer lifestyle which is Holt (1994; 1997) and Thompson & Troester (2002). The study by Holt (1994; , 1997) set the stage in calling for consumer researchers to investigate lifestyle research by looking at consumer's cultural meanings system or what he termed—'cultural framework' that contextualized their experiences. Although he didn't carry out a full empirical work Holt's work demonstrates that by looking at cultural framework applied by consumers in relation to consumption a more nuanced and subtle differences can be discerned in consumer's lifestyle and consumption patterns. Thompson & Troester (2002) constructed a cultural meaningful Values System or Framework from the meanings consumer's give to their Natural Health consumption practices. Meanwhile Thompson's (1996) study is concerned with finding the meanings of consumption from the perspectives of working mother. In his research the focused is on the emergent meaning of consumption for working mothers whom are situated in the 'juggling lifestyle' hence

the lifestyle of these mothers have been assumed and theorized from the outset of the research.

In this light, this review demonstrates that there is much to be gained in broadening the currently under researched topic of lifestyle research from the emic perspective by looking at consumption experienced from the inside—through interpretation and articulation of the local consumption experience as denotes by (Ger & Belk, 1996, p. 296; Sandikci & Ger, 2002, p. 465) '*What appears to be a simple emulation and senseless pastiche when looking from the outside often turns out to be highly sensible and creative sense making synthesis when looking from the inside*'. The next section discussed the cultural framework adopted in exploring the Malay consumer's lifestyle and their everyday consumption experienced.

### **3.3.1 Cultural Framework as Meaning Systems for understanding Lifestyle**

In my quest to research lifestyle from the emic approach I have drawn an understanding of culture from the view of contemporary cultural theorists or cognitive cultural theorist (D'Andrade, 1984; Hannerz, 1992; Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). This section will discuss an overview of the culture framework from these contemporary theorists.

Cognitive cultural theorists view *culture as meaning systems, frameworks, models or schemas that helps people to make sense, interpret and understand the world.*

According to (D'Andrade, 1984, pp. 96-97) culture as a meaning system have at least four functions;

*First* is 'representational' function – our cultural meaning system represent our knowledge and belief about the world, about what is out there and what can be done with it; e.g. what represents a family;

*Second* is 'constructive' function – our cultural meaning system construct our cultural entity or realities which is established by social agreement that something counts as something e.g. what counts as wealth, success or motherhood;

*Third* is 'directive' function – our cultural meaning system direct or constrain us in doing things by prescribing sanctions, conformity, satisfaction or reward and values. Consequently they are constitutive rules that not only regulates but also create or define our behaviours e.g. when eating an individual from a Malay culture eat using their hands, feel satisfied or rewarded when fulfil role as good mother etc and;

*Fourth* is 'evocative' function – our cultural meaning system evoke certain feelings e.g. speech (thank you, apologies, curses) and symbolic form (music, poetry) are meaning systems that demonstrates the capability to arouse various expressive and emotional responses from humans.

Concomitantly people draw from their cultural meaning system or cultural framework to interpret and make sense of the world around them. People's interpretation of something (e.g. rituals, lifestyle, games) is called 'cultural meanings' as the process is a result of similar cultural framework or contextual background such as life experiences, history, sociocultural factors and so forth (Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). D'Andrade

(1984) and Strauss & Quinn (1997) asserts cultural meaning as produced through the interaction of what the individual is experiencing at the moment with the cultural framework the individual brings to the moment. In this sense a meaning of something is not readily inherent in objects, minds or message instead it is produced by people's active ongoing construction process within the context of various cultural resources (D'Andrade, 1984; Hannerz, 1992; Shore, 1996). Accordingly we use various collection of cultural framework, models or schemas (Holt, 1997; Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) as a resource in our interpretation or meaning making process. Cultural frameworks can exist in two forms (Shore, 1996); the material or public form of culture (e.g type of clothing, buildings, house, rituals, dance) and less consciously or tacitly known form of culture (e.g. conversation scripts, narratives, stories, kinship relations, theories, styles of movement).

Shore (1996) outline examples of important but usually less consciously known cultural framework or model which we frequently use to construct meanings in our daily life. Two of the examples are narrative and theories.

- **Narrative**

Narrative are categorised under verbal or linguistic cultural model which people used to make sense of their reality through narrating or articulating their experience. Examples of narrative are wide range such as gossip, life stories, everyday stories and so forth. Shore posits that narrative is a cultural framework that involves *'activity of adjusting and creating reality through talking it out. In narrative people continue to make sense of their*

*worlds 'on the fly'. Through narrative, the flow of events is given an articulate form, made into kind of model. Experience is talked into meaningfulness'' (Shore, 1996, p. 58)*

- **Theories**

Theories are categorised under conceptual cultural model that provides clarity to societies about important but otherwise unspoken understandings and experiences. Examples of theories are folk theories, scientific theories and scientific theories (Shore, 1996, pp. 64-65). Folk theories are always empirically based (as is scientific theories) and are often forms of tacit knowledge. Meanwhile scientific and scholarly theories are cultural model that are self-conscious creations, subject to discussion and critical review. However as scientific theories are subject to strict scientific method (e.g. verification and falsification) scholarly theories are usually not subject to the same strict criteria.

Although we draw from these various cultural models, scholars reminds us that cultural framework or models are not rigid rules or script instead they are 'abstracted, transposable, generative frameworks' that we use as our resource to improvise our actions across a wide range of activities (Holt, 1997, p. 332; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Shore, 1996). Hence our cultural frameworks are collection of shared or partly shared elements that work together to help us interpret information at a given time. They are a necessary part of our actions and social interactions; they determine the meanings we give to our current experience, reconstruct our memories of the past, provide expectations of future concerns and usually fill in missing or ambiguous information (Schank & Abelson, 1977; Strauss & Quinn, 1997).

Consequently this research is based on an understanding of culture as; *meaning systems or framework that human beings draw from to make sense of their lives and guide their action* to gain deeper understandings of consumer's lifestyle. This research views consumer's life stories as a cultural model in which consumer's reveal and articulate their everyday consumption experience and meanings to construct lifestyle. Thus cultural frameworks of lifestyle were produced from consumer's emic point of view. Moreover by using life stories as a narrative cultural model to gain deeper understandings of lifestyle this research were able to further explicate other significant cultural frameworks/theories that consumers used to described, interpret and make sense of their everyday consumption experience in their construction of meaningful lifestyle.

### **3.3.2 Gendered Consumption Meanings and Lifestyle**

Historically consumer studies on women's lifestyle were focused on their role as a mother, wife or homemaker with the general trend of interest related to consumption such as patterns of purchase on household product or service (Davis, 1970; S. Douglas, 1976; S. Douglas & Urban, 1977; Ferber, 1974). However changes in socio-economic landscape leading to more women entering the work force saw trends in research changing from focusing on women and their traditional motherhood role towards focusing on women's conflicting role between work and home (Leo Y. M Sin et al., 2001; Southerton & Tomlinson, 2005).

Most studies on women's lifestyle and consumption in the literature were then based on the issues of consumption and the competing roles of women at home/family and their roles at work (Casey & Martens, 2007; Thompson, 1996). These stems from the traditional and normative ideals placed on women through domestic responsibilities (Berg, 1986; Crosby, 1991; Shaw, 1998). As a consequence women's lifestyle is claim to necessary entail 'juggling' or juxtaposing competing ideals of responsibilities, goals and emotional direction between traditional motherhood and career oriented profession (Crosby, 1991; Hochschild, 1989, , 1997; Sullivan, 1997).

Scholar's interest on women's juggling lifestyle has produced various researches addressing consumption and relating it with women's dual roles at home and in the workplace. Amongst the examples are researches showing women's being mostly responsible for the domestic practices (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990), multi-tasking domestic activities e.g. managing household finance (Bobinski & Assar, 1994; Pahl, 1990) or food consumption (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Jackson & Moores, 1996). These social conditions portraying women grappling with juggling lifestyle have given rise to other research particularly on labour saving technologies promising to ease women's dual role and domestic burden (Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Cowan, 1983; Oropesa, 1993).

These studies on women's lifestyle and consumption have indeed provided significant insights into the social dynamics of consumption and gender issues related to the juggling lifestyle. However research that focuses on women's emic meanings of lifestyle and

consumption practices is much needed to fully understand and gain deeper insights from women's own views and description about their experiential aspect of *the lifestyle* that they are living. Much of the research mentioned have implicitly assumed that women are necessarily living a 'juggling' lifestyle which revolves around multitasking between career and home/family. Thompson (1996) demonstrates the potentially rich and detailed insights we can gain from conducting research that explores what women themselves think about their 'juggling lifestyle' and consumption practices, nonetheless in carrying out his research he also assumes from the outset the framework of a 'juggling' lifestyle of work and family that revolves around women's lived world.

Hence this research is predicated upon investigating the lifestyle phenomenon based on consumer's point of view; no pre-existing framework were assumed on what kind of lifestyle these consumers lived, alternatively meanings of lifestyle and consumption practice are sought from the consumer's own articulation and description of their lived experience. Recognizing consumption as a fundamentally gendered process as gender is a filter through which individuals experience their social world (Bristor & Fischer, 1993, p. 519), this study focused were on *women's experience* of everyday consumption and meanings of lifestyle.

This study further justified an investigation on women's lived experience of lifestyle on the basis that women's voice/experience is centered around different issues compared to men (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Whelehan, 1995). Moreover life in a gendered world tend to mostly generates reality which is inclined to the male perspective (Casey & Martens,

2007; Harding, 1991; D. Smith, 1987). This makes it ever more essential to offer this distinctive female voice of lifestyle – *‘not necessarily as a general attribute of women as a class or persons but as a mode of experience that is distinctive to women’* (D. Smith, 1989, p. 34) *and in important ways an experienced that have often been trivialized, regarded as the minutiae of everyday life’* (Hogg et al., 2004, p. 240).

In the quest to understand, articulate and present female experience as an equally valid basis for developing knowledge it is important to take into account gender theories (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Woodruffe-Burton, 1996) that inform us on the male/female related socialization differences. Consequently the next part will focus its discussion on the theories explaining the socio-cultural condition that contributes to the interpersonal orientations and self conceptions that are unique to the female experience - ‘the ethics of care’.

### **3.3.3 Gendered Self: The Caring framework**

According to Thompson (1996), Chodorow (1978) provides the most influential theoretical accounts of the gendered self. She posits that male and female sense of self identity formations are differentiated from an early age as a result of the reproduction process of mothering by women as mothers. She further postulates that women as mothers produce ‘daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother’ thus forming female identity that is orientated towards forming relationship and themes of identification and connectedness-these capacities and needs are built into and grow out of

the mother-daughter relationship. In contrast women as mothers produced sons whose 'nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed' thus resulting in male identity orientated towards autonomy, differentiation and socialization (Chodorow, 1978, p. 7).

Meyers-Levy (1989) in her study of the difference in gender information processing concurs and assert similar male and female notion of the self . According to Myers-Levy research evidence demonstrates that women are more inclined toward a communal outlook which accentuate 'interpersonal relationships, affiliation and attachment of self and other' while males are inclined towards 'self-focused and autonomy-driven orientation' (Meyers-Levy, 1989, p. 244).

Gilligan (1982) echoes Chodorow (1978) and Meyers-Levy (1989) about the differences between female and male identity formation. According to her, women's conception of the self and morality which emphasizes on relationship and connectedness leads them to have different priorities and views in their experiences. Women view the world as 'comprised of relationships rather than people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through system of rules'(p. 29).

This importance of connectedness theme in women's lives translates the way women defines their self concept through the 'ideals of care' or 'ethics of care'- a sense of self seen in relation to others. For women the self is defined through the connection with others whereby their sense of accomplishments is seen through their action that could

help and response to others. This 'ethics of care' revolves around the activity of relationship — an orientation of living one's life and resolving conflicts driven by the feelings of responsibility to respond to needs others while and a sensitivity to the consequences of one's action and choice. This relational self concept which involves the inclusion of both the others and the self could give rise to conflicts such as the feelings of selfishness (when doing things for themselves) or frustration or guilt (when they sacrifice their own preference) Gilligan further (1982) posits that;

*'Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view. Women's moral weakness manifest in an apparent diffusion and confusion of judgment is thus inseparable from women's moral strength, an overriding concern with relationship and responsibilities'. (p. 16)*

Meanwhile Stern (1990) pointed out that in the feminine orientation although the needs for self (individuality) and the needs for others (relationship/connection) are seemingly contradictory, women are able to connect self and other within a context of relationship. This involves the ability to juxtapose between independency (individualities) and dependency (connectedness) by renegotiating their individualities as channeling or contributing to relationship. This concurs with Chodorow (1980) assertion that *'differentiation is not distinctness and separateness, but a particular way of being connected to others'*.

Thompson (1996) provides a set of framework outlining these characteristics of the female identity or relational self which is based on the 'caring framework' and relate this to women's consumption experience which he terms 'the caring consumption' (drawing examples from the women he studied). He proposed that the caring consumption involves the following;

- The relational self- in which one's personal identity is formed and sustained in relation to the activities and the interpersonal relationship that compose one social network. One's accomplishments are not defined by objective achievements instead from the positive affects that their action has on the lives of others particularly the significant other e.g. balance career and motherhood, being more aware of the family/household need.
- The caring orientation – a feeling of responsibility to maintain the network of relationships that composes one's social network. Responsibility of care inspires creative responses to constrains and potential trade offs e.g. personal sacrifice, adjustments, consumption choice focused towards persons/people not objects, feelings of guilt or frustration.
- Anticipation of future consequences – moral judgement that follow from this caring orientation are driven by anticipatory focus on the likely consequences that different courses of action will have on relevant others e.g. focused of women were always on future consumption needs (clothes, routine meals and etc.)

Literature demonstrates various versions of women's experience with regards to the gendered self conception predisposed on the characteristics of relationship and caring. Scholars reveal different experience and version of women's 'caring identity' particularly in respect to the working and caring role (e.g. mothering).

Pinker (2008) put forth a discussion on the general characteristics of the female orientation or self concept also centring on women's general characteristics as predisposed towards a more connectedness outlook or women as having the 'empathy advantage'. Pinker used the term 'empathy advantage' (or termed *empathizing as does Baron Cohen (2004); sympathy as Nancy Eisenberg (1991) or tender-mindedness as Feingold's(1994)*<sup>5</sup> (p. 104) as unique to women in general. Women she says are quicker at identifying and sensing others emotional states and intentions which they sometimes feel deeply as their own and this influences the way they make their decisions. In her study of high achieving women (women who have achieved high ranks and excel in their jobs e.g. in the field of science, engineering and law) tend to leave their job because they had a different view of success, it was more meaningful for them to realize their intrinsic goal - '*interest and capacity to have an impact in the real world are more powerful drivers for women, on average than higher salaries, job security and benefits*' (p. 70). These women found that they valued and defined success as being able to be involved in

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<sup>5</sup> For further references see Nancy Eisenberg et.al (1991) 'Personality and Socialization Correlates of Vicarious Emotional Responding', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61 (3); Alan Feingold (1994) 'Gender Differences in Personality: A Meta Analysis', *Psychological Bulletin* 116 (3); Simon Baron Cohen and Sally Wheelwright (2004), The Empathy Quotient, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 34(2).

service oriented and less obsessive work that were *'making a difference to other people and to a project greater than themselves'* (p. 78).

In addition to these findings, Pinker further asserts that the 'empathy advantage' of women plays a pivotal part in women's decision to make adjustments to their career particularly in terms of adjustments for 'care giving'. The decision for doing work which enables them to put their family as top priority-'care giving' after all the hard work building their careers according to Pinker (2008) may seem like a self denial however it is claimed to be an act of achieving self fulfilment, she says this decision; *'can look like self-denial or a throwback to a time when women assumed all the caretaking. But saying no to inflated work demands to preserve a few hours with a spouse or children or to safeguard time to take care of a sick parent can be a selfish act. Empathy for family members can trump an exclusive focus on status and money for many women, not as self denial but as a form of self fulfilment'* (p. 97).

Similar to Pinker, Hewlett (2002) in her study of women in top careers (e.g. high powered corporate jobs in banking, accountancy and so forth) demonstrates that these women are unhappy because they were family-less and child-less. In line with their ethics of care Hewlett purports that these women doesn't gain fulfilment by having top career instead they long to have children but their commitment in making sure they are at the top of their career ladder seems to hinder their chances of having their own family and children. She portrays cases where these women go to extra length to bear children such as their effort in turning to high technology to conceive, yet only a small percentage of

women are successful in conceiving by this way. Consequently Hewlett suggest that even though women's career are nonetheless important they should first attempt to build a family at an early age (where the chances to bore children are higher) and focused on career after having achieved this.

On the other hand other scholars have demonstrates that women's identity or ethics of care doesn't necessarily put them into a dilemma of choosing between either career or family/children instead they employ various strategies to keep up with these two domains of their life. Two of the known strategies are balancing and weaving; whilst balancing is seen as strategy employed by women who sees that their work and family as competing weaving is a strategy that connects two of this spheres which is seen as compatible (Garey, 1999; Halpern & Murphy, 2005).

(Garey, 1999) in her study found that instead of seeing work and home as opposites, women creatively integrate or 'weave' the two domains together which counter the notion that *'the more a woman is said to be oriented to her work (employment) the less she is seen as oriented to her family'*(p. 6). This is also evidenced in the work of Gatrell (2005) whose study shows that despite women's love and devotion for their children they were still deeply committed to their job and made every effort to juxtapose their career and motherhood. Although faced with conventional gender ideals imposed unto them - as the person in charge of the domestic and emotional labour in the family; these women outlined various reasons for their effort in juxtaposing these two domains such as; achieving satisfaction from having a career, working as a moral contribution to the

society, maintaining the high position that they had established and the ability to reduce the power difference between themselves and their husbands by having an earned income. Meanwhile (Hattery, 2001) found that women in her study employ various strategies in putting up work and family, some of them see the necessity of weaving between work and family, whilst others feel the need to balance these spheres.

Meanwhile Blair-Loy (2003) work shows situation where women whom are committed to maintaining their high powered ranking job experiencing difficult terrain in trying to excel in both spheres; between identity as a mother and identity as an excellent worker. This is in part is an outcome of the construction of 'work' which only recognised male patterned work and continues to render invisible women's (unwaged) work such as reproductive labour and domestic labour (Blair-Loy, 2003; Gatrell, 2005, , 2008). As a consequence most women employ various strategies to keep up with the employment and familial responsibilities such as relying on commercial childcare centres, employing paid help for domestic chores, employing living in helpers (England, 1996; Gatrell, 2005; Yeoh & Huang, 1999).

Research further demonstrates that due to their financial lack, women from working class or those from lower income tend to have different experienced of the working and caring (e.g. mothering) domain as they are necessarily involved in employment. Their social condition forces them to learn to accept jobs and motherhood as a workable domain as opposed to competing domain (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Segura, 1994; Sobritchea, 2007).

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter began by outlining the overview of the culture concept. It then identified the etic and emic cultural approaches applied particularly in relation to consumer lifestyle research. Further to this the cultural meaning system or cultural framework adopted in this research in relation to consumption and lifestyle was then introduced and discussed. Finally discussion was focused on the gendered consumption meanings, lifestyle and self concept. This discussion on the cultural approaches in consumer research presents the basis for the adoption of the cultural framework approach of this thesis and also as a platform for analysis and discussion in Chapter 6, 8 and 9.

## Chapter 4: (Malay) Women's Local Cultural Framework

*When we receive a man as bridegroom  
If he is strong, he shall be our champion.  
If a fool, he will ordered about  
To invite guest distant and collect guests near;  
Clever and we'll invite his counsel;  
Learned and we'll ask his prayers;  
Rich we'll use his gold;  
If lame, he shall rear chicken,  
If blind, he shall pound the mortar,  
If deaf, he shall fire the salute,  
When you enter a byre, low;  
When you enter a goat's pen, bleat;  
When you tread the soil of a country and live beneath the sky;  
Follow the customs of that country...  
(**'Pantun Melayu Bebas'**-Free style Malay poem translated by Andrew Caldwell, Resident of Negeri Sembilan (Wazir Jahan, 1992)*

*'Muslim women are central to family affairs from domestic decision-making to rituals. Where their lot are miserable and they have virtually no rights..it is to be attributed to Muslim male tyranny not Islamic advice and is in need of urgent redress'(pg 43)  
(Akbar S. Ahmed, 1992)*

## **4.0 Introduction**

In this Chapter an overview of Malaysia as a country is first offered. This is followed by discussions of the country's socio-cultural and economic progress in relation to gender such as economic development, participation in employment and the state's modernization project. Next, two important identity characteristics of the Malays in Malaysia –Islam and *adat* are discussed. Among the focus of discussion are on the historical path and appropriation of Islam in Malaysia and also the combination of *adat* and Islam which coexist as a dual structural principle guiding the social relations of the Malay society . Further to this the 'bilateralism framework' a specific form of *adat* which is argued to give prominence and autonomy to Malay women and in part forms the basis of the social construction and conceptualization of gender relationships are discussed. Finally the developments of Islam in contemporary Malaysia are reviewed. The developments of Islamization (Islamic revivalism) is further discussed focusing on issues (re)presenting and (re)constructing the Malay Muslim womanhood (e.g. effects of Islamization on women's values and self conception, participation in intellectual Islamic activities and practices such as veiling and attending religious classes).

### **4.1 Malaysia-An Overview**

Geographically Malaysia is a part of the South East Asia archipelago consisting of two regions separated by the South China Sea which is Peninsular Malaysia (or West Malaysia) and East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia is connected to the mainland South

East Asia via the long narrow isthmus of Southern Thailand, while East Malaysia lies on the island of Borneo. Across this two regions are thirteen states and three federal territories which are Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya (in Peninsular Malaysia) and Labuan (in East Malaysia) . Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia while Putrajaya is the Federal Government administrative centres which houses most of the government agencies (Perbadan Putrajaya, 2010).

Climate wise, Malaysia doesn't experience many changes in the weather. It is sunny all year round and occasionally rains in certain months with temperatures ranging from 21°C to 32°C. The weather is influence by the north east and south west monsoons which blows alternately during the year. The North east monsoon brings rains to the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia from November to February. Meanwhile south west monsoon brings drier period for the whole country particularly the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, which is sheltered by the land of Sumatra, Indonesia (Gin, 1999).

**Figure 2: Map of Malaysia and Southeast Asia**



Malaysia can be considered one of the most developed countries in the Asian region. After more than five decades of Independence there have been numerous changes and developments in the country. Some of the examples of famous structural development are her own car manufacturing industry, hosts of the world tallest twin towers (the Petronas Twin Towers); she is one of the cities in the world (the others being Tokyo, Hong Kong, London, Oslo and Stockholm) that offers express train service (KLIA Express Rail Link) for the fastest way to the airport. Besides that, another astounding structural development is the international airport (KLIA) Kuala Lumpur International Airport which is one of the largest in the world, and certainly the region's largest

international airport when it opened in 1998. Close to KLIA is Malaysia's own Formula One circuit that has hosted some prestigious international races.

Malaysia's population is as remarkable as her structural development. The nation of 28 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009b) is a melting pot of divergent of race, religion and culture living together harmoniously. The three main ethnic groups are the Malays plus other indigenous groups or sometimes called the *bumiputeras* (65.1%), Chinese (26%) and Indians (7.7%), remaining 1.2% are other races. The Malays are usually Muslim by religion, which is also the official religion of the country. Meanwhile other ethnics' practices other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism and Confucianism. *Bahasa Malaysia* is the official language in Malaysia, however English is widely spoken. Other languages spoken are Mandarin, Cantonese, other Chinese dialect, Tamil and Punjabi.

#### **4.3 Malaysian Modernization and Gender**

Malaysia has stood out as one of Asia's success story particularly as one of the few countries in the world that has consistent economic growth since the late (Ng & Lee, 1999). The country has seen a massive social change since independence in 1957 moving from relative poverty and rural backwardness towards an image and position of a modern nation demonstrating booming economies, consumption and progressive and rapidly improving conditions of society (health, education, life expectancy etc.). Although the economic path faced several obstacles for example the economic downturn in 1985-1986

and also the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the Malaysian economy has demonstrated a strong resilience against external uncertainties and continues to thrive in the current times. In 2003 Malaysia's GDP registered growth of 5.2% well ahead of the 4.1% recorded in 2002. Despite the slower economic growth in 2003, the unemployment rate was at 3.5 % (Price Water House, 2004). In addition to this Malaysia through its financial sector has shown noteworthy resilient when facing the 2008 global financial crisis, its economy shrunk as a result however economist forecast that the economy will recover between 4.5%-5.5% this year (Gooch, 2010).

Malaysia used to be an agricultural based economy, however over the past three decades the structure of the economy underwent major and positive changes through various policies and efforts by the government in an attempt to propel the country towards a fully developed Malaysia by the year 2020 (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2005; K.S. Jomo, 1993; Kahn, 1996).

Currently manufacturing and service sector has become the main contributor to the economy. Some of the policies introduced and implemented as an initiative towards this modernization process are; the New Economic Policy (NEP) implemented in 20 year period (1970-1990)--formulated with two prime aims which were to alleviate and eventually eradicate poverty and to restructure the economic imbalances between ethnic

groups<sup>6</sup> (recently the current Prime Minister-Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak in his speech on the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan to the House of Representatives at Parliament outlines the governments continuation support to the Bumiputera development agenda) (New Straits Times, 2010), partnership between state and private economic sector (K. S. Jomo, 1995) and the National Development Policy-with aims to encourage increasing participation of the Malay's in the economy, emphasis on high technology industrialization and skill, emphasis on human resource development and so forth.

Malaysia's modernization and development process have had significant effect on women's experienced and daily lives. The government's modernization efforts resulted in a rise of women's participation in the labour force for women generally and saw particular dramatic increase for Malay women due in part to the NEP policy (e.g rapid urbanization of Malay population related to work in urban areas particularly in the 1970's and 1980's, Malay women dominated the manufacturing sector employment) (Norani Othman, 1998) .

Currently the 2008 Labour Force statistics indicates that half of Malaysians total population of 27.73 million of the were women (49.1%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009a). Among this women population, 45.7% of women between aged 15 and 64 years participated in the labour force. Using various policies and establishing

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<sup>6</sup> The NEP was initiated to redress economic imbalance between ethnic groups (although ethnic Malays comprises nearly 60% of the population they only held 3% of the nation's wealth) which was thought to be the reason for ethnic tensions leading to riots in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, it comprises various strategies to help the Malay ethnic boost their economic standings; - critiques see it as contributing to class differentiation and government giving in to Malay business/intelligentsia demands to protect 'Malay' interests; see for example (Jin, 1992; Searle, 1999)

institutional structures the government provides an enabling environment for the advancement of women both at national and international levels and are progressively assimilating women into the mainstream of social and economic activities, amongst the examples are (Ministry of Women & Family Development Malaysia, 2003); National Vision Policy on Women which aims to ensure equal opportunities for developments among men and women and the integration of women in the process of development, National Education System which aims at providing a non discriminatory access to male and female alike, establishments of institutions and departments specifically to coordinate, administer and monitor issues regarding women such as Ministry of Women & Family Development (MWFD), National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) and National Population and Family Development (LPPKN).

Acknowledgements of women's capabilities and competencies have led to the appointment of women ministers as well as administrators joining the top positions of the civil service for example; women's appointment as ministers registered an increase from 11.4% in the year 2008 to 14.7% in 2009 (Cabinet Division Malaysia, 2009) . The Census revealed that the health status of women have improved, for example the life expectancy of Malaysian women indicates an increase of 29%, from 58.2 years in 1957 to 75 years in 2000 and an increased at 76.4 years in 2007 (Ministry of Women & Family Development Malaysia, 2003, , 2009).

Variiegated and expanded educational opportunities showed improvements not only in the level of labour participation but also in terms of new career trajectories with more women participating in non-agricultural based occupations than their male counterparts. These developments parallel with the higher education level for women since the 1990's compared to man (Ministry of Women & Family Development Malaysia, 2009) and trend where female outnumber male students in securing places at institutions of higher learning (Berita Harian, 2010; Irfan Mohamad, 2010). Meanwhile the percentage of women in professional jobs (legislators, senior officials, lawyers, engineers, managers, technicians, teachers, religious workers, performing artists and social workers and etc.) saw an increased from 26.8% in 1980 to 36% in the year 2007(Ministry of Women & Family Development Malaysia, 2009).

With respect to marriage it is recorded that the mean age at first marriage for women have risen from 22.1 years in 1970 to 25.3 years in 2004 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2004) a sign that women are considering marriage until later years in life in part due to participation in workforce and gaining education (Jones, 1994; Rabieyah & Roszaini, 2002). In terms of employed married working women, there was a lower participation of married women in work force during 1975-1984. However the proportion of married working women underwent significant changes from the late 1980's, with the proportion of married working women escalating to 55.3% in 1990 and 58.4% in 2000 (Ministry of Women & Family Development Malaysia, 2003). The increase in the percentage of married working women also reflects that the percentage of families with dual incomes has also increased.

Evidently the modernization projects through social, political and economic policies have brought many positive changes to women's lives within the last four decades. However it is equally pertinent to look beyond this straightforward effect of modernizing project on women and take into account that these modernization projects are gendered processes which have a wider and complex repercussion (possible of creating positive, contradicting, confusing and other values and practices with regards to women's live and roles). Through this gendered modernization development and process women's image and bodies have been constantly produced and reproduced to accommodate the state's or government current policies. Some of the examples of modernization projects of the state specifically focused on women's image and bodies are;

- In the 1970's -1980's under the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970) the country's policy was of family planning (Roziyah Omar, 1994, , 2003). The government's policy was to limit family size which was in line with government efforts to subscribe to policy by the World Bank which saw unmonitored birth growth as causing poverty and underdevelopment (Stivens, 1998a). Consequently Malaysian women were exposed to various programmes funded by the World Bank and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to control their fertility through various state family planning services such as rural health clinics, midwives clinics and contraception (Laderman, 1983; Wazir Jahan, 1984). However Stivens in her study of the women in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan during the 1970's found that village women appeared to have knowledge about contraceptive but did not

practice them, only younger and middle class women who appeared to have an intention of applying this form of controlled fertility once they achieved the number of children they want (Stivens, 1998a). In addition Ong (1990) posits similar situation where some of the women she studied were exposed to conflict and ambivalent situation with their husbands, families and even themselves about taking the contraceptive pill.

- Post 1980's saw a reversal in the governments projects where women are now encouraged to have a big family size as the country are now aiming to increase its population to 70 million (Swee-Hock, 1988). The rationale given was that the country needed a big population to provide large domestic market in order to support the country's future industries and high tech industrialization policies (Rashidah Abdullah, 1993; Swee-Hock, 1988, p. 260). Consequently families are encouraged to have more children (Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed during that time suggested a possibility of five children) with encouragement strategies such as; changing the name of The Family Planning Board to National Population and Family Development (LPPKN), tax rebates for more children and introducing 60 days entitlement of maternity leave for women (Rashidah Abdullah, 1993; Roziyah Omar, 2003)
- The 1990's and beyond, saw the government promoting the importance of a strong *family* through various campaigns of 'Family Values', Keluarga Bahagia (Happy Families), declaration of National Family Day and so on (Mohd

Azizuddin et al., 2009; Stivens, 2006, , 2007). Government through these projects continue to exhort that *family institution* can act as a barrier to social problems such as sexual abuse, teenage social loafing and so on. The government project promoting importance of families parallels the pervading government discourse on women that represents their image as one who successfully balances her work and family life (Stivens, 2007). Thus the woman is represented as an image of a person who holds on strongly to her family (hardworking modern mothers and housewives) while at the same time remains successfully in her career (energetic and successful career women). Some examples of this policy are exhibited in speeches delivered by ministers and top civil servants such as below;

This quote from Datuk Sharizat Abdul Jalil (Malaysian Women & Family Development Minister) speech delivered at a Seminar to office workers;

*'Only strong women can carry out the multifarious roles of mother, child and worker effectively while remaining pillars of the family and country'* (New Straits Times, 2000)

Two years on Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Prime Minister at that time) outlines the importance of the family and its values in curbing social problems at the launch of the 'Family First-Bring Your Heart Home' campaign at the Women's Affair and Family Development Ministry;

*'we must be resilient and hold on to our family values, which have been proven good to us'*(New Straits Times, 2002)

Seven years on the National Population and Family Development (LPPKN) announced a course carried out in an attempt to educate civil servants on finding the balance between family and work. According to Dr Anjali Doshi (the acting deputy director of LPPKN);

*'Called parenting@work, these courses are designed for those trying to manage their multiple roles as parent, spouse and employee.....Some 47% of women in the country are in the workforce and this means that a large number of families are dual income..With long working hours and bigger commitments at work many find their family suffering as a result. Less time is spent with children and spouse and this contributes to greater stress level'*(New Straits Times, 2007).

In this sense the effort to synchronize modernization projects with the country's development and growth agenda some of the modernizations discourse continues to (re) create complex and contradictory situations for women and seem to take little accounts of the realities in which women are currently embedded into for example; the call for women to have more children to fulfil the country's 70 million target population will create a pressure on women to stay at home as a large number of women are already participating in the labour force. In fact it is ironic as historically (married Malay) women in Malaysia have been rarely confined to the 'domestic' and going out to work for

subsistence is a normal situation-see for example (Firth, 1966a; Lie, 2000; Stevens, 1998a; Wazir Jahan, 1992, , 1995; Winzeler, 1976). Furthermore government discourse on family values (as outlined in the example quotes above) seemed to put more prominence on women as responsible for successfully nurturing the family and also weaving of work and family.

In this light the review of the modernization process which goes beyond the simple ‘effect of modernization on women’ is important as this thesis believes that in order to provide as close as possible account of women’s lifestyle it is important to look into the general and also specificities of contextual development in which the women is embedded into. However this research doesn’t claim to provide holistic and detail discussion on the complex relationship between government’s modernization or ‘intervention’ projects with rights and images of women as this would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

Apart from modernization efforts based on structural progress by the government, Islamization projects and discourse promoting Islamic modernity initiated by the state and also by various Islamic forces in the country are part of important modernization developments that have significant impact on women’s lives.

*As ‘every religious tradition is a combination of not only its sacred texts and their interpretation but also the application or appropriation of these interpretations within various contexts... when context changes so does the interpretation of the text that shapes our consciousness, and therefore our attitudes’(Ataman, 2007, p. 496), therefore it is*

important to understand Islam as practiced in the local context. Thus the next section will discuss Islam in the social and historical context starting from the early arrival of Islam followed by Islam in the contemporary time in Malaysia where the modernization or revival of Islam have taken place.

#### **4.4 Islam and Adat in Malaysia**

A Malay person is usually identified as a Muslim<sup>7</sup> in practice and in definition. The Malaysian constitution clearly defined a Malay as: *A person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay customs....*(Malaysia: Federal Constitution, 160(2).) Various scholars outlines the fact that the Malay's beliefs, ideologies and knowledge are based on the integral function of Islam and *adat* (Malay customs) (Milner, 2008; Sharifah Zaleha, 2000; Zainal Kling, 1995), hence in the quest to understand the lifestyle of Malay women it is pertinent to look at the relations between the historical developments of Malay society in terms of *adat* and Islamic practices as these are two important sources of a Malay identity.

The historical path of the arrival and appropriation of Islam into the country during the early Islamic era can be said to be one of the important factors contributing to the different interpretations of Islam in Malaysia. When Islam arrived in Malay Peninsula it encountered the existing local customs of the Malay people or *adat* that was already heavily influenced and integral with Indian customs and practices due to the fact that in

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<sup>7</sup> 'A Muslim is an adherent of Islam who identifies with the religion and lives in general accordance with the values and tenets both of the religion and of the civilization that has emerged to represent Islam' (Federspiel, 2007, p. 2)

the era before the advent of Islam, Malaya had been a part of the Hindu empire of Srivijaya (Milner, 2008). Moreover when Islam was embraced in Melaka (in Malaysia) during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was first embraced by the leaders or ruler titled the raja or sultan (highly respected and believed to have mystical and Godly power by his followers) whom subsequently instructed his kingdom to follow suit. It was the raja/sultan who was the spiritual leader rather than the Islamic specialist (ulama/mullahs). Hence at the beginning the rulers were still largely exercising adat or local customs in their everyday practices and occasionally incorporating Islamic beliefs with these (Federspiel, 2007; Milner, 1981, , 2008).

*Adat* or customs governs and guides behaviour and way of living for the Malays. According to Karim (1992) *adat* generally refers to the '*total constellation of concepts, rules and codes of behaviour which are conceived as legitimate or right, appropriate or necessary*' (p. 14). The term *adat* covers a wide spectrum of meanings, levels of contents and practices ranging from special rituals in lifecycle 'rites de passage', crafts, arts, traits and behaviours, and systems of social and gender relationship (Milner, 2008; J. A. Nagata, 1974a, , 1974b). Elements of Indian influences in *adat* can be seen in the 'Malay wedding' ceremony (e.g: the groom and bridegroom seating on a high throne) (Asiapac, 2004) beliefs in shaman (bomoh) and spirits (Milner, 2008; Wazir Jahan, 1992), shadow play (Cheng, 2006; B. Wright, 1981), ceremonies and titles of the Malay monarch (Milner, 2008).

Consequently when Islam was embraced by the ruler-*raja/sultan* in the fifteenth century it was adopted as the religion but did not displaced *adat* instead in the early phase Islamic practices were syncretize with the existing adat framework-*'old rituals were combined with rather than replaced by Islamic ones'* (Cheng, 2006; Milner, 2008, p. 44; Sharifah Zaleha, 2000). Various works demonstrated that although Islam was adopted in Malaya it did not transform the local practices in a revolution or dramatic manner instead the process was far slower and gradual which saw the *adat* surviving this process and being enmeshed with Islamic beliefs (Federspiel, 2007; Milner, 1981). Some of the animistic and (un)Islamic habits that were still practiced and slow to changed were –e.g drinking of wine by the monarchs (Mills 1970 cf. Milner, 2008) and people making offering to tree, stones and spirits (Reid, 1993).

According to (Federspiel, 2007) folk beliefs around the role of shaman (bomoh) were already in placed when Islam arrived and the Muslim specialists did not essentially change their roles. On the other hand the local shaman used Islam as a source for supplementing their incantations. Meanwhile Peletz (2002) and Milner (1981) noted that during the early modern times of Islam, although the sultan's of Peninsula Malaysia did incorporate Islamic phrasing and symbols in court, they did little to enforce and institutionalize Islamic law and court system. Rulers instead preferred the local and customary penalties such as shaming and fines. Federspiel (2007) concurs and states that *'..the law and law codes that emerged were first of all reflective of the local customary law which prescribed the greatest portion of principles, procedure and punishments, while Islamic law fit into that custom and gave it underlying principle and direction'* (p.

51). It is for these reason it is argued that Islam in Malaysia is practiced in a more tolerant and moderate way (Wazir Jahan, 1992; , 1995; Wong, 2007).

According to (Zainal Kling, 1995) in Malay society adat and Islam functions as a dual structural principles through which society is organized, it is '*reflected in the constitution of the basic social institutions in politics, economy, kinship, family and stratification*' (1995, p. 46). Islamization of the Malay state did little to replaced the system of social relations of the local Malay society which was characterized by the 'bilateral norm' (Milner, 2008; Wazir Jahan, 1992) where importance of descents and roles were equal both through the mother (or wife) and father (or husband) which helped in enhancing the female roles (Djamour, 1959; Firth, 1966b; Kuchiba et al., 1974; Maeda, 1975).

Alternatively it coexisted with the existing adat system of social relation –women were at most time using this fluidity of systems of social relations to their advantage (Firth, 1966a; Wazir Jahan, 1992); where men's power lies in Islam, adat reduced this hierarchical gender difference by articulating women's position by emphasizing on elements such as seniority, reciprocity and productivity. This moderating effect is also demonstrated in Karim (1992) and Djamour (1959) observation in the case of division of land and property in the Malay society where decisions are not made automatically based on Islamic laws but often made based on cooperation (sepakat) in which male and female is given equal opportunity to inherit property.

Notwithstanding that other domains of *adat* will be insightful it will be out of the scope of this thesis to focus on the broad issues of *adat*, alternatively the discussion entails will focus on the significance and consequences of the ‘**bilateralism framework**’ in women’s lives, role and development.

#### **4.4.1 (Malay) Women and Bilateralism Framework of Adat**

The most salient and persistent form of *adat* in the context of giving prominence and autonomy to women is the concept of ‘bilateralism’, which forms the basis of constructing and conceptualizing social and gender relationship in the Malay society (Djamour, 1959; Milner, 2008; Wazir Jahan, 1992; Zainal Kling, 1995). Karim (1992) put forth the term ‘bilaterality’ which introduces bilateralism framework as signifying rules of ‘*balancing or harmonizing intersexual ties and relationships*’(p. 11). The bilateralism framework prioritize the need to maintain social relationships through rules of complementarities and attempts to balance out differences and hierarchies in ranks, gender and class (Wazir Jahan, 1995).

Consequently bilateralism framework can be said to assists and facilitates women’s participation and independence in the Malay society as noted by (Wazir Jahan, 1990);

*‘One of the more important points which were highlighted (in previous anthropological studies of the Malays) was the loose ego-centred bi-lateral pattern of kinship, minimising gender differentiation and maximising generation differences and seniority. Women are*

*not completely subsumed by Islam except in matters of marriage and divorce, and adat held close to rein on all, ensuring equitable distribution of inheritance, property and status between men and women'* (1990, p. 14)

Djamour (1959) and Lie (2000) demonstrates the contribution of bilateralism framework where importance is placed on maintaining a close network with the kinship system thus providing women with the support and independence in the times of need. (Djamour, 1959, p. 143) put forth that the Malay women is always able to 'depend upon her own kin's support', while (Lie, 2000) posits the importance of extended kin such as grandmothers and other family members as important source for childcare for women who had to go out and work.

In addition developments such as industrialization and urbanization related to opportunities and location of work (Ng & Lee, 1999; Ong, 1987) in contemporary Malaysia such as the urban and reduced sized households mushrooming in the cities and surrounding suburbs (e.g Kuala Lumpur, Selangor) have not obliterated the strong kinship ties of the Malay women. Stivens (1996; , 1998a; , 2000) demonstrates evidenced of continuation existence of strong kinship ties or 'kin help'; one example is where mothers to be usually go back to their home town (their parent's home) to give birth and undergo their confinement period. She further contends that the pressures of industrialisation may be a condition that intensifies the dependence of women towards their extended family as women negotiate their place within the urban lifestyle.

The bilateralism frameworks of *adat* have also been related to the assertiveness of Malay women in not putting up with marriage that have become unsatisfactory. Swift (1969) noted that 'divorce in such a system carries no stigma' and 'no moral prestige' is gained by putting up with a marriage that has become unsatisfactory' (cf. Milner, 2008, p. 190) in fact according to Wazir Jahan (1992) 'it is more socially acceptable than not marrying at all' (p. 142). A study of the Malay society in Kedah (Kuchiba et al., 1974) outlines that the bilateralism *adat* system 'not the inherent nature of the Islamic law' as the possible reason for the prevalence of divorce, some of the reasons were;

- *The nature of Malay family structure allows divorce to occur...He or she is able to find support and refuge in the natal family in the event of a divorce...(it) functions as an emotional and material support system for its members as long as it persists.*
- *Competition of conjugal relationships between spouses and consanguineal relationships between parents and their children facilitates much of divorce.*

*..a married person is..free to move into their father's, mother's or any of the grandparents's house in the event of a divorce (cf. Zainal Kling, 1995, p. 57)*

Wazir Jahan(1992) in her observation of the high rate of divorce cases of Malay couples in Kelantan and Terengganu reported that it was women who initiated the divorce procedures as women feel that it is better to terminate an incompatible marriage rather than to maintain and persists with mental anguish and unhappiness. Firth (1966a) asserts that '*one of the undoubted reasons why divorce is not a disaster for a woman which it might be her ability to earn her own living in sundry ways which may also, of course supplement her husband's income*' (Firth, 1966a, pp. 29-30). Although women have

limited amount of prerogative in divorce, Malay women usually resort to informal procedure of getting a divorce (when the husband is reluctant to give one) such as; nagging and public humiliation of her husband through exposing his weakness which eventually results in them obtaining a divorce (Banks, 1983, p. 100; Djamour, 1959, pp. 115-117; Firth, 1966a, p. 29).

This bilateralism framework of the Malay adat combined with other general adat is an important source that the Malays draws from as guidelines for courteous behaviour and refined character or what is termed '*budibahasa*' (Asma Abdullah, 1996). Some of the general adat relating to character of '*budibahasa*' prescribes to the Malay to be distinguishable on the basis of good traits and behaviours are; guarding personal honour or dignity (*maruah*) and name or reputation (*nama*) (Djamour, 1959) and being gracious and cordial (*baik hati dan peramah*) (Asiapac, 2004; Goddard, 1997). In addition the Malay (women) particularly are expected also by *adat* to be gentle and refined (*halus dan lemah lembut*) (RoZIAH Omar, 2003).

These behavioural traits as coveted by *adat* can be argued to be one of the reasons for Malay women to practice 'informality' and avoid exerting direct power in their everyday life because a Malay who attempts to correct another openly without minding his words would be considered uncivilized or brutish expressed in statements like '*tidak tahu adat*' - a person without understanding and concern for customs or in a very negative and derogatory term '*kurang ajar*' - a person without refinement and education (Wazir Jahan, 1992, p. 65)

Wazir Jahan (1995) states that for Malay women *'to do things through informal structures is the proper way and one which is fully acceptable within the confines of custom (adat)'* (p. 18). When exposed to various situations in which conflicts arises women are said to respond or retaliate *'invincibly'* resorting to methods such as; witchcraft or sorcery (Stivens, 1998b), cutting of communication (staying silent for days as in *'silent treatment'*), withdrawal (from participation or discussion of activities), staying silent about personal incomes (Wazir Jahan, 1992, , 1995). These are the strategies deployed to avoid direct confrontation instead they *'develop a form of hostile harmony which will be uncomfortable for the person who is the source of irritation—friendly animosity'* (Wazir Jahan, 1995, p. 18).

In this sense then agency and power for the Malay women is not exercised and exerted publicly instead it is applied in an invisible, informal yet effective manner which is alienated from the system of privileges and rights sanctioned by the formal institutions in order to maintain a dignified front of *'maruah'*, *'nama'* (honour and reputation) and *'budibahasa'* (courteous and refined behaviour) as sanctioned by *adat*. In coherence with *adat* then, the Malay women's exercise of agency and power are dissimilar to that of the Western perspective which;

*..tend to identify 'power' with activity, forcefulness, getting things done, instrumentality and effectiveness brought about through the calculations of means to achieve goals. The prevalent view in many parts of island Southeast Asia however, is that to exert force, to*

*make explicit commands, or to engage in direct activity—other words to exert power in a Western sense—reveals a lack of spiritual power and effective potency and consequently diminishes prestige* (Errington, 1990, p. 5)

The availability of the syncretic combination of *adat* and Islam as a framework for negotiating a complementary gender and social relationship can be argued to ‘facilitates women’s active participation in ritual and community relations’ (Wazir Jahan, 1992, p. 230); and the reason that women in Malaysia differs from that to women in other Muslim countries (Norani, 1998; Ong, 1990). Generally studies exhibits that even though men are represented to be leader and decision makers of the family, the Malay women (at least the married women) is accorded flexibility and seldom restrained in many spheres such as participation in economic and social activities (Firth, 1966a; Lie, 2000; Ong, 1990; Rudie, 1994; Strange, 1981; Wazir Jahan, 1992; Winzeler, 1976)<sup>8</sup>

In his research on the State formation of the Southeast Asia, Winzeler (1976) observation points to the evidence of this bilateralism concept in which he notes of the equal involvement of both men and women in supporting a living;

*‘Societies in this region all lack the kinds of subsistence bases that are most readily linked to male-centred patrilineal forms of social organizations, such as co-operative big-game hunting, large scale animal pastoralism and dry-grain draft animal*

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<sup>8</sup> These studies demonstrate how the meaning of ‘work’ have changed over time, in the 1960’s ‘work’ for women meant gaining income for subsistence through various available activities, while in the 1980’s work meant earning specific wage through participating in formal labour or industrialized market. Post 1980’s also saw a shift where women who largely participated in industrialized labour force were unrestricted to married women, see for example

*agricultural. Instead, they rely for the most part on either slash-and-burn horticulture or wet-rice agriculture, with fishing and in some case gathering being important secondary activities, in all these, men and women tend to be more or less equally involved, both in production and processing'* (1976, p. 631).

Rosemary Firth (1966a) in her detailed ethnographic description of the Malay fisherman society in Kelantan outlines that women plays an extremely important role in the economic organization of the society and are rarely restrained to the domestic space instead she observes that *'among the villagers the women go about freely unveiled, and mix with men on the beach, in the markets, and in the rice field....some women teach Koran at schools (some) women pray at the evening prayer time just as men do, and even go to special services for women in the Mosque. They are not excluded from active participation in Muslim religious affairs'* such as during the circumcision affair event of female babies or older boys (Firth, 1966a, p. 26). She further notes that the women's real influence was her ability to control either the household or her own income for example; women were largely seen as the banker or administrator of money in the Malay household (these are clearly demonstrated in Firth's observation where men have said *'it was difficult if his wife was ill because then he would have to keep an eye on the cash which was hard as he had to work'* and said to have to discuss (with wife) before he could give a price to sell his boat).

In addition women are also recorded to have their own capital such as boats, nets or houses which they inherited or obtained from saving or working, Firth put forth *'a woman*

*is not wholly subservient to man in economic or social affairs. Both by law and by customs she preserves a considerable degree of individuality'*(Firth, 1966a, p. 29). Amongst the various economic activities in which these women participated in were making and selling of snacks, thread spinning and net making, harvesting paddy, gutting fish to sell as dried fish or dealing with fresh and cooked fish, shop keepers, copra maker and gold worker. Similar situation were observed by Wazir Jahan (1992) in her study of the Malay agricultural society in Mawang, Kedah. She notes that women in Mawang have an important role in maintaining the household economy and resources and large units of farm land were cultivated by women. In addition women derived significant power from owning and managing land which they usually inherit from their parents.

Ong (1990) outlines the way *adat* defines adult womanhood in which the roles of married women are constructed with more leniency compared to restricted roles of single women, although this is done within the Islamic construction in relation to men. According to Ong (1990); *'Women were the ones who maintained kin and neighbourly relations through sharing resources, information, childcare, and the work of preparing feasts. In their own homes, married women customarily held the purse-strings, despite Islamic emphasis on men's keeping and handling money. Most important, women's special knowledge and skills were used in cooking, child-birth, health care and intensification of sexual pleasure'* (p. 261). Indeed one of the important guideline from *adat* framework is the importance of preserving sexual attractiveness of married women in order to retain the husband's interest. Sexuality is viewed in a positive light and emphasized as an important aspect (for both men and women-see (Wazir Jahan, 1992, pp. 143-144)) to maintain a

healthy and satisfactory relationship and marriage. Hence the high priority and emphasis of health and conditioning women's bodies throughout marriage such as; taking traditional health tonics or herbs (jamu) and also taking good care of oneself after giving birth or during confinement/postpartum period (avoiding certain 'cold' or 'hot' food etc.) so as to maintain women's sexual prowess (Ab. Rahman et al., 1999; Laderman, 1983, 1987; Ong, 1990; Stivens, 1998a). All of which are usually departed from elderly women whom have knowledge and skills regarding these matters.

Meanwhile Malay women also play an important role in coordinating and organizing of *kenduri*<sup>9</sup> a feast in connection to a certain ceremonial events including possibly organizing ceremonial events for political parties in which they are a member (Manderson, 1980; J. A. Nagata, 1974a; Rudie, 1994; Wazir Jahan, 1992). It is normal to find that Malay women are most active in preparing and organizing task and work teams to conduct these ceremonies such as preparing, cooking and serving food associated with *kenduri*, creatively involved in decorating of the bridal throne (pelamin), the bridal room, or bridal gifts (hantaran), preparing for feast for the completion of reading Quran (khatam Quran) and many others. These activities are usually carried out independently from man and women find this an important aspect of their activities hence it is not unusual for women to compete in these respects. Moreover those who have become well known for

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<sup>9</sup> Three main categories usually associated with *kenduri* being held are religious celebrations (welcoming those returning from pilgrimage), life cycle or rites de passage (marriage, circumcision, death) and happy events (completion of studies, completion of a house, birth of a child)(Frisk, 2009; Wazir Jahan, 1992), a *kenduri* can be initiated by an individual, a family or collectively and can be held at the mosque, private house or a community hall (Rudie, 1994). In the city many of this team effort in preparing the *kenduri* is now replaced and widely carried out by commercial companies paid to organize various aspects related to the *kenduri*.

their expertise and skills in conducting these massive events (e.g. coordinating, organizing or cooking) are widely sought for their services by others in the society.

In summary, *adat* and Islam have become a unified force which serves as a complementary framework (yet at times can be contradictory) in which the Malays draw from and negotiate with in their everyday lives. While the *adat* and Islam framework has become integral to the identity of the Malays, the socio-political changes particularly Islamic revitalization which embraces Islam as a way of life beyond the basic function as religion; saw calls for the Malay's to be more critical in incorporating the *adat* that they adopt as opposed to following them blindly. The next section entails a discussion on Islam in Malaysia and the influences of widespread Islamic awareness in the country particularly to the Malay women.

#### **4.5 Islamic Modernity and Gender in Contemporary Malaysia**

Although Islam is the official religion of the country Malaysia it is not a Muslim state nonetheless it has been known as a model of 'moderate and modern Muslim' country for its non-revolutionised and careful way of juxtaposing socio-political and Islamic modernization of its citizen from multiple ethnic and religious roots with majority of its Malay Muslim population (Martinez, 2001; Ong, 1990; Weiss, 2004) as put forth by Weiss (2004, p. 145) 'state-managed Islamization has yielded a largely tolerant, non-violent, pluralist society in Malaysia'.

Malaysia's 'modern Islamic nation' parallel Shepard's definition of Islamic modernity as providing an adequate ideological base for public life and *'a tendency to place a high value upon modern material technology and to use modern techniques of social organization and mobilization...also a tendency to accept certain modern institutions such as parliaments, and political parties certain attitudes such as positive orientation toward change and certain ideas such as belief in progress'* (1987, p. 311).

As stated in the overview, Malaysia since the mid 1970's have been through rapid modernisation period promoted through industrialization which lead to high and resilient economic growth, massive structural developments and extensive general improvement in overall social conditions (e.g.health conditions, education and literacy rate).

The modernization projects initiated during the 1970's as well as delivering benefit to the Malaysian society as a whole and to the Malays in particular, is also a period of dramatic Islamic modernization corresponding to the Islamic revitalization<sup>10</sup> globally and domestically (Mohamad, 1981; Norani, 2006 ; Wong, 2007). The Islamic revivalisms were triggered by heightened Islamic stirrings (e.g. Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, Iranian revolution, the Gulf War) and intellectual activities (e.g. islamization of knowledge by Muslim scholars like Ismail al Faruqi, Siddiqi and Ali Ashraf and

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<sup>10</sup> This term has been variously used in the literature as Islamic resurgence, Islamic revivalism or Islamic fundamentalism. In this thesis I will adopt the term Islamic revivalism/revitalization as it implies a more accurate meaning of calling Muslims to return to the basic sources of Islamic ethos in order to integrate, participate collectively and critically in the modern world as compared to say 'fundamentalism' which implies negative return to Islamic ethos to withdraw from worldly and modern affairs (Akbar S. Ahmed, 1992; Akbar S Ahmed & Donnan, 1994; Gole, 2000; Hussin, 1990). In Malaysia Islamic revivalism emphasizes Islam as a contemporary alternative to the Western modernity, Islamic values is seen as a force to engage in modernisation and moderation (Hussin, 1993; Shamsul, 1995; Wong, 2007)

establishments of Islamic universities in Arab Emirates and Pakistan) worldwide (Akbar S. Ahmed, 1992; Hussin, 1990).

Hussin (1990, pp. 878-879) outlines the characteristics of the Islamic revitalization as;

- Viewing Islam as beyond religion in the western sense rather the view is Islamic ideology as al-din –a total comprehensive way of life. Consequently Islam see life as an integrated system with all aspects of life; the family system (such as reproduction, sexuality, relationship), social, economic and politics comprising parts of the of the holistic Islamic system of life (Kausar, 2006).
- Muslims everywhere around the globe as part of the Muslim community or umma
- Espousing Islamic values, policies and solutions
- Establishment of organization aimed at making organizing and educating Muslims better hence effectively resolving their problems

These manifestation of Islamic revivalism quickly followed precedence in the domestic sphere of Malaysia. Consequently various local Islamist or dakwah groups (e.g. ABIM-Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, Darul Arqam, Jamaat Tabligh and Perkim), the main Islamic opposition party the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (*PAS-Parti Islam SeMalaysia*) and the government's own Islamization projects pervaded the society in their quest for Islamic revitalization (R. Lee, 1988; Mohamad, 1981). The countries development post 1970's saw new Islamist group emerging for example Muslim women's group; Sister's in Islam (SIS) and Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM) (Norani, 2006 ; Stivens, 2003) and the Alternative Front<sup>11</sup> (Barisan Alternatif) established after the deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was dismissed from office in 1998 joining the efforts for Islamization of Malaysia and further adding to the complex Islamization

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<sup>11</sup> These involved coalition between the main Islamist and Chinese opposition party PAS, DAP, religious and secular and NGO activist across all faiths.

process of the country (J. Nagata, 2001; Stivens, 2007; Weiss, 2004). The late 1990's saw resurgence in attention to progressive Islam which focused on the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

These different groups attempted to articulate their different visions of a modern Malaysian Muslim state as an alternative to Western modernization; their Islamization projects aimed at strengthening the Islamic identity and religious practice of the Malays (Hoffstaedter, 2009; Mahli, 2003; Norani, 2006 ; Wong, 2007) is a broad, complex and reflexive process involving clear gendered and social consequences (Frisk, 2009; Ong, 1990; Stivens, 2006). Collectively the Islamization discourses by these groups established various competing versions or images of Islam in Malaysia.

The country governed by the Barisan Nasional (BN) headed by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO)<sup>12</sup> a secular nationalist party was quick to initialize their own version of Islamization projects to reaffirm their Islamic credentials with the Muslim majority and in response to the Islamization efforts and pressures by other Islamic groups particularly in rivalry with the main opposition Islamist party (PAS) (Mahli, 2003; Stauth, 2002; Weiss, 2004). Amongst the early Islamization projects were introduction and establishments of Islamic banking and financial institutions, Islamic administration centres or think tanks, inculcating of Islamic values and others. Islamic banking was established by introducing product and services which are permissible according to Islamic principles such as loans and savings which is non interest based, general Islamic

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<sup>12</sup> The head of UMNO has always been the head of the government or the Prime Minister; Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003), Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2003-2009) Najib Tun Razak (2009-incumbent)

insurance or 'takaful' and also government controlled institution for Pilgrims Saving Fund –the Tabung Haji (R. Lee, 1988; J. Nagata, 1994; Wong, 2007).

Besides this Islamic administration institution were set up for example; the Institute of Islamic understandings (IKIM-Institut Kefahaman Ilmu Islam) and the Department for the Advancement of Islam (JAKIM-Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia)-previously known as Islamic Centre (Pusat Islam) to fulfill government Islamic policy objectives (e.g. to find common ground between all Muslims and non Muslims, to reassure the non Muslim about the government Islamization projects and as clarification of Islamization policies to foreign investors, conducting various seminars and lectures, publishing government pamphlets) (Mahli, 2003; Martinez, 2001; J. Nagata, 1994). Various ulama's (Islamic scholars) were appointed to lead these Islamic administration centres and to implement and endorse the state's various Islamization policies.

The government emphasis were not to build an Islamic state but to channel the Islamic revivalism for its own mould of modernization process different from that of the west; hence their policies were usually a fusion of Asian values with Islamic values e.g. promoting hardwork and frugality, emphasizing importance of Muslim family and values, encouraging pursuits of knowledge in science, business and technology (Hooker, 2003; Mahathir, 1993; Mahathir & Ishihara, 1995; Stivens, 2006).

Post 1990's saw the government adding control measures on the ideas and discourses related to Islam in the Islamization process using measures under the Internal Security

Act (ISA)<sup>13</sup> and the Penal Code<sup>14</sup> for example; in the 1994 the Darul Arqam group established in the 1960's and 1970's at the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur were banned as it was deemed to deviate from Islam, the authoritarian leader Ashaari were detained under the ISA (Mahli, 2003).

These restrictive measures have been stretched further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century triggered by events mainly the 11 September 2001 and the Bali bombings in 2002; the government have taken pre-emptive measure to control extremist Islamic forms in the country such as through monitoring religious teachers in government funded religious schools, temporarily stopped funding private religious schools, and establishing the National Service program for all citizens of 18 year old to enhance racial integration and discourage extremism (Martinez, 2001; Weiss, 2004).

Scholars have agreed that the government coupled with the various Islamist groups espousing diverse Islamization discourses in Malaysia have not been able to create an Islamic unity, nonetheless it has indeed produced a rise and heightened of religiosity feelings and consciousness among the Muslims in general (Hussin, 1993; Weiss, 2004; Wong, 2007). Hoffstaedter (2009) denotes that *'Islam has been gaining ground within politics steadily and is now in a political mainstream position. Islam is invoked at public*

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<sup>13</sup> The Internal Security Act (ISA) was formerly designed and meant to be used against the earlier communist threat to the nation, it allows partly detention without trial up to 60 days, this has been increasingly used especially during Mahathir Mohamad was in seat as Prime Minister and continued being used until now, there have been massive critiques on how the ISA is manipulated and used for the political purpose of those in power see for example (Camroux, 1996; Fritz & Flaherty, 2003; Slater, 2003)

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the year 2000, the Minister for Law announced the possibility of using Section 298 of the Penal Code against those who disunite Muslims, the code Section 298 states; 'uttering words, etc. with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings of any person' see (Martinez, 2001)

*rallies and in speeches; it is made to seep into the everyday life..*'(p. 124). In relation to this, Stivens (2006) cautioned that representing the Islamization process of Malaysia through a simplified process of dividing groups base on traditional/theocratic Islamist versus modernist Islamist would be to overlooked the various complexities with the Islamization process and the support it garners in Malaysia. What is without doubt is that Islamization of politics and politicization of Islam continues at many levels in the social organization of Malaysia. Hence it will be beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss all the aspects of the Islamization process in Malaysia; more pertinent is to review the Islamization projects that represent and (re)construct Malay Muslim womanhood.

#### **4.5.1 Negotiating Islamic Modernity**

Various academic interest on women and Islamization have discussed on the gendered process of Islamization (Norani, 1998, , 2006 ; Ong, 1990; Stivens, 1998a, , 2003, , 2006). These theorists argued that Islamization and modernization have to a certain extent reproduced the patriarchal notion of women's primary role as the carer for her family whilst and the same time implying men's role as only confined to being the breadwinner of the family. This typical gender discourse is easily found manifested in the public discourse, policy formulation, publication programmes and the media carried out by the government or other Islamists group; some examples are Islamic television programmes portraying the image of the ideal mother who puts her husbands and children's needs above everything else, religious pamphlets, newspapers and religious talks emphasizing the role of good or ideal wife (Norani, 1998; Ong, 1990). However Stivens (2006) put forth that it is thus far unclear that the discourse of women's role as 'primary carer for the

family' has translated into a singular unified model of Malay Muslim women. According to her some of the revivalist group namely PAS have asserted that motherhood and childcare are women's true role but insists that Islam at the same time upholds and values women's full participation in the society, hence demonstrated by many of its women supporters and members whom are actively working; see for example (Khalijah, 1994)-'a physicist, who argues that women should use the gifts given to them by Allah and not feel obliged to be housewives only' (cf. Stivens, 2006, p. 358), as well as Dr. Lo Lo a member of the National Women Council of PAS and a Parliament Member who is a medical doctor by profession and also an Executive Director of Kohilal Medical Centre (a private medical centre in Selangor) (Lo Lo, 2010).

In addition Stivens (2006) showed that over a quarter of her Muslim informants (women and their partners) were overt supporters of various version of Islamic revivalism, while others emphasize the certainties of Islamic values or frameworks in their lives although minor cases showed disavowed to religion all together. These values exposed in their narratives of 'family values' saw evidenced where Islam, modernity and gender where often enmeshed into each other—'for a sizeable number becoming more Islamic was a way to become more modern Malay' (p. 363). Noraini (1999) found similar results in her study of roles and women's well being in Malaysia. Her qualitative data showed that informants related their overall well being (related to work, family and health) and persistence to trials and tribulations in life as associated with connection with their religious framework (her studies included other religion as well such as Christianity). Further to this Stivens (1998a) in her study of the experience of the Malay mother

highlights that these women experiences of mothering are an embodiment of the highly complex relationship between modernization and Islamization in Malaysia. Thus she cautions of the simplistic representation of this gendered experienced as *'simply a governance of women as victims by an ultimately repressive religion. Indeed, we could equally see their religious practice as representing a form of social and political agency...the support for Islamic revivalism...can be seen as a means for women to confront Malaysian modernity on terms somewhat more of their own making'*(p. 72).

Consequently two of the significant reflection of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia which is the dakwah movement and the adoption of veiling will be reviewed in the next section. Women are not only affected by these religious practices instead they are themselves an active participant who produce, recreate and transform religious discourse which translates into many aspects of their social life.

#### **4.5.2 Seeking knowledge**

Proliferation of intellectual Islamic activities such as Islamic forums, talks, seminars and through dakwah<sup>15</sup> movements in Malaysia and people responding to these calls through attending general Islamic talks or seminars, Arabic classes, Tajwid classes (teaching proper pronunciation of Arabic in order to read/recite the Quran correctly) and so forth held at various places such at workplace, mosque, surau (smaller mosque), individual

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<sup>15</sup> There can be confusion in the Malaysian context as to what is actually meant by dakwah (J. Nagata, 1995; Shamsul, 1995). This thesis takes dakwah as to be activities of specific person, groups or organizations in calling Muslims to adhere to the Islamic faith-(people who do dakwah) and also people who respond to this call of faith-(people seeking to develop or reinforce their spiritual knowledge or faith) (Shamsul, 1997)

private houses and so forth were one of the concomitant feature of the Islamization process (Frisk, 2009; Hussin, 1993; Shamsul, 1995, , 1997). These dakwah movements are diverse in the way they operate and their aim but their primary focused was to espouse the Muslims to strengthen their faith by leading an Islamic way of life that upholds the teachings of the Koran and Hadith (Prophetic Tradition). They were said to generate supporters and especially amongst urban society which are largely well educated and professionals such as civil servants, graduate teachers, doctors and engineers (R. Lee, 1988; Mohamad, 1981; Muzaffar, 1987; Sharifah Zaleha, 1997). Sharifah Zaleha (1997) and Muzaffar (1987) have related the attractions of dakwah movements in terms of providing alternative networks of kinship relations and pronouncements of ethnic identity through religious membership for the newly urbanized Muslims which is arguably not unusual during the 1970's and 1980's. Further information on this topic can be found under Section 4.5.4 discussing the Religious Practice as Cultivating Piety (Submission to God)

### **4.5.3 Veiling**

The Islamic revitalization saw many Malay Muslims women resorting to veiling and more modest style of clothing which reflects their commitment to pursue an Islamic worldview and lifestyle. In the early period of Islamic revivalism there was a widespread of Arabic attire such as *serban* (male-turbans) and *jubah* (long robes) worn by men and many women donned the *tudung* (headscarf)<sup>16</sup> and the more extreme form of veiling

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<sup>16</sup> They are diverse ways that the veil can be worn (J. Nagata, 1995; Watson, 1994), as clarification purposes the *tudung* or headscarf (or hijab) as usually worn in Malaysia refers to the head covering that

*purdah* (niqab) (J. Nagata, 1994, , 1995; Ong, 1990; Zainah, 1987). These appropriation of the extreme form of veiling by Malay women have generated critiques among the Malaysia society as well as generating concern for the state; some Malaysians for example one of the women's Islamist group-'Sisters in Islam' felt this was an extreme form of dressing which is historically alien to the Malay culture (adopted from Middle East and South Asia) while the state's is concerned that these form of extreme veiling would present a backward image of Malaysia to the world and 'scare off foreign investors' (Ong, 1990, p. 269; Wong, 2007). Hence the government instituted a dress code for all civil servants (this was followed by private employers) which restricted this form of veiling. In addition the government through its Islamic administration think tanks and *ulama* published many religious pamphlets and brochures advocating and portraying women who is successful and religious, wearing attire which consists of headscarf with the traditional *baju kurung* (long two piece dress) or tunic (J. Nagata, 1994). Today this version of modest Muslim attire has been adopted and can be seen appropriated by most Muslim women in Malaysia (Frisk, 2009; J. Nagata, 1995).

Although in Malaysia the concern is more directed towards the *purdah* or niqab, nonetheless there exists a general concern over the phenomenon of veiling as well (J. Nagata, 1995; Norani, 1998, , 2006 ; Ong, 1990). These scholars examination on the meaning of veiling in Malaysia is grounded in the typical mainstream assumption of 'veiling' as simply oppression to women by or an act of resistance against patriarchal and

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women wear over their heads and tie or pin at their neck with their face showing. Meanwhile *purdah* or niqab which involves increasing degrees of concealment comprising of the headcovering plus the face veil attached to the headscarves; that covers all parts of the face except the eyes or totally covering the face altogether (Bullock, 2003).

other dominant social structures. Norani (1998; , 2006 ) and Ong (1990) posits that Malay women embracing the headscarf as a victim of situation where they are being compelled to conform to a common or group identity of 'being an ideal women' as a result of the dominant and authoritarian Islamization discourse by the government and other Islamist groups (e.g. religious scholars). They further argue that by donning the headscarf working women are indeed accommodating to the forces of religious patriarchal structures as it creates the protection and legitimacy for their public performances which symbolizes the ideal hardworking women and good mother (Norani, 2006 ; Ong, 1987).

Their analysis echoes the work of theorists studying the effect of veiling on Middle East women (for example Hessini, 1994; Hoodfar, 1991; MacLeod, 1992). These studies outline that veiling confers women with access, authority and protection to enter public space without being criticized or harassed. While these studies raise useful insights in comparison to Malaysian situation, it seems odd that this notion of veiling as enabling (Arab) women's integration in public space (whom was traditionally excluded) be seen as applicable to Malay women (married women at least) whom have historically not been excluded from the public sphere (Frisk, 2009; Wazir Jahan, 1992) and whose condition of social relationship displays no sharp distinction between male or female space. Brenner (1996) in his studies of the veiling phenomenon of the Javanese women concurs; he cautioned us of this direct application of meaning of veiling in Middle East or South Asia onto the Southeast Asian region like Java and Malaysia where the normative feature of society are different.

Nagata's (1995) analysis points out that the adoption of the veil by Malay women cannot be limitedly seen as mindless conformation to the pressures of male dominance, she says; *'...to attribute all dakwah related behaviour (in this case veiling) to a mindless conformity or to a naïve acceptance of the immediate social network would be to oversimplify, or worse to come close to falling in the 'Orientalist' trap. Many of these women are thoughtful and articulate and quite capable of reflecting their own condition, with its contradictory, pressures and responsibilities..'*(p. 113). In addition her study demonstrates the importance of accounting for different local socio-historical context in examining the meaning of veiling. According to Nagata unlike the women in the Middle East and South Asia, the Malay women she studied placed less importance on veiling as a symbolic protection. Alternatively veiling was a personal conscious and informed choice to negotiate an identity between two competing cultural hegemonies; the Western culture on the one hand and the ethnic Malay culture on the other.

#### **4.5.4 Religious Practice as Cultivating Piety (Submission to God)**

Most studies analysing women's participation in dakwah movement and popularity of veiling have offered different reasons for women's involvement in these religious practices as discussed in Section 4.5.2 and 4.5.3. Studies conducted on the dakwah movement for instance have cited cultural and ethnic response as the reason for participation in the dakwah movement. Meanwhile studies on women's adoption of veiling have described the reasons to be an agentive reaction of resistance by women towards the suppression of patriarchal structures or western hegemony of modernization.

Despite these important insights, other scholars have demonstrated the importance to recognise other forms or terms describing agency such as ‘cultivating piety’ (Frisk, 2009), ‘realizing piety’ (Mahmood, 2001, , 2005) or ‘obedience out of religious awareness’(Brenner, 1996; Mack, 2003) for women participating in religious practices in their quest to submit to the highest divine authority –submission to God.

Mahmood (2001) points out that in examining religious practices it is pertinent for researchers to address the specificities or emic meanings of the ‘terms’ used by the people being investigated because it is used in relation to the people’s context of personhood, knowledge or experienced. She further contends that despite their contribution, many studies investigating women’s religious practices (for example the veiling phenomenon) in Egypt were unable to capture the religious terms (Islamic virtues or piety) that these women provided in making the decision to adopt veiling. Instead of representing as close as possible these women’s terms, researchers were prone to use analyst categories such as (economic necessity, social protest and utilitarian strategy) to offer explanation thus overlooking the more nuanced term used to explain their reality. She cautions ‘...*what I want to emphasize is the importance of being attentive to the elisions any process of translation entails, especially when the language of social science claims a self-transparent universalism and the language used by ‘ordinary people’ is understood as a poor approximation of their reality*’ (p. 209).

Consequently there is more potential to be gained when we are more sensitive to the different local context and experienced of women in the quest to interpret the meaning

ascribed to religious practices. As asserted by (Bullock, 2003) in her call for researchers to be more sensitive in listening to the women's experienced of adopting the hijab *'Muslim women are not homogenous group, they do not experience the hijab in the same way. Though Muslim women may share 'Islam' they come from wide variety of class, race and ethnic backgrounds...they experience wearing hijab differently. They have different lifestyles, ambitions and understandings .....to emphasize 'fractured experienced' is to emphasize perspective on hijab'* (pp. 38-39).

(Mahmood, 2001) further problematize the universalization and naturalization of agency as the desire to be free from relations of subordination or resistance to authoritarian structures; for women the default situation is pursuit to resists male domination. She suggests that because the desires for individual liberty are socially constructed then it is pertinent to *'interrogate the conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including those for submission to a variety of goals..'* (p. 208) which does not based solely on reference to gender equality or resistance to male domination. Moreover she posits that recognition of other forms of agency will widen the ability to understand and gain insights into lives of women whose desire, motivation and goals are not necessarily shaped by the normative liberal tradition.

In her ethnographic study she found that women's participation in the mosque movement (attending religious talks conducted at various mosque) in Cairo (Mahmood, 2005) demonstrates an agentive action of 'realization of piety' or 'becoming pious' through abiding to Islamic theological guidelines and ethics in every aspect of their lives ranging

from styles of consumption, dress, education, employment, domestic life and other social activities, hence to living a life which is not limited to performing basic religious worship. These women's commitment of practices towards pious living did not mean that they were withdrawn altogether from the social political issues surrounding them. Instead realizing piety or becoming pious entails disciplines such as endurance, humility, emotional and physical struggle in relation to their social and political context in order to live a life which is compliant with God's will (pp. 119, 125, 126).

In relation to this (Mack, 2003) work on the religious experience of Quaker women also demonstrates women's religious practices as aimed towards submission to God, the Quaker women '*defined agency not as freedom to do what one wants but as the freedom to do what is right 'what is right' was determined by absolute truth or God... And since doing what is right inevitably means subduing at least some of one's own habits, desires and impulses, agency implies self-negation as well as self expression.*' (p. 156)

Similarly, Frisk (2009) exploring the meanings Malay women's ascribed to their participation in religious practices (e.g. attending religious talks, tajwid classes or adoption of veiling) found that that these women's commitment were an active submission to God in order to cultivate piety within themselves. Thus their agency is based not on the arguments for subordination or resistance instead it is based on dimensions of faith and religious practices as expressed in their desire to '*live in obedience of God's will*' (p. 66). Through the classes attended these women were committed to (re) polished or enhance their Islamic knowledge by improving basic

worship skills such as proper pronunciation of Arabic words in order to read Quran or perform the *doa* (prayer) correctly, fasting and paying *zakat*<sup>17</sup>. In addition they were also committed in acquiring knowledge through talks and active discussions with the *ustaz/ustazah* (male/female religious teacher) on how to abide to the Islamic ethos in their everyday life. Discussions and explanations were given from the questions raised ranging from general to very specific or personal questions that surround these women's everyday activities (e.g. response to a Non-Muslim using Islamic greetings, women's accessories and ways of attire, kinship relations, husband and wife relationship and many others).

Hence the central theme for these women participating in religious practices were towards fulfilment of God's will by cultivating piety—which could only be realised by commitments to ensure correctness in religious practices and religious obligations in all aspects of their daily life, in many situations these women describes fear not of human authority but of God (pp. 73, 128, 129).

#### **4.6 Summary**

This Chapter has considered the local cultural framework of the Malaysian (Malay) women. Firstly Malaysia's socio-cultural and economic progress in relation to gender was reviewed. Then Islam and *adat* the two characteristics that identifies a Malay person and

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<sup>17</sup> *Zakat* is type payment to the poor or needy (organization or individuals). There are many types of *zakat*. *Zakat fitrah* is compulsory tax performed before end of Ramadhan for Muslims who have the means. Other types of *zakat* are *zakat* paid in relation to personal wealth (based on amount of salary or savings one have in cash, or gold) Women were usually concerned with the gold they have and if the amount worth is considered compulsory for them to pay *zakat* and also with the correct way to disseminate, pay and calculate *zakat* payments to the needy (Frisk, 2009).

guides their behavior were discussed. In addition the bilateralism framework which is argued as giving prominence and autonomy to Malay women was included in the discussion. Issues and developments related to Malaysia's Islamization (Islamic revivalism) was further identified and reviewed. This was then focused in relation to how Malay women are affected by these Islamization processes and also how they are in turn (re)producing these religious practices and discourse which translates across various aspects of their lives.

## Chapter 5: Methodology

*In the social science today there is no longer a God's eye that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory or value free knowledge. The days of naive realism and naive positivism are over.*

***Reflections and Reviews: The Seventh Moment: Qualitative Inquiry and the Practices of a More Radical Consumer Research, p.325 (Norman K Denzin, 2001)***

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter present a discussion on the research process and design of the study at hand. An overview of the philosophical and theoretical paradigm issues is first reviewed. This is followed by a discussion of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical position underpinning with the subject of the researcher's interpretation identified. Next, discussion is on the phenomenology methodology which looks at the specific strand of phenomenology adopted – existential phenomenology. This is then followed by a review on the methods applied in conducting the study such as the sample selection, the interview and data analysis.

## 5.1 Philosophical and Theoretical Paradigm

As researchers we have to offer an account of how we view the world; our net of epistemological and ontological underpinnings or sets of beliefs that guides us (Guba, 1990) in our research inquiry particularly in choosing our methodologies and methods (N. Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Although philosophical assumptions would not usually be the first point of departure in embarking our research (our research inquiry is usually triggered by a certain question or issue drawn from our experience or surrounding that we feel need to be solved) (Crotty, 2003; Patton, 2002) nonetheless we need to expound and lay out how our philosophical and theoretical underpinnings informs and justify our chosen methodological perspectives so as to demonstrate that we have devised sound research procedures which produces worthy outcomes.

The debate between positivism and qualitative or interpretivism, two competing paradigms with different axioms in carrying out research is not recent news and have been articulated by consumer researchers and marketers alike since the 1970's (Schwandt, 2000) and gained momentum well into the 1980's and 1990's (e.g. Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Thompson et al., 1989; Woodruffe-Burton, 1996). Although the dominant positions is still it is claimed to be occupied by positivism, the qualitative paradigm (e.g. critical cultural studies, interpretive studies) have made significant inroads into various social sciences discipline particularly marketing and consumer research (Norman K Denzin, 2001; Shankar & Patterson, 2001). Consequently it is not the intention to reiterate the differences between these two

paradigms instead the focus of subsequent discussion will be on the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that was used in informing my methodological perspective for this research.

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are myriads of ways scholars used to explain the possible philosophical and theoretical underpinnings available in helping researchers to inform and carry out their research; some offer explanation based on epistemological assumptions; Schwandt (2000) for instance discusses three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry - interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructionism; while Crotty (2003) offers epistemological variants - objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism with explanations on theoretical stances, methodologies and methods perspectives. Others offer explanations in terms of different qualitative inquiry paradigms available usually mixing this category with methodology and methods of research; Creswell (1998) for example discussed five qualitative traditions of inquiry - biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study while Patton (2002) offers categorization of various qualitative inquiry based on theoretical traditions/orientations which is subsumed under - firstly culture orientations such as ethnography, autoethnography and secondly truth/reality orientations such as social construction and constructivism, phenomenology, symbolic interaction, hermeneutics, narrative analysis and others.

Although these examples and others in the literature offer various guidance informing researchers in conducting their research, they provide no definitive or consistent framework for understanding the various philosophical and theoretical underpinnings on

offer. On the other hand what is usually given '*appear more as a maze than pathways to orderly research...one frequently finds the same term used in a number of different, sometimes even contradictory ways...*(Crotty, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore it seldom contains unambiguous explanation of how methodologies and method are related to these philosophical and theoretical perspectives instead '*what one often finds however is that forms of these different process of elements thrown together in a grab-bag style as if they were all comparable terms*' (ibid, p. 3). Consequently I opted for Crotty's framework (depicted in Table 4) of social research process which I believed will help me explain with clarity the philosophical and theoretical foundations informing my research process and at the same time explain how these foundations then guided my methodological perspective and chosen method.

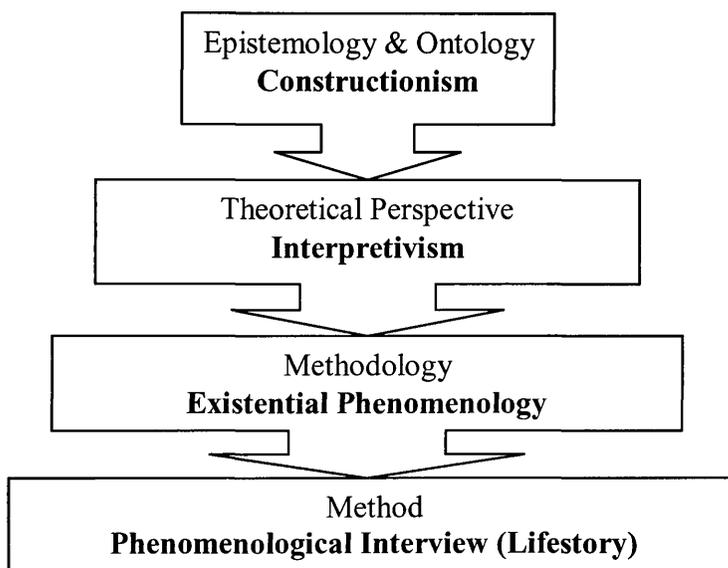
**Table 4: Scaffolding of Social Research Process**

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Main positions;  Constructionism  Subjectivism  Objectivism	Examples;  Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Phenomenology</li> <li>▪ Hermeneutics</li> <li>▪ Symbolic interactionism</li> </ul> Feminism  Positivism & post positivism  Postmodernism	Examples;  Phenomenological Research  Survey Research  Grounded Theory  Feminist Standpoint Research	Examples;  Questionnaire  Interview  Narrative  Content analysis  Statistical analysis  Focus group  Case study  Observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participant</li> <li>▪ Non-participant</li> </ul>

Source: (Crotty, 2003, p. 5)

Figure 3 shows the approach I have taken in this research based on Crotty's social research process framework.

**Figure 3: My approach, based on Crotty's scaffolding**



## **5.2 Discussion of Epistemology, Ontology and Theoretical Perspective**

My study views the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and reality (ontology) from the social constructionist paradigm. From a constructionist point of view meaning is not inherent in the object waiting for somebody to discover upon it. Instead meanings are constructed out of the interaction between subject and object reflecting that *'all knowledge and meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context'* (Crotty, 2003, p. 42).

Consequently constructionist do not create meaning instead we generate or construct

meaning using something that is already there; the world is 'always already there' but it becomes meaningful only when human beings engaged with the world and objects in the world—the world becomes meaningful only when human beings makes sense out of it (Crotty, 2003). This differentiate it from the subjectivism epistemology that views meaning as something imposed on the object by the subject rather than out interaction between object and subject.

Ontologically whereas positivism look at the nature of reality as a single unchanging reality, constructionist accepts that multiple realities exists , without denying that the 'real world is out there' nonetheless reality which matters most is when it is subjectively experienced by human beings (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1986; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000) Accordingly constructionist emphasizes that there is no one true or valid interpretation, *'the same phenomenon or event can be described in different ways, giving rise to different ways of perceiving and understanding it, yet neither way of describing is necessarily wrong'* (Willig, 2001, p. 7). The fact that what we experience *'is never a direct reflection of environmental conditions but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions'* and is contingent and mediated by our contextual background (e.g historically, culturally and linguistically) (Willig, 2001, p. 7) points to constructionist view of reality as 'socially' constructed. Geertz (1973) and Fish (1990) posits that culture or 'publicly available system of intelligibility' which precede us and which we are embedded into are used as a source of interpretative strategies to construct meaning (Crotty, 2003).

In this light, constructionism as an epistemological and ontological stance fit this research as the objectives is to gain understanding of (women) consumer's lifestyle based on their lifestories of everyday consumption; in which their local cultural framework (Holt, 1997; Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) are being looked on as the interpretive sources for consumer's to construct a meaningful lifestyle. This is in line with the social constructionist spirit that views culture not as a thing or concrete behaviour patterns but as a source- plans, recipes, rules, instructions or programs for the generation of meaning (Crotty, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Accordingly all the informants' sense making of their lifestyles are socially meaningful reality in congruent with social constructionism which emphasizes culture as shaping '*... the way in which we see things (even the way we feel things!) and gives us the definite view of the world*' (Crotty, 2003, p. 58).

Thus with a constructionist epistemology and ontology worldview I seek to gain an understanding of the consumer's lifestyle based on their lived experienced and interpretation of everyday consumption whilst taking into account the inevitable cultural framework that provides these informants with their meaningful worldview. By taking a stance that individual or consumer's shouldn't be studied out of their context or in other words by taking a contextualist worldview further informs the theoretical perspective I have adopted as an interpretivist researcher (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) refer Table 5 below.

In congruent with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism my study sought to understand human beings in their totality—understanding them within their cultural situatedness and interpretations of the social world (Crotty, 2003; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000). As an interpretivist researcher my concern was with understanding (Verstehen) consumer's experience in their own terms (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1986; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). No pre-existing assumption is made beforehand with regards to what these consumers's lifestyle is about; instead the produced lifestyle framework was the informant's own construction and sense making of their meaningful everyday consumption. Thus the focus was to understand individual and shared meanings of lifestyles (Ozanne & Hudson, 1989) presented by consumer's consumption experienced of 'being-in-the-world' or as it is lived (Thompson et al., 1989) which concurs with the existential phenomenology methodology (will be discussed in the subsequent section). In line with interpretivist approach the aim of this research inquiry was also to gain particularistic /idiographic rather than generalized knowledge (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000) of consumer's lifestyle phenomena which allows for rich and detailed information to be gained through 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). In the quest to understand a phenomena (in this case-lifestyle) from the consumer's point of view an important point to consider is the interpretation and the researcher's role in the study.

**Table 5: Summary of the Interpretive and Positivist Approaches**

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Interpretive</b>	<b>Positivist</b>
<b>Axiological</b> Overriding Goal	‘Understanding’ based on Verstehen	‘Explanation’ via subsumption under general laws, prediction
<b>Ontological</b> Nature of reality	Socially constructed Multiple Holistic Contextual	Objective, Tangible Single Fragmented Divisible
<b>Epistemological</b> Knowledge generated	Idiographic Time-bound Context-dependent	Nomothetic Time-free Context-independent
View of causality	Multiple, simultaneous shaping	Real causes exist
Research relationship	Interactive, cooperative No privileged point of observation	Dualism, separation Privileged point if observation

Source: (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 509)

### **5.2.1 Interpretation and Role of the Researcher**

Scholars’ points out to the importance of interpretation and the role of the researcher as part of the interpretation tool in carrying out research. Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy (1988) asserts that deriving meaningful outcomes from any kind of research be it lab experiment, surveys or others will inevitably involve the process of interpretation. They put forth that interpretation is indeed a scientific knowledge citing Gadamer’s (1975) notion that *all* knowledge and *all* science rest on interpretation, they further say that *‘...any hope for the scientific study of consumption hinges on our abilities, however fragile and however variegated, to construct meaningful interpretations of consumer*

*behaviour* (p. 402). Thompson (1991) concurs and posits that knowledge cannot be formed without interpretation. Meanwhile (Hirschman, 1986; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1986; Patton, 2002) propound the role of the researcher as an important part of the interpretation process in interpretivist or humanistic research. Hirschman (1986) and Patton (2002) asserts that in interpretivist research where ‘understanding’ is the nature of the study requires the researcher to participate or be involved in meaning construction of the phenomenon investigated. Hirschman cites Kaplan 1984 in making her point;

*Effective observation of human affairs is virtually impossible without some degree of participation in what is being observed; there are not many one way mirrors, and what can be learned by stooping to keyholes is of dubious scientific worth. Without participation, data, even if somehow made visible, remain cryptic (p. 240) .*

Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) further posits that in order to investigate and comprehend consumption experience a researcher needs to be involved with the phenomenon as humanly as possible and be receptive to the structures and meanings coming from the phenomenon or the consumer studied such as through role taking and empathy. Smizigin and Foxall (2000) points out that there have been various ways interpretivist researchers have approached role taking and empathy in their attempt to appropriately interpret and communicate the phenomena of consumer’s reality to their audience such as producing rich and extensive account of people’s lives, be personally and emotionally involved with other humans and use empathy and intuition to interpret

results (for example Hill, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1986; Holt, 1995; Thompson & Troester, 2002).

Consequently the interpretivist researcher plays a highly interactive and cooperative role in facilitating consumers or participants meaning construction; the participants are trying to make sense of their world while the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51). Moreover in seeking understanding of the phenomena studied through interpretation of the informant's reality, interpretivist researchers are always involved in a continuous process of understanding – a process of hermeneutic circle where past understandings influence current interpretation/understanding and current will influence future interpretation/understanding and so on (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1986; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000). Ultimately what we represent is 'only ever our interpretation not *the* interpretation' (Shankar & Patterson, 2001, p. 491 emphasis are originals); 'one never achieves *the* understanding, one achieves *an* understanding' (Norman K. Denzin, 2007; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 510 emphasis are originals).

In the subsequent section a form of interpretivist approach – existential phenomenology that has been taken in this research are discussed.

### 5.3 Methodology: Phenomenology

Following the philosophical paradigms, theoretical stance and the research topic at hand an existential phenomenological based study was conducted in this research. Before discussing the existential phenomenology methodology adopted, the basic tenets of phenomenology inquiry<sup>18</sup> which informs the existential phenomenological methodology will be first outlined.

Phenomenology a combination of the Greek words phainomenon (appearance) and logos (reason or word) is the study of human beings making sense of their experience as it appears to them in their consciousness. Phenomenology was first developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) whose work was later expanded by other scholars such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). It aims to describe and gain deeper understanding of people's experience of a phenomenon by exploring the meanings and the explanations that individuals attribute to their experience (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology is not about verification such as 'whether something actually happened' or quantification such as 'how often it tends to happen' instead phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings of a phenomena as we live them in our everyday existence – our life world (Manen, 1990). The focus on describing experience as it appears is one of the basic foundations of phenomenological approach despite various phenomenological strands in the literature. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) summarizes the phenomenological stance:

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<sup>18</sup> The term phenomenology has appeared in many guises in the literature, it is sometimes refer to a philosophy, an interpretive theory, social analytical perspective, major qualitative tradition or research methods framework (Cope, 2005; Langdridge, 2007; Patton, 2002).

‘The phenomenologist views human behavior – what people say and do – as product of how people interpret their world. The task of the phenomenologist, and for us the qualitative methodologists, is to capture this *process* of interpretation...in order to grasp the meanings of a person’s behavior, *the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person’s point of view*’(Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 14 emphases are originals ). Other common foundations on which the phenomenology methodology is based upon are as below;

- **Intentionality**

For Husserl intentionality is the key feature of consciousness. Intentionality does not refer to the usual meaning of intending to do something in the usual sense instead it refers to that whenever we are conscious or aware, our consciousness is always directed towards something (Langdrige, 2007). Our experience is always an experience of something—there is always an object of consciousness; as humans we cannot describe experience without ‘describing what is that is seen, touched, heard and so on’ (Hammond et al., 1991, p. 3; Moran, 2000)

From a phenomenological stance the experience and object of experience are a co-constituting unit; it is impossible to separate one’s experience from what it is that is experienced (Cope, 2005; Thompson et al., 1989). Consequently for phenomenologist there is no separate or objective reality for people, what can be described is the world that is subjectively experienced.

- **Description of Experience – Rejection of the Dualism between Consciousness and Matter**

Phenomenology attempts to uncover the life-world/lived world –the world as concretely lived or *Lebenswelt* (Langdrige, 2007). Hence the central concern is in describing the lived experienced from the participants point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In describing experience, phenomenologist rejects the dualism between consciousness and matter (Hammond et al., 1991) or reality and appearance, instead subjectivity is understood to be inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity (Moran, 2000). In other words there is no dichotomy between the subject and the object; the object cannot be adequately described apart from the subject nor can the subject be adequately described apart from the object. The focus is on understanding experience the way it appears to the participants.

- **Bracketing or Epoch-Husserlian/Transcendental Phenomenology**

Bracketing or epoch refers to the call for researchers to abstain from making judgments or presuppositions about the things or phenomena that we are investigating (Moran, 2000). Husserl maintains that it is necessary to bracket our assumptions so as to provide a careful and authentic experience of the phenomenon investigated or to return to the things themselves (Moran, 2000). For Husserl assumptions or preexisting frameworks should not be imposed on the phenomena before the phenomena has been understood as it

appears –‘to describe experience as what it was actually like than as what it should be like’ (Cope, 2005, p. 166; Hammond et al., 1991). Keen (1975) concurs;

*The phenomenological reduction is a conscious, effortful opening of ourselves to the phenomenon as a phenomenon...We want not to see this event as an example of this or that theory that we have we want to see it as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own meaning and structure (cf. Hycner, 1985, p. 280)*

This phenomenological reduction according to Husserl requires researchers to break with the natural attitude; suspending his/her presuppositions held within the natural attitude to enable the researcher to focus attention to the essence of the phenomena investigated which is free from inaccuracy or distortion (Amedeo, 1997). The extent of the ‘bracketing’ concept is the main difference between Husserl phenomenology and Heidegger existential phenomenology. Husserl speaks of many level of phenomenological reduction from the basic phenomenological reductions involving bracketing of the natural attitude right to transcendental phenomenological reduction which involves bracketing not only the world but also the individual’s consciousness.

This transcendental stance of the researcher as detached from the phenomena and going beyond the natural attitude to maintain to the pure and untainted experience has been criticized by various scholars (Koch, 1995; Sokolowski, 2000), many came from Husserl’s own students such as Heidegger who later became proponent of the existential phenomenology. Although existential phenomenologist believe some extent of bracketing should be applied – our scientific preconception and knowledge of the phenomenon in

order to see the experience as what they are they question the necessity and ability of researchers to totally bracket off all of their presuppositions and achieve a ‘God’s eye view’ of the phenomenon investigated (Langdridge, 2007; Moran, 2000).

### **5.3.1 Existential Phenomenology**

Notwithstanding the differences in understanding of ‘bracketing’ between Husserl’s phenomenology and existential phenomenology, it is important to note that existential phenomenology still adheres to the basic tenets of phenomenology by Husserl; the intentionality concept – the view of the experience and the object of experience as co-constituting and places primacy in understanding experience (Thompson et al., 1990) from the participants point of view – *‘a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself’* (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 52; Thompson et al., 1989).

Existential phenomenologist departs from pure transcendental view of Husserl’s phenomenology in expanding the concept of lived-world; whereas Husserl asserts that transcendental phenomenology as describing the lived-world from a detached observer, existential phenomenology insists that the observer cannot separate himself from the world (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). Stewart and Mickunas (1990) in explaining the lived-world put forth that *‘throughout one’s waking life, one is concerned with projects, things, other human beings ourselves as inner-worldly beings, in such a way that none of these levels of experience seems to be isolated but is always found in contexts which expand spatially and temporally. The context in which one experiences changing things,*

*expectations, emotions, ideas and so forth...The horizon is always given with everything that appears and one can never totally extricate himself from it. The lived-world is the background of all human endeavors regardless of correct, mistaken, illusory, truthful or erroneous orientations'*(pp. 45-46).

Consequently from the existential phenomenologist perspective, describing and understanding the meanings of phenomenon means to study and understand the experience of beings-in-context. Human beings cannot be studied separated from their contextual setting, rather they study the totality of human-being-in the world (Cope, 2005; Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore the existential phenomenologist seeks to describe experience from the contextualist world view; experience as it emerges in the participants lived world in which they interact and live. No separation is implied between the person and the experience instead phenomenologist's focus on investigating the person-in-context; experience cannot be located 'inside' the person as a complete subjectivity nor 'outside' the person as a subject-free objectivity (Thompson et al., 1989).

### **5.3.2 Employing Existential Phenomenology**

Existential phenomenology methodology was embraced in the research process for this study. The following discussion centers on the existential phenomenology methodology applied in relation to the study at hand;

- **Focus on Understanding Participants Lifestyle Experience and Meanings**

This research follows the existential phenomenology in which the aim is to understand and described the meaning of consumer's lifestyle through their experience of everyday consumption as it is lived – the focus was to understand the meanings and experience of lifestyle from the consumer's point of view e.g. what it meant to them, how they feel about it and so on. No assumptions are imposed on what the women's lifestyle is about instead these are rendered from their own description and terms. Thus the participants were regards as experts of their own lived world and lifestyles.

The existential phenomenology approach used to study consumer's lifestyle was considered to be most appropriate as I sought to develop a rich and deeper understanding of the lifestyle phenomenon. Moreover this phenomenology methodology is deemed most suitable to study the lifestyle phenomenon (which is largely unexplored from the first person point of view) because its method and procedures are designed to describe and understand phenomena as it appears rather than to explain experiences in order to predict and control them. Hence the existential phenomenology methodology devotion '*to description and understanding, its openness to the life-world and its celebration of experience and experiencing person, letting both speak*' allows for any concealed lifestyle meanings or experience to show itself (Garko, 1999, p. 169)

- **Researchers Role as Tool of Interpretation and Relationship with Co-Researchers**

Following phenomenological methodology as a form of interpretivist approach, in this study the researcher's role is acknowledged as facilitating the co-researchers construction of meanings. The researcher is not seen as a person who is a neutral observer who studies the phenomena detachedly. Instead the researcher and the co-researchers are dialogical collaborator –co-researchers describe their experience as lived, while researchers used his or her situatedness with the co-researchers to communicate or describe the co-researchers experience reflecting a fusion of horizons (e.g. perspectives) between the researcher and the experiencing individual. Hence the researcher and the co-researcher are 'interdependently linked and not individually and mechanistically separated' (Garko, 1999, p. 171; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000; Thompson, 1991). Notwithstanding that the researcher tries to described the experienced and meanings of lifestyle from the consumer's own term with it also involves an inevitable process of interpretation as asserted by Manen (1990);

*'And yet, we need to realize of course that experiential accounts or lived-experience descriptions – whether caught in oral or written discourse – are never identical to the lived experience itself. All recollections of experiences, reflections of experiences, descriptions of experience, taped interviews about experiences or transcribed conversations about experiences are already **transformations** of those experiences (p. 54).*

Therefore this study acknowledges the fact that the understandings of the participants experiences by the researcher cannot be gained objectively instead understandings are gained through the researchers interpretations deriving from direct personal experience

(Hirschman, 1986) and also ‘cultural self’ or personal characteristics that the researcher brings to his or her work (Olesen, 2003).

- **Bracketing**

This study tried to adopt the existential phenomenology version of ‘bracketing’ which refers to bracketing any assumptions, beliefs or knowledge about the world (previous experience or literature information) (Hirschman, 1992; Moustakas, 1994), it is ‘to be completely open, receptive and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience...’(Moustakas, 1994, p. 22) This is to enable the researcher to represent a complete, comprehensive and original description of participant’s consumption experiences in their own terms in order to see the experience as what they are like not as what they should be (Garko, 1999).

This been said, my experience was similar to Hirschman (1992) I felt that my own contextual background helped established rapport and trust between my informants/co-researchers and me. Like Hirschman who believed that some of the participants ‘*willingness to serve as informants was based largely on their knowledge of (her) own addictive history*’(p. 161); in my case I believed most of my informants were comfortable in articulating and divulging their detailed life story to me as they see me being through the same situation and able to understand where they are coming from (having similar cultural and contextual background).

I would say that I did achieve bracketing by suspending any academic/operational knowledge and terms in relation to the lifestyles phenomenon investigated – where my informant’s life story in their own emic terms drove my subsequent literature reviews and not the other way around. Nonetheless I found it challenging to bracket my own lived experienced and context (as a Malay women consumer with a family and career) in the research process. My own direct experience and role as a researcher meant that I couldn’t help but had more sensitivity and empathy to the stories that my informants revealed to me. However in line existential phenomenology methodology’s which refers to ‘bracketing’ as not implying a neutral view as *‘researchers must always see and describe the world from some perspective’* (Thompson et al., 1989, p. 140) and the interpretivist paradigm which recognize the researcher’s experience and involvement as inevitable in interpretation of any kind of research; I would say that my contextual sensitivity and emphatic insightfulness came to be a resource (Hirschman, 1986; Olesen, 2003) by enabling me to be more *critical* in scrutinizing my own thinking and more *receptive* and *reflexive* (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009) when exposed to my co-researchers construction of thoughts, beliefs, values and realities throughout the research process.

## 5.4 Sample Selection

Corresponding with the interpretivist research convention, this study's sampling decision was based on purposeful sampling strategy which motive is to acquire information-rich cases from relatively small number of participants (Patton, 2002; Thompson et al., 1990). Consequently the study was based on nine individual cases which were recruited based on the snowball sampling technique and selected to provide a depth of lived experience of everyday consumption across age. Initially the plan was to collect 20 sample however when the researcher started the process of interviewing participants while at the same time transcribing, it was realised that each interviews had generated a massive amount of data with very detailed cases from the current transcripts.

Scholars states that the process of collecting data for in-depth interview can range from the very least 1 to 325 number of interviewees (Creswell, 1998, p. 122); with work range from 6-10 interviewees shown as being suitable for phenomenological study involving in-depth interviews and the study objective being to grasp the essence of experience (Morse, 1994; Polkinghore, 1989; Reimen, 1986; Thompson, 1996, , 2005). Miles and Huberman (1994) cautions that more than 15 cases may result in the study becoming out of hand and larger sample sizes may result in lost of detail and thickness of data. Based on these factors, nine life stories were considered acceptable to allow for sufficient depth of understanding to emerge. This corresponds with the logic of the qualitative sampling strategy which is *'not to discover how many and what kinds of people share certain characteristic [but] to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according*

to which one construe the world ... qualitative research does not survey the terrain it mines it' (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). Profiles of all participants are summarised in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Participants Profile**

<b>Lifestory&amp;Age</b>	<b>Lived Lifestyle</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Spouse/Age/ Occupation</b>	<b>Children/Age</b>
Lifestory 1: Riza (32)	Hands On	Bank Officer	Azhar (33) Bank Officer	Khalil (6) Kamil (4)
Lifestory 2: Nurin (36)	Idealistic	Senior Lecturer	Izam (37) Run own company	Nini (9) Idris (7) Nani (6 months)
Lifestory 3: Asyikin (32)	Pragmatic	Run own Kumon Learning	Hamdan (31) Medical Engineer	Hazim (9) Alia (6) Amira (4) Harith (1)
Lifestory 4: Ramlah (38)	Prudent	Personal Assistant	Romzi (42) Manager at Central Bank	Rosma (10) Rifki (5) Rizqi (4) Roza (1)
Lifestory 5: Siti (44)	Climber	Secretary	Khairul (45) Police	Khazami (18) Shahila (16)
Lifestory 6: Rima (30)	Entrepreneur	Manager	Hizam (33) Economist	Hazri (5) Raihan (4) Raha (10 months)
Lifestory 7: Salmi (40)	Survivor	Run own Food business	Azri (44) Vocational trainer	Hijaz (20) Hisham (15) Aini (12) Hairi (10) Aina (8 months)
Lifestory 8: Murni (55)	Easygoing	Retired	Mazlan (63) Retired	Izlan(30) flown nest Azra(25) Idris(24)
Lifestory 9: Bibah (48)	Devoted	Teacher	Divorced	Hazni(22) Hezlin(19) Haziiah(17) Hariz(11)

Corresponding with the aim of the study which was to gain an emic understanding of women's lived experienced of lifestyle from a cultural framework, it was decided that in this exploratory study the focus will only be the - Malay women. All the women participants came from a similar social background. All have attained qualification from higher learning institutions (degree/diploma) except for two women holding the Malaysian Higher School Certificate or SPM (a high school certificate equivalent to the GCE O-Level). All of the participants are working women or have had working experienced, which means they have (or have had) their own disposal income. It could be said then that these women participants are from a somewhat middle class background. However they were no preconceived assumption on the relationship between the backgrounds of the participants with the life stories or data that would be acquired.

Data about the lived experienced of consumption were solicited through single in-depth interviews with an average duration of 2-3 hours, where women recount their life stories in detail. Interviews were conducted based on where the participants felt comfortable, this was usually done at their office or at home with the interviews being structured very loosely and conducted in an informal, warm and friendly conversation style rather than a rigid question answer session (Marrais, 2004; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Further elaborations on the interview process are discussed in the subsequent section.

## 5.4 Phenomenological Interview

This study followed the conventions of phenomenological interviewing laid out by (Thompson et al., 1989). The purpose of the phenomenological interview is to obtain the meanings of lifestyle and consumption experience as they are lived from the accounts of the women themselves. To do this the interviewer does not assume that she knows more than the interviewee, those contained in the literature and existing theories are secondary to the participants. It is them who are considered to be expert of their experience (Thompson et al., 1990). The interviews were carried out in Malaysia and done in the Malay language –the mother tongue of all the women participants in this study.

Before beginning the interview I introduced and explained the purpose of my study which was to obtain insights into everyday consumption practices and lifestyle. Following this the participants consent was sought to audiotape the interview and it was assured that the participants anonymity will be preserved with each of the participants will be given a pseudonym. The interview began the conversation with an open-ended question which asks the participants ‘can you tell me about your latest shopping experience’. This was an anchor point from which the conversation and dialogue flowed around the stories the interviewee recounted. There was no set of pre-established question from the interviewer rather subsequent question flow from the course of the dialogue with the interviewee. However the pilot study carried out prior to the data collection in Malaysia proved helpful as it had given insights into the type of probes or follow-up respond that will draw out more description of the experience from the interviewee (e.g. You mentioned....., Tell me

more about...or what was...like for you) and especially with avoiding asking 'Why' questions (Thompson et al., 1989). In addition the researcher offered empathy (e.g. 'I know what just what you mean', or sharing her own account of experiences) which corresponds as one of the steps researchers can open themselves to the phenomenon as they present themselves as suggested by Smaling (1995) termed 'open-heartedness'. This term refers to self disclosure by the researcher of some of his or her thoughts or personal experiences (cf. Dahlberg & Halling, 2001, p. 14). This step appeared to have helped the keep the conversation flow naturally thus facilitating the interview rather than impairing them. In addition most of the interviewees expressed that the interviews were a good way for them to 'talk things out' which they didn't expect prior to the interview.

## **5.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Following the interviews the researcher transcribed the information collected verbatim to that in the interview. This process took longer as the interviews were in Malay language thus the researcher had to do a double translation before transcribing, however the 'code switching' that are common to the Malays in verbal communication did help the translation. In the effort to capture in the written transcripts as close as possible the information described in the interview, statements and non-verbal communication that would alter the meaning of the data was not left out. This meant that the interview recordings were revisited several times to ensure accuracy of the transcription process. Each interview yielded an average of between 10-25 pages of transcription text which

were typed and recorded in the excel format to assist the analysis in the later stage (e.g. the column and rows was important to identify lines of interviews).

The transcribed interviews or transcription was treated as an autonomous text that contained participant's description of their experienced as lived from which interpretation ensues following guidelines from (Thompson et al., 1990; Thompson et al., 1989) which means a hermeneutical 'iterative back-and-forth' process was employed to gain a sense of the text as a whole and from which themes would subsequently emerged, which is detailed below;

First, the transcript was reread several times and recording revisited to gain a sense of a whole and assists in understanding the participants and their experience. During this process any relevant or significant phrases or statements was noted on the right hand margin of the transcription page. In addition interesting section of the text was highlighted. This is done with each transcript. This process is an attempt to discern the unit of meanings from the transcription and to ensure that the themes which will subsequently emerged are not inferences, conjectures or hypothesis that exceed the evidence provided in the transcripts thus staying through to the participants own terms and description. Following this the researcher returned to the text and reread it again this time concise phrase was used to described the earlier comments so to capture the essence of what was described by the participants and themes were subsequently developed. Each interview transcript was interpreted using the part-to-whole process where text as whole and separate passage was related to discern the meanings described by the participants.

This accords with (Spiggle, 1994; Thompson et al., 1989) suggestion that the process allows a unified interpretation and aids in refining the concepts and draw out theoretical implications.

Moving from the idiographic interpretation, the next step was the cross case interpretation which involved a new hermeneutical part-to-whole process but in this preceding step separate interview text were compared and relations among them were noted in terms of common or different meanings expressed by consumers across these cases. This drove the cross case theme to be developed which was continuously revised so that these themes reflect and informed the meanings emanating from all the interview transcripts. Consequently this process of developing themes is a process of capturing the emic meanings of the participants which relied on the participants own articulation and description rather than a conceptual category or term imposed unto the experience. Following this intratextual and intertextual interpretive cycle (Thompson, 1996; Thompson et al., 1990) the etic interpretation was ensued to linked the emic meanings to the wider theoretical concept and meanings in the literature.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter traced the steps of the research design and the process underpinnings the research and the researcher experience. Details of the research philosophical and theoretical standings were laid out, method of the study was outlined and the interpretation process was presented.

## Chapter 6: Lived Cultures of Lifestyle: Meanings of Malay Women Everyday Consumption

*...we knew that fundamental truths were embedded and reflected in women's experiences as revealed in their life stories. We are not talking about **a** truth or **the** truth. We had developed a healthy disdain for reductionist approaches that would have us determine the 'truth' of a woman's word solely in terms of their exact factual accuracy, the representativeness of her social circumstances, or the reliability of her memory when it was tested against 'objective' sources. We were talking about **truths**, a decidedly plural concept meant to encompass the multiplicity of ways in which a woman's life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape, creating from both her essential reality.*

***'Truths' in Interpreting Women's Lives, p.14 (Barbre et al., 1989)***

*The everyday has this essential trait: it allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance...It is perceived, first in the sense that one has always look past it;...by another trait, the everyday is what we never for a first time, but only see again...*

***'Everyday Speech', p.14 by Maurice Blanchot (1987) in (Martin, 2003)***

## **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter represents the nine lifestyles of women consumers I interviewed based on their interviews transcripts. Their lifestyles are revealed through their everyday consumption life stories which offer insights into the meaningful consumption experiences revolving around their everyday life and also the contextual background underlying these experiences. The lifestyle themes labelled for these women's lifestyle reflects the emergent themes surfacing from these women's own construction and point of view, similar to the style of (Thompson & Troester, 2002) and (Holt, 1994, , 1997). Therefore these women's lifestyle are articulated and revealed through the stories they tell about their consumption experiences. It represents an emic meaning of women's lifestyle; women's own voice of what their lifestyle is about.

## **6.1 Nine Lifestories**

### **6.1.1 Riza's LifeWorld -The Hands on Lifestyle**

Riza (aged thirty two) have been married to Azhar (aged thirty three) for six years and have two children Khalil (six years old) and Kamil (four years old). The family resides comfortably in their own home in the suburbs of Selangor in the neighbouring city of Kuala Lumpur. Both Riza and Azhar work in the banking industry in Kuala Lumpur and they hold a middle management position at their current work respectively. Riza lifestyle centres on the notion of being Hands On—the ability to personally carry out certain tasks

in the household and participate in activities which involves the whole family as much as possible.

Riza and her husband have a well worked out routine for commuting to work and for the child care of their children. Riza and her husband drives to the commuter station and commute daily to work using the commuter (similar to the tube/train) which links the majoring housing areas in the suburbs of Selangor into the city centre in Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile Riza has no problem with her childcare arrangement as her children are taken care of by a child minder that they know very well who treats them (the children) like her own 'grandchildren'.

Riza's everyday consumption focus on providing Hands On service for her family. Being able to personally carry out household tasks and participate in activities which involve the family as a whole is top priority for her. Riza coordinates and shares all household responsibility with Azhar, this ensures that she is able to carry out her share of household tasks smoothly. Thus although she prioritizes on living a Hands on Lifestyle, she doesn't get overwhelmed. She makes sure that the household responsibilities and work is shared with Azhar as well;

*HH: oo ooo so what about housework?*

*Riza: aaa we divide.. if I cook he will wash the dishes*

*HH: ahah*

*Riza: he's really he's really helpful if let's say everything is put on to my shoulders alone I don't think I can do it.. but because when I got him he is really helpful so when we do this (managing the family) he will help look on the children work while I cook*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Riza: so while waiting for me to get the food ready and everything Azhar will look at the children school work or maybe he'll play with them, for us when we reach home its already 7pm then Azhar will do his prayers, rest and everything, so in the mean time we let the kids play, they will play until they get tired and then only do their school work so the children knows when it's time for play and when it's time for books*

Thus with Azhar's cooperation Riza is able to spend quality time with her family while being able to carry out the household chores smoothly. Simple activities such as watching a favourite television programme, or watching the children play is very important for Riza who considers this as an important family activity.

*Riza: aaa we have a routine, after that we'll have dinner , if they haven't finish their school work they continue when its done they will watch their favourite cartoon Samurai Jack at 9pm so **all the four of us** will watch this samurai Jack..(R.168)*

*Riza: aa like I do the cooking , washing the dishes after eating then tidying the table and other things he does it , usually I will clear everything in the kitchen already I wipee and everything so I let him wash the dishes only..(R.419)*

*HH: oo so what do the children do?*

*Riza: sso I let them play, so that is the time I take a rest for a bit or I watch 'producer'(a tv program) or anything like that and after we finish our dinner we watch the news.. the kids won't so they'll play*

Here she describes how Azhar's support has helped her enormously in managing the household. She admits that without his support she would probably have to resort to hiring a helper, which she strongly feels unsafe about;

*HH: so what are you worried about most*

*Riza: urmmm.... recently ummph my best friend her helper.....let a man inside the house and then I hear case that they use black magic.. if they steal things its different..... of course you feel worried but more worried for those kind of things so I don't think.... I don't want to boast but so far I think Azhar he is very helpful at home so I feel it's still manageable with*

*two kids I can still do it, if not because of this maybe I would have needed a helper*

In Riza's everyday consumption stories she depicts various significant consumption situations where she negotiates between the positive and negative consumption experiences that she exposes her children to. For Riza after having children she rarely goes out to do their monthly groceries shopping. For her this is the best arrangement for their family in terms of avoiding impulse buying and also to for the children's comfort;

*Riza: now even more after having children its really seldom that I go because you have to take the trolley... the kids*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Riza: because of the children if we go to Carrefour there's places where you have toys...things like toys or anything if we pass them for sure the children will be tempted to buy..and then you will start to buy things that you dont plan..so its best to avoid things like that*

In addition, Riza sees any kind of shopping trip as a negative exposure for her children. She contend that these activities is only fulfilling material-wise, which she feels her children already have more than enough, Alternatively, consumption that she sees as positive—in her words must include 'family things' that provide her the ability to be involved or a part of the activity. The excerpt below reveals that she seemed to be trying to protect her children from the material factor of consumption. Nevertheless, she does leverage on consumption activities that she feels includes her/the family as a part of that experience as well;

Riza: *Ahah yess for me whatever it is I won't bring the kids, that's why if I go to shopping complexes I don't really bring the kids regardless I go alone or with Azhar...I think there's many other places I can bring the kids rather than shopping*

HH: *where do you usually bring them?*

Riza: *if Saturday Sunday whenever I'm free I'll bring them for example every Saturday we'll bring them to the children's gallery they have story-telling , craft and things like that... ..like the one in the Museum of Islamic Arts..*

HH: *aaha*

Riza: *otherwise I bring them to the library because they enjoy it or else I bring them to the cinemas , like recently they know that a new movie 'The Wild' will come out ... so we bring them , or else we bring them to my sisters or in laws or sometime we go to the park , we go jogging and we occupy their Saturday Sunday..., Saturday Sunday must be for them... but I hardly bring them to shopping complexes because I feel everything that is needed I have bought like toys for example I will buy for them ,only sometimes if we want to give them a treat then only we bring them to Toy's R Us or Toycity and let them choose what they want but that is like in a year two to three times only.. but most of the times iiii will buy the tooyss..*

HH: *What makes you not want to bring them along?*

Riza: *I feel it's not convenient for the kids..with the crowd on weekends, the queue..unless you go to the place that have family things aa that's ok but so far what I can see is that all this things I have done before*

Preparing family meal, cooking and eating together were another significant consumption experienced in Riza's s life-world. She proudly informs that she was able to cook -hands on- for her family.

HH: *so you seldom eat out*

Riza: *mmhmm very seldom... not because of Azhar.. its my desire I like to eat my own cooking for example if Saturday Sunday like today Sunday I get up in the morning make breakfast, like this morning was just light breakfast so then for lunch I will ask what he likes for lunch but if i cook a heavy breakfast then its considered brunch (combination of breakfast and lunch)*

HH: *mmhmmh*

Riza: *and if it's a light breakfast then in the afternoon I will cook and in the evening I make something for tea then I cook again for dinner*

HH: *wow*

Riza: *aahah but I really like doing it , I like to do it maybe because Azhar he likes to complement every time I cook he says thank you so I feel...I enjoy doing it*

Cooking, preparing meals for her family and eating meals with them provide her the sense of completeness as by being involved directly in preparing food for her family gives her the certainty that these foods were healthily prepared;

*HH: aaa so what made you wanted to do these things?*

*Riza: aaa that one it was my desire before marriage*

*HH: can you tell me what the desire was about?*

*Riza: My desire was I feel I have had enough of eating out with the MSG... the salt and everything so when I look back urrrmm a year before my marriage I rented a house that was before I met Azhar so at that time I felt so small because the friends that I lived with I initially didn't know them when they advertise I just got in the house, so they were very good cook, their house when I stayed there I rented a room for myself that house was already complete like a family house with the microwaves and everything ..... sooo with them I really didn't eat out so.. every day they cook..so my job was because I didn't cook I did the 'marketing'*

Here she further emphasizes the sense of hands on control enabled by her ability to prepare homemade food for her family – she is careful to avoid harmful chemicals in food such as preservatives

*HH: You mentioned that on Saturday Sunday you cook as well*

*Riza: mmhmm I cook*

*HH: so even for breakfast you don't recall buying like 'nasi lemak'(rice cooked with coconut milk) or 'roticanai' (prata bread) –common breakfast dishes sold widely in Malaysia]*

*Riza: very rare and I can't even remember the last time I bought it*

*HH: can you share with me what you usually decide to cook?.any special menu?*

*Riza: usually I'm the one who decides but if I have no idea I will ask him for ideas like what he wants to eat tomorrow, usually like noodles for example now I don't even buy at the shops because my friend tells me lots of things about noodles things like boric acid and what not that why it's been quite a while now if I feel like eating noodles I will order from my friend because she makes her own noodles, so the other day my mother in law*

*gave me a recipe on how to make noodles ..so I think after this I'm going to make my own noodles*

Preparing homemade food is a service for the family that she is proud of and shared with her extended networks of family

*HH: so you really enjoy it*

*Riza: ahah yes I enjoy but the noodles I haven't made any yet.. but if I feel like eating I will order from my friend and I will order like 2-3 packets so during weekends I cook curry noodles, fried noodles [ooo] and I like to call my siblings to come around because I have 4 siblings living here (in the same city)*

*HH: then you cook?*

*Riza: mmhmm I will cook otherwise I bring the stuff I cook to ..for example at my in laws*

In addition, Riza sees these consumption experiences as fostering the family with the sense of closeness and unity. The sense of togetherness brought out by consuming food together was the same feeling Riza felt during her 'single' days and thus she wanted her family to feel and have the same positive ambience;

*Riza: you know right to get the things ready is more difficult than cooking itself, once you get everything ready cooking part is easy isn't it, so I were the one getting the things ready so I will ask themm what is needed and everything*

*HH: aaa so that's where you learn from*

*Riza: aaa right that's where I learned from there on I didn't eat out and I felt that we were closer because before this I have experienced staying with other friends as well but everyone ate out so we were not very close... but this time it was different..when you urm when youu eat together you feel closer through that...because eating together, the process of cooking, eat cutting the onions and what not..in that process you will talk and chat all this cutting fish and things we do it together ..it made us closer*

Thus Riza posits that one of the important ritual in her household that has been deliberately instilled in her children are the importance of eating together as a family.

Therefore, Riza and Azhar rarely bring her family to eat out;

*HH: So eating out is very seldom for you and your family?*

*Riza: aha very rare..*

*HH: even fastfood*

*Riza: for my kids they seldom request, even if we pass Mc Donalds or KFC they don't.. but if they were to say they want it we will drop by but its really seldom that we go if ...we buy... it will be through drive through , we ask them want they want but its seldom, what they know is when they eat is eat at home with mom and dad so its like that*

*HH: ahah so did you purposely teach them this?*

*Riza: yes..when we eat we turn off the tv and we will eat together the four of us and we have planned it to be this way from the beginning , we want to teach our kids this way*

Riza prioritize in getting involved personally in the management of her family. Even in areas when it is impossible for her to do this because of work commitments, Riza tries her very best to provide the familial 'Hands On' to her children. She mentions that her current baby sitter could provide a momentary family-connection/bond for her children compared to hiring a live-in helper.

*HH: mmhmm..taking about managing the household ..don't you have any intention to hiring a live-in helper?*

*Riza: aaa no*

*HH: what makes you say that*

*Riza: tooooo manyyyy storieslah about maid because urmm so far from my experience I see.. from the many people that take live-in helper only one from those many that I feel the helper is ok... the rest I see they have problem and everything so I think not yet and one more thing is because my baby sitter is really good*

*HH: when you say really good means, what does that mean?*

*Riza: for me its good because **she treats my children like her own grandchildren so she will worry for them in the same way we worry, and so far I think***

*it's still manageable. I have two kids and I am able to discipline them so I don't feel the need for a helper because cooking wise maybe it's easy if you have a maid you can order them and they'll do it but not yet for me*

### **6.1.2 Nurin's LifeWorld-The Idealistic Lifestyle**

Nurin (age thirty six) and Izam (age thirty seven) have been married for ten years and have three children, Dini (nine years old), Idris (aged seven) and Nani (six month old). They live in a rented semi detached house while waiting to move in their own bungalow house due to complete in October. Nurin holds a lecturer post at one of the public university while her husband Izam runs his own property development company. Both of their workplace is within a short driving distance from their residence, with each of them commuting to work driving their own car. Meanwhile they have another car which is dedicated solely for the driver to take their two children to and from school (at the opposite side of the city which could take an hour drive or longer if running through traffic), the youngest child being taken care of by a live-in helper.

Nurin's lifestyle revolves fulfilling ideal principles of her life—she devotes herself in achieving an ideal situation in everything that she does. In terms of family she stresses to achieve the version of the 'perfect mother' for her children, the perfect wife for her husband and the perfect daughter for her parents, career wise she targets to gain the highest qualification possible and set a target to achieve a certain post in her career as a benchmark for good achievement at work. Her story reveals her consumption experienced that are channel to realizing these idealistic principles.

Nurin acknowledges that she needs to manage the household chores on her own as her husband Izam does not help in any of the household chores. Fortunately he doesn't mind resorting to paid services to help Nurin manages the household chores. Before having a live-in helper at her house, Nurin expressed that she used to loath doing household chores thus she resorts to paid service or a helping hand from her extended family—her mother in law and her own mother to get this done;

*HH: ok so in terms of housework how did you cope with your housework before you had a helper?*

*Nurin: hahaha all the clothes that needs ironing we sent it to the laundry and the ones that doesn't need ironing we had one big room with a big bed and all the washed clothes we will pile them there, weekennds my mother in law came.. my own mother came and they help to fold the clothes hahahah*

*HH: What about cooking?*

*Nurin: aa that's really easy Pizza! or we eat out..that's not a problem for us because my husband is not fussy so we either eat out or we order..cooking is not a big thing for me I don't feel i have to do it*

*HH: what about other chores then..perhaps ..hanging your washing*

*Nurin: aargh that I really hate it..I did it..before having a helper I had to do practically all the household chores because my husband won't help at all, he never does he won't do it*

*HH: is there any particular reason?*

*Nurin: he doesn't want to because he says that during his 'single' days he' had it with doing all the household chores and so now he doesn't want anything to do with it hahahaha*

After four years of tolerating household chores on her 'own', Nurin's decision to further her studies has initiated her in employing a live-in helper to help organise the household as she feels she will not be able to cope without any consistent help;

*Nurin: it took us four years with the children then only we took a helper because I wanted to further my (xxx) studies,*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Nurin: that was the time we decided to take the helper*

*HH: so the main reason was you furthering your studies*

*Nurin: yes..because I think I cannot cope with the hooouse chores, maintaining the children and also my studies*

For Nurin the presence of a live-in helper helped her enormously to follow the Idealistic Lifestyle that she wants; enabling her to focus her time for her children and family and also her studies without the need to worry and maintain banal activities such as ‘cooking’, cleaning the house, doing the laundry and other chores. It also alleviates her from the stress of wanting two opposing things at the same time; to free her from household chores and having a tidy house at the same time;

*HH: ooo ok so does having a helper helps you a lot?*

*Nurin: aaaa loooooo I don't have to think about anything...what I know is when I come back everything is available.. so If I cook it's for leisure .. it means if and when I feel like cooking thats the time I'll cook*

*HH: ooo so she will do the cooking and everything*

*Nurin: ahah cooking, cleaning and everything,*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Nurin: for me I don't want my time to be occupied doing the house chores I feel it's a waste..it's better for me to use that time with my children and husband so I would rather my clothes to be just like that.. and spent time with the children and the father,*

*HH: mmhm*

*Nurin: I don't want to waste my time dooing it butttt at the same time I dont want the house to be messy,*

*HH: ahah*

*Nurin: urm I don't mind not sweeping but the house must be tidy if it's not if let's say I come back from work and find the room is messy.. I will feel so annoyed because I really don't like it*

Nurin depicts that with the burden of managing household chores off her shoulders, she could focused her time for her children. Nurin illustrates the time she spend to help her children in their schoolwork;

*HH: can you tell me more about how you spend your time after having a helper*

*Nurin: oo everything's been done for*

*HH: so can you tell me more about how you spend your time?*

*Nurin: oo ok ideally we should spent time with the children, so now they are already schooling so they have school homework so helping them doing the homework is one thing but.. it's also something that brings up the*

*tense because I will always be annoyed at my daughter because I will be like 'ooh why cannot she (Nini) understand?' I expect her (Nini) to know everything*

As Nurin lifestyle centres on the notion of perfection, her sense of guilt overwhelmed her as she criticize herself for unable to have enough patience in teaching her daughter, her sense of guilt is further amplified as she compares herself with her husband. As a result Nurin creates a special routine which she feels can mend the (im) perfect situation that occurred between herself and her children;

*Nurin: Most of the it me if I teach her..it will be me shouting,*

*HH: ahah*

*Nurin: Because I expect her to know*

*HH: So you are angry at them for not knowing?*

*Nurin: Actually I think they know it..I don't know if they just do it to seek my attention*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Nurin: If their Dad were teaching them, they will be a lot better..because when he does teach them he never shouts or anything like that,*

*HH : ooo*

*Nurin: but with me and my children if I scold them when I'm not suppose to I will write to them saying I'm sorry I shouldn't have scold you I give them a small note to them , I always write with my children and even with my eldest daughter if she gets scolding form me she will write saying ; 'mama I'm sorry next time I promise not to do this' so it has been our routine to do it like that since they were young*

Nurin leaves the weekend especially for spending quality time with her children However Nurin expresses her dissatisfaction about the 'very limited suitable place' in Malaysia that offers a place for children activities with minimal charges;

*Riza: I think we have really limited places for families to bring their children that requires only minimal charges*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Riza: ahah for example we went to the aquarium in KLCC do you know how much we have to pay to enter... it cost us a few hundred (Malaysian Ringgit) for one entry, and there's also one more place in Time Square but for one children is expensive for me if I want to clear my mind we don't want to get tensed up or anything so we avoid going to the mall instead we go to the club because I am a club member so we go to swimming pool, we spent the whole morning go to swimming pool. but when you come to think of it.... for the ordinary people they don't really have places to bring their children*

Nurin's dissatisfaction on the limited places dedicated for children activities arises not only because she sees this as an inconvenience for her. Rather she sees this as an issue that involves the wider public—other parents, that do not necessarily have the resources to send their children to current play centres at the mall or other places that charges quite a substantial amount of money. In keeping with her living an idealistic lifestyle Nurin ambitiously aspires to establish a place dedicated for children activities;

*Nurin: because I think in Malaysia we really are limited in places where kids can go, one of my ambition is a place for the kids for example a public library or a childrens museum..my concern and priority is to open a place for children*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Nurin: for example if you go shopping like me I don't bring the children isnt it, but try and look at other people at Giant or Tesco bringing their small children in the trolley... its just not right isn't it?.. as eventually when the child gets bored it disturbs the parents to do the grocery then the whole situation tensed up—the child , the parents and followed by other people*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Nurin: I think there's really limited place that you can leave the children and let them play aaa there are like for example at the Mega Mall but its really expensive that is RM21 and there is one in Ampang it was RM15 per hour....so isnt it better if they built a public library for the children.you know the public library in Bangi recently I went and scold them because they have a childrens section but the books weren't organized at all not... even labelled, then I asked them about it.. they said messy is normal because its childrens.. that I can understand but why are there no label for the books... so how do you expect children to find books..*

### 6.1.3 Asyikin's LifeWorld-The Pragmatic Lifestyle

Asyikin (aged thirty two) and Hamdan (aged thirty one) have been married for ten years with have four children; Hazim (aged nine), Alia (aged six), Amira (aged four) and Harith (one year old) and they all live in a large bungalow house with spacious all round garden. Asyikin is a businesswoman; she runs her own Kumon (learning centre) which is a short distance drive from her house. Hamdan works as a Medical Engineer for an international company thus he will usually be working from overseas making him rarely at home during weekdays.

With Hamdan mostly away for work, Asyikin's has a very busy lifestyle as she has to multitask all her activities on her own; take care of her children, manage the household and running her business. Consequently Asyikin's lifestyle revolves on the notion of being Pragmatic. Her life stories resonates with her leading a pragmatic lifestyle –she describes of following strict schedules and avoiding unexpected situations in everything that she does; organizing for work, children activities, social activities and consumption. In the excerpt below, Asyikin recounts the routine schedule that she strictly adheres to in terms of organizing the household activities to synchronize with her ability to run her business in the afternoon;

*HH: oo ok sounds that you have a full day*  
*Asyikin: that's right.. that is I need to finish up my routine as a full time mom so that time must be fulfilled first aa by 12 o'clock usually my schedule will be that I have already done the cooking and then I have to pick them up from school so morning send them to school, the younger oones I have to handle at home all must be settled by*

*12 my daughter will come back from school so that time I don't have time to cook or anything, but when my daughter is back that is the time I take my bath because that is the opportunity for the sister to look after her younger sister for a while , while I have a quick bath no time for me to take a leisure bath just a quick shower and then got to get ready to pick up my son about 1.30 then by before 4 they have to finish their lunch and I have to clean up and everything and 4 o'clock we need to go.*

*HH: ooo where to?*

*Asyikin: because my centre runs at 5 o'clock so 4.30 send them to the child minder the older ones follow me to the centre so from 5 to 10 I will be at the centre running business, 10 o'clock pick up the children from child minder and usually they are already fed so once we reach home I give them warm milk and get them ready for bed while I put dinner on the table for the two older one, I quickly put the young ones to sleep and meanwhile the other two children have eaten and when they're finished they just put the plates in the sink but they don't have to tidy the table and then they will go upstairs and get ready to bed*

As Asyikin lifestyle is base on handling and organizing series of voluminous activities within a stipulated time, all of her consumption preferences are focus on being very practical ---sticking to uncomplicated ways that allows her to handle everyday matters smoothly and quickly without major problems. Asyikin repeatedly emphasize around the issue of 'practicality', for example in choosing her furniture; Asyikin describes how it should be child and mom friendly; easy to clean, maintain and consume less time.

*HH: urmm in terms of furniture so how do you decide to get the furniture?*

*Asyikin: It's like I tell himm and he says ok, but like I said.. my children are all young and I won't buy the very expensive sofa white colour which is not practical very expensive leather white color because my children are still young*

*HH: ahah*

*Asyikin: so I go for solid wood like this (showing me) but mine can be removed and clean it's more like a sofa but the base is wood and it's what do you call it aa upholstery can be dry cleaned so it's easy to maintain*

*HH: so your house furnitures a mostly child friendly*

*Asyikin: practical for me It's also because I don't have time to clean*

*HH: so where do you buy your sofa*

*Asyikin: just the ordinary shop so I don't go expensive brands because my kids are still young this expensive brands I can buy when they are bigger and well behave so I just bought my furniture at an ordinary furniture shop not too expensive*

Explaining further on her house décor, Asyikin again mention about 'practicality', for her if an addition to the house décor doesn't suit the children and fit in her situation she would rather not have it in the house as this would help managing the family easier and less a problem to worry about;

*HH: oo ok, so in term of house décor does your husband participates?*

*Asyikin: aa usually I'll ask his opinion if he agrees then ok but if he doesn't I don't do it because we also must give and take if he doesn't like it you don't do it*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Asyikin: but everything is more to practicality because with small children it's not suitable.. like my husband he really likes huge very up to date sound system kind of thing,*

*HH: like a home theatre?*

*Asyikin: ahah like AV kind of thing but to me it's no use because he's not in the house all the time and the children cannot watch dvd in the weekdays so what for, it will become a display and also you invite people to come and break into the house*

Even when Asyikin talks about taking supplement or using cosmetics she mentions about her preference of simple and easy routine as this helps to save her ever precious time;

*HH: so you mentioned about taking vitamins*

*Asyikin: mhhmm I eat vitamins for the skin and hair because you don't have any time you know aaaa,*  
*HH: so how about cosmetics what do you go for*  
*Asyikin: previously I have kept some Nuskin products so I'm still using that, because the routine is simple it's not too complicated to follow because I'm busy you know so I don't have time for too difficult routine...I go for the quick ones*

Apart from that, Asyikin illustrates how she resorts to stocking and freezing as the practical way to solve her problem of running out of food while she is constantly on the run. Asyikin purposely stock up loads of food in her house. The availability of these foods enables her to prepare a quick or speedy meal for her family whenever she needs to;

*HH: do you cook for dinner as well*  
*Asyikin: aaa usually there will be some leftover from lunch but if they (the children) don't really like the food I will have a quick deep fry nugget or something [so you have that in your stock] ooo yesss I have a freezer for chicken, like my normal stock is like I'll go buy for example that day we went shopping at Giant we spent urrrmm for daily use food about MYR1000*  
*HH: mmhmm so you stock up*  
*Asyikin: because we buy like six chickens and absolutely loads of frozen food*  
*HH: frozen foods do you mean like sausages burger?*  
*Asyikin: usually it's like sausages, nuggets, fishballs, whatever that can be freeze even bread we freeze up.... for example Gardenia we'll buy like 3 bags and put it in the freezer so when we want to eat it just store it to room temperature*

Asyikin also emphasizes how consistently having 'backups' ensures her daily routine doesn't get disrupted by the need to replenish these items;

*Asyikin: like rice there must be one extra bag [ooo] you don't like things running out] oo yess because I don't have time to go out even like cooking gas I allways have another extra , 2 gases if one runs out*

*I have the other one [ooo] backup backup always have backup, it's the same with bread I won't wait till the last one runs out , it means I always have three in the freezer so if 2 runs out before I use the last one I get another one aa.*

As Asyikin is pressed for time in allocating and organizing her activities everyday; she illustrates her own strategy in doing this when she needs to buy any products. First if she is interested in buying a certain electrical appliance, Asyikin uses other mom's recommendation or testimonials (that she read from magazines) of products as a source of reference. This practice is a quick and a 'short cut' method to investigating about items that she is interested in buying without the hassle of searching relevant information about the product elsewhere. For Asyikin other mom's recommendations is a trusted and reliable source as she describes that she will go for the recommended items even if there exist a same product that looks nicer;

*HH: So all these things before you buy do you do any kind of research for example read or the internet?*

*Asyikin: aa normally through magazine*

*HH: what kind of magazine do you read*

*Asyikin: certain magazine like Mother and Baby they sometimes have research on certain products and they have ratings of products [ahah] so It's that, if they say that's a good product I follow them even though other products may look nicer but I follow the ones recommended [ahah] because the other moms they have experienced using the products and they find it very useful so I go for that aa things like that , if I go through a magazine and it says that I have been using this and its quality then if I need it...aaahah so if I need tthat product then I just go for that thing*

Second important thing for Asyikin is the after sale service, reliable after sale service is important as this will ensure she gets help if any problems came up;

*HH: ooo, ok in terms of all the appliances what characteristics do you usually go for?*  
*Asyikin: for me I go for the service*  
*HH: customer service do you mean after sale service]*  
*Asyikin: ahaa after sale service, well go for that because like I'm a busy mom if things break down I don't have time to bring that thing to the shop so I want the person to come and fix it*

Asyikin describes two appliances that are very practical and really helpful in saving her time thus maintaining her consistency to follow her routine schedule.

*HH: oooo, so besides having a fridge you have a freezer as well*  
*Asyikin: yess, the deep freezer type which is kind of deep and uncommon for Malaysia because Malaysians usually don't have a freezer but when you have 4 children [mmhmm] young children and your husband is not really at home all the time it's very difficult to go for shopping... but for vegetables usually I'll get it when I pick my son from school because they sell vegetable opposite the school*

Meanwhile Asyikin's automatic hot water boiler provides her more time by speeding up the time she does her works;

*HH: so what are the things in the kitchen that really helps you out besides the freezer , fridge and microwave*  
*Asyikin: no I seldom use microwave I have it but its seldom being used, aa ok what is the name of the thing you know the kettle that boils water all the time [ahah] aa that thermos that have hot water when we press it*  
*HH: aaa does it have cold water as well*  
*Asyikin: aaa noo cold water its always hot because my fridge has an ice maker so that's ok but the hot water kettle is really helpful, whenever I feel hungry I just make a cereal drink or a nestum drink so it's easy and also its easy to prepare milk for the children [aa mmhmm] either you want to wash or rinse its easy with that or else it will be a headache [mmhmm] that's something very helpful*

When it comes to leisure time, Asyikin describes spending time with her family out of the house is like a vacation for her and this doesn't necessarily has to be somewhere far. Shopping mall is like a retreat for her to relieve all her stress; she describes her leisure shopping trip as below;

*Asyikin: if we go for vacation we go all out, it's a must, to steam out everything from the brain, for me going out from the house is a vacation for me*

*HH: where to?*

*Asyikin: I don't really care.. shopping complex just have lunch, take our time walking and browsing relax and the children play at the play area*

*HH: ok do you eat out*

*Asyikin: aa yessss ....it's usually near a shopping complex [fastfood]ahaa its what the children wants usually its Pizza Hut [how about Mc Donalds] we seldom go to Mc Donalds because they usually get to eat Mc Donalds by drive thru (oo)we usually go to Pizza Hut,....sometimes we eat 'roti canai'(prata bread) because the roti canai shop is just opposite our house.*

Asyikin's pragmatic lifestyle can be seen from the way she defines her self identity. Although at times she feels the urge to give full attention for her children, Asyikin recounts that it was more sensible and practical for her to take the opportunity to contribute her skills and interest in teaching other children

*Asyikin: ok I think sometimes there's always a part of me that wants to urmm watch the children grow up 24-7 you want to be there to see every second every thing they do but itss impossible righth sometimes you just have to urmm tolerate the current situation ok I cannot say I just want to be a full time mom because I want to watch my children grow all the time...when you don't stop looking*

*at other chances then you will realise that you need to leave your children because you want to give the opportunity for other children as well to teach them...like in my case I teach other children but I have to balance and make sure I teach my children as well but its not to the extent that I don't want to teach other children just to teach mine...I will use the goodness of that the goodness of what I learn in teaching other children aand use it to practice it towards my children and see whether it makes a difference*

#### **6.1.4 Ramlah's LifeWorld-The Prudent Lifestyle**

Ramlah (thirty eight years old) and Romzi (fourty two years old) have been married for about eleven years and have four children, Rosma (ten years old), Rifki (five years old), Rizqi (four years old) and Roza (one year old). The family lives in spacious double storey terrace house in a very smart housing area. Ramlah works as a Personal Assistant at an international petroleum company while her husband Romzi holds a top managerial position at the Central Bank.

Ramlah leads a Prudent Lifestyle, she admits to being very careful and meticulous in managing the household and in consumption preferences. She acknowledges from the outset that in her family she is responsible for managing everything in the house. Although this is the case, it does not seem to bother her, rather she proudly mentions (quite a few times) that she is able to single handed all the affairs in the house.

All of Ramlah consumption preference revolves around the issues of getting the best value of the money spend. Ramlah employs a live-in helper to help her manage the household chores and take care of her children. Ramlah describes her decision in hiring a helper in terms of the value that she receives compared to sending her children under the care of a child minder, she notes;

*HH:                   ook what makes you want to have a maid*  
*Ramlah:           aa because it helps you a lot because I feel if you have two kids if you want to send them to Kindergarten its cost really expensive around MYR500 [mmhm] you have to manage your house, wash the clothes and if you hang the washing if it rains it gets wet and you have to wash again, and you have to sweep the house and by the time you come back its already late so at least you have a helper when you come back ..if likkke for example the first time I hired her it cost me only MYR350 soo you can save MYR150 and when you come back the house is already tidy all the clothes have been washed and fold everything in order and for the children so far she's ok so far I can trust her and she.. you don't have to always tell her what to do [mhmm]*

She also frequently talks about how she manages her money and relates and emphasizes savings as a priority. Ramlah's is very proud of her role in safeguarding and managing all the house affairs and it seems to give her a sense of accomplishment and completeness as a mother.

House affairs includes almost everything in the family for example opening and managing children's bank accounts, decision in choosing furniture, renovating the house and others. The excerpt below depicts how Ramlah runs the show in her house affairs with careful detail; she even describes that during confinement she is still in charge:

HH: *ahah so you budget*

Ramlah: *ahah that's why I said every month when I get my salary I will do budget ok for children's smart reader how much, religious school for my eldest how much, tuition how much , reading quran how much aa all that I have prepared and then to give to my parent how much , the groceries how much and all including my helpers salary how much also including the water and electricity and telephone bills finish that aa then only comes aa savings also how much*

HH: *oo so you manage everything*

Ramlah: *aaa I manage alllll, I am everything Secretary, Admin everything in the house all me and to make the house the plan and everything is all me*

HH: *oo the plan of this house means relating to renovating the house?*

Ramlah: *aa yess everything iiii, what designs , what kind of gates all I decide because I'm very fussy very meticulous for example when I was in confinement for 2 weeks I paid for painters to paint the house but then they did a lousy job so I called them and told them to do it all over because I paid a lot and I want my house to be nice so they did it all over again the kitchen everything [mmhm] that's why my husband for the design and everything he hand it to me because he knows that I am fussy, I am fussy I cannot help it*

HH: *oo so he doesn't mind*

Ramlah: *aa no because I think he trust me he knows my taste[aaa he can go with your taste] aa its ok even if it's not the same then we sit and talk and he says his justification and I do my justification so we go with whichever suggestion is good because sometimes you cannot think that only you are good, sometimes other people are good.....for example like colours(referring to her house walls), I ask him whether this is nice so he says he want the colours to blend then only it looks nice so I agree he agrees so it's like that*

HH: *mhmm oo so what about the designs?*

Ramlah: *ahaha everything is meee my dearr cabinets*

HH: *hahaha*

Ramlah: *type of materials for wood or whatever eeverythingg aa 'papa this chair is it nice this chair is it ok? '..up to you mama' haaa (mimicking a conversation between her husband and her)[hahahahaha] up to me, so I go for it*

In two of the excerpt below Ramlah also describes proudly how she is in charge of opening and managing the children's saving accounts and insurance, here she again mention how she is the one in charge:

- HH: ooo so how about other savings*  
*Ramlah: eeh of course we have it, savings for example like him (pointing to the youngest child) for him at this young age he already have RM1000 something in his account, I open an account for all my children , I open Tabung Haji, Insurance[aahah so its different] mmhmm savings is different insurance is different*  
*HH: so for the children what type of insurance do you take*  
*Ramlah: education insurance every month is MYR100 for all the four..aaa the other savings its Tabung Haji*  
*HH: is this the for the money that they get during 'Raya'(Eid) ?*  
*Ramlah: no... every month I will put MYR50 and what they receive then I will save as well*  
*HH: ahah*  
*Ramlah: but normally of course they will receive a lot around MYR200-MYR300 because we have a big family but for monthly only MYR50 but I think its sufficient the important thing is at least you have a saving isnt it*  
*HH: aaahah ..oo so you do that for all the children*  
*Ramlah: aahah I do it and everything I will do it he doesn't know ll ..(oo really hahaha) what he knows if he doesn't have money he will ask 'mama' (referring to herself) for the money haahahah that's all*

Ramlah is fully in charge of running the show in her family and takes pride in her ability particularly in money management. Being prudent gives her a piece of mind that she is doing the best at safeguarding her family's future and well-being. In the excerpt below, Ramlah informs that she is given a monthly allowance (besides having her own income) from her husband. Ramlah holds the key to the family's saving where she has the authority to do whatever she wants with the money;

*Ramlah: ...my husband will usually give me every month RM2000 so its up to me whatever I want to do with the money [ooo] so I use that money for the children like these things*

*HH: ooo so he gives you RM2000*

*Ramlah: ahah so I use the money for saving for expenses and everything but for the children's milk is different, he gives me cash at hand, that does not include the MYR2000*

*HH: ooo so groceries is different*

*Ramlah: ahah different, for groceries he will sponsor.. pampers (diapers) and things like that its on him, the MYR2000 is my allowances*

Although Ramlah has the freedom to spend the extra money that she received from her husband, her priority is in using the money as a 'backup' so there will always be a financial reserve for the family:

*HH: oo so then the MYR2000 you can do anything with it*

*Ramlah: yes its mine soo it doesn't matter what I do with it and every year when he gets the end of year bonus..every year he will give without fail... he will give at least MYR4000*

*HH: oo that's nice*

*Ramlah: aa so I use that money for savings for the children because I don't think he does the saving for the children that's why I have to... at least one party is giving the other has to save up[mmhm] when my husband gives me I save up because when we are facing rainy days aa if he says we don't have money aa I can say 'mama have the money the money you gave me', then we use the money[mmhmm] sometimes things suddenly come up like car sometimes road tax or anything so I use that money*

Savings is most important in Ramlah's lifestyle, the excerpt below shows that Ramlah links any kind of consumption with the ability to save up or replace the money that was spent:

*HH: aaa..soo when you buy do you use credit card or cash*

- Ramlah: aa that depends, for me I combine but I prefer using cash because it's really a hassle to use credit card because you have to pay loads of debts, I really like to use cash that's why when you get your salary and its going to be sale you already have savings let's say every month MYR100 so during sale when you spent MYR300 you won't feel it and then you buy cash isn't it it[mmhmm] I if I want to buy things I like to save up money then only I will buy[ooo]*
- HH: so aa can you tell me when you usually use your credit card*
- Ramlah: aa it depends for major things like for example recently I went to Bali I buuy all these furniture in Bali all these chairs(showing me her furniture in the lounge) I brought back here... soo aa I use credit card[aahaa] and when I came back then I pay up*
- Interviewer: oo so you pay at one go*
- Ramlah: aa like if the total is MYR6000 I pay half of it first aa then I pay another MYR3000, if big amounts then I will use but if just to go shopping and buy around MYR100 noo ii try to avoid that.it depends lets say if I save monthly MYR1000, so if there's a sale that particular month, so I spent MYR500 and save MYR500 so at least i save MYR500 thats how.... soo it depends[oooo] i do it that way because i don't want to take my money that I have saved up monthly so i just reduce the particular monthly savings if I need to spend for the month[I see] at least we don't touch that one (the savings) [ahah] that is how I work at least you must have savings for me savings is very important*
- HH: oo so every month you strictly save*
- Ramlah: ahah I must I must have savings every month*
- HH: so your savings is from the money that he gave you?*
- Ramlah: ahah and from my salary because my salary sometimes I don't use it that much...how farr I want to use my salary because the one that he gives me sometimes is already enough*

Even though Ramlah prefers value for money in her consumption, in her choices for children Ramlah's goes for the best. Ramlah prefers to buy clothing that are 'branded', for her branded clothing are of good quality and last longer. Therefore to make sure she does not have to compromise buying 'unbranded clothing' for a value price, Ramlah uses two strategy, first Ramlah uses her networking of friends to buy her the branded clothes overseas where it is available at a far cheaper price compared to if she buys them locally.

Alternatively then, Ramlah buys her children clothing during the sale, she describes how she takes opportunity of the Mega sale that are held periodically in Malaysia

*HH: how about in terms of clothing for example the childrens clothing?  
Ramlah: haa for clothing I like branded yess yess I don't buy clothes at the night market I won't buy..I bought before but it doesnt lasts. So I go for branded quality items. Of course it's expensive but its durable..So I will buy for them usually during sale..the Mega Sale (mmhmm) during Sale I have started preparing for my kids clothes for 'Raya'(Eid) because if you by a lot because I have 4 children aa soo to buy letss say jeanss, jeanss one cost you at least MYR60 MYR80..so if its on sale for example 50% sale you get half of it instead of paying MYR70(normal price) and you get one but if it's on sale you get two isnt it. sometimes.. because my office mates many of them are engineers soo if they have courses at Houston(USA) I will ask them to buy my childrens clothing for me for example Osh Kosh aa and if like Kiki Lala, Annakku*

Ramlah is meticulous about how she spends her money as is described in her great effort of comparing prices and surveying many shops before finally deciding to purchase of furniture, however this does not apply for the children's necessities especially for clothing as depicted below:

*R: aa because sometimes lets say Ikea we have to see like Ikea is but I think it depends on individual because sometimes Ikea the designs are sometimes ok smetimes its ok sometimes it meets your requirement sometimes it doesn't meet you requirement .*

*HH: mmhmm*

*R: sometimes you want a certain style they don't have it .soo you have to survey many shops its like you want to buy clothes we cannot only compare only two shops we have to go at least three to four shops because sometimes they sell the same thing but for example at KLCC the things are the same but the price is expensive then you go to Sogo in the city centre compare to KLCC i think Sogo is much cheaper because KLCC the shops rent is already expensive*

*that why they impose the price to you an expensive price and sometimes you go to Tuanku Abd Rahman road its nice and the material is similar but its cheaper because the rent is cheap*

*HH: mmhm*

*R: so I go for whichever is reasonable usually it's like that but exceptions are for the children's necessities ...aa yes for the children yes I dont mind paying extra because it lasts like their clothing.. (pointing to her third child) his Kiko trousers I bought when he was 2-3year old and the brother can still wear until now and if for them I buy Hush Puppies shoes and things like that it can be pass on to the others because I take care of the things really well for example my eldest daughter shoes when she was a baby is passed to her sister, my eldest is 10 year old and her sister is 1 year so how many years is that 9 years isn't it*

Ramlah also describes how she make sure that she treat her children and bring them to various places that she thinks they can enjoy themselves. For Ramlah this is compulsory weekend activity as she feels it is the most suitable way she can give back to the children for the times that she or her husband is very busy working:

*R: noo sometimes during school break we don't go anywhere..because we go for vacation every week aa aahah we bring them just for fun sometimes we go to A Famosa(Waterworld), go for picnic's in Port Dickson there's a Central Banks chalet so we go and have a swim and sometimes we go to Sunway Lagoon .. aa ahah I bring them ..my children..i am like that I am a committed mother I am what do people call it women family ,family man*

*HH: aaa family man?*

*R: aahah family man but I am family woman because I feel I cannot If I neglect my kids during weekends during school holidays I feel guilty that is me but I don't know about other people that's why I rather stay at home and then cook if they say they want cake I will make cake or whatever they want I will cook*

### 6.1.5 Siti's LifeWorld-The Climber Lifestyle

Siti (aged forty four) and Khairul (aged forty five) have been married for twenty years and have two teenage children Khazami (eighteen years old) and Shahila (sixteen years old). They live in a modest apartment in the middle of a university town. Siti works as a Secretary at a university near her house while Khairul works as a police. Siti currently works two jobs; as a full time secretary from 8.30 to 4.30 pm and as a part time secretary at the same place which lasts until 6.30pm in the evening. In addition to this Siti is currently pursuing her part time studies for a degree in Business Studies at the same University.

Siti's lifestyle akins that to a Climber - her lifestyle revolves around the notion of taking the opportunity to improve the position of her family. Siti's consumption focuses and orientates towards ensuring that the whole family benefits in the long term, especially in terms of preparing resources for her children's future and for when herself and her husband retires.

Siti acknowledges that she started from a very humble beginnings where she hadn't had the opportunities to further her studies or do anything that was of her interest during her younger days for fear that this would burden her parents who was not well off;

*HH: oo so when did you have the intention to further your studies*  
*Siti: since the Executive Program were launch at our Faculty I thought it was an opportunity for me and I don't think I ever regret doing it because even if there were'nt any programmes here I would have done it somewhere else*

*HH: so what triggered you to do this*

*Siti: maybe first is because of my background like I said my parents didn't have enough money to sent all of us to further studies and also I had a sisters that was still schooling*

Siti started working right after she finished her high school and from thereon she has been working hard to better her life. In the illustration below, Siti expresses her determination in reaching up for a better position in life;

*HH: oo so after your SPM (similar to GSCE's) you work straight away*

*Siti: ahah I did because I didn't want to burden my parents anymore I felt they were tired of looking for money so I said its ok I will work for it...in the future if I have the opportunity I will further my studies....[..] my principles of life is what I want I will get it if not at that time.. one day I will get it hahahaahha.....for me I can persevere and I can work towards it.. for example when I started work I was only a typist then I took the exams to go up to become a secretary and then I applied for secretarial post and I got it so for me If I can I will try to achieve the highest I can  
aaa*

Siti's long-term orientation and determination to provide a better position for her family is evident in most of her consumption practices where she focuses on things that will help expand and move up her family's position; investing in her own and her children's education and buying properties. Siti's sees the knowledge that she gets out of pursuing her degree makes her more confident and accessible to higher positions or 'ranks';

*HH: mmhmm..so after getting your degree I supposed your salary increased as well?*

*Siti: ahah a llittle but most important for me is the knowledge that I get that... makes me more confident.. like ranks you know everybody wants rank*

Siti believe as parents, she and Khairul have to make sure that they have the resources to help their children pursue their learning in a field of their interest and give their children the opportunity they never had. The excerpt below depicts how Siti really wants her son to explore all the learning opportunities rather than to commit to work straight away;

*Siti: I talkk to them because my son is not that brilliant but I always tell him that I use to have a hard life that is why I continue to do my degree even at this age, I still continue to study although I'm old because I didn't get a chance to study previously , so look at me haa I reminded him..... aaa I always say Khazami you may not excel academic wise, so you can tell me any other field that you are interested in.. just please don't tell me you want to work at this time..... I want you to search for knowledge first it's for you own future*

*HH: oo so he is more interested to work?*

*Siti: ahah initially you know..with influence from his friends..I said 'if you are not interested in academic and you want to go into apprenticeship...just tell me..the important thing is you are interested'..because we have some savings to support you even though it is not much but we still saved up from the start.. you know deduct from the salary even RM50-60 It doesn't matter.. like people say bit by bit so you don't have to borrow from anyone else isnt it*

Similar to that of a climber who doesn't see the heights of a mountains as the limits; Siti doesn't see her children's weakness or disinterest in academia a hindrance for them to take up learning opportunities in other areas;

*Siti: He told me that he like things that uses skills.. aa so I told him I will look into that for example mechanicals or anything.. that's what I'm doing right now I'm browsing , so I told him if you are not interested in academics they are a lot of areas where you can find for work aa for example maybe repairing cars or anything... [...] so I tell them and I want to encourage them so that they take the opportunity to learn and do this while they are young even if they feel that academic is difficult for them.. so find other areas that they can seek knowledge.. there are many other areas isn't it.. so that's my plan and for me if I have the interest I will go on with it and I don't bother if other people don't want to do it because*

*you know some people if they want to do something they want to have their friends with them but not me*

She will usually be the one to initiate to Khairul any plans that she thinks will benefit her children. Her initiative and active effort in helping her children is illustrated in the excerpt below;

*HH: ooo so it was your initiative to send them to this course*

*Siti: ahah it was mine because with the course they get a certificate and maybe that can help them*

*HH: mmhmm, so how did you get the information about that college?*

*Siti: I got the information from the newspapers then I ask my husband to checkout if the college existed so we went to have a look and we found out it was there and have a looked at the classes and met the teachers as well*

*HH: oo so you have already planned to sent him to learn something after he finishes SPM*

*Siti: ahah yes I did plan to send him to learn something so I told my husband I didn't want him(their son) to waste time and he is going(for the course) with his cousin so at least he has a friend...my nephew is also waiting for his SPM results.*

Siti's acknowledges that she is willing to go all out in ensuring her children are exposed with learning opportunities. Siti's active moral and physical support evident in the excerpt below;

*HH: mmhmmm, so you don't mind paying*

*Siti: aah I don't mind because I told my husband , the reason for us to save money is for them so whether we like it or not we have to help them with our money..of course we like it to be something that incur less expenses (like getting scholarship or loans) buut then if he does not have that chances... then we have to give it to him.... let's say he is interested in computer maintenance so we sent him, ahah so this time around they are*

*going to have exam so the computer at home becomes the target for practice*

*HH: ooo ok how is he doing so far?*

*Siti: ahaha so far I think he can do it , so I told my nephew because you are going to have exam you must sleep over ahah I want you guys to practice all the questions because its more towards practical theory isonly twenty percent*

*HH: oo thats good isnt it, whenever you have a problem with your pc they can help*

*Siti: aa that's what I told them.. learning this is good for you because in the future no matter where you work and no matter which company ..if you have this maintenance skill then you can do all this computers wiring or networking*

Siti's support is not limited to her family only instead she extends her support to her other networks of family for example her nephew and her siblings. Siti describes paying for her nephew's education. In addition, she even resorts to using her credit card as a backup plan when her familys' expenses went over budget because of helping out her siblings;

*HH: so when do you use credit card*

*Siti: I will use only at certain times*

*HH: can you give me an example?*

*Siti: let's say in a month we have already budgeted the expenses for groceries and everything...(mmhmm)..sometimes within that month you don't know whats going to happen and sometimes the money that we have isnt enough.. (mmhmm)... so credit card is for something that is important*

*HH: can you share any previous experience of this*

*Siti: urm for example like my siblings needs to borrow some money and during that time I myself have already an amount budgeted sufficiently for us but still you lend it to them because you...pity them... further more they are not wealthy people for example like my sister she has a family problem so i am the one who help her by supporting her son's education so that have also altered a bit of our ....*

*HH: budget?*

*Siti: aaha budget , that's why I need to work part time hahahaha*

Apart from Siti's avid dedication in finding opportunities for her family, her effort of buying properties shows Siti's devotion in building the wealth and status of her family. Siti acknowledges that she and Khairul will go back to live in their hometown after retirement. Consequently, Siti justifies that her purchases of two apartments in the city would help them in the future as she wisely predicts that these properties would have higher value by then;

*Siti: aa..now I have 3 houses... two apartments...I bought one in Equine Park and then another one in Sri Serdang (the apartment that she and her family are currently living at) and my husband bought one house in Malacca...[.]. ahah we bought apartment because I thought if we bought a house we wouldn't be staying here anyway and the money that we got from our retirement can be used to go for pilgrimage oo to go for vacation or we could even sell one of our houses here and pay up for the other houses so we dont have any debts.... in the near future we dont know what the price may come up to..*

Purchasing properties is not for the sole purpose of living in, instead Siti sees her properties as an asset through which she can gain profit;

*HH: ooo so you have two apartments, one currently ;you're living in, the other one in Equine Park is rented out, so how much do you rent out the apartment for?*

*Siti: RM350 and I think that amount is ok as long as the tenant take care of the house*

*HH: so it's considered an investment*

*Siti: ahah I think for me yess.. if I don't do these things you know..it's me.. I am the type who thinks about things and whats going to happen*

*HH: oo soo which apartment did you buy first?*

*Siti: the one that I am currently living in*

*HH: how much did you bought the house for*

*Siti: aa it was RM25thousand.. at that time really cheap.. now it has increased to RM40 something and the house has 3 bedrooms... so I think its fine for*

*a small family like mine and urmm now people rent it out for RM500 on the 3rd floor even on the 5th floor its RM500*

Siti was determined to buy a property immediately after she secured a permanent job. Limited income was not a deterrent for Siti; instead she acquired a property that was suitable within her budget;

*Siti: haha after I got my permanent job the first thing I thought of was to buy a house because we been renting for years so I told my husband now I already got a permanent job so I want to buy a house and during that time my loan wasn't that much it was RM60 thousand over compared to know is RM100 over but its ok I thought.. it doesnt matter even though its small if people say anything we already have a house..[.] .. ahah at that time my salary wasn't that much and we were staying in a rented house but my husband told me it's the same we have to pay for the terrace house that we were renting for about RM300 something nearly RM400 so we thought never mind just buy the flat instead of paying RM300 no..its actually more about RM380-RM400..so might as well we live in the apartment and we only pay the bank loan for RM220, it doesnt matter even if its a flat because we dont have that many children anyway and when we retire we plan to go back to our hometown*

#### **6.1.6 Rima's Lifeworld-The Entrepreneur Lifestyle**

Rima (aged thirty) and Hizam (aged thirty three) has been married for six years and have three children; Hazri (five years old), Raihan (four years old) and Raha (ten months old). The family lives in a spacious full facilities apartment in the outskirts of Selangor and at the border of Kuala Lumpur. Rima currently holds a manager position after getting a promotion from her recent post as a service engineer at a renowned petroleum company, meanwhile Hizam works as an economist at the Central Bank.

Rima's lifestyle centres on Being Entrepreneurial; she focuses on managing and organizing her affairs with considerable effort and risks in order to gain the highest possible economic return for the benefit of her family. Rima leads the 'Entrepreneur Lifestyle', she is highly enterprising, resourceful, determined and is not afraid of taking risks in everything that she does and this reflects throughout her consumption taste.

From the outset, Rima attributes her entrepreneurial vision to a brief involvement in Multilevel Marketing. She depicts how actively doing sales and involved in the programs under the Multilevel Marketing made her realised her self-potential and help built and broadened her vision for the future;

*Rima: ...when Amway came into our life through Network 21 system it opened my mind..so I did the business I think for about 2 years....I did direct selling I mean network marketing but my husband he is not so ..he encourages me but I do it on my own he himself... he's not interested..so in the end I became a user only , I used to have many downlines... actually that is the time I realize that I can do sales , all this while I have been doing technical ...it was that time that I realise I can do sales and the beauty of networking system as a whole, take it openly for me its actually a leadership driven business and that time Marina introduce me to all these business so that time I went to all the functions and that time I learn business and how to groom ..how to do business..during that time I was still a technical service engineer but already quite senior and that time I started to groom my engineer and at the same time I was doing business so you imagine myself working with family family and suddenly venture in to network marketinng so i did the network marketing either during lunch or at night so it is really tiring*

*HH: aa so you were really busy?*

*Rima: ahah full fledged every night I went out to search for down line with appointments and everything it was really tiring but I really enjoyed doing it because I really go outside the box at that time*

Rima illustrates how her involvement in multilevel marketing helped changed her lifestyle from being complacent about what she has to being very ambitious in life;

*Rima: soo this is the concept of network marketing which I am involved in which has changed my life last time I just...I didn't know what else I wanted... everything I already have..I got a house, a car... that I have this I have... I was complacent at that time*

*HH: mhmm so that time was before you joined the network marketing?*

*Rima: mmhmm yess that time but when I joined actually I..I find something else in myself that you must have a dream you must have a vision..for yourself not for your company or whoever but for yourself...what is our priority in our life so that's why we must be able to dream again you know for example we want real estates in Indonesia, a house in Canada, rest house in Switzerland... dream big.. that's what I'm doing either you get it or you don't that is God's willing but we must work towards that so because of that involvement I found out that actually I can do sales amd I know that actually I can go further and the most fundamental thing I learn is about Leadership aaa..because network marketing you tend to groom your downline so that they can duplicate you to sell the products and in my work I started grooming my engineers*

Rima didn't pursue her interest in multilevel marketing as her husband wasn't as keen as she was, her new found vision and drive as a result of this was channelled towards purchasing and investing in 'real estate and property'; an area where she feels both she and Hizam have common interest.

*Rima: my husband actually he is not interested in network marketing so I cannot go on because we were always **arguing** at the time when I was doing the network marketing because he didn't want to follow me and I am the type that I'm ok if its only once or twice ..I thought I could do it by myself which I can actually but I'm also working in the office and then at night I have to meet people to sell products to add on downlines.. I love to do it with my husband and I don't want because of that (network marketing) we*

*arguel..so thats why I stopped not stopped I.. I don't continue to add my downlines but I am still using the products..for me if I can I want to do it with my husband but if he says he is not interested then I cannot force him...what I can do is I find things both of us are interested in... so both of us are interested in investment*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Rima: so that really makes us lively..sometimes people say when you are married for a long time we don't have any more interesting things to talk about so at least we can talk about investment..so with these (buying and selling properties) we can share a lot of things together*

Rima acknowledges that she is the one who initiates the move on buying and selling properties to her husband. She feels that very proud of her ability to gain and inspire Hizam's cooperation and interest in properties investment;

*HH: ok you mentioned investing and buying properties , can you tell more about how you go on to make this decision..does Hizam get involved?*

*Rima: ahah I'll tell him ..I know this is risky but I want to buy this... then I give my suggestions for example after the shop house actually my vision is every year the very very least is we buy at least one property..so I mooted the idea and he agreed for example like now I bought Casa Andaman in USJ (Subang Jaya) ... the only thing is my husband told me to look for good deals, good deals from the banks , many banks come to see me but I only met the bank that can give me up to 40years loan you imagine until your age is 70 years you can borrow.. I told my husband there are 2 scheme one is you can sell after you buy and the other is you have to pay the penalty if you plan to sell within 3 years...I take that scheme... even though I have to pay quite high for the interest I don't have to pay the penalty if I want to sell because the reason I bbuy in the first place.... to sell it*

*HH: ooo*

*Rima: and then this idea I mooted to him... initially he didn't agree but after that he agrees because at the same time he just bought a terrace house in UK Bistari Perdana near our house which is freehold he bought it for RM250,00 now somebody offered it for RM338,000 so he is planning to sell it, so you imagine ..our idea as a wife..our husband actually if they are clever they will think about it... the only thing is the way you suggest it to him has to be right in a way that they can accept..*

Rima illustrates how she applied her knowledge from Multilevel Marketing into her life, which leads her to venture in purchasing and selling properties as a means of business. Rima wisely combined Hizam's expertise as a support;

*Rima: yess exactly previously I thought I could only do technical but when I do this I got some downlines I started selling products and I know I can do sales so there is a potential there, and at the same time my upline invited me to play cash flow board game... a simple game that thought me about investment about share and then there's a game by Robert Kiosaki you should alsoo play that game.. its..very good .. I applied that to real life and I learn to take risks*

*HH: oo can you explain a little bit more about your experience of taking risks*

*Rima: coincidentally there was somebody wanted to sell his land in Canada , so when I was a student I had a cousin who studied in the uk and they bought a house there then at that time I wondered how they got the money to buy the house..so thereon I promised myself to do the same....so when opportunities like this come by that's why I don't hesitate*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Rima: I felt I wanted to buy the house in Canada but I know if people hear about this they will wonder but then I am willing to take the risk... I'm aware that I didn't know the procedure the s&p and everything.. I didn't know .. coincidentally my husband is working at the Central Bank as an economist so he is really good in terms of paper procedures and everything.. he is good at analyzing so i use his strength.. I told him can you please have a look at this property..is it ok if we buy it...so he did all the research and it was ok and also because my dad had left me some money, so i put my idea there and the land in Canada was RM5 per square feet you can't even find that kind of price here in Malaysia..so that was a starting point because of the network marketing business I changed..my lifestyle changed... I am more thinking about investment infact I already bought a paddy field then after I bought a shop house which is under a guaranteed rental scheme... the shop house is actually RM300 thousand over but because in Malaysia we have a scheme that is call a Guaranteed Rental Scheme so I got about 26% discount... so when I can get that cheap price I went and ask my bank for a loan ..and i got about 85% so..and also I get cash back which means the price is RM220k after discount so i got loan for about 240 so i got extra 20k and on top of that I only pay the bank monthly RM1,200 and I get rental for RM1,500*

For Rima all the hard work that she does in finding opportunities to gain the highest economic return through investing in real estate would enabled her to realized her vision and dream to have options or choices when bringing up her children;

*Rima: ...I think you must be able to dream again that's why there's a lot of things that when you start dream what you want this is not dreaming ....its dream what you want you will be surprised of what you want ..you think all the impossible for your kids... actually you know why I wanted to do this network marketing, actually I have mmoney I have time but thats for myself ...one day I went to this seminar by this Indonesian lady she said if you dont know why you want to build the bussiness you look into your childrens eyes wha tactually do they want.... since then I started thinking I told myself I have been to all this places U.S and all I have been but..that was my father's dream to bring me there... but how about me so I want to be able to bring all my children to all these places and I want to be able to have choices in bringing them up*

Rima's entrepreneurial lifestyle does not limit to purchasing and selling properties, alternatively it also resonates in her other affairs. Rima used her entrepreneur vision, skills and effort in persuading her husband to see the benefit of letting the children take golf lessons, this way she could also benefit from the lessons as well. She illustrates how she convinced her husband into agreeing to let them (she and her children) take golf lessons, which she feels as an important skill for her to acquire since her promotion to a Manager. Rima sees this as smart way to balance her career needs with her family's needs;

*Rima: so I use to not like golf but then I said to myself why not...I told my husband... initially he didn't agree but then as a wife how I tackle my husband..you know how..it like this I said nowadays you see how the westerners teach their children play golf until some of them become professional players so I said why don't we groom our children.. we expose them to everything..so I can learn as well you know..I mean it will*

*good.. at least if I can play golf now you know urmm..at least with that I can mix around with all other managers and the senior managers because they will normally play golf..but I didn't say to my husband I want to play golf with the senior manager for sure he won't accept..isnt it*

*HH: I see*

*Rima: so I told him why don't we groom our children we look at what their interest are who knows one day he becomes a golfer if he's not good in his studies at least he plays golf hahahahaha we can make money..the best thing is he agrees and he even when and bought child's golf set that cost RM200 for his son*

*HH: so it depends on how you tell him*

*Rima: ahah as a woman we must be smart because we have a career and it's important to balance that with family*

Apart from balancing career needs and family needs, Rima recounts the importance of self-care management. For her it's important for women to be 'selfish' (RMA.28) for her own self although they are busy with their family and children. Rima notes the turning point for her to pay attention to herself was the moment her friend compared her with her mom;

*Rima: ...my friend she said she wanted to do facial to me.. and I I have never done a facial very rare that I do facial I did it once near to my wedding day and that's it.. I never did it anymore..so then she came and did a demonstration.. she did a facial on my mom first..she said my mom's skin was very beautiful good and everything but she said my face had a lot of blackheads and she said what happen.. 'dont you take care..?' so at that time it was what you called the moment..*

*HH: urmm..turning point?*

*Rima: turning point I thought I have to change in terms of self care ..so since then I start all those and that was when I had my second child which was four years ago*

After this moment, Rima took the initiative to emphasize on her own self-care, she invest quite a sum of money to buy her supplements. Rima sees grooming herself as maintaining inner beauty--her health and outer beauty—her face and skin;

*Rima: aaahah..so I started to use the products..and then after that I started to take care and I went for grooming session I learn how to do facial so I can do it to myself so it's ok because I am taking care for my inner and outer self that's the most important..that comes first ...not the clothes ..for me first is health and then your outer part.. your face, hands, and then at that time i thought about it.. I..I..have a husband ..so we have to take care of ourselves you know.....be selfish..do it for yourself and not for someone else, even though you already have many children but you still maintain your looks like you were in your twenties ...ahah that's my intention*

*HH: so you buy all the supplements?*

*Rima: of course every month I spent at least around RM300 just for my supplements..[.].I take Lecithin E, Vitamin C and I also take Multi Carotene anti oxidant to delay aging and then I take also multivitamin once a day.*

### **6.1.7 Salmi's Lifeworld-The Survivor Lifestyle**

Salmi (forty years old) and Azri (forty four years old) have been married for twenty years and have five children; Hijaz (aged twenty), Hisham (aged fifteen), Aini (aged twelve), Hairi (aged ten) and the youngest Aina (eight months old). They live in a modest three bedrooms terrace house in a small town in the state of Selangor.

Salmi currently runs her own food business to help increase the family's household income. She has 10 years experience selling homemade food from a food stall in front of her house. Currently her main business is managing and preparing food for a school

canteen from morning until about 3pm in the evening. Apart from that, she also sells homemade food at the food stall in front of her house that runs from 4pm until 10pm at night. During school holidays when the school canteen isn't operating, Salmi supplies homemade 'nasi lemak' every morning (rice cooked in coconut gravy with spicy gravy anchovies side dish - a Malay dish popularly and usually eaten during breakfast) to restaurants. Meanwhile Azri works as an Instructor and Trainer at the Vocational and Training Centre for Local Communities. After office hours Azri will usually be helping Salmi operating their food business. Although Azri is the person giving Salmi moral and physical support, Salmi acknowledges that she is the main backbone for all the operations of their food business.

Salmi's lifestyle is focus on increasing the economic status of the family through her business. Salmi leads the 'Survivor Lifestyle' as her priority is to persevere regardless of the hardship that ensues with running her food business and her current life. She sees this as the only way to cope with the cost of living and raising the children;

*HH: what about hobbies, do you have any hobbies*

*Salmi: aa hobby hahahahhahah I don't have the time for hobbies hahah what my head thinks during weekends is only to sleep and sleep*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Salmi: because now my focus is to (showing an action of lifting her hand) increasing the economy, now because of the business here I think we are doing ok but then I feel we need to increase because the children are growing up and the salary I feel its not sufficient with the cost of living now for example one (her son) is studying in Lumut (a state where her son attends college) and a month for his pocket money alone we have to give him around RM300*

Her consumption experience resonates with the meaning of survival as Salmi taste and preference throughout based on the notion of being able to adapt and endure hardship for the sake of future comfort and survival. Salmi is aware before embarking in the canteen business, the family were living sufficiently and had more time compared to after venturing in the canteen business, where they currently really busy focusing on the survival of the business.

Undeterred, Salmi feels this sacrifice is worth it as they are now able to buy more expensive things (changing from a car to an MPV) and she believes it will provide the family with better things to come once the business flourish. Salmi insists that this is the time for the family to forgo any thought of a break (such as going on a holiday) and to focus on the survival of the canteen business. Salmi feels their endurance will pay off in the end by having the ability to buy things that are comfortable for them through the success of their business;

*HH: mmmm ook so since you started doing business you didn't have the time to go for a break like for a picnic or things like that?*

*Salmi: aa no I don't have time and I feel now we don't need to go because I feel we don't have enough yet..previously when I did my business at a stall ...with my husband getting a monthly paid and using a Wira (their previous car) it was sufficient for us.. we could go out and go sightseeing and everything but now I cannot because I think I feel we have so many more commitments and it feel like we have to bear a burden but then you have to have a principles isn't it*

*HH: mhmm*

Salmi acknowledges the importance for her to add to the family's income to ensure that they have a 'comfortable life'. Salmi interprets comfortable lives as having the means to fulfil more than the family's basic needs;

*HH: ooo so you diversify your business*

*Salmi: ahah I have to haa and because we work from morning till night because we want to have a comfortable life.. what other people use we want isnt it*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Salmi: our wants are big... of course I can just sit home and do nothing... with my husband's pay it is sufficient but then I have to settle with only the car that we have (a common national car) a Wira car that's it... so let's say my husband salary is RM4000 so after deduct the house (monthly mortgage) say RM500 the car (monthly loan) is RM500 so the balance say deduct EPF and everything lets say we get net pay of RM2000 so I think I can live with that but only up to that... we can survive and eat but just able to eat 'kembung' fish (common and quite cheap fish sold in the market)*

*HH: mmhm*

*Salmi: but then when we do this business then we have the money to roll so if we want something more then we work for it*

Salmi currently oversees and handles everything with regard to the food business from cooking the food through to the administration tasks. Though she is critical of the challenges she faces in her canteen business nevertheless she is persistent and uses her creativity to solve the problems she is facing. Here she talks of the slim profit margin of her canteen business;

*Salmi: of course when we earn the money it look a lot but the outflow is also a lot for example here (her canteen business) the sales come up to RM1000 over but then after deducting everything for example with the workers pay, the materials and everything we end up with only money that can cover our tiredness thats all, but we dont get much profit because the cost of things for the busniess is really expensive.. cost of things are expensive nnowdays*

*HH: ooo it must be difficult*

*Salmi: ahah very difficult, usually we only get very little profit the margin is very small.. because things are expensive and we cannot markup prices because we are tied to the contract with the school so what are we to do and then noww if we calculate all the days that we do business here if we deduct all the school breaks we only get to do business for 6 months*

And here she describes amongst her strategy to come around this problem;

*Salmi: its really taking a heavy toll on us but we can't increase the price because we already have an agreement with the school..mm so only thing is we have to be creative we sell food that the school children can afford to buy*

*HH: can you give an example of what you do*

*Salmi: examples like rice and mix side dishes (nasi campur), special burger, fried rice, noodles all kinds of special foods and also we sell drinks for RM1.00, we still have the RM0.50 but we add the RM1.00 drinks*

Besides improvising her selling strategy she controls her administration cost by employing only one helper cum cook to help her;

*Salmi: so now the cooking I do it myself and I..I have only one helper I cannot afford to hire for a another cook because the cost is really expensive so now I do the cooking myself so at least we have profit even though it's really minimal but to say we gain loads of profit at one go noo not yet*

*HH: mmhm*

*Salmi: for example one day we get net profit RM200 that haven't include water and electricity payments yet for one day so that's why now I cook with her and I don't send my baby to the baby sitter we take turns to look after her because I find now money is so small..too small..*

*HH: mmhm*

*Salmi: sometimes one day for example on Friday sometimes we get around RM1000 over then the suppliers will come so the balance left is about RM300-400 and to pay for salary I have to take out from the bank the money that we save everyday*

Having all these challenges does not mean Salmi is thinking of giving up, instead she insists that she will try her very best to solve the problems that arises;

*HH: mmhmm..so you are tired of doing this (the canteen business)*

*Salmi: mmhmm if you say tired of course (I'm) tired but stress I don't want to think about it because now I'm already 40*

*HH: ahah*

*Salmi: so I don't want to think about it.. if I have a problem if it can be solved then I try to solve it.. I don't want to think over it too much because for me I am the sort that I cannot handle pressure so if I have any problem I can solve it then I try to solve it , but I dont put myself on stress or anything like that ..whats the point*

Salmi has very high sense of survival, as she talks of maintaining positive outlook in business and credits her Chinese friends for this motivation (Chinese people are usually renowned for their successful business in Malaysia)

*HH: have you ever felt like giving up*

*Salmi: nooo we must be positive and don't be dead always positive and also now we mix around with chinese soo they say*

*HH: ooo which Chinese?*

*Salmi: aa all my materials (groceries) many of them I buy from chinese..and actually chinese people give us a lot of motivation*

She also talks of the importance of perseverance in doing business;

*Salmi: and also if I feel I don't get the tender for next year I cannot be frustrated because everything is Hijrah (forward movement) for example from Giatmara to here and soo we cannot be frustrated but we have to find a way soo in this Jun I have to do something for example if its confirmed i wont be getting the tender then i will look for a shop that i can rent*

*HH: aaa so you cannot be frustrated*

*Salmi: aaa cannot because when you are frustrated your luck will become more grim.. we are giving space to people because I have experienced it myself when we let ourselves be frustrated people will take advantage of it and take your place (in business)*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Salmi: sooo I don't want frustration anymore because I've learned my lesson if you feel frustrated and take all your things from that place actually other people are waiting to take your place*

Meanwhile Salmi is fully aware that with her focus on the food business she is unable to manage her household affairs personally but have to resort to paid services offered in the market to help her do this. Salmi is rarely at home to manage her household let alone to prepare any home cooked food for her children as is busy at the canteen from morning until evenings every weekday. Consequently, Salmi relies heavily on instant food such as nuggets, burger, sardines and peanut butter (S.75) for her children. Aini her daughter will be the one responsible to prepare quick lunch for her siblings after she finishes school in the afternoon. In addition, when Salmi comes home in the afternoon she will bring the food that she had cooked at the canteen back home;

*HH: ooo so you have stocked your fridge*

*Salmi: ahah we buy things like burgers, nuggets..that's what they like hahah aaa that's why I have to always have food like sardines, eggs, maggi (instant noodles)*

*HH: mmhm*

*Salmi: so food must always be at home because the sister(her daughter will come back home from school at 2pm and usually I don't have time to bring lunch to them so she will prepare the food at home sometimes if there's sardine she will cook sardine or whatever is at home, then in the evening when we come back from the canteen they will eat what we bring back like 'nasi lemak', laksa and others.. so thats what they eat.. ..hmm because when we finish the business here we will bring back all the food back home*

Salmi expressed the need to reward her children for putting up with her not being there for them during the days. She does this by treating them to anything they want to eat once a week;

*Salmi: ahah then once a week after their help for being independent at home..you need to treat them as well because they put up with me not being there....I feel they deserve a treat..so i treat them...usually their favourite will be Thai Food...so I have to entertain them if they want to eat Thai food (R.77) [..]. like fried 'puyuh' is their favourite ..and then sweet and sour beef, tomyam aa things like that (R.81)*

Her busyness in business seems to be compromise by the Salmi's ability to provide her children with the material things they need such as buying 'branded' clothing for them. For her teenage boys she will give them a budget of RM300 each as a pocket money for them to buy their own choices of clothing;

*Salmi: urmmm usually for this young ladds..BUM..Guess I will usually give them money usually around RM300-RM350 so they will go and buy on their own*

*HH: oo so there's a certain budget*

*Salmi: aah yess there's a buddget and usually the most that I give is RM300 each*

### **6.1.8 Murni's Lifeworld-The Easy Going Lifestyle**

Murni (aged 55) and Mazlan (aged 63) have been married for about 32 years and have three adult children; Izlan (aged 30, already flown the nest), Azra (aged 25) and Idris (aged 24) are both college students. They lived in spacious semi-detached house in a town located in the suburb of Selangor. Murni is a fulltime homemaker; she used to work as a bank clerk before finally resigning because of difficulties getting a helper to take care of the children (M.205). Meanwhile Mazlan who used to work with the armed forces in the government is now retired.

Currently both Murni and Mazlan leads an 'Easygoing Lifestyle' and are enjoying the fruits of their labour; a result of their effort when they were young. In the interview Murni describes in detail the highs and lows of her consumption experienced and how she managed to built a sound financial background for the family. Although Murni is a fulltime homemaker when all her children were young and still schooling, Murni recounts of the various ways that she employed to adapt to the family's financial background--from finding various ways to earn her own income through to various ways of saving up and reinvesting the money that they have as a family.

Murni illustrates the things she did such as selling homemade cookies and cakes, bought issue shares, sewing and many others. Murni found that she was able to earn more money when she was a homemaker compared to when she was working as a bank clerk. She recounts buying issue shares as one of the things that she did to earn her own income;

*Murni: ahah that why I stopped working, when I didn't work I could make more money (laughing)*

*HH: ooo..what did you do?business?*

*Murni: no...I played shares..not the one you always have to monitor every time ..this is what do you call it..urmm..share issue<sup>19</sup>*

*HH: How did you get to know the trick to play?*

*Murni: aa the my Chinese colleague at the bank (previous workplace) used to use my name so when they got profit I thought eeh I'm not going to let them just use my name I want to play as well.. Aa so I tried and played so when the price goes up I sell and from that I make money*

Here she recalled how she managed to earn income and even used the money to go

for a holiday overseas from her effort of selling homemade cookies and cakes;

*Murni: aa yes I did, after I stopped working you know I was used to earning my own salary so I made cookies cakes..aa chocolate cake aand I even went for a month holiday from the cake sale money that I got*

*HH: ooo*

*Murni: aahaah., during that time my sister was studying in London she was there for four years so I thought I want to go for holiday but I know my husband is thrifty aa so I had to find my own money and that time I didn't have a job. But..I managed to save up RM4000 from selling cookies and that time everybody was crazily selling chocolate cakes, so I made chocolate cakes, traditional Malay cookies and when people order I will sell and keep the money. During that time Azra was 2 years old, I told him (Mazlan) I want to go to London... to visit my sister there I just want your permission aa you have to give me because I already have the budget..aa I just want your permission aa.. so he said ok*

For Murni even after she stopped working she had to find ways to gain her own money as she is used to having her own salary, which she feels gives her more freedom of buying anything she wishes;

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<sup>19</sup> Issue share: Shares issued by companies to the public in order to increased their business capital

*Murni: haaa because I am used to earning my own money haa and then after that I sewed I used to love sewing clothes, curtains and things but now I stopped because of my nose couldn't stand it every time I cut fabrics I will sneeze because of the dust.. so I stopped if not I used to sew my own clothes even my pyjamas I sewed them myself and I save money hahaha*

*HH: oo so you cut cost through that*

*Murni: aahah in a way..ahah its like a side income and because I am very independent I don't like to always ask and ask and until now if I feel like buying something I will buy or if I feel like eating anything I will buy so I don't have to ask or have expectations*

Murni acknowledges that she saves up the money that she earned from all her incoming earning activities really well that her own children were amazed about her ability to generate her own income as they knew she didn't go out to work. Here she describes in detail part of her strategy of getting profit from selling her issue shares and again she mentioned proudly about her success of saving up her cake and cookies selling money that enabled her to go to London to visit her sister. Her effort in gaining her own income worked out so well that people started to suspect herself and Mazlan;

*Murni: ahah save up the money that I invest.. I save, if I see the price has increase like from the telekom (A telecommunication company share) I got quite a profit from it because at that time you could buy a lot so I bought 10 for RM5 and I sold it for RM7*

*HH: mmhmm*

*Murni: aa first you keep then when the price increase then I sell , I sell one buy one.. let's say I have something to do let's say to go for holiday in Europe so that time I used that money... if not how do you expect we have money... you know as a government servant you dont have that much money, and then what made me want to laugh is I used to buy a Volvo actually it wasnt brand new it belonged to my nephew and he wanted to sell it so I thought we should take it because its cheap so at that time I had my Genting Resort share I bought for RM5 and it went up to RM25 so I sold it and got RM25000 so I said lets sell off the Genting share... also because it wasnt very good to have Genting so I sold it and bought the Volvo at that same time I just stopped work, even I went to London I used the money from*

*selling the cakes... so we know what we do and where we get the money but then this became a gossip because people wondered how with the husband working as government servant and the wife is not working can afford to buy Volvo*

Apart from her side business, Murni recounts on other incomes coming from the rented house that Mazlan owns. Murni emphasized that during these times when their household income were limited she was very frugal and gone by with just the things that she already have; for her the priority was to have savings or cash at hand;

*Murni: we have a land it...it's my husband.. his land he built houses on it and rent them out so we could top up our salary because as a government servant we don't receive that much income with the kids tuition fees and so on.. so all using the rent money..aa so we accumulate everything aaa..for me when I first got married for me all these things (pointing to all the furniture in her house) I didnt really have..I used what was available.. if it was only a simple mat then I would use it because we make sure we had...(showing me a money gesture with her thumbs and pointing finger)*

*HH: money..cash?*

*Murni: ahah having money is very important, so those days if people came to our house we would only use a simple mat and we didn't mind if we didn't have any chairs because that (referring to cash) we must have.. must have, when you have that then we can use it as a capital then when you have the money then you buy slowly , aahah our revenue from the house rent we use it to cover for the children's tuition , the children's schooling and everything... now they are not at school anymore so I use the money to play 'kutu'<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Kutu: a traditional way used to save up money. Kutu playing is a game in a group where there is a mutual agreement among each person playing to pool a fixed amount of money every month (according to the numbers of person playing) where everybody in the group will get a chance to have the pooled money(the turn for getting the money will be done by lucky draw of names); e.g 5 people playing agreed on paying 100/month for 5month (Jan-May) so each person will get their turn on the 5x100=RM400+RM100(his/her own money) starting from Jan till March.

All Murni's effort and hard work building a sound financial standing for her family seemed to paid off as Murni's current lifestyle is focused on leading an easy going lifestyle—happy and stress free. For Murni at her 'old age' her focus is to be mentally and physical healthy. All of Murni's everyday consumption experienced, parallel this notion of an easygoing lifestyle.

Murni emphasized the importance of being happy and worry free in her activities, thus make an effort to go anywhere at a non-peak hour time. Murni describes that she frequents the shopping mall for two reasons; one is for shopping/window shopping and second is to watch a movie at the cinema. In her stories she emphasized the importance of being consistently happy and stress free while doing these activities;

*Murni: for that if I go to KLCC or Midvalley I will go with the family, sometimes we want to go for a movie at the cinema apart from shopping you know (laughing)*

*HH: ooo so you still go to the cinema?*

*Murni: Ouuiii yesss (laughing loudly)*

*HH: what kind of story do you watch?*

*Murni: Comedy, I like to watch comedy, I don't go for science fiction, horror and the likes.. I don't think I have the energy for this sort of story at my old age, it tensed you up, but love story is realllyyy good as its bring back nostalgic memories..ahaa I like to watch love story, comedy*

*HH: your whole family goes as well?*

*Murni: only with uncle, the children will go themselves sometimes with their friends, at home we will ask them to book the tickets for us and we need only to go and pay for it, aa..'book for mama this mama wants to watch 'Baik Punya Cilok'(title of Malay comedy movie) '(laughing)*

*HH: as long as it comedy you will watch it?*

*Murni: Yess as long as its comedy I'll watch, it doesn't matter whether is Western, Chinese or Malay I will go and see (laughing), usually I will go to KLCC and I usually go after prayer time so the easiest is always at night*

Here she relates time/day factor as related to enabling her and her family to enjoy the activities more intensely;

*Murni: usually I will go during the weekdays because it will not be crowded, weekends is usually crowded, we are pensioners so we don't have much thing to do so we go during week day...sometimes you know we even go for a picnic and have a swim at the river with my sister, at that time all my nieces and nephews came back from London, so we all went for the picnic on a weekday and there was hardly anybody around so the place ( at Lipur Lentang in Karak) was like ours, it was really fun*

And again she describes time/day as a significant part for her shopping experience;

*HH: So you don't like places that are crowded?*

*Murni: Yes I hate crowded places*

*HH: How is it when you shop at KLCC?*

*Murni: In the morning...in the morning there's less people, weekdays, so when its nearly lunch hour I'm already set to go for lunch and you're happy because you have the time to browse the things, have a look at the things (you're not rushing) aa yess not rushing and of course less people*

Apart from insisting the importance of mental health, Murni is always very conscious about consistently maintaining her physical health. She frequently describes the importance of maintaining good health in terms of being careful about her diet, religiously taking supplements and vitamins, frequently paying for health screening and acquiring paid helper to do housework.

Murni describes that as all her children are seldom at home, she rarely cooks during the day and usually goes to the restaurants or food stalls to eat. In the morning both Murni and Mazlan usually take healthy breakfast avoiding traditional dishes, which is normally full of fat;

*Murni: ahah because there's not many people in the house, Azra (daughter) doesn't eat rice, uncle doesn't eat rice that much for health reasons.. so usually we all go out and eat*

*HH: what do you eat usually? Fast food?*

*Murni: no not fast food I think we had enough of fast food because we always eat it when the kids used to be around, sometimes I eat sizzling noodles*

*HH: ooo in the foodcourt*

*Murni: ahah in the foodcourt, sometimes sizzling noodles sometimes 'rojak buah'(malaysian spicy fruit salad) usually we eat sizzling noodles at Giant (a hypermarket), but for breakfast only occasionally we eat out, now at our 'old' age we are health conscious so when we eat breakfast at the house we take oats or cereals only sometimes we take 'roti canai' (roti prata) maybe once a in a week*

*HH: how about 'nasi lemak'(rice cooked in coconut milk)*

*Murni: ooo noooo..I controool my cholesterol level is high (laughing loudly)*

Here Murni recounts that she likes to take any health screening opportunity offered buy any pharmacy. Her hereditary high cholesterol condition contributes to this factor as well;

*Murni: for me I like to go to Ampang Putri (private hospital) I pay around RM10 and fast (abstain from eating and drinking) and then go and check my colestrol and blood also sugar, I've already check for colestrol I have a hereditary thing about colestrol that needs me to take Lipitor, I went to HUKM(government hospital) they also told me to take Lipitor, but because Lipitor is a kind of drug I don't want to eat it.. but they told me to take it for 3 months*

*HH: mmhm*

*Murni: when you take it (Lipitor) your colestrol level will decrease but once you stop taking it will shoot up again so I'm really annoyed, recently I went to Vitacare (a pharmacy) and they have an offer on Blood test which cost*

*RM88 compared to original cost before offer which is RM150, so for me if this kind of opportunity comes I will most certainly take it, so I did the the whole thorough test...everything is included so yes...my colestrol level is high it is from the liver that produce the colestrol and there's many things in your liver so one of it I think is.. Delirium is high for me which means my liver produce a lot of colestrol, they say food produce 30% colestrol your body produces 70%*

Murni is also an avid consumer of supplements and vitamins;

*Murni: yes too control..I control the food I take, go to the gym to exercise but eventhough I go everyday to exercise at the gym without taking Lipitor my colestrol level will still be high, so recently the pharmacist recommended me to take Herbal supplements instead of Lipitor which is I think red rice and yeast and she told me to eat liver tonic which contains dandelion and something else, I have to eat for about a month and then do another check up, so now I'm on the tonic and I dont take Lipitor*

*HH: so were you always health conscios*

*Murni: oo yes I was always health conscios, I eat all the vitamins, from my younger days my father used to insist us eat vitamins B and C*

She frequently visits health exhibition held by many networking companies promoting their health supplements and vitamins. Although Murni faithfully takes vitamins she avoids long term usage of one brand for fear that would reduce the vitamins effect on her;

*HH: so how did you decide which brand to take as there are a lot in the market*

*Murni: I always go to the Health expo, recently I went to 'Alterny', this brand is not sold in the shops instead you have to call or order..aa there are so many that they recommended... like for me with high cholesterol they recommended fish oil, Omega 3, for hormones is Primrose Oil all these .... I usually take Primrose Oil, Fish Oil, Multivitamin*

*HH: you take that specific brand (Alterny)?*

*Murni: for the brand before this I go for Amway, but for me if we are used to taking the same brand for a vitamins I think at one time you get immune to it like it has no effect so I change to another brand 'shaklee' after eating it for a while and I feel it has no effect on me I then changed to Biolife*

*because to me I feel if you get to used to eating one brand... as time goes by it would not have the effect on you anymore*

So pertinent her priority in taking vitamins that it even permeates in her choice of choosing a suitable handbag;

*Murni: aa for me I don't really mind as long as the quality is good its long lasting, what looks nice to me and is suitable for me like it can fit all the things aa (laughing)*

*HH: so it (the handbags) still has to pass certain requirements from you*

*Murni: ooo yes that's a must*

*HH: you mentioned fit all your things..can you describe that*

*Murni: uuuu there are so many different things in my bag, sometimes people say to me 'why is your bag so heavy?' but when they ask me do you have a scissors? I will take out scissors aaa (laughing), do you have stapler" aaa I have a small stapler, I got nail clipper, twizzer everything I have in my beg (laughing)*

*HH: your whole life is in your beg (laughing)*

*Murni: or pills like vitamins I also have just in case you know if we go out for breakfast, I must have in my beg my vitamin box*

*HH: you mean the small box meant for pills*

*Murni: aa yes the small ones I purposely fill it, because sometimes we don't have anything to do the both of us so we go out for breakfast so if I forgot to eat my vitamins I don't have to worry because I have them always in my beg*

*HH: so your beg must be huge then*

*Murni: aahah everything is inside just name it and you'll get it sometimes I even carry ointment in it (both laughing loudly), sometimes they(her children) ask me 'mama what do you have inside your beg its really heavy?', aa but when they need scissors to open anything I have scissors so you see..*

Describing about housework Murni feels that to care for her health she needs to let go of having the perfect and clean house like she used to during her younger days;

*Murni: like now there is hardly anyone around, so I don't really need to clean the house and plus I have a helper. It's because I have sinus so I have to hire helper to clean the house every once or twice a week, she does everything wipes, mop and sweep because if I were to do it I will sneeze and when I sneeze I have sore throat so I hire a helper to avoid that. so now I really*

*don't mind, previously I always wanted everything to be spick and span but when age is catching up we really have to take care of ourselves , if we want to take care of everything and make everything too clean but put our health at risk I think there's no point. anyway there's no more kids around so I do a liittle bit here and there, if at times I feel I need to do more work I'll do some gardening..that's me I prefer reading*

Murni's easy going and stress free lifestyle are also evidence in some of the other activities that she and Mazlan likes to do during their leisure and holidays for example 'hang out' and taking a vacation. Here she describes her 'hang out' time;

*HH: urm....during your holiday or leisure what do you like doing?*

*Murni: go to the cinema, gardening, sometimes go to my relatives house hang out there, because they have a food stall in Gombak sometimes sit and chat with our nephews and nieces, eat and just spend our sweet time , if the kids can hang out we also can hang out.....hahahaha*

Murni and Mazlan will also go for vacation if they are celebrating a special occasion or whenever they feel like it;

*Murni: aa I like to go for holiday, now I'm retired I entered the Berjaya Vacation Club quite some time ago, so as a member the hotel is free of charge,I normally book one week because there's only the two of us, the children are all grown up so they don't want to follow us , so its just the two of us, sometimes on our Anniversary or Birthday, even more now because were retired when we feel like it we just booked and go, 14 days before you could book and there are lots of places to go Singapore, Australia and even now there have England and all over China*

### **6.1.9 Bibah's LifeWorld-The Devoted Lifestyle**

Bibah (aged 48) is a single working mom with three teenage daughters and one young son. They all live in a spacious double storey terraced house in a small town in Selangor. She recently got divorced after she found out about her ex-husbands infidelity. Bibah is responsible for the care of all her four children; Hazni (22 years old) currently doing her undergraduate degree at a local university, Hezlin (19years old) studying at a preparation college for Japan, Haziah(17 years old) studying at a renowned boarding school in Seremban and Hariz (11 years old) studying in standard five at the nearby local school. All of them except Hariz are currently staying at the places where they are studying and only come back home during term break or school holidays. Hariz the youngest child in the family currently stays with Bibah at home.

Bibah works as a high school English teacher. Bibah leads a devoted lifestyle--she avidly dedicates her lifestyle around the events, wants and needs of her children. Bibah describes herself as being a devoted person, even when she was married she fully devoted herself to managing everything in the family from financial responsibilities right to fixing the plumbing. She feels that this independence and staunch dedication was taken for granted by her (ex) husband therefore she does not see the need for her to continue the marriage.

Bibah's describes that she wakes up every morning and cook everyday as her son doesn't like eating food from the shop. Despite having to wake up very early in the morning to get ready Bibah describe that she is used to this;

*B: I cook everyday..because this boy he doesn't eat if I buy any food..so every day I wake up at 5 or 5.30am I cook ..but simple dishes..I take about one hour is enough for me I'm used to it..after that prepare to go for work..actually my son he's not that fussy ..if he likes fried rice..if I cook friend rice everyday he will eat..but then I would be able to eat isn't it..worst come to worst if I only cook rice and fried egg is enough for me..as long as I cook..ahh don't buy outside food he doesn't eat..thats all...*

As Bibah and her children moved on from the 'divorce phase' Bibah recounts that her lifestyle of managing the family from scratch such as providing financial security, looking after the children, managing her household and other things didn't change as she was used to this even before her marriage dissolved. Currently Bibah consumption is more focused on providing and fulfilling her children's need;

*B: All these while I was the one who looked after the needs of my family..even when I was with my husband he did not care because somehow my family left me some properties..which is not a big deal..so for me he is around or he is not around is the same for me... because all these while I was the one taking care of everything..*

*HH: moneywise and everything..*

*B: yesss infact when my children got into boarding school the father when he saw the offer from the boarding school ..I told him ok our child got this..this...he said 'no need to go I don't have money anywhere they study is the same' ..so being a teacher being a mother I know going to boarding school is something good..so I pumped in the money..everytime each of my daughter go to boarding school I withdraw RM2000 from my saving...and I also provided for other expenses like to buy..their towels all these necessities you need to buy ..that i provided as well..that RM2000 cash is only for them as a starter to go to boarding school ..the other expenses I*

*provide as well..so everytime I give them(each RM2000) so I'm fair to everybody(her children)..if these person get everything new the next person must get everything new..because its kind of a motivation for them because they got the offer to go..so I want them to have everything new..so I don't mind*

Bibah describes that she does her everyday groceries based on convenience. Convenience for Bibah means--where she will be at a certain time. As Bibah will frequently visit all her three daughters who are currently studying at different places thus her place of buying will be based on where she is at the time;

*B: usually if I don't go anywhere I will buy here near my home—Econsave, if for example on the way when my daughters are at home and they want to go to Jaya Jusco ..I buy in Jaya Jusco or Giant or Tesco..at times if I go and fetch my daughter in Seremban I will drop by at the Seremban parade (mall) and buy there..whichever is convenient.*

Her places of shopping are based on the choice and convenient that it provides to her children;

*B: I usually go on Friday night when my son finishes school..if nnot if I don't have time I go on Saturday..and I go to Jaya Jusco because its very convenient..there's a lot of shop which caters for teenagers and the children like it.. further more there's lots of places where I can sit quietly and enjoy a meal..for example Secret Recipe ..I like their cakes (laughing) ...so the children can go shopping and whenever they are done they can come over and join me or whenever they feel they need my approval to buy something they can call me..*

*HH: ooo so you usually give them the money..*

*B: ahah yess..unless if they feel the things thay they buy I need to know aaa call me and we'll see if I approve or otherwise.. Nowadays they buy their own clothing..because nowadays i'm not up to date (about teenage clothing)*

*HH: mmhm (laughing)*

*B: infact now my choice of dress/ outfit they help to advise (laughing)...*

Bibah describes that one thing that change after she is divorced is that she is now more careful about spending her money. Before she was divorced she described how she used to buy and spend quite lavishly but she feels that now is she cannot afford to do the same as she needs to save the money to use for her children's expenses especially their education expenses;

*Bibah: Before I divorced those days I used to go for shopping in Singapore..you know those days its really cheap in Singapore...I am the type I don't quite go out that often but once I go for shopping I spend really a lot...if I bring RM2000 I will spend RM3000 (laughing) I borrow from my cousin...I used to love buying sunglasses you know YSL..all these branded sunglasses..it's not because of the brand so much..but I think it is because you feel so soothing and comfortable when you put them on..because I got astigmatism so I need to have a quality sunglasses..those were the days..but not any more now..I buy if there is sale or If I need to use them..compared to those days the children were small and they dont need to use our money isn't it..now there are all grown up..they need money for the education..so now I'm a bit more careful with my money..*

Bibah acknowledged that she is very organized and well planned from the start. For Bibah this helped her to acquire and secure all the important things in life that actually helped her in a way such as buying her own house even though at the same time she feels uncertain this could be a bad thing as well;

*HH: can you describe what triggered you to buy your own house ..this house*  
*Bibah: I dont know actually..maybe..maybe thats the bad part of me..I'm aa ..I planned it myself (mmhmm)..I thought I need a house..because last time...in the first place we stayed in the quarters..teachers quarters..my children were not very comfortable..it was very hot..small..so I thought oh why not I buy a house.. so when I was in my 30<sup>th</sup> year (of teaching) at that time in you are only allowed to take up a loan(house mortgage) when in you 30<sup>th</sup> year..so when I reached 30<sup>th</sup> I straight away took up a loan*  
*HH: so what about your (ex) husband during the time?*

*Bibah: he never bothers..even when I tried to discuss with him to do or buy anything he will say I dont have any money...I'm expanding my business and whatever...I think all the while he saw it ..from the start...everytime he says I dont have money..then he saw that everytime I can manage ..so he knows that somehow I can do it and I have the money ..so he's not bothered*

Bibah recalls her lived experienced when she was with her husband, reflexively she realised that during that time she had no time for herself as she was too busy and too occupied managing her household and her children;

*Bibah: when I was still married come to think of it ..eveery week I was busy so I didn't have time for myself ..you know its like going around and around in a circle to visit aall my daughters at boarding school, I drove long distance on my own, buying all their needs for them...you know sooo once I knew about it (her husband strings of affair)..so I said to him..noww you provide for the children..now I want to use my money..because I never bought anything for myself..have anytime for myself...I want to use my money to buy my own things...at that point of time he still thought I will forgive him so he provided for the family for one whole year...so that time I was easy with my money ..shopping..shopping..shopping..*

Here she explains that she feels the current state that she is contented with the way she and her children are now.

*Bibah: I managed myself successfully and I am much happier now..previously it was difficult..when I was still married I was very afraid of him ..he is very possessive very jealous of me..I very hu..ha.hu..ha (bubbly and friendly)..when I comeback I get scolding from him..he seemed to be annoyed that I am independent but I cannot help it.. he doesnt show me the effort to do anything..to manage anything*

## 6.2 Summary

In this chapter nine women's life stories have highlighted and provided significant insights into these women's lifestyle phenomena. They particularly show some significant variations especially on issues women relate and experienced in their lifestyle. Juggling of work and family was not only and main issue emerging in their lifestyle as mostly depicted in various literatures about women's lifestyle (indicated in Chapter 3). Instead through their life stories these women constructed various genres of lifestyles which were a reflection of the self.

The next chapter is an analysis of the existential life theme or life concerns that emerged from these women's life stories. These emergent life themes from women's point of view is deemed important as it contributes to our understanding of the significance relationship between life themes and lifestyle which has arguably been a neglected dimension in the literature.

## Chapter 7: Living Melodies of Life: Emergent Life Themes/Life Goals

*The goal of superiority with each individual is personal and unique. It depends upon the meaning he gives to life. This meaning is not a matter of words. It is built up in his style of life and runs through it like a strange melody of his creation. (pg181)*

***Alfred Adler in (Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956)***

*A life theme is a single melody with many variations that are played out in different life situations*

***Holland (1985-1986)***

### 7.0 Introduction

Having presented individually emergent lifestyle from the nine women's life story, this Chapter now represent a cross analysis of the emergent life themes/life goals of the nine women consumers as revealed throughout their life story. Life themes/ life goals are a source of stress or concern in these women's life which appears time and time again in their life stories which these women attempts to resolve or achieve. They are rooted from their existing life world conditions which saw women creating strategies in order to resolve or overcome the existential theme which are of concerned to them in the current moment.

## 7.1 Life Theme/Life Goal 1: Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman

One of the life themes or life goal that the women strive to achieve is Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman. It is a classic juggling life theme where these women feel the strain to juggle both the need to be with the children and family and their need to be working. In other words their self need to Be a Mother and also Be a Career Woman reflects an existing concern which saw these women go to great effort to create strategies so that they could overcome both these competing need/identity at the same time. Three participants share this underlying concern of Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman; Riza, Nurin and Ramlah. Their concerns and articulations of this theme vary according to their life world.

### Riza

Emerging in Riza's life story is her effort of juxtaposing her existential life concern of doing the two equally important things to her Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman. Riza illustrates her conflicting needs for being a mother and having a career. She is forthright in declaring that she does not want to do fulfil only one of her needs by surrendering work to be an all time at home mom or vice versa;

*R: I think it's because you think one day in your life when the children are growing we must me..we must be with them, for me I feel I have to be there with them because now you go out at 7 and come back at 7 its ok because they are still in school and everything.. that's what I'm always thinking , I want to do something*

*but not a fulltime house wife that only watch tv all day if I can help it I don't want to*

Riza strives to fulfil her goal to continue working and earning her own income by striving to work from home in the future—this way she feels she could fulfil both needs of being there for her children and having a career for herself.

*R: aa recently I have thought about something that I feel I want to try*

*H: what have been on your mind*

*R: aa I feel I want to go into real estate..to become a real estate agent .. I feel I want to try and venture in that area because I am not interested in doing things like marketing people about insurance or investments I think that's not suitable for me*

*H: so real estate is your interest*

*R: I'm not quite sure yet whether that would be my interest ..but yes I feel its one of the things I am thinking of..maybe one day to try.. just incase anything comes up because you just don't know how long you will work and get paid every month*

She admits that her yearly target of taking various courses as a preparation towards this;

*R: my dream is actually to work from home but I don't want to be a full time housewife I want to work and earn my own money but I want to work from home that's it, I have thought about the things that I want to do, that's why I said I am preparing like I have learn how to drive aa..*

Here Riza describes her feelings having fulfilled her yearly targets;

*R: this things what do people call it.. Goals urmm during this 3-4 years Alhamdulillah (Thanks due to Allah) every year I have had a goal that I try to fulfil in a certain time, so like..*

*H: mmhmm*

*R: my goal was to learn to drive, actually I already have a driving licence.. all this while I just drove a little bit and then every time he ask me to drive I will say I'm lazy I'm lazy until it struck me one day then I thought eeh why am I too dependent on him, so by hook or by crook I decided I have to learn and Alhamdulillah (Thank God) I did it and I passed so that was 2 years ago so last year my plan*

*was to learn to recite the Quran... I want to learn Tajweed so I could teach my children to recite the Quran*

Besides preparation reasons, fulfilling yearly target is an important validation she is doing something which adds value to her self-development and asserts her self-independence.

*R: because I feel like we are already entering our 30's I don't want the age to fly away without doing anything beneficial like you take care of the children you go to work like there's no new skill that we acquire you know that's what I feel like and urmm i'm going to be 33 this year...I feel I will lose if I don't acquire new things , like every end of December ends just like that and you don't even know what things we did and in a year its always doing the same things so I feel at least when I can drive like noww I feel I have something..*

Riza's beliefs in fulfilling her life theme of Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman for her family are evident throughout her Hands on Lifestyle. Although she faces two conflicting life goals of wanting to be a Mother and Be a Career Woman she acknowledges the fact that in the mean time she is not in a rush to achieve both life goals.

The two excerpts below depict this;

*R: I think it's because you think one day in your life when the children are growing we must me..we must be with them, for me I feel I have to be there with them because now you go out at 7 and come back at 7 its ok because they are still in school and everything*

*R: aa so far I still like my job I like what I'm doing because sms banking is the first in Malaysia no other bank that does this soo when I do it I feel satisfied so far I still like it but you didn't know after 3-4 years you get bored*

Hence Riza accepts the fact that she can't fulfil both her life themes as she needs to go out to work however she feels compensated by carrying out Hands on Lifestyle where she makes an effort to be present in all their activities and at the same time preparing herself for the possibility of working from home.

### Nurin

Nurin foremost concern in her life stories is to achieve both life goals of Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman. Nurin's faces dilemma in her quest to achieve life goal of Being a Mother - fulfilling the needs of her children and family by being the Perfect Mom with the life goal of Being a Career Woman. Being a Career Woman means fulfilling her parents need whose aspiration is to see her working as a successful academician. The excerpt below illustrates this conflicting concern;

*N: soo to me if you do it you have to achieve the highest, like myself in the first place I take this job not whole heartedly I do it because of my parents..I nearly quit my work when I had a child I wanted to quit my job because for me I want to become the perfect mother the perfect wife so if you work you have to take care of your work as well, because I have to be the best in my job and I have to be the best as a mother ..*

Nurin describes that she finds it difficult to fulfil both her life theme of Being a Mom and Being a Career Woman for her family and her parents. She took assistance in the form of a live in helper to help balance her commitment at work for the sake of her parents and at home for the sake of her family.

Nonetheless she acknowledged that initially when she started her own family and having her own children her life theme she felt she was backtrack on fulfilling her mission to resolve or juxtapose two of these life themes instead she admitted to channel her focused only on Being a Mother for her family.

*N: I think I cannot do both, that's why for the past several years I wasn't the best for both (at work and as a mother and wife)*

*H: so did you find any resolution for it?*

*N: ahah I took a maid to reduce the burden to balance to do the house chores, to study, previously I didn't do my Phd.... initially when I started work in (the year) 1995 I just gave myself three years to start doing my Phd.. but then I got married I got one child so that distract me from my work.. that changed my perception... I became more towards urrrmm being a better mom and wife*

Nurin depicts her difficulty when she was in a limbo between achieving the goal of Being a Mother for her family (Be the Perfect Mom and Wife) and Being a Career Woman (Be an Excellent Academician). However, since having her third child Nurin has revised her decision and decided to be steadfast to her first goal, which is to juggle both her life theme of Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman and fulfilling both her family and her parents need. Her strategy to accomplish her parent's aspiration to see her as a successful academician is to lay out a career plan to her parents with targets that she intends to achieve within a stipulated time.

*H: so what encourages you to do your phd since that*

*N: my parents*

*H: mhmm how about your husband*

*N: aa he supports me in whatever decision I make... the important thing is he doesn't want me to be tension..because if it affects me it affects the family aa that's why these few years I had a quite terrible time because I cannot stayed at home and I*

*didn't want to quit my job as well... previously with my first and second child..when they were a baby if I go to work I will cry when I leave them but for this one (referring to her youngest child) I said to myself I won't cry because I said I have to be strong and I do not want to go through the same cycle as both the elder children..so now not anymore I made the decision I need to be strong and I cannot quit working because of my parents I said to my husband I love you but I don't have the heart to let my parents down soo I have to do this*

*H: can you explain more about what your decision is?*

*N: aa to not stop working and to do Phd so I told them I will do my phd and then after getting my phd I will give myself 7 years to get a Prof Madya then after that I quit..aa so they accept the pplan.*

Nurin's concern on her ability to juggle and fulfil her life theme for her family and her

Parents parallel to the way she relational self concept. Here she describes who she is;

*N: soo in terms of career is more of my parents influence if not I will be at house enjoying the kidss enjoying the house so for me I am an 'insan' (human being) I am a wife, I am a daughter and I am a mother and the other one is siblings aa that me that's how I see myself ..I'm a sister and I'm an in lawss after all this only comes I am a lecturer that how I see me, the I am a lecturer is at the bottom because God will ask me all these questions.. so these are important as a wife as a mother as a daughter and then comes everything else that's how I see myself.....*

## **Ramlah**

Ramlah's expresses her existential life theme of Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman in her feelings about the uncertain future. She defines accomplishing her life theme of Being a Mother as being able to be there all the time to take care of all the things in relation to her family. Thus when she reflects the uncertainty of the future which

shakes this ability, she admits of being in a state of worrisome. However she describes of falling back to religion as helping her to cope with this stress;

*R: ahah I always have this feeling if I were not here... not be able to be there..maybe pass away..not present.. who will take care of my children, my family but I..I believe in God's plan because if God takes us away He knows He has already put who shall take care of our kids what will happen, actually that we shouldn't be worried that's why I always reflect on myself not too think too much about it*

Ramlah life stories resonate with her effort to juxtapose and resolve the two conflicting themes of Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman. Her interpretation of achieving 'Being a Mother is through spending time with her children as much as possible when not at work and providing solutions when the family is in any trouble. She then juggles this with Being a Career Woman. She compensates her lost times of (not) Being a Mother when she is Being a Career Woman by dedicating all her free time off work to cater to the children's need.

In the excerpt below, she describes of taking cooking classes for the sake of her children, again she mentions about the importance of spending time with the kids as some sort of relieve from the sense of guilt that envelopes her because of her busyness at work;

*R: ahah I bring them ..my children..I am like that I am a committed mother I am what do people call it women family ..family man?*

*H: family man?*

*R: aahah family man but I am family woman because I feel I cannot If I neglect my kids during weekends, school holidays I feel guilty that is me but I don't know*

*about other people that's why I rather stay at home and then cook if they say they want cake I will make cake or whatever they want I will cook.*

*H: mmhmm*

*R: so that's why I learn to cook first I really am interested in cooking and then the children like to eat cakes so I learn how to make cakes*

Ramlah depicts the various weekend 'vacation' with her children. For Ramlah every weekend she and Romzi will try their best to create activities involving the children. Thus, the term 'vacation' is not limited to school holidays only;

*H: ooohoh so your Saturday Sunday is like that?*

*R: ahah that's why if Saturday Sunday I'm quite difficult to make appointment with people because I am really committed to my family aa... because we go for vacation every week aa..*

*H: mmhmm...so you don't just go during school break*

*R: noo sometimes during school break we don't go anywhere..because we go for vacation every week aa*

Ramlah describes some of the activities that she does during her weekend 'vacation' with her children;

*H: mmhmm how about vacation..where you go for vacation*

*R: yess I go..ook its like this if we don't go back to our hometown on Saturday morning my husband plays golf then on Saturday evening we will bring the children out..it's a must if we don't go oon Saturday it will be on Sunday*

*H: ahah*

*R: for example last week on Friday night we brought them to play bowling haa and then let's say if he plays golf in the evening in the morning he will bring us the children to the bookstore and buy books aa*

*H: mmhmm*

Here she elaborates on various other places she brings her children to;

*R: sometimes I go to places like Putrajaya I bring them on boat rides sometimes we bring them to the zoo because we like to watch animals ... my son he has an Encyclopedia about animals they can recognise the animal*

*R: and sometimes I bring my children to the Nature Park in Kuala Selangor look at fireflies....aa so I bring the kids to see we slept at DePalma aa so I like it because they enjoyed it.. I like to see what they like and also like I said sometimes (we) play bowling.. we have to bring them because every day we are busy working isn't it so we have to take the initiative to spent time with the children as well*

Ramlah's relates her Prudent Lifestyle as contributing to her effort juggling both her existential life themes of Being a Mother and Being a Career Woman. Leading a prudent lifestyle and having a career at the same time helped her accomplished her life theme of Being a Mother. Although these life themes seem competing Ramlah redefines it in a way that these different life themes have enabled her to be there for her family if/when they face adversity. In the excerpt below Ramlah illustrates the importance of leading a prudent lifestyle (prudent financial management and being a career woman (having her own salary) as contributing towards being a mother (be there for the family no matter what) ;

*R: for me yes.. once I get my salary I will settle everything..that's one of the benefit having a career isn't it.. then what is left then only I spend because if you don't do that forever you won't have any savings then start having problems to pay bills..that's once you forget one bill that will make you slack every month..hmmm you have to be discipline if you are managing money..for me it's important to manage a very discipline budget to ensure we have savings for rainy days*

*R: oo no I don't like white gold..aa white gold because I think I am a person who think for the future so like white gold is for people who really have lots of money soo for them white gold is ordinary but for me I am not as wealthy as they are so I*

*go for urmm gold... because if gold if I face rainy days this is like contingency plan*

*R: ...when my husband gives me I save up because when we are facing rainy days aa if he says we don't have money aa I can say 'mama have the money the money you gave me'... then we can use the money*

## **7.2 Life Theme/Life Goal 2: Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner/Not Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner**

This theme stood out in the lived world of the participants when they described the underlying goal of striving for a certain degree of freedom in making choices in their life. Siti, Rima and Salmi share the same life goals of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner/Not Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner. For these women having a career didn't create any tension or stress in their life. To them having a career is an accepted fact that is not contentious or to be guilty about. Alternatively the profound concern for them is in helping their family by moving from the state of being contented with having a career sufficient to provide the stability to their family or accepting their current status – Not Being a Progressive Co-Bread winner - towards fulfilling a more progressive role (e.g. taking other part time jobs or applying other efforts) achieving the life goal of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner in order to provide more than just stability –more options and choices for their families.

### **Siti**

Siti acknowledges the importance of moving beyond a life theme of accepting her current status of Not Being a Progressive Breadwinner to fulfilling the life theme of Being a

Progressive Co-Breadwinner. She sees Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner as the only way providing her children the choice and opportunity for their future. Siti's effort in fulfilling the life theme of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner can be seen in the way she choose to lead a Climber Lifestyle. Siti's concern to fulfil her life goals of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner that enables her to provide the opportunities for her family parallels with a concern that her children might be complacent and take things for granted if they realized her success in fulfilling this life theme.

Here she describes of the savings that have been allocated for her children in terms of money and properties. Siti depicts her action of always reminding both her children that they will have to work and study hard and not expect any wealth from inheritance;

*S: aa my children won't have to worry God's willing they will have their portion... but they way we bring them up is important that why I talk to them and tell them so that they won't misuse their money..their savings... of course its theirs there is already a portion for them and we also have houses here and in our hometown but I purposely tell him (her eldest son).. 'aa in the future when your dad and me are retired we are going to sell everything.. so you better study and save your own money and buy with your own money'*

*S: I tell this to my daughter as well, 'you have to study hard if I am not here anymore you have to do everything on your own whether to buy a house , a car or anything... if you are lazy then you won't get all those things...for me when I'm old I'm going to sell off what I have'*

Although Siti feels strongly about providing opportunities for her children, she feels it is important to educate them so that they would not feel complacent with what they have inherited from their parents.

*S: ...I'm telling them this way for their own good...of course all our money and effort now is for them...so that they can have the opportunities.. the choices in the things they want to pursue..thats what we strive for...unlike my situation when I was younger we didn't have any choice...*

She strives to fulfil the life theme of Being A Progressive Co-Breadwinner through continuous effort of accumulating the family's wealth through savings, investments and also education.

She acknowledges that her childhood experience coming from an underprivileged family with eleven siblings was the main reason that motivated her to work hard and move from accepting current status of her life to achieving something far better and promising which would prepare a comfortable future filled with choices and opportunities particularly for her children. The excerpt below illustrates some of the efforts Siti gone through in order for her to move from her current status towards accomplishing a more stable future;

*S: ahah more or less its directly deducted at RM50 from the salary that was what we could afford at that time because during that time our salary was not that much compared to now..its increased Alhamdulillah (Praise to God)because we have been working for so many years isn it..I can still remember when I had my first child that time I wasn't working on permanent but on contract basis..but my first thought was if I don't do these things (save up) ..you don't know what's going to happen in the future anything can happen even though what you save up might not be that much but at least there's something isnt it*

*H: were they any reason that influences you to prepare for the future*

*S: maybe I'm more aware because my parents had a hard life..they work in the village as rubber tappers , and at that time I felt mmm previously my parents had a hard life so if I don't do this you know because we don't know what might happen I the future and I have been through that hard life..how you live in a village with so many siblings..you don't get many choices*

*H: mmhm..so how many siblings have you got*

*S: my siblings are 11 in total, I'm the 10th in the family... because you remember how hard it was, at that time we didn't have much wealth because we were villagers and also because I had many siblings even if we have any wealth (land) it would be not much and maybe we would fight over it because there were so many of us, that's why when I got a job I thought if I had some money I would do this (save up)*

Siti ascribes the future return from her properties in allowing her family choices to do various things;

*S: aa no that is intentionally for renting out (her house in Malacca), we will built the house on that land (the land Azhar inherited from his father) I said to my husband if we stopped working we will have the money so the gratuity money combined will be close to RM100 thousand so then we can think of building a house on that land with the gratuity or maybe sell one of our houses here so at least we have a choice, and if we feel we don't want to use that money on the house because at that time we are quite old so maybe we can use the money for anything, the children, to go anywhere ahah*

Here Siti depicts the importance of helping her children realise the importance of grabbing education opportunities, which she believes will equip her children with the challenges of their future lives;

*S: I tallkk to them because you know my eldest son is not that brilliant but I always tell him that I use to have a hard life that's why I continue to do my degree even at this age, I still continue to study although I'm old because I didn't get a chance to study previously , so look at me haa I reminded him*

*H: so does he see the way you do you work (part time studies apart from daytime work)?*

*S: aahah he does he look at how I do my work at night, so I said you are still young so don't be lazy..grab this opportunity.. but I don't put too high expectation on my son it's not like want him to be a doctor or anything but at least I want him become a human being who is useful and can take care of himself (sad voice tone)*

*S: so I tell them and I want to encourage them so that they take the opportunity to learn and do this while they are young even if they feel that academic is difficult for them so find other areas that they can seek knowledge there are many other areas isn't it ..(S.799)*

Even though Siti is aware that her income is not high, she believes that with careful planning and effort the accumulation of wealth can still be achieved;

*S: mmhmm..I think it's important... you can still accumulate wealth even if your salary is not that much but if you are careful about your future planning, your savings and all these things... I think Gods willing you can but of course you have to spend according to what you have, soo even though you have a small salary you still can accumulate wealth..*

## **Rima**

Rima's choice of resolving her life theme is illustrated in her story and can be seen from her choice of living an Entrepreneur Lifestyle. For Rima although she has the freedom to be satisfied with her current life she feels this is not an option as only through Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner she can realize her dream of accumulating wealth at a young age;

*R: actually I want to retire Rich and young because if possible I want to have options, choice in my life for example there'll be one day I say that I don't want to work today I want to work... I can have that option.. and there'll be one day that because we work it doesnt mean that we will work here forever there will be one day that maybe xxxx (the company she's working with currently) dont like me or I dont like xxxx and I have the option to retire but at the same time I have the money and I dont have to think about it soo thats one thing*

Rima outlines the importance for her to achieve this goal of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner so that she would be able to provide her children with the liberty of making choices in their life and to nurture them the way she wants. She believes that she could achieve this through her business ventures.

*R: yess.. I think you must be able to dream again that's why there's a lot of things that when you start dream what you want this is not dreaming ...its dream what you want you will be surprised of what you want ..you think all the impossible for your kids... actually you know why I wanted to do this network marketing, actually I have mmoney I have time but thats for myself ...one day I went to this seminar by this Indonesian lady she said if you dont know why you want to build the bussiness you look into your childrens eyes what actually do they want.... since then I started thinking I told myself I have been to all this places U.S and all I have been but..that was my fathers dream to bring me there... but how about me... so I want to be able to bring all my children to all these places and I want to be able to have choices in bringing them up*

She attributes her brief active involvement in a Multilevel Marketing Programme as initiating her aspiration and dream of accumulating wealth through property and real estate investments. This involvement further motivated her to accomplish her life theme of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner;

*R: so means I have thought about that because of my dream, I have a dream and I am a woman oof dream, I have a dream I want to retire rich and young..by the age 40 I want to have a million in my account cash*

*H: mmhmm*

*R: that's my...that is my vision, my dream is to retire rich and young and of course by the age of 40 I want to have a million in cash in my bank..so what I'm doing now is going towards that so.. In terms of shopping for clothing and everything I am 'biasa'(ordinary) really ordinary but in terms of (property and real estate) investment..I go all out..thats my priority..without this our choices would be limited*

*H: soo you learn all this things from your network?*

*R: network marketing was the starting point at the same time I subscribe book (investment related books)*

## **Salmi**

Salmi is willing to go through the hard work and challenges of running her business rather than succumb to accepting her current status of life. Her underlying concern is to fulfil her life theme of Being a Progressive Breadwinner so that she could provide her family with a far more comfortable life she feels they need. Salmi translates comfortable life in terms of material acquisition – for her this means the ability to consume what others are consuming as well, and also to buy expensive when they want to for example buying an imported car or eating a more expensive fish;

*H: ooo so you diversify your business*

*S: ahah I have to ahaah. we work from morning till night because we want to have a comfortable life.. what other people use we want isnt it*

*H: mmhmm*

*S: our wants are big... of course I can just sit home and do nothing... with my husband's pay it is sufficient but then I have to settle with only the car that we have (a common national car) a Wira car that's it... so let's say my husband salary is RM4000 so after deduct the house (monthly mortgage) say RM500 the car (monthly loan) is RM500 so the balance say deduct EPF and everything lets say we get net pay of RM2000 so I think I can live with that but only up to that... we can survive and eat but just able to eat 'kembung' fish (common and quite cheap fish sold in the market)*

*H: mmhm*

*S: but then when we do this business then we have the money to roll so if we want something more then we work for it*

In this excerpt Siti again describes the ability to acquire the things they want as a motivator for her to work hard achieve the life theme of Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner;

*H: oo so what made you decide to change the Wira to Naza.. your new car ?*

*S: aaa that's why I said our wants is big we have work really hard*

*H: mmhm*

*S: so we want something that is comfortable for ourselves that's all and we want to see the things we get out of our hardwork...we want something that shows that that's all*

To fulfil more than the family's basic need and achieve her life theme of Being a Progressive Breadwinner Salmi believes she needs to persevere with all the challenges that she will confront. For Salmi her effort of sustaining and broadening her business will eventually pay off by giving her the ability to buy and do things that will provide her family a more comfortable life in the future. Here she depicts her vision of buying a bigger house;

*S: because people say in business it takes 4 years to see the results we have to be patient , persevere and not think about having holidays yet we have to put aside because when you have a business after 4 years only you can see the results now its good enough if you can at least have the money to roll back its good enough soo we won't have to bear any debts.. so now alll these things(holidays) we can't think about it yet*

*S: aa house we have a vision to buy a bigger house..yess for the children's sake for comfort that's one of my goal so within this 2-3years I will find a way to get it and also all the debts I want to pay all the debts aa and also the ambition to become a successful entrepreneur hasn't been achieved yet...it will be a tough journey but if we pull through..it will give us more freedom in terms of getting what we need.. be more comfortable*

### 7.3 Life Theme/Life Goal 3: Harmonious Being/Disharmonious Being

The third life theme emerging from the women's life story was that of striving towards Harmonious Being and avoiding a Disharmonious Being. This concern for accomplishing a state of Harmonious Being is an existential concern that doesn't involve any existing dilemmas or conflicts in the quest for them to be resolved. In fact to achieve the life theme of Harmonious Being these women described the need to avoid the opposite state of being which is Disharmonious Being - avoiding being overload with everyday stresses such as personal problems, hectic lifestyle, job pressures, unhealthy food, (Thompson and Troester 2002), material consumption and worldly life are amongst the strategies described to achieve a 'healthy and peaceful of mind and body'. One important emphasis in accomplishing this life theme is by seeking the best from the life in this world and the life here after.

#### **Murni**

Murni's underlying goal to achieve the life theme of Harmonious Being is illustrated in her explanation about her principles of life. For Murni to seek Harmonious Life is seek the best in both worldly life and the life hereafter. She believes she could achieve this by taking things easy and not worry too much about anything;

*M: my principle is we must Be Balance we want to Live our Best in this World now and also to Live our Best in the life Hereafter..and we want our life to be cheerful.. people say Laughter is the Best Medicine aa I always hear people ask me 'how do you look so young?' ...I think it's because I like to be cheerful.. I like*

*to laugh soo I take it easy and if the thing is to heavy then I take it is a challenge God have given to me...so I don't feel it is as a burden because it will be more heavier so we have to take it easy everything is a test from God*

In the excerpt below, Murni ascribe that she has done everything that she wanted to do be it in the material world or religiously. Thus, Murni feels contented with the Harmonious balanced that she feels she achieved. Material wise she doesn't crave for anything more however this doesn't mean she is shoving this aside completely. Alternatively, her priority is for acquiring and maintaining a balanced healthy life;

*M: I went for pilgrimage when I was at the age of 40, I have also been for holiday overseas so I don't know what I want more so now the only thing is I want my children to be successful get married things like that , I don't think there's anything more I want Alhamdulillah (Praise to God) for giving me good health nothing major ...so far Alhamdulillah (Thank God) health wise I Alhamdulillah (Praise to God) I have no major illness , that's what I always pray for I will fast on Mondays and Thursdays for one thing to pray that I will not get major illnesses like cancer or heart problem*

Murni's way of realizing her life theme of Harmonious Being while avoiding Disharmonious Being can be seen through her living the Easy Going Lifestyle. where she undertakes a series of strategy such as taking extra care with her diet, being more relaxed about her household cleaning regime and scheduling her activities to avoid peak times and others (as discussed in her lifestyle in Section 6.1.8 )

## Bibah

Bibah concern of fulfilling a life theme of Harmonious Being is demonstrated in her life story where she describes her strong feelings about the need to achieve a life theme Harmonious Being while avoiding Disharmonious Being. She illustrates her strength on achieving this life theme from her children and being positive about the all the obstacles that she had been through,

*B: of course you feel stressed but it's important to maintain the balance..physically and mentally..I am the kind of person that whatever it is I think positive...whatever happens to me I feel there must be a reason..like my husband what he did to me..I told myself I have to be strong because of the children..thats important for me it's important to avoid being too stressed over something..I mean of health ..what more I'm not getting younger hahahah....even before all these happened I used to have positive thoughts about him (her ex husband)..even though he didnt provide...*

She describes the previous time that she had 'lost it' due to being stressed up by her marriage problems but then she came to realised that her strategy of immersing herself in a shopping spree did not help her achieve a long term solution for her problems. Hence she describes how she turns to religion as a way of managing her stress which helped her in fulfilling a life theme of Harmonious Being;

*B: so once I knew (about her husband's affair) about it I said to him 'now you provide for the family I want to use my money to buy my own things..at that time he thought I can forgive him.so he provided for the family for one*

*whole year..so at that time I was easy with my money..shopping ..shopping..shopping.....actually I am not like that but after that it doesnt work .. The relieve I get (from shopping) is just temporary so what I did was every night I will do hajat prayers..so I felt very serene..compared to shopping it was temporary after that I got back to my tensed up self..with this it was very serene..so that helps aa go more to the spiritual part of it ..every prayer I will read yasin (chapter in the Quran)*

Here she describes in detail about committing herself to religion as a source of her strength and achieving Harmonious Being;

*B: I think so far I'm quite settled now..What I am aiming for now is I want to go for pilgrimage.I have been saving up and I think I am just waiting for the right time to go. Now that I'm getting old all that happened to me I fall back to religion..whatever has happened to me all these things God has destined it..a husband like that..I believe God tests you to make you stronger to give you more rewards.. I feel like that..and then I always listen to religious talks to help me keep strong and also to reflect on myself..*

Apart from turning to religion, Bibah also describes how she sets her priority of what she really needs and what she needs in her recourse of achieving a Harmonious Being;

*B: the things that I haven't accomplish now is ..mm I want to my car..the car is really old now and then this ..this house to renovate ..to finish up the renovation for this house..before this I had to stopped the renovation worked temporarily because of the problem with my marriage..financially I had to allocate where the priority was..the expenses, the children ..thats all other than that I dont think.. Aa and then furniture..my mission is end of the year my cousin will come back from Sabah so her container will be*

*empty so I want to buy Indonesian furniture because their furniture is half price you know..so know I am saving money for that..*

*B: moreover all my children are grown up already so I don't think I have a problem of them damaging the furniture and things like that because when the children were young I refrained from buying as they is no point ..I didn't want to worry about it all the time..also during that time my ex husbands nephew and nieces frequently came to our house..so we had a lot of young children around..they used to play in the house..I believed that you don't need to put yourself under unnecessary stress..so I opted not to have all the nice furniture during that time..for me there should be a balance between what the things you want and the things you need..maintain your spiritual health as well...that for me is the way to help me be at peace, not stressful..maybe thats why I am Alhamdulillah (Thanks to God) still healthy despite all that has happened..hahahah*

#### **7.4 Life Theme/Life Goal 4: Being in Control /Being out of Control**

##### **Asyikin**

The existential concern of Being in Control vs Being out of Control is demonstrated in the lifestory of Asyikin. Asyikins manifestation of Being in Control entails not being caught up in something out of an unusual situation. In order to avoid and overcome stressful situation of Being out of Control, Asyikin create various strategies such as sticking to routines schedules, avoiding uncertainties or new arrangements that might disrupt routines.

The excerpt below Asyikin describes her strict schedule that she devised and follows everyday in order to Be in Control and not being able to deviate from this schedule;

*H: aaa ok like your Kumon Business I got to know that you run a business, so how is it with you during weekdays?*

*A: ok my schedule, ok because I don't have a maid so running a household with 4 children you need to follow a tight schedule, once you mmiss one schedule it will always delay you and you will find that when the children is asleep you have to find time to do that thing, so for me my schedule is very tight I won't be seeing people between morning to 12 o'clock and if anybody wants to see me within that time they just can't.*

In addition to this Asyikin mentions avoiding any social event such as gathering at relatives houses or attending invitations that falls within her busy schedule;

*H: how many students do you have currently?*

*A: around 70 but our operation hours is very short we only run 5-9 so that's four hours so we stick with two sessions Mon-Friday, Tues-Friday within that four hours we have 70 children coming not once but ins and out, so Friday is Heavy Metal period I definitely cannot take leave on Friday if anything happens like there's a 'kenduri' or anything I just cannot go*

*H: oo I see*

*A: other days is ok, Monday is ok if lets say relatives have something on then I can make it but if its Friday im really sorry I cannot make it*

One of the things that Asyikin does to protect her routine schedule is to avoid making any changes to her routine. For Aida hiring a helper means bringing change to the routine schedule. Therefore the risk for her is - if this change doesn't go well. It would end up putting extra pressure on her, which is most worrying because if this happen she might

not be able to handle the pressure and this will put the children's in an uncomfortable situation. For Asyikin the children's need and comfort are her priority, for her if she is in control of all her tasks she can manage both her children and career successfully;

*Asyikin: I have had a helper but I don't quite like it maybe...urm I always have this doubtful feeling whther I want or don't want, we (Asyikin and her husband) always go for like enquiries and everything almost—recently but then I told my husband I'm not really prepared to have somebody else*

*HH: what makes you think that?*

*Asyikin: for me I have a tight schedule I'm not sure that the person who comes in can follow my tight schedule and also I feel it's difficult to adapt it's not about the helper finding it difficult to adapt to me... but I'm worried that I can't adapt to the helper especially with the schedule, you know it takes time to adjust right...and then the adjustment period is the period that I'm not ready to go through yet because when I'm angry then nobody is there to cool me down so I think it's better to let things be,*

*HH: ooo, ok what about security reasons would that be one of factors that hinder you taking a helper?*

*Asyikin: hmhm I think if I was concern about that I can always bring the helper and all the children to the centre while I am at the centre because I have my own office urmm I dunno its just generally to begin to trust another person to say... that I'm worried she'll take our belongings.. well we don't keep valuables in the house, it's in the safe at the bank I think that we can take precaution we could lock the door set up the alarm and just stay in the house during night time we tell her that they not allowed to go out.. but to me I think in terms of the maids presence is I worry more about the adjustment period in which I don't think I'm not prepared to go through because the children are still young..... I cannot have that extra burden on my shoulder.. I think It's ok to be tired physically but to be tired mentally I could not go through, it's ok for your body to be physically tired*

Further to this Asyikin also avoids buying any unusual items that might entail her of losing control of the situation. Some of the things that she mentioned are about buying a

home theatre or subscribing to additional channels (similar to Sky channel). For her buying acquiring a new television set complete with a home theatre or subscribing to additional channels only adds to her task as she will have to encounter new situation; first the need to monitor her children's watching the television and create anxiety for her as she worries that having an up to date home theatre might attract thieves to the house as depicted by her;

*A: but everything is more to practicality because with small children its not suitable like my husband he really likes huge very up to date sound system kind of thing*

*H: like a home theatre?*

*A: aa like AV kind of thing but to me its no use because he's not in the house all the time and the children cannot watch dvd in the weekdays so what for, it will become a display and also you invite people to come and break into the house*

*H: ooo*

*A: so I think we just keep to the normal 29 inch tv that its... even the other day he subscribe Astro(additional cable chanel like Sky channel) I did oppose it but that's where he's ESPN sports channel so he wants it but after we have that in I really really have to discipline the children*

## 7.5 Summary

In this chapter four life themes were discussed that emerged as source of unresolved concerns for these women as in Table 6 below. Life theme 1: Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman was a theme that emerged in the lifestories of three women Riza, Nurin and Ramlah, Life theme 2: Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner/ Accepting Current Status emerged in life stories of Siti, Rima and Salmi, Life theme 3: Harmonious/Disharmonious Being emerged in life stories of Murni and Bibah, while Life theme 4: Being in Control/Being out of Control emerged in Asyikin's life story.

These life themes were an emergent life theme interpreted through woman's articulation of their life story and lifestyles. From all the four life themes only Life theme 1 represented an existential concern which involves a dilemma to the women involved. Thus some of the women demonstrate stressful experience in overcoming this conflicting concern in their life world. Nonetheless although other life themes (Life theme 2,3 and 4) or existential concerns that were described did not involved any dilemmas, these unresolved concerns saw these women created various strategies which usually followed by a corresponding lifestyle to resolve their worries or achieve their life theme. Table 7 below shows a summary of the nine women's life themes.

**Table 7: Summary of Nine Women’s Life Themes**

<b>Life Theme/Life Goal 1: Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman</b>			
	<i>Riza</i>	<i>Nurin</i>	<i>Ramlah</i>
<b>Conflicting Existential Concern</b>	Strive to be with Children/Wants to Work	Strive to be Perfect Wife & Mother/Wants to be Perfect Daughter	Strive to be with Children/Wants to Work
<b>Life Theme/Life Goal 2: Being a Progressive Co-Breadwinner/Accepting Current Status</b>			
	<i>Siti</i>	<i>Rima</i>	<i>Salmi</i>
<b>Non-Conflicting Existential Concern</b>	Strive to prepare stable platform so children could have more opportunities	Strive to built a solid financial wealth so to have more choices	Strive to build a more comfortable life beyond basic needs
<b>Life Theme/Life Goal 3: Harmonious Being/Disharmonious Being</b>			
	<i>Murni</i>	<i>Bibah</i>	
<b>Non-Conflicting Existential Concern</b>	Strive to achieve unstressful being; at peace physically and mentally	Strive to achieve unstressful being; at peace physically and mentally	
<b>Life Theme/Life Goal 4: Being in Control/Being out of Control</b>			
	<i>Asyikin</i>		
<b>Non-Conflicting Existential Concern</b>	Strive to be adhere to schedule without need to face unusual situations which might disrupt routine and lead to losing control		

## Chapter 8: Discussion on the Emergent Lifestyle and Life Themes

*...the life-world of contemporary married women is often predefined as problem, in need of solution rather than as meaningful human situation*

*Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990*

### 8.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the emergent lifestyle and life themes that emerged in the findings of this study and relates it to the relevant theories. First the genres of lifestyle that emerged as a result of looking at consumption meanings are presented. Next discussion focuses on how the findings capture lifestyle as concept and space for constructing women's self-identity. Following this is the discussion on the three lifestyle patterns that emerged from the study which is viewed like a snapshot or picture of life. Finally the life theme or goals that emerged during the life stories of the women consumers are then discussed.

## 8.1 Genres of Lifestyle

By constructing lifestyle through women's everyday consumption meaning and articulation of their life stories my study has shown that various different lifestyles exist across these women consumers (Hands on Lifestyle, Idealistic Lifestyle, Pragmatic Lifestyle, Prudent Lifestyle, Climber Lifestyle, Entrepreneur Lifestyle, Easy Going Lifestyle and Devoted Lifestyle). These women construct their lifestyle through meaningful everyday consumption which reflects a narrative of their self-identity (Giddens, 1991) in relation to their existential concerns and social context. Their lifestyle is unique and distinctive as put forth by Reimer (1995) *'[lifestyle is a] specific pattern of everyday activities that characterizes and individual. Each individual lifestyle is unique; it is not identical to anyone else'*. Table 8 shows a summary of all the women's consumption practices as presented in their life stories in Chapter 6 and the lifestyle constructed from these meaningful patterns of consumption. As the focused of the study was on consumer's meaning, the nuance differences in consumption patterns could be discerned which would not have been possible if the 'behaviourist model' or the 'universalist model' was applied (See Chapter 3).

**Table 8: Meaningful Pattern of Consumption and Lived Lifestyle**

<i>Lifestory</i>	<i>Patterns of Everyday Consumption</i>	<i>Lived Lifestyle</i>
<i>Riza</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience revolves the effort to do things from scratch</li> <li>• Emphasis on doing everything for children and family</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption activities/experience that can involve the whole family</li> </ul>	<b><i>Hands On</i></b>
<i>Nurin</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience revolves around focusing solely on children/ family's need with her need excel at work</li> <li>• Prioritize and aspire for consumption experience which is ideal for children</li> </ul>	<b><i>Idealistic</i></b>
<i>Asyikin</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience revolves around maintaining and adhering to a routine schedule</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience which can avoid uncertain/unusual situations-familiar consumption</li> </ul>	<b><i>Pragmatic</i></b>
<i>Ramlah</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience focusing on being organized and careful about family's financial management</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that is dedicated to make the children happy and help family facing unanticipated situations</li> </ul>	<b><i>Prudent</i></b>
<i>Siti</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience that can increase family's status</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that guarantee returns e.g. investment/ education</li> </ul>	<b><i>Climber</i></b>
<i>Rima</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience that can widen the opportunities for family to increase their financial based</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that can give high return</li> </ul>	<b><i>Entrepreneur</i></b>

Continued:

**Table 8: Meaningful Pattern of Consumption and Lived Lifestyle**

<i><b>Lifestory</b></i>	<i><b>Lived Meanings of of Lifestyle</b></i>	<i><b>Emergent Lifestyle</b></i>
<i>Salmi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience that enabled her to focus on building her business</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that can help organize business/family</li> </ul>	<i><b>Survivor</b></i>
<i>Murni</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience that focused on avoiding stressful situation</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that are relaxed and joyful</li> </ul>	<i><b>EasyGoing</b></i>
<i>Bibah</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyday Consumption activities/experience that focused on avoiding stressful situations</li> <li>• Prioritize consumption experience/activities that are dedicated to children e.g. education, children's other needs and consumption that are necessary only</li> </ul>	<i><b>Devoted</b></i>

## 8.2 Lifestyle as Narrative of Self Identity

Scholars put forth that in consumer culture, lifestyle becomes a site for individuals to actively construct, refine and rework lifestyle (life projects) to represent and articulate self identity (projects of the self) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Featherstone, 2007 [1991]; Giddens, 1991). These women's life stories demonstrate that they reflexively construct lifestyle by both embracing and avoiding the wide array of consumption choices on offer as denoted by Wilk (1997); *'as daily practice it (consumption) creates identity and social boundaries through practices of non-consumption, non-association, avoidance, and taboo. Consumption always carries the relations of non-consumption as a silent partner'*(p. 183). This parallels scholars view that consumption and non-consumption is an important source of our sense of being. Below are examples of women expressing their non-consumption;

Murni (EasyGoing Lifestyle):

*Comedy, I like to watch comedy, I don't go for science fiction, horror and the likes.. I don't think I have the energy for this sort of story at my old age, it tenses you up, but love story is realllyyy good as its bring back nostalgic memories..ahaa I like to watch love story, comedy*

Riza (Hands on Lifestyle):

*otherwise I bring them to the library because they enjoy it or else I bring them to the cinemas, like recently they know that a new movie 'The Wild' will come out ... so we bring them , or else we bring them to my sisters or in laws or sometime we go to the park , we go jogging and we occupy their Saturday Sunday..., Saturday Sunday must be for them... but I hardly bring them to shopping complexes because I feel everything that is needed I have bought*

Nurin (Idealistic Lifestyle):

*for example if you go shopping like me I don't bring the children isn't it, but try and look at other people at Giant or Tesco bringing their small children in the trolley... its just not right isn't it?.. as eventually when the child gets bored it disturbs the parents to do the grocery then the whole situation tensed up—the child, the parents and followed by other people (mmhm)I think there's really limited place that you can leave the children and let them play aaa there are like for example at the Mega Mall but its really expensive that is RM21 and there is one in Ampang it was RM15 per hour....so isnt it better if they built a public library for the children.you know the public library in Bangi recently I went and scold them because they have a childrens section but the books weren't organized at all not... even labelled, then I asked them about it.. they said messy is normal because its childrens.. that I can understand but why are there no label for the books... so how do you expect children to find books..*

At the same time, women's lived experience also showed that they embraced consumption that provides them the avenues to help them achieve their life goal or get things done much easier as depicted in the examples below;

Rima (Entrepreneur Lifestyle):

*that's my...that is my vision, my dream is to retire rich and young and of course by the age of 40 I want to have a million in cash in my bank..so what I'm doing now is going towards that so.. In terms of shopping for clothing and everything I am 'biasa'(ordinary) really ordinary but in terms of (property and real estate) investment..I go all out..thats my priority*

Asyikin (Pragmatic Lifestyle):

*if we go for vacation we go all out, it's a must, to steam out everything from the brain, for me going out from the house is a vacation for me (where to?) I don't really care... shopping complex just have lunch, take our time walking and browsing relax and the children play at the play area.*

Salmi (Survivor Lifestyle):

*ahah then once a week after their help for being independent at home..you need to treat them as well because they put up with me not being there....I feel they deserve a treat..so i treat them...usually their favourite will be Thai Food...so I have to entertain them if they want to eat Thai food*

Ramlah (Prudent Lifestyle):

*noo sometimes during school break we don't go anywhere..because we go for vacation every week aa aahah we bring them just for fun sometimes we go to A Famosa(Waterworld), go for picnic's in Port Dickson there's a Central Banks chalet so we go and have a swim and sometimes we go to Sunway Lagoon .. aa ahah I bring them ..my children..i am like that I am a committed mother I am what do people call it women family ,family man*

Siti (Climber Lifestyle):

*ahah yes I did plan to send him [to computer apprenticeship course]to learn something so I told my husband I didn't want him(their son) to waste time and he is going(for the course) with his cousin so at least he has a friend...my nephew is also waiting for his SPM results*

Bibah (Devoted Lifestyle):

*usually if I don't go anywhere I will buy here near my home—Econsave, if for example on the way when my daughters are at home and they want to go to Jaya Jusco ..I buy in Jaya Jusco or Giant or Tesco..at times if I go and fetch my daughter in Seremban I will drop by at the Seremban parade (mall) and buy there..whichever is convenient.*

Exploring lifestyle through lived consumption experiences further showed that the women in my study were constructing lifestyle not to impress others or as struggle for distinction as suggested by (Bourdieu, 1984) and other classical theorists such as (Weber, 1946/1958) and (Veblen, 2007 [1899]). There were no evidence that these women were flaunting high status lifestyle to others, instead their lifestyles were an effort towards self realization in achieving personal goals and motives connected with themselves and in relation to significant others in their immediate social network such as their children, husbands and parents. Hence their consumption practice were directed towards reassuring themselves and a way of forming or maintaining links with their significant others relationship (Longhurst et al., 2000; Longhurst & Savage, 1996).

Nonetheless although women seemed to have more freedom in constructing lifestyle and negotiating identity through consumption regardless of their background such as mentioned by (Featherstone, 2007 [1991]), (Giddens, 1991) and (Gans, 1999 [1975]), the women's experience in my study showed that their lifestyle were to a certain extent still bounded to particular factors such as – the amount of income/ wealth the family has. This could be seen in the emergent themes e.g. the focused towards increasing their source of income or wealth in order to create better condition or opportunities for their family by Rima (Entrepreneur Lifestyle) and Salmi (Survivor Lifestyle). Besides money, education were seen as an important source of capital; Siti (Climber Lifestyle) for example were putting her best effort to make sure that her children see the importance of acquiring this cultural capital as she believes this is one source besides money that could guarantee them a comfortable position in the future. This indeed points to lifestyle as a dynamic space and process of identity for individuals involving negotiation, integration and affiliation of the individual and society which are continuously (re) produced through each other (S. Miles, 2000; Reimer, 1995).

## **8.2 Snapshot of Lifestyle**

Three snapshot of lifestyle emerged from this study which put the various typology of women's lifestyle into three pattern; the first is Adapting Family into Lifestyle (8.2.1) followed by Changing Lifestyle to Fit Family (8.2.2) and finally Settled Lifestyle (8.2.3).

### **8.2.1 Adapting Family into Lifestyle.**

The first snapshot of lifestyle that emerged from this study is of women adapting their family into their constructed lifestyle. The women constructing lifestyle in the first snapshot are Riza (Hands On Lifestyle), Siti (Climber Lifestyle), Rima (Entrepreneur Lifestyle) and Salmi (Survivor Lifestyle). Within this snapshot, these women acknowledged that they have a busy lifestyle integrating family and work; their lifestyle demanded them to relinquish certain parts of their role in the family and required participations from their significant others (e.g. husband and children) to ensure smooth integration of the two spheres. These women didn't described work and family as oppositional spheres instead their lived experienced demonstrate that they are committed in weaving the two spheres smoothly in order achieve a win-win situation. This snapshot of lifestyle is very similar to the findings of Garey (1999) and Halpern & Murphy (2005) whose empirical work shows evidence of women connecting both their work and family in an agreeable situation.

The women in this snapshot did not resent or expressed guilt for their involvement in employment. In fact in many ways the women in this snapshot expressed a sense of satisfaction or pride gained from working. This is comparable with Gatrell (2005) whose study shows that women value their participation in employment. Examples of these findings are depicted in the interview excerpts below;

Riza: *my dream is actually to work from home but I don't want to be a full time housewife I want to work and earn my own money*

Siti: *.. for example when I started work I was only a typist then I took the exams to go up to become a secretary and then I applied for secretarial post and I got it so for me If I can I will try to achieve the highest I can aaa*

Rima: *but in terms of shopping its yess..lately I have done quite a lot of shopping because I just got promoted to manager's position..about 2 weeks ago..(oo ..thats great Congratulations) all this while I have been the only lady engineer in my division*

Salmi: *ahah I have to ahaaa.. we work from morning till night because we want to have a comfortable life what other people use we want isnt it.*

In addition the women in this lifestyle snapshot expressed strong believes about the benefits of their career particularly in securing an improved if not better standard of living for their children (e.g. allowing the children choices and opportunities in their life, saving for education purposes, providing wide range of enrichment experiences - bringing children for vacation overseas, enrol in apprenticeship courses and so forth) which is similarly portrayed in the works of Hattery (2001) and Glenn (1994).

Furthermore they feel that their family's adaptations to the lifestyle they lead as necessary and recognize it as a sacrifice that both parties have to adapt to before they could realize the life themes they set out to achieve. They didn't expressed being stressful (e.g. feeling frustrated or guilt) when not being able to fulfil the 'traditional' or 'idealistic' notion of women's responsibilities instead they see the necessity to spread the responsibilities to others (e.g. husbands, children). Moreover their everyday consumption can be seen as significant in weaving their work and family; the excerpts below demonstrate various ways these women employed to weave their two domains of life;

Riza:

*so while waiting for me to get the food ready and everything Azhar will look at the children school work or maybe he'll play with them, for us when we reach home its already 7pm then Azhar will do his prayers, rest and everything, so in the mean time we let the kids play, they will play until they get tired and then only do their school work so the children knows when it's time for play and when it's time for books*

Siti:

*Usually for us weekdays my husband will manage the children's lunch and dinner. When he comes home for lunch he will already bought a few side dishes so it could last for dinner (so you seldom cook) yes...we only it whats available, everybody is accustomed to that since both of us are working and what more during weekdays I work right up to late evening*

Rima:

*even though I have a maid when I come back I will cook for my husband...my maid I have already thought her how to cook for the children's and she is a very good cook because my children seemed to like what she cooks*

Salmi:

*aa no I don't have time and I feel now we don't need to go because I feel we don't have enough yet..previously when I did my business at a stall ...with my husband getting a monthly paid and using a Wira (their previous car) it was sufficient for us.. we could go out and go sightseeing and everything but now I cannot because I think I feel we have so many more commitments and it feel like we have to bear a burden but then you have to have a principles isn't it*

Consequently the women in this lifestyle snapshot demonstrates an important aspect of women's 'caring self' which is; women's ability to connect the 'self' and other within a context of relationship (Chodorow, 1980; Stern, 1990). In this case these women described their need to work as (need for self-achievement) as invaluable and positively contributing to the needs of their significant other – e.g. their husband, children, mother and so forth. These women creatively weaved the need of their own self (as demonstrated by their need to work) and the need for others (as demonstrated by the importance they

put on their family). Therefore this lifestyle snapshot has uncovered a first dimension of the caring self which this study named – ‘Connecting Caring Self’ as indicated in Table 9.

### **8.2.2 Changing Lifestyle to fit Family**

Nurin (Idealistic Lifestyle), Asyikin (Pragmatic Lifestyle) and Ramlah (Prudent Lifestyle) are the women constructing lifestyle under the second snapshot which saw women changing their lifestyle to fit their family. In this second lifestyle picture these working women were more idealistic; they feel it is their responsibility to accommodate or adapt their lifestyle to fit their family’s (e.g. children, husband or parents) need and in order to achieve their life goals. Consequently moulding and changing to fit the ‘significant other’s’ need is the priority of their lifestyle. These women describe their work and family as two competing spheres. Moreover they expressed their effort in balancing both spheres which saw them being overwhelmed if they were unable to fulfil the needs of either one or the other domain. This lifestyle snapshot is in line with Thompson’s (1996) work which saw women ‘juggling’ work ( self achievement need) and family (caring for others need) experiencing sense of overwhelmed, self doubt and ambivalence. These women generally demonstrate having guilt and control issues with regards to their involvement in employment and having to manage this parallel to their family life as demonstrated in their excerpts below;

Ramlah:

*aahah family man but I am family woman because I feel I cannot If I neglect my kids during weekends, school holidays I feel guilty that is me but I don't know about other people that's why I rather stay at home and then cook if they say they want cake I will make cake or whatever they want I will cook or like I mentioned we go for weekend vacation.*

Nurin:

*aa that's why these few years I had a quite terrible time because I cannot stayed at home and I didn't want to quit my job as well... previously with my first and second child..when they were a baby if I go to work I will cry when I leave them but for this one (referring to her youngest child) I said to myself I won't cry because I said I have to be strong and I do not want to go through the same cycle as both the elder children..so now not anymore I made the decision I need to be strong and I cannot quit working because of my parents I said to my husband I love you but I don't have the heart to let my parents down soo I have to do this*

Asyikin:

*ok I think sometimes there's always a part of me that wants to urmm watch the children grow up 24-7 you want to be there to see every second every thing they do but itss impossible rightt sometimes you just have to urmm tolerate the current situation ok I cannot say I just want to be a full time mom because I want to watch my children grow all the time...*

Their everyday consumption practices are ways to help alleviate the emotional tension or stress they faced with their competing responsibilities towards their family and work. For example;

Ramlah:

*and sometimes I bring my children to the Nature Park in Kuala Selangor look at fireflies...aa so I bring the kids to see we slept at DePalma aa so I like it because they enjoyed it...I like to see what they like and also like I said sometimes (we) play bowling.. we have to bring because everyday we are busy working isnt it so we have to take the initiative to spent time with the children as well*

Nurin:

*I think I cannot do both, that's why for the past several years I wasn't the best for both at work and as a mother and wife (so did you find any resolution for it?) ahah I took a maid to reduce the burden to balance to do the house chores, to study [...]*

Asyikin:

*[...] but to me I think in terms of the maids presence is I worry more about the adjustment period in which I don't think I'm not prepared to go through because the children are still young...I cannot have that extra burden on my shoulder...I think It's ok to be tired physically but to be tired mentally I could not go through, it's ok for your body to be physically tired*

Consequently the sense of being overwhelmed, guilt and self-doubt described by these due to their commitment to work is in line with their caring self which emphasizes on relationships or connectedness or giving priority to the needs of others care (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Pinker, 2008). Hence this lifestyle snapshot has uncovered a second dimension of the caring self which this study named – ‘Conflicting Caring Self’ as shown in Table 9.

### **8.2.3 Settled Lifestyle**

The third emergent lifestyle snapshot is the ‘Settled Lifestyle’ which is demonstrated by Murni (Easygoing Lifestyle) and Bibah (Devoted Lifestyle). The women constructing lifestyle within this picture are usually settled with the kind of lifestyle that they and their family are living, their concerns does not involves working and mothering instead their focused are on issues well beyond these. They have reached a stable point in their life where they are content with most if not all parts of their life for example they

acknowledged of being blessed with more than sufficient resources 'healthy wealth wise', they feel they have acquired and are blessed with all the things they need and want (e.g. acquired a certain extent of material wealth and experienced). What these women described as priority is, to match their material abundance with spiritual health in their life - they emphasized of maintaining a connection with God in their attempt of acquiring spiritual health. These women description of being blessed with wealth and physical health and also their focused on balancing this with spiritual health are depicted in their interview excerpts below:

Murni:

*my principle is we must Be Balance we want to Live our Best in this World now also to Live our Best in the life Hereafter..and we want oour life to be cheerful.. people say Laughter is the Best Medicine aa I always hear people ask me 'how do you look so young?' ...I think it's because I like to be cheerful.. I like to laugh soo I take it easy and if the thing is to heavy then I take it is a challenge God have given to me...so I don't feel it is as a burden because it will be more heavier so we have to take it easy everything is a test from God*

Bibah:

*of course you feel stressed but it's important to maintain the balance..physically and mentally.. I am the kind of person that whatever it is I think positive...whatever happens to me I feel there must be a reason..like my husband what he did to me..I told myself I have to be strong because of the children..thats important for me it's important to avoid being too stressed over something..I mean of health...what more I'm not getting younger hahahah....even before all these happened I used to have positive thoughts about him (her ex husband)..even though he didnt provide*

Although the women in this snapshot stressed on maintaining a strong spiritual side – having connection with God, it did not meant that they totally abandon their worldly life instead the lifestyle that they are living were significant in allowing them to participate in both worldly and religious commitment. These women negotiated various consumption

practices to maintain this balance and believed that this would give them a balanced in physical and spiritual health, for example:

Murni:

*aa because now I go to class hahahah tafsir Quran, aqidah class, I go to read the Quran, I go three times a week on Tuesday Wednesday Thursday, actually class is held every day but I don't want to spend all my time at the class, so at least three classes is good for me Tafsir, Aqidah and sometimes Hadith urrm three times a week 10-12pm is sufficient after that I take a rest and do other things for example I follow the drama series that is usually aired on television*

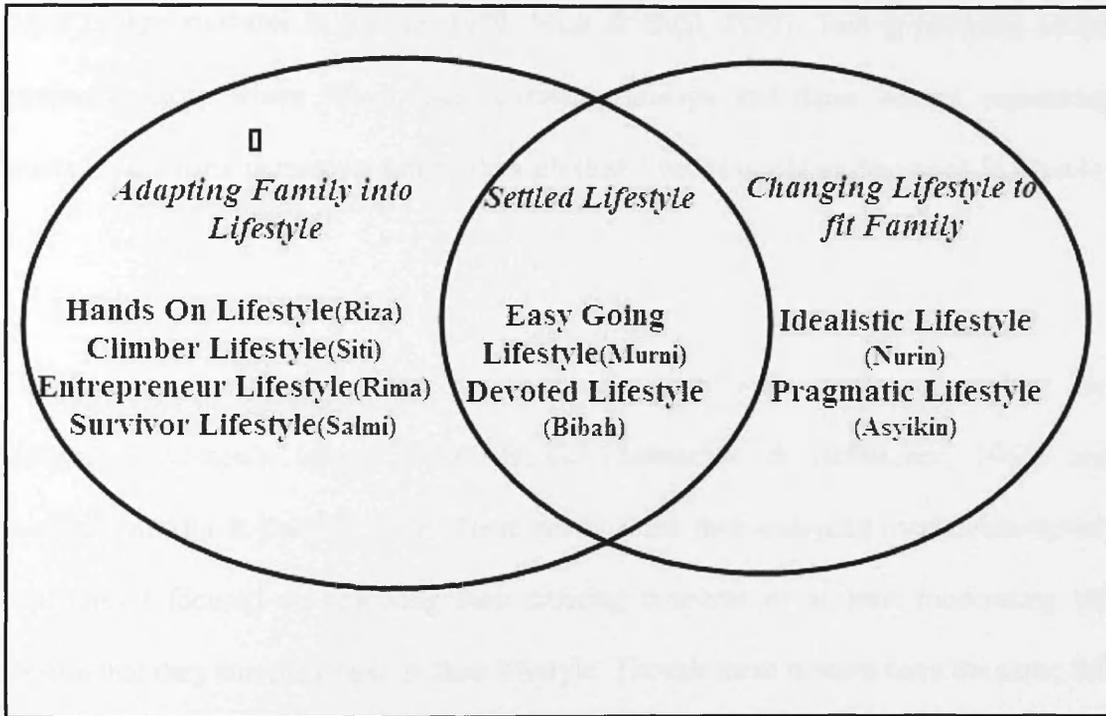
Bibah:

*[...] moreover all my children are grown up already so I don't think I have a problem of them damaging the furniture and things like that because when the children were young I refrained from buying as they is no point ..I didn't want to worry about it all the time...also during that time my ex husbands nephew and nieces frequently came to our house, so we had a lot of young children around, they used to play in the house...I believed that you don't need to put yourself under unnecessary stress, so I opted not to have all the nice furniture during that time..for me there should be a balance between what the things you want and the things you need..maintain your spiritual health as well...that for me is the way to help me be at peace, not stressful..maybe thats why I am Alhamdulillah (Thanks to God) still healthy despite all that has happened..hahahah*

This women's 'Settled lifestyle' snapshot depicted women's concern with balancing their worldly life and spiritual life. This departs from the work of scholars such as (Thompson, 1996), (Hattery, 2001), (Garey, 1999) and (Holt, 1997) who emphasized among others women's feminine identity or women's caring self concerning with balancing issues of family and work. Consequently this lifestyle snapshot depicts that women's feminine identity or caring self can involve broader dimensions for example 'Connecting Caring Self' encompasses balancing the needs of the self with need for relationship with God or religious matter in addition to weaving the needs of self and need for relationship with

others as discussed in the literature such as (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Thompson et al., 1990) as shown in Table 9.

**Figure 4: Emergent Lifestyle Snapshot**



**Table 9: Dimensions of the caring self**

Dimension	Resolving Strategy	
<b>CONFLICTING CARING SELF</b>	<p><u>Changing Lifestyle to fit family</u></p> <p>BALANCING (needs of self and need for relationship with others)</p>	
<b>CONNECTING CARING SELF</b>	<p><u>Settled Lifestyle</u></p> <p>BALANCING (needs of self and need for relationship with God)</p>	<p><u>Adapting family to fit Lifestyle</u></p> <p>WEAVING (needs of self and need for relationship with others)</p>

#### **8.4 Lifestyle and Life Themes/Life Goals**

My finding's on life theme/goals and lifestyle demonstrates that they are indeed important in giving meaning and driving consumer's lifestyle (Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956; Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; Mick & Buhl, 1992). This is reflected across women's stories where life themes repeatedly emerge and these women expressing attempts or efforts in resolving them through their lived lifestyle as discussed in Chapter 7.

The findings further shows that life theme/life goals were central in guiding and motivating women's unique lived lifestyle (Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956) and (Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). Their stories about their everyday lived consumption experienced focused on resolving their existing concerns or at least moderating the tension that they currently have in their lifestyle. Though these women have the same life theme/goal the meanings and definition referring to this life theme is unique to their own context. For example Riza's unresolved life theme/goal (Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman) translates as striving to be with the children and be a career woman at the same time, meanwhile Nurin's unresolved life theme/goal (Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman) translates as striving to be a perfect wife and mother while at the same time strive to be a perfect daughter.

Consequently through their everyday consumption these women attempted to resolve their existential life goals; for example to fulfill her existential concern of Being a

Mother/Being a Career Woman simultaneously, Ramlah resorts to employing a helper so she could prioritize consumption that makes children happy and managing family financial, meanwhile Murni and Bibah's strive to achieve their life theme of Harmonious Being through living an Easy Going Lifestyle (Murni) (e.g. making sure her consumption activities are not stressful, indulging in serious health consumption activities) and living a Devoted Lifestyle (Bibah) (e.g. prioritizing her consumption for her children's need and also maintaining her relationship with God). The Table

## **8.5 Summary**

This chapter had presented a discussion on the lifestyle and life themes that emerged from the nine women consumer's life stories and related the discussion with the theories discussed in Chapter 2 and 3.

**Table 10: Summary of Meanings of Life Theme and Lifestyle**

Life Theme/Life Goal 1	Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman		
	<i>Riza</i>	<i>Nurin</i>	<i>Ramlah</i>
<b>Conflicting Life Theme</b>	Strive to be with Children/Wants to Work	Strive to be Perfect Wife & Mother/Wants to be Perfect Daughter	Strive to be with Children/Wants to Work
<b>Lived Lifestyle</b>	<b>Hands On;</b> Favour consumption activities that can involve the whole family	<b>Idealistic;</b> Employ helper to deal with housework – prioritize ideal consumption for children	<b>Prudent;</b> Employ helper so could prioritize consumption that makes children happy and managing family financial
Life Theme/ Life Goal 2	Being a Progressive Co-breadwinner/Not Being a Progressive Co- Breadwinner		
	<i>Siti</i>	<i>Rima</i>	<i>Salmi</i>
<b>Non-Conflicting Life Theme</b>	Strive to prepare stable platform so children could have more opportunities	Strive to built a solid financial wealth so to have more choices	Strive to build a more comfortable life beyond basic needs
<b>Lived Lifestyle</b>	<b>Climber;</b> Prioritize on consumption activities that provides opportunities to enhance family status	<b>Entrepreneur;</b> Focus on being entrepreneurial and taking risk in investments- prioritize consumption that can give hih return	<b>Survivor;</b> Focus on maintaining and expanding business-prioritize consumption that can help business

Continued:

**Table 10: Summary of Meanings of Life Theme and Lifestyle**

Life Theme/Life Goal 3	Harmonious Being/Disharmonious Being	
	<i>Murni</i>	<i>Bibah</i>
<b>Non-Conflicting Life Theme</b>	Strive to achieve (un)stressful being; at peace physically and mentally	Strive to achieve (un)stressful being; at peace physically and mentally
<b>Lived Lifestyle</b>	<b>EasyGoing;</b> Focus on consumption activities that are not overly stressful-fun and stress free, health conscious	<b>Devoted;</b> Focus on children and needful consumption
Life Theme/Life Goal 4	Being in Control/Being Out of Control	
	<i>Asyikin</i>	
<b>Non-Conflicting Life Theme</b>	Strive to adhere to schedule without need to face unusual situations which might disrupt routine and lead to losing control	
<b>Lived Lifestyle</b>	<b>Pragmatic;</b> Focus on adhering and maintaining routine scheduled activities; avoid non planned or complex consumption	

## Chapter 9: Emergent Cultural Framework and Discussion

*..in the recent period, culture has been taken to be above all a matter of meaning (pg 5)...A cultural meaning is the typical (frequently recurring and widely shared aspects of the) interpretation of some type of object or event evoked in people as a result of their similar life experiences.(pg 6)*

*‘ Meaning and culture’ (Strauss & Quinn, 1997)*

*Through ‘interpretation’, cultural meanings are transformed. And through ‘embodiment’, collective symbols acquire the power, tension, relevance and sense emerging from our individuated histories....danger lies in blindness, on the one hand to the fact that histories of experience, and so of affect, are essential to all thought...A grasp of individuality requires a grasp of cultural form..*

*Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feelings (Rosaldo, 1984)*

### 9.0 Introduction

In this chapter the ‘**cultural framework**’ or ‘**meaning systems**’ that the women consumers draw from to make sense, interpret and guide their everyday consumption and lifestyle are examined across life stories. Emergent cultural themes under these cultural frameworks are then presented based on these women’s own lived experienced of their everyday consumption stories and discussed in relation to the cultural framework outlined in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively.

## 9.1 The Caring framework

The ethics of care or the caring framework (as discussed in Subsection 3.3.3) was one of the cultural framework that emerged in the lived experienced of these women's lifestyle. This caring framework organized the consumption tastes, activities and experiences of these women centred on fulfilling the needs of significant others in their social networks- such as the family, household and children (Chodorow, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Thompson, 1996). The themes that emerged which reflects these women's caring identity are negotiating family friendly consumption (9.1.1.), giving the best for the children (9.1.2) and anticipating of future consequences (9.1.3).

Grounded by their network of feelings of care, concern and emotions these women's focus of consumption choice was not on objects rather it was focused on protecting, organizing and maintaining the integrity of significant others in their social networks. These findings saw women going all out in ensuring their children get the best of everything, tallies with Hays (1996) description of 'intensive mothering' where women tend to focused heavily on their children to the extent that they are willing to put their needs secondary and also put up with high expenses related to their children. The women from this study described their willingness to pay expensive prices in order to secure branded clothing which they saw as the best quality for their children although acknowledged feeling that these branded clothing are more often than not overpriced.

### 9.1.1 Negotiating family friendly consumption

One of the caring themes that emerged from these women's life stories was these women's effort in selecting consumption they consider 'family friendly'. Most of the woman particularly those with young children embraced consumption which were educational, could bring positive experience to their children or could included themselves or the whole family in the consumption experience as well. These women were adamant to avoid consumption activities that were only fulfilling material-wise; providing things to their children without giving any educational positive experience in return. Consider Riza, Nurin and Ramlah's illustration on their effort negotiating and participating in this family friendly consumption;

**Riza;**

*..I bring them to the library because they enjoy it or else I bring them to the cinema, like recently they know that a new movie 'The Wild' will come out so we bring them....for me if I go to the cinema..like recently we just watched 'chicken little' so I bought a book on chicken little... so after watching the movie then on the way back we go to the bookstore and I'll find them books about what they just watched*

**Nurin;**

*but actually in Malaysia there's very limited places to bring the children for example like public library is not open during the weekend...and places for children to play and not resort to buying things is very very limited.. because if we were to go to shopping malls we will tend to buy things and I think it's no point... what's the purpose bringing kids there..... and if we do go at the shopping malls we will search for places that the children can play or else we go for the purpose to eat out.....that's why in the end we bring them to shopping malls*

*because there are places for them to play there and when we go to places like that so they can have either ice cream or chocolate..or we go to book stores because they love to go to bookstores*

**Ramlah;**

*ahah we must monitor the kidss so they will buy books and if their dad go to play golf I will read the books to them sometimes we go to the Czip Lee (bookstore) and sometimes MPH at One Utama ... anywhere actually ... when we go to the shopping mall its compulsory to pop in a bookstore because I think in this era it's not only about giving them money but you have to educate your children as well soo besides enjoying ourselves in recreation we must bring the kids as well*

Rima were forthright in her aversion on buying 'material' or tangible things that she felt provided only fun but no other positive values in return. She says;

**Rima;**

*to tell you the truth I don't mind spending money or effort for the children but I..dont like to buy for them toys..toys is their dad ..hahahah for clothing and everything it's me hahah..but the father will buy for them toyss I will rarely buy something that's just for fun..I'm very selective on what I buy ..cartoon cartoon I don't always buy what I buy is always educational*

Meanwhile Asyikin's made sure that she monitors the kind of programs her children watch in the television; she only encourages her children to watch program that contains 'natural' human character. She said;

*for them I only leave the animal planet for them to watch... to me animal planet is not so bad, like cartoon I don't really encourage my young children to watch but*

*if it involves human (character) then yess like Barney there's human (character) right..so the program they watch must include human character in them..*

Interviewer: (ooo what makes you do that)

*I don't know its urmm imaginary isnt it these cartoons.... are imaginary figures that the adult come up with the idea and the character so whatever the character does is the adult assumption of the character so it's not urmm purely from the children unlike Barney which involves real children so their character is natural isnt it*

Siti makes sure she controls her teenage son's consumption by giving him a specific budget and discouraging him to spend on items that are too expensive. She says;

Interviewer: (so you are quite strict?)

*aaa yes but it depends on the situation..my eldest (son) is in Form 5 and they are still under our care more ever they are not working yet..so I don't really encourage them to buy clothing that is too expensive and also I don't allow them to always go (shopping) with their friends.. only sometimes I give them some space..only once it was last year Raya (Eid) he wanted so much to go shopping with his friends and that time I did give him some money but not that much about RM100 only hahahah, so he brought back one pair of trousers and a shirt that was all he bought..I let him because I kind oof pity him because he wants to go out with friends but mostly the rest of the time it's usually with me and my husband*

### 9.1.2 Give the Best for the Children

The second theme emerging from the ethics of care framework is the theme 'Give the Best for the Children'. These themes emerged when women described buying necessary things for their children from branded ranges e.g (buying branded clothing), buying branded food (food from well known brand) or sending children to kindergarten/clubs that requires high fees. The items that these women bought were purposely chosen for their brand as they are considered to provide the best quality and value for their children. Although these women realized that buying such branded items costs them a lot of money and even admits that these branded products are 'overpriced' ironically they still feel justified buying them. For these women buying branded which equals quality items reflects their desire to ensure the Best for their children.

Nurin and Ramlah are three women that depict the importance to buy branded clothing for their children. Nurin illustrates that she usually buy branded range for her children's clothing. Although she realized these branded clothing range are overpriced (price in Malaysia compared to the price overseas) and admit to feel being cheated this doesn't stop her from buying them. She says she usually buys these branded expensive items during sale as illustrated below;

**Nurin;**

*aaaa for the childrens Raya cloth usually it will be a bit branded like all the Osh Kosh, Esprit for me its always Osh Kosh and Esprit aa more expensive aa and actually Guess and Osh Kosh is ridiculously expensive*

Interviewer: (overpriced do you think?)

*ahah overpriced..we bought at that time my husband went to the US the same dress 12 US dollar and here the price is RM100 something soo when you know it's like that we feel we are being cheated..but we still want to buy the brand...soo usually if I want to buy branded items I will buy during sale*

Similar to Nurin, Ramlah also describes buying branded clothing for her children. She admits these branded clothing are expensive but feels that the price reflects the quality of the clothing. She further illustrates her strategies for buying these items at a reasonable price for example; buying during sale, asking friends who go overseas to buy for her. Her descriptions are as below;

**Ramlah;**

*.. haa for clothing I like branded yess yess I don't buy clothes at the night market I won't buy..I bought before but it doesn't lasts. So I go for branded quality items. Of course it's expensive but its durable..So I will buy for them usually during sale..the Mega Sale...during Sale I have started preparing for my kids clothes for 'Raya' (Eid) because if you buy a lot because I have 4 children aa soo to buy let's say jeanss, jeanss one cost you at least MYR60 MYR80..so if it's on sale for example 50% sale you get half of it instead of paying MYR70(normal price) and you get one but if it's on sale you get two isn't it. sometimes...because my office mates many of them are engineers soo if they have courses at Houston (USA) I will ask them to buy my childrens clothing for me for example Osh Kosh*

Meanwhile Asyikin also insists on buying branded items for her children. However her emphasis or descriptions are on providing food items which are branded. She associates branded food to quality food and emphasize that she doesn't mind if these incurs far higher costs, as it's for the best interest of her children as indicated in her description.

**Asyikin;**

*everything, everything I spent on the children I mean I'm not fussy when it comes to the children's side.. if I want to buy food and the option is either F&N grape or Ribena..I will buy Ribena even if the price is more , I always go for the better...if I buy cereal I will go for well known brand even Giant have their own cornflakes but I will always go for either Kellogg or Nestle Cornflakes things like that I will always give the best for the children aa. When we can afford it that's the thing instead of just a normal brand (mmhm) even for chocolate spread ahaa chocolate spread brand I will always go for Nutella even though Nutella costs RM50 will last me only two weeks but for children's it's ok.. like rice also instead of just normal brand sometimes we go for AAA to feed them more.. make them more chubby aa give all the best for the children*

Rima and Bibah states their willingness to put up with the cost and expenses of sending their children to good educational institutions; Rima insisted in sending her children to a selected English speaking kindergarten and also to golf classes; while Bibah insists that she would go all out to ensure that her children are motivated when going boarding school by willingly incurring all the expenses by her own. These are depicted in their stories excerpt below;

**Rima;**

Interviewer: (mhmm.. you mentioned sending your son to golf classes..it must have cost quite a sum of money for the golf classes)

*yess but for the children's sake it's fine..we want the best..even now my son is in kindergarten (preschool) , even the selection for kindergarten I was very selective.. I insists in sending him to an English speaking Kindergarten not the normal kindergarten.. so it's quite expensive*

**Bibah;**

*..so being a teacher being a mother I know going to boarding school is something good so I pumped in the money..usually what I remember is every time the girls get an offer to go to boarding school I will draw RM2000 from my savings to give them..and then other expenses is another thing ..to buy all their needs like towels..etc that's considered another expenses..the Rm2000 cash is for each of them when they get to go..so every time one of them got to go I give the same amount to them so I am fair to everybody ..if this person gets anything new the next person gets everything new..It's kind of like a motivation for them because they are going so I want them to have everything new so I don't mind...taking out my money*

Salmi states her goal to buy a bigger house for the sake of her children's comfort. She further asserts that her journey to reach this goal will be tough but one that she is willing to go through to 'Give the Best for her Children';

**Salmi;**

*aaa house we have a vision to buy a bigger house... yess for the children's sake for comfort that's one of my goal so within this 2-3 years I will find a way to get it and also all the debts I want to pay all the debts aa and also the ambition to become a successful entrepreneur hasn't been achieved yet...it will be a tough journey but if we pull through..it will give us more freedom in terms of getting what we need.... be more comfortable*

Although Murni's son is an adult and is going to be married soon, Murni described her intention to help him buy some of the things he might need such as electrical appliances. Helping her son to buy in cash and to avoid debts is her way of 'Giving the Best' for him.

**Murni;**

*ahah, and for this my son is getting married soon so he is going to lead a new life with his wife, I am sure there are lots of things he needs to buy..I haven't told him yet but I am thinking of telling him that if he wants to buy fridge or oven aa I will buy cash for him and monthly he pays back to me so he pays interest free isn't it, I want to tell him that because sometimes I think they are a bit shy or embarrassed to ask us. So if they are married and even working I don't see any reason they should pay or buy using credit because with that there's a lot of interest involved and you're be in a debt for quite some time... so I told them I will buy for you then you pay back to me monthly..It's a lot more cost effective and safer that way for them in building a new family*

**9.1.3 Anticipating for Future Consequences**

Anticipating for Future Consequences is the third theme that emerged under the caring framework. This theme stood out when these women described their indispensable obligations in preparing a financial resource for their children's future needs. The themes ethics of care framework which depicts women as actively participating in providing and creating a secure and comfortable living for their children is similar with the findings of (Glenn, 1994) and (Hattery, 2001). Two types of funds were frequently mentioned by all these women when they talked about their effort in preparing for the ideal future for their children; savings accounts and insurance (educational, health and etc). All of the nine women illustrated some form of arrangement made by themselves or by their husbands in terms of consistently providing savings into their children's fund which they feel would be useful as a resource for variety of purpose in the future such as; educational reasons, as

backup fund if anything were to happen to themselves or their spouses especially with regards to employment, unanticipated emergencies and so forth.

In the excerpt below Siti and Salmi emphasized future education needs for their purpose and priority in securing funds for their children. Salmi even mentioned the benefit of preparing this fund as she found through her experience from her first child. Their excerpts are as below;

**Siti;**

*although not much but consistent savings is important for the children..especially now at their age..they will be going into higher education soon maybe university, courses etc... it doesn't matter if they are clever or not still we need the money to pay for lots of things..if they are not into academics then they might want to follow some courses aa so still we have to prepare some money that's why I have to save and be ready for all these future comings*

**Salmi;**

*ahah education insurance my husband take for everybody including the youngest child aa that one he direct debit from his salary every month and then for myself he takes per month is RM50..aa for the children and everything he provides soo his salary is deducted for insurance I think a month is around RM270.... ahah we started from when they were young..but for the my first and second son we started a bit late because at that time the economy wasn't very good but since his salary was increased we can see the result where when my first son got into college he use his money on the savings for them, its not that much only we save RM30 per child...aaaa so its easy if they want to go anywhere for their studies at least we have a savings that we can use for them*

Meanwhile Riza and Asyikin state the need to provide funds in terms of savings accounts, educational and also health insurance as a contingency plan as they anticipate various impending and unusual situations that could disrupt the employment stability of their spouses or themselves.

**Riza;**

*I take education insurance for the kids and also hospitalisation, although my company provide benefits but we don't know how long we will be at the company so meaning I take for the children yearly basis for hospitalisation, for education is monthly..*

**Asyikin;**

*aa yess ASB(saving account) they (the children) have a seconds savings besides their education insurance ..aa its consistent for them for every month its 50, because that account is new so we so we calculate their age and and bank it in..so once they are born we decided that we just put a total up to their age and times it with 50 , so currently the brother has the most savings because he's the eldest.. I feel that's the best way because the ASB savings there's an age limit, so by a certain age everybody will have an equal savings..it's also because my husband he is not working for the government he works in medical engineering in Singapore...it's a US company based in Singapore so that's why we have to have these for rainy days*

Ramlah recounts unanticipated emergency situations as the most important reasons for her to prepare savings for the children;

*aa so I use that money for savings for the children because I don't think he does the saving for the children that's why I have to... at least one party is giving the other has to save up..when my husband gives me I save up because when we are facing rainy days aa if he says we don't have money aa I can say 'mama have the*

*money the money you gave me' ,then we use the money...sometimes things suddenly come up like car sometimes road tax or anything so I use that money*

## **9.2 Cultivating Piety Framework**

Cultivating Piety is the second cultural framework that emerged from these women's life stories. Many of the consumption experience and activities elucidated were related to the meanings drawing from this piety framework. Cultivating piety framework represents a cultural framework for action or decision making done based on the quest to submit to the highest divine authority-God (Frisk, 2009; Mack, 2003; Mahmood, 2005). In this study, these women expressed their consumption activities and actions as meaningful from the perspective of the 'Piety framework'. Some of the consumption deemed meaningful in congruence with the Piety framework are giving priority for Islamic products (9.2.1), participation in religious classes/Acquiring religious knowledge (9.2.2) and Guarding of *Aurat*<sup>21</sup> (9.2.3).

### **9.2.1 Priority for Islamic Products**

One of the priorities concerning the consumption in the life world of these women is to consume Islamic products. An Islamic product is a product which is verified by Islamic practitioners and Shari'ah scholars to be lawful (*halal*) according to the rules and injunctions of Islamic practices (Zaharuddin, 2010). These concerned were particularly

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<sup>21</sup> Parts of women's body that are instructed to be covered when in public according to Islamic laws.

evident in their stories about consuming of financial and banking products as illustrated in the excerpts of Riza, Nurin, Rima and Bibah below.

**Riza;**

*I took insurance while I was still studying at that time it was with AIA, urmm then when I got married he is more Islamic so he told me that I should change he says let it be that we start this family from sources that are free from any 'gharar'<sup>22</sup> so I change, so that time the option was takaful nasional and takaful malaysia that was it , so when I worked at 'bank Islam they offered takaful Malaysia—which is a part of 'Bank Islam' so we took that up..*

**Nurin;**

*aahah if we can for the major things like this we choose Islamic because we don't want interest (riba)<sup>23</sup>*

**Rima;**

*insurance yes after I give birth to all my children and finish my maternity leave I immediately take up insurance for them... I take the Islamic Takaful because Islamic Takaful one thing good is their product are inclusive of all compulsory donations and payments that we need to pay as Muslims and ..thats really convenient so I don't have to think about settling it myself..that's the reason for me purposely choosing Islamic banking products*

**Bibah;**

*urmm initially the first one I bought was a conventional Insurance but I already bought so let it be so the second time another person came he told me that he is selling Islamic product so I bought another one...so for them there's two insurance ..one is non islamic because there's no choice during that time second one when I*

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<sup>22</sup> Gharar means any transaction which are unclear in its nature and could lead to an unknown results see (Zaharuddin, 2010)

<sup>23</sup> Riba meaning 'any increment upon specific items and upon debt due to deferred payment term' is non permissible (*haram*) in any monetary transactions see (Zaharuddin, 2010)

*heard Islamic one is even better so I bought another but I didn't cancel the first one so in way its kind of a savings for them*

### **9.2.2 Participation in Religious Activities**

The second theme emerging under the 'Cultivating Piety Framework' is 'Participation in Religious Classes/Acquiring Religious Knowledge'. This theme emerged when these women described of participating and attending religious classes such as Quran recitation classes, tajwid classes<sup>24</sup>, or religious talks as a way to (re) polished their Islamic knowledge or to prepare for their life here. These women's accounts of their participation in religious classes correspond to the work of Frisk (2009) and Mahmood (2005) that women get involve in equipping themselves with religious knowledge due to their commitment to faith. This women's piety framework does not however mean they are withdrawn from other social activities in their lifestyle.

Ramlah relates her commitment in attending religious classes as her way to cultivate piety and as a preparation for the life here after;

*ahah I go for Reading Quran, (religious) talks is always held at my office everyday because I think those things help me a lot its good because now it's like the world is nearing to an end only thing is either we realise it or not, so we will have to prepare for that actually and not worry too much about accumulating too much wealth..that's how I feel for example I haven't thought about wanting a bigger house a bungalow nooo this is enough Alhamdulillah (Thank God) because we don't know how much more time the world will last..*

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<sup>24</sup>classes teaching proper pronunciation of Arabic in order to read/recite the Quran correctly

Meanwhile Murni explicate her consistent attendance to religious talks and classes nonetheless she is adamant that this should not mean that she should forgo other activities that are of interest to her;

*aa because now I go to class hahahah tafsir Quran, aqidah class, I go to read the Quran, I go three times a week on Tuesday Wednesday Thursday, actually class is held every day but I don't want to spend all my time at the class, so at least three classes is good for me Tafsir, Aqidah and sometimes Hadith urrm three times a week 10-12pm is sufficient after that I take a rest and do other things for example I follow the drama series that is usually aired on television*

Riza expressed that her participation in Quran recital classes have instilled more confidence in her as she feels she now knows the proper techniques of reading the Quran;

*like attending Quran tajwed classes the previous time I learn was during school days aa now when I learn again I feel that when I read I have more confidence and enjoy it because I know all the correct techniques of reading*

### **9.2.3 Guarding of *Aurat***

Guarding of *aurat* is another notion under the 'Piety Framework'. This piety theme emerged when these women mentioned their awareness and concerned about the proper covering of *aurat* – the proper way of dressing or clothing that will not exposed the body parts of Muslim women that is non-permissible.

Nurin illustrates her awareness and effort to accord by the Islamic ethos as she explicates how even though her husband prefers that she put on outfits which accentuates her body

she declined and in return advised her husband about proper covering of aurat. This theme departs from the 'cultivating piety framework' described in the literature (Bullock, 2003; e.g. J. Nagata, 1995; Norani, 2006 ; Wong, 2007) as it is not concern with 'veiling' alternatively it is concerned and awareness to proper covering of aurat through style of clothing. Nurin's insistence in keeping within the guidelines of Islamic laws in her clothing though her husband prefers her to wear more fashionable clothing points to the fact that she is serious in submitting to God. Her effort in telling her husband or correct his misconception regarding proper covering of aurat in Islam demonstrate the agency of the pious women that is also potrayed in the work of Frisk (2009).

*I use to by Edmunser skirt and blouse but I feel that now the skirt and blouse from Edmunser we cannot wear anymore because the fashion is all fashion for young women which is body hugging aa so I don't think for me who has gone to pilgrimage woould want to wear it..I still have all those blouses but if I wear them I feel really guilty but sometimes my husband likes me to wear like that so occasionally I wear them because usually outfits that are nice have a bit of a cutting aa, but those outfits are usually sold at boutiques but now I seldom buy those kind of clothing... now I usually buy my blouse at Alamanda..*

Interviewer (what makes you feel guilty?)

*I feel it's with age and I have been for pilgrimage and also I am the type who is careful about my 'Aurat' I told my husband of course I can put on nice clothes which is stylish and things but to me that's not actually covering of aurat*

Rima explains of her interests to look fashionable when she buys her maternity clothing however she found it difficult to find a ready made maternity wear that fulfils both values

of fashionable and Islamic. Thus because other commitments to the guarding her aurat she resort to the tailor to fulfil her needs;

*..But then when I was pregnant I think I look more fashionable I went to buy maternity dresses and for that I tailored my dresses because so far pregnant wear in Malaysia its not really Islamic..everything is bare here and there so I didn't like it so then I normally buy the fabric and I sent to the tailor.*

*.....apart from them..I will ask my husband.. whether its nice or not..but if I want it I will buy it anyway... more over my husband doesn't mind as long as the thing covers your 'aurat'(the parts of the body that should be covered in Islam) ahah in that sense my husband is very particular and I myself am also very particular about..so no problem there*

Meanwhile in Riza, Salmi and Siti illustrates that there were times when they did not adhere to the proper Islamic covering of aurat or got carried away, however due to their awareness of God's instructions they willingly feel the need to abide by these proper rules of covering usually reinforced by advised from their husbands;

**Siti;**

*still I take into consideration the advise that he tells me that are actually following Islamic values... he says for me to follow my age hahaha sometimes for blouses he discourages me to put on a tight fitting blouse... well I think in a way he is right so I follow him because I know sometimes I get over excited hahahahaha..so I do take that into account as well ..although when I see what people wear hahahaah I want to put on as well (talking in between laughing hahaha)... aaa what he advise me I will follow for example he will advise me not to wear blouses that are too short because moost of our our blouses like this*

*(showing me one of her blouse) is quite short at the back..aa so he says buy the ones that can at least cover your back*

**Salmi;**

*ahaha he is not that fussy..usually he comments in terms of colour he might say that it doesn't suit my skin.. that I can understand and so far in terms of my clothing so far is ok as long as I don't wear clothes that are too tight that's all and I wear my scarf that's all..sometimes if I go outside without my scarf hahaha because sometimes I'm too lazy hahaha to put on he will tell me to put on my scarf hahahaah*

**Riza;**

*it was myself previously it was myself but as your age increases ..your (Islamic) knowledge increases he influences you more.. he is more Islamic for example I use to put on tight fitting jeans and everything so now mostly everything is loose hahahaha.. he doesn't prefer me to put on short blouses aa so he influences me more*

#### **9.2.4 Emphasizing Religious Values**

Emphasizing Religious Values in their lifestyle are the fourth theme that stood out in these women's consumption life stories. This theme emerged when women relate their consumption, overall well being and perseverance to trials and tribulation of life in connection with their religious values.

Asyikin depicts a general framework of religious values as guiding her in choosing the right choice in living her life;

*oo .. ok I think things that I always go for is logic and go for the right you don't go for the wrong if you know like there no space for white lie for me if you're wrong you're wrong*

*so you don't choose to ok lets say if by telling something you will earn mmore but telling that you will lose profit but that is wrong so don't complicate your life and just follow one path ...that's what our religion teach us as well*

Ramlah and Murni relate the good things that they have in life in terms of material acquisition in connection with their religious values. Both state their intention to go for pilgrimage as a kind of thanks giving to God for all that they have in life.

**Ramlah;**

*I really Thank God for what I have so far I have children, I have work..and I Thank God for everything but one thing I want is to go for pilgrimage. I think I can go but so far I Thank God for what I have today and I don't feel like I want to stay in a bungalow house or anything like that, I'm satisfied with what I have right now.. alhamdulillah (Thank God) I already have 4 children and all are naughty hahaha....Alhamdulillah(Thank God)*

**Murni;**

*I went for pilgrimage when I was at the age of 40, I have also been for holiday overseas so I don't know what I want more so now the only thing is I want my children to be successful get married things like that, I don't think there's any thing more I want Alhamdulillah (Praise to God) for giving me good health nothing major.....so far Alhamdulillah (Thank God) health wise if Alhamdulillah(Praise to God) I have no major illness , that's what I always pray for I will fast on Mondays and Thursdays for one thing to pray that I will not get major illness like cancer or heart problem*

Bibah connects her life with religious values as well; she relates all that happened to her including her personal life crisis for example her divorce as a test from God and illustrates how she found solace and strength in religious values. Similar to Murni and Ramlah she states her intention to go for pilgrimage in Mekah. However for Bibah going for pilgrimage is a way to forge a stronger bond with God to help her going strong in life.

**Bibah;**

*I think so far I'm quite settled now..What I am aiming for now is I want to go for pilgrimage. I have been saving up and I think I am just waiting for the right time to go. Now that I'm getting old all that happened to me I fall back to religion..whatever has happened to me all these things God has destined it..a husband like that..I believe God tests you to make you stronger to give you more rewards.. I feel like that..and then I always listen to religious talks to help me keep strong and also to reflect on myself..*

Nurin's manifestation of the Religious values as Guidance theme emerged when she emphasizes her effort of sending her children to Islamic private school as a way to instil Islamic knowledge and values into her children and hope the acquired knowledge will help guide her children in the future. She accords;

*aa that's why we made a decision to sent our children to Islamic (private) school because we cannot coontrol them and protect them but hopefully we ppray that if they have the values they will able to filter it on their own that's why we are willing to spend money a lot for schooling our children*

### 9.3 Bilateralism Framework

Bilateralism framework is the third Cultural Framework identified in the women's everyday consumption life stories. Bilateralism framework prioritizes maintaining relationships through rules of complementarities and harmonized intersexual relationship by reinforcing values of generosity, reciprocity cooperation and sharing (Wazir Jahan, 1992). The themes that emerged under this framework are Financial Administrator and Investor of the House (9.3.1), Maintaining Strong Kinship Relations (9.3.2), Avoiding Direct Confrontation (9.3.3) and Not Putting up with Unsatisfactory Marriage (9.3.4).

#### 9.3.1 Banker and Investor of the House

This theme stood out when these women described being in charge of the financial management and administration of the house. These evidence of the bilateralism framework were outlined in the work of scholars such as (Firth, 1966a) and (Ong, 1990) who posits that the normative role of Malay women as the one who 'holds the purse-string' in their household. In addition to managing all financial aspects of their household these women also illustrated their active role in initiating strategies to increase their household economic resources.

Murni depicts of being in charge of all the financial administration of the household (paying bills, tax, bank accounts) right up to maintenance of the car;

*mm everything from payment for electricity bills, water bills all the bills even 'cukai tanah' cukai pintu and also if the car breakdown I will go (oo you do everything) ahh I do everything when he was still working but now he is already pensioned so I ask him to come with me as well, haa but when he was working I*

*took care of everything for example 'cukai tanah'(land tax) cukai pintu' (council tax) everything including opening the bank account and because the bank account holds to names which is his and mine I can then sign cheques so sometimes he will ask me what is this this this and sometimes I tend to forget what I did because there were so many things so now I write down everything*

While Riza illustrates that she and her husband allocate the responsibilities of financial management, nonetheless she acknowledges of managing the family household account and budget;

*aaa this part I ... I do it because the both of us its like this urmm when we get our salary Azhar will give me a portion , so he will pay bills and the budget for 'marketing' and everything he will take and also he will take some money for him to spend or anything and the rest he will give to me, I will keep in the account so I will take a little portion for things like... because I think everything has been taken care of by like buying groceries to the market everythiing so for me sometimes if I feel like buying toys or maybe this month I feel like buying pants or i want to add so I will take it from there its like this every month urmm I already know how much is left and how much I can spent for example aa MYR500 because the others I can't take as MYR250 is for KUMON, their insurance MYR200 and our insurance are fixed and the ones I want to bank in in 'Tabung Haji' so everything is fixed every month...*

Ramlah recounts that she is in charge of everything in the house from financial aspect right through deciding on the renovations of her house;

*aaa I manage alllll, I am everything Secretary , Admin everything in the house all me and to make the house the plan and everything is all me Interviewer: (when you say the plan of the house) aa yess everything iiii, what designs, what kind of*

*gates all I decide because I'm very fussy very meticulous for example when I was in confinement for 2 weeks I paid for workers to paint the house but then they did a lousy job so I called them and told them to do it all over because I paid a lot and I want my house to be nice so they did it all over again the kitchen everyyything*

Asyikin, Rima, Murni and Salmi depict the values of cooperation in managing the household economy. Asyikin reflects that through mutual consensus she and her husband agreed to devise their own pension-like scheme (after considering the fact that his current employment doesn't offer such) so that in the future her husband could retire early if he wants to. She says;

*in a way it made me to be more careful about our financial management... because my husband he is thinking of if he wants to retire by the age 45 is it possible or not, so we calculated as if he is going to retire at that age so everything all our budgeting reflects he's retirement age at 45 so we pay (insurance) quite a lot because we want to achieve that*

Rima illustrates her active part of initiating her husband on ideas and strategies that could increase their household income. Although she admits in the first instance these ideas didn't sail through her husband, after some 'clever' coaxing he finally agreed and now sees the benefit of her idea.

*hah I'll tell him ..I know this is risky but I want to buy this... then I give my suggestions for example after the shop house actually my vision is every year the very very least is we buy at least one property I want...means I mooted the idea and he agreed for example like now I bought Casa Andaman in USJ (Subang*

*Jaya) ... the only thing is my husband told me to look for good deals, good deals from the banks , many banks come to see me but I only met the bank that can give me up to 40years loan you imagine until your age is 70years you can borrow...I told my husband there are 2 scheme one is you can sell after you buy and the other is you have to pay the penalty if you plan to sell within 3 years...I take that scheme... even though I have to pay quite high for the interest I don't have to pay the penalty if I want to sell because the reason I bbuy in the first place is to sell it ....and then this idea I mooted to him... initially he didn't agree but after that he agrees because at the same time he just bought a terrace house in UK Bistari Perdana near our house which is freehold he bought it for RM250,00 now somebody offered it for RM338,000 so he is planning to sell it, so you imagine, our idea as a wife...our husband actually if they are clever they will think about it...the only thing is the way you suggest it to him has to be right in a way that they can accept*

Murni describes how it was essential to maintain a harmonious relationship. She describes how she passed this advise on maintaining harmonious relationship to her son and future daughter in law For her a harmonious relationship means as a wife she has to have an independency of her own and mutual understanding and cooperation to not expect economic contribution solely from her husband (Murni depicts that she didn't expect her husband to pay all the household consumption).;

*one thing between husband and wife we must trust each other like the sayings 'pakat membawa berkat' (cooperation make miracle happens) so when my son is getting married I told them sepatat(cooperate) when there is anything we must do it together and I told my future daughter in law you are going to share your life together so don't just expect your husband to work...in the olden days yess because woman didn't work so its ok to expect because those days we didn't work but now both of you are working so we have to cooperate for example like me if I want to buy all the groceries I don't expect my husband to buy everything*

*because I know that he already pays for the car , the house and the food so the other things we buy on our own don't depend too much on our husband like for example the children's clothing or anything because even though I know he is stingy I also know where the money goes too aa and he doesn't hide anything from me and I know his plan he plans for the family*

Meanwhile Salmi recounts that she is the one managing everything about her 'food business' but acknowledges Azri's help and moral support in running the operation of the business as very valuable to her;

*ahah I do it its my responsibilities to manage everything.. Administration, the money for example to bankk in, to pay and things like that, Interviewer: (mmhm what about Azri?) he helps me with the basics like to buy groceries..ahah but usually we are more to discussion and what you say that table talk aa more to our table talk sometimes if I got problem that I cannot handle myself then I will discuss for example last year we had a three months of really hard critical period but he was ok and he kept smiling and giving me support if it were somebody else they might become tensed but he gave support to me*

### **9.3.2 Maintaining Strong Kinship Relations**

This theme was highlighted in these women's description of their financial management and consumption which involves some form of care and connection to and from their extended members of the family. These women's everyday consumption experienced often cited concerns and emphasis on helping kinship relations (siblings, mother) in terms of monetary contribution.

Siti describes how she feels the need to help her siblings even though she admits that this stretches the household budget. She says;

*urm for example like my siblings needs to borrow some money and during that time I myself have already an amount budgeted sufficiently for us but still I lend it to them because I pity them... further more they are not wealthy people for example like my sister she has a family problem so I am the one who help her by supporting her son's education so that have also altered a bit of our.. budget*

Meanwhile Salmi illustrates the help she gets from her sister in terms of paying for her other three younger children's expenses such as toys and clothing;

*aah yess there's a budget (for her two elder son) and usually the most that I give is RM300* Interviewer: (oo ok soo how about your other children..Aini, Hairi and Aina)? *aa for them their aunty will usually help quite a lot* Interviewer : (oo what does she helps with)? *so many things for example she will buy all her nephew and nieces things toys clothing* Interviewer: (so you don't have to spend that much for them) *aa I don't need to nooo not very much even if clothing for Raya (Eid) or anything else,usually for this three its their aunty sometimes every month they will get something.. she usually brings them out and for this showing her youngest child her aunty frequently brings he out just recently they went out its like if they want shoes I just call and they'll get shoes..aa to the shopping malls and for Aini (her third daughter) her aunty will usually buy her branded things..for example BUM , Scarlet (Jaya Jusco brand) , Kiko, Guess*

Riza depicts her detailed budget for paying monthly consumption such as her children's tuition fees, insurance and other necessities. Included in this important and compulsory outgoing budget is a consistent monthly payment to her parents;

*its like this every month urmm I already know how much is left and how much I can spent for example aa MYR500 because the others I can't take as MYR250 is for KUMON, their insurance MYR200 and our insurance are fixed and the ones I want to bank in in 'Tabung Haji' so everything is fixed every month, so I have an excel (spreadsheet) at my office so the figure is a fixed figure such as amount I want to give to my parents because from before I was married till now I have never fail to give to them.. so like the preschool fees is fixed and also for the babysitter*

Similar to Riza, Ramlah emphasizes monetary contribution to parents particularly to her mom in describing her management of household budget. In addition to this, she relates the act of giving to her mother as an act of 'ibadah' (good deeds done for the sake of God in which you get intangible rewards for the life here after). According to Ramlah;

*yess yess I will put everything in all my savings and everything the balance then I spent it aa and if I don't have enough money then I will take a little bit here and there something like that but as long as I am concern I try not to go over the limit because I must know in a certain month there will be sale and what the money is for lets say "Raya (Eid)" soo I already know because its routine isn't it, so I must estimate things like that so maybe like usually my savings is MYR1000 but during 'Raya' (Eid)' maybe you don't save at all because you are going to buy 'raya' cookies, clothes , give 'raya' money, give your mother and things like that soo its ok then I can cover when I get my bonus..*

Interviewer: (mmhmm so that's your way)

*ahah yes lets say if my mom say she wants to renovate her house like recently I gave my mom MYR5000 she didn't request but I give her MYR5000 so see how much I have use my money but its ok for me giving to my mother is one 'ibadah'*

*(good deed) after all is our mom isn't it...so its ok InsyaAllah (Gods willing) if you give MYR5000 God will repay you MYR15,000 and then I thought when I get my bonus I can cover aa soo things like that ..that's how I manage my money*

### **9.3.3 Avoiding Direct Confrontation**

Avoiding direct confrontation is a theme under the Bilateralism Framework. This theme stood out when these women described their strategies of indirectly exerting power and avoiding confrontation when faced with conflict or dilemma in their everyday consumption experienced. Alternatively these women resort to various strategies to resolve their dilemma and achieved their goals.

This theme emerged in Rima's excerpt when she mentions avoiding direct confrontations with her husband in various instances in her life story. Although she is very much interested in participating actively in Multilevel Marketing program she acknowledges that she cannot pursue her interest as her husband doesn't share the same passion with her. Rather than forcing her husband to change, Rima found other ways to influence her husband to join in her entrepreneurial interest which is through properties investment.

She says;

*My husband actually he is not interested in network marketing so I cannot go on my because we were always arguing at the time when I was doing the because he didn't want to follow me and I am the type that I'm ok if its only once or twice ..I thought could do it by myself which I can actually but I'm also working in the office and then at night I have to meet people to sell products to add on downlines.. I love to do it with my husband and I don't want because of that (network marketing) we argue...so thats why stopped not stopped I.. I don't*

*continue to add my down lines but I am still using the products..for me if I can I want to do it with my husband but if he says he is not interested then I cannot force him...what I can do is I find things both of us are interested in... so both of us are interested in investment*

In another instance Rima illustrates how she influences her husband in agreeing to let her take 'golf classes'. Rima sees the skill that she acquires by playing golf as valuable in helping her communicate and built rapport with the managers at her workplace, however she admits she couldn't bring this as a reason to take up golf lessons to her husband instead she justifies importance of golf lessons for their son. She depicts;

*so I use to not like golf but then I said to myself why not...I told my husband... initially he didn't agree but then as a wife how I tackle my husband...you know how..it like this I said nowadays you see how the westerners teach their children play golf until some of them become professional players so I said why don't we groom our children, we expose them to everything..so I can learn as well you know..I mean it will be good.. at least if I can play golf now you know urmm..at least with that I can mix around with all other managers and the senior managers because they will normally play golf..but I didn't say to my husband I want to play golf with the senior manager for sure he wont accept..isnt it*

Murni's excerpt demonstrates the theme of 'Avoiding Confrontation' when she mentions about the time her husband query about where her income or money had gone to. Rather than arguing about the question (as this was her money – In Islam a husband has no say/rights to his wife's earning) she resorts through showing him all the things that she bought with her income. She says;

*previously when I used to work aa he will ask me where did your money go..haa I said you want to know where it goes you open the cupboard can you see all the bed linens aa that's my money, aa opened and see the plates and bowls have I ever asked you for money to buy plates and bowls this and that? or pots and pans? aa when I used to work I didn't like to always ask him if I have the money I will buy*

In another situation (after she stopped working) Murni describes her effort to garner her own income in order for her to go and visit her sister in London. Although knowing that her husband was 'stingy' with his money Murni did not resort to forcing or nagging her husband off his money. Alternatively Murni recounts her own effort to save up her own money so that this vacation to London could be realized. Through baking and selling cookies Murni eventually got enough fund to go, for her the important thing was her husbands permission.

Nonetheless she did acknowledge that at the last minute before departure to London her husband did give her some money to spend although she didn't ask from him.

She says;

*aa yes I did , after I stopped working you know I was used to earning my own salary so I made cookies cakes..aa chocolate cake aand I even went for a month holiday from the cake sale money that I got aahaah., during that time my sister was studying in London she was there 4 years so I thought I want to go for holiday but I know my husband is thrifty aa so I had to find my own money and that time I didn't have a job. but.I managed to save up RM4000 from selling cookies and that time everybody was crazily selling chocolate cakes, so I made chocolate cakes, traditional Malay cookies and when people order I will sell and*

*keep the money. During that time Azra was 2 years old, I told him (Mazlan) I want to go to London... to visit my sister there I just want your permission aa you have to give me because I already have the budget..aa i just want your permission aa.. so he said ok..*

Interviewer: so you went to London alone?

*Ahah I brought Azra at that time she was 2 years old and I stayed in London for a month ...you know in the first place my husband didn't give me any money so I said to myself I got one stingy husband (lowering her voice) until we reached the airport and until I was in the departure hall then only he gave me (hahahah) he gave me RM1000 to spent hahah at first in my heart I thought he was cruel for not giving me any money just because he knows I have , then when I got into the departure hall finally he gives me hahahaaa, but then when I was in London I used the credit card until the bank called up to check because it was frequently used..*

### **9.3.4 Rejecting unsatisfactory Marriage.**

This theme emerged in Bibah's life story. She depicts her decision to end her marriage as the best rather than putting up with mental and physical anguish in staying married. She describes that she is willing to support her children with her own income rather than rely on her ex-husband's income which she feels uncertain of whether it came from non-prohibited sources (*halal*)<sup>25</sup> according to Islam. Furthermore she feels that all through her

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<sup>25</sup> Halal are lawful or permissible sources/food/things and others that Muslims are allowed to consume based on the rules in the Quran and consensus of the Muslim scholars or shari'ah. Usually non-halal (haram) sources –for example income that came from cheating during work or bribery which then is used to buy food will affect the spirituality and characteristics of persons consuming food bought from this income.

marriage she had been doing a one-woman show where every single thing in her household was her responsibilities. She says;

*after one year when he saw there was no chance for me taking him back he stopped but for me its ok I don't want the children to get money from him because I dont know what kind of money his getting I don't want the children to get this kind of money..if its not from a 'halal' source then it will affect my children's ability to study well..so its better that they get the money from me Interviewer: (what made feel there was no chance of getting back)? there is nothing that can touch my heart, from the beginning he was not a family man..he never bothered..you just imagine everything I have to deal with until anything and everything was up to me to do it..even if there was a leak in the pipe I had to call the plumber.. until I think I can become a plumber now as well because I am really expert now because if I wait for him to resolve for me it will be there without any action soo everything I had to do it..and then love..he doesn't care about the family*

## 9.4 Summary

This chapter has represented the discussions on the emerging cultural framework that informs guides the women consumer’s consumption and lifestyle as depicted in the table below. These are The caring framework (negotiating family friendly consumption, give the best for the children, anticipating for future consequences), Cultivation Piety framework (priority for Islamic products, participation in religious activities, guarding of Aurat and emphasizing religious values) and The Bilateralism framework (banker and investor of the house, maintaining strong kinship relations, avoiding direct confrontation and rejecting unsatisfactory marriage).

**Table 11: Emergent Cultural Framework and Themes**

<b>Caring Framework</b>	<b>Cultivating Piety Framework</b>	<b>Bilateralism Framework</b>
Negotiating Family friendly consumption	Priority for Islamic products	Banker and investor of the house
Give the best for the children	Participation in religious activities	Maintain strong kinship relations
Anticipation for future Consequences	Guarding of Aurat	Avoid direct confrontation
	Emphasizing religious values	Reject unsatisfactory marriage

## Chapter 10: Conclusion

*Unlike the reassuring truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and the world view that inform them. Sometimes the truth we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters 'outside' the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them.*

*'Truths' in Interpreting Women's Lives, p.261 (Barbre et al., 1989)*

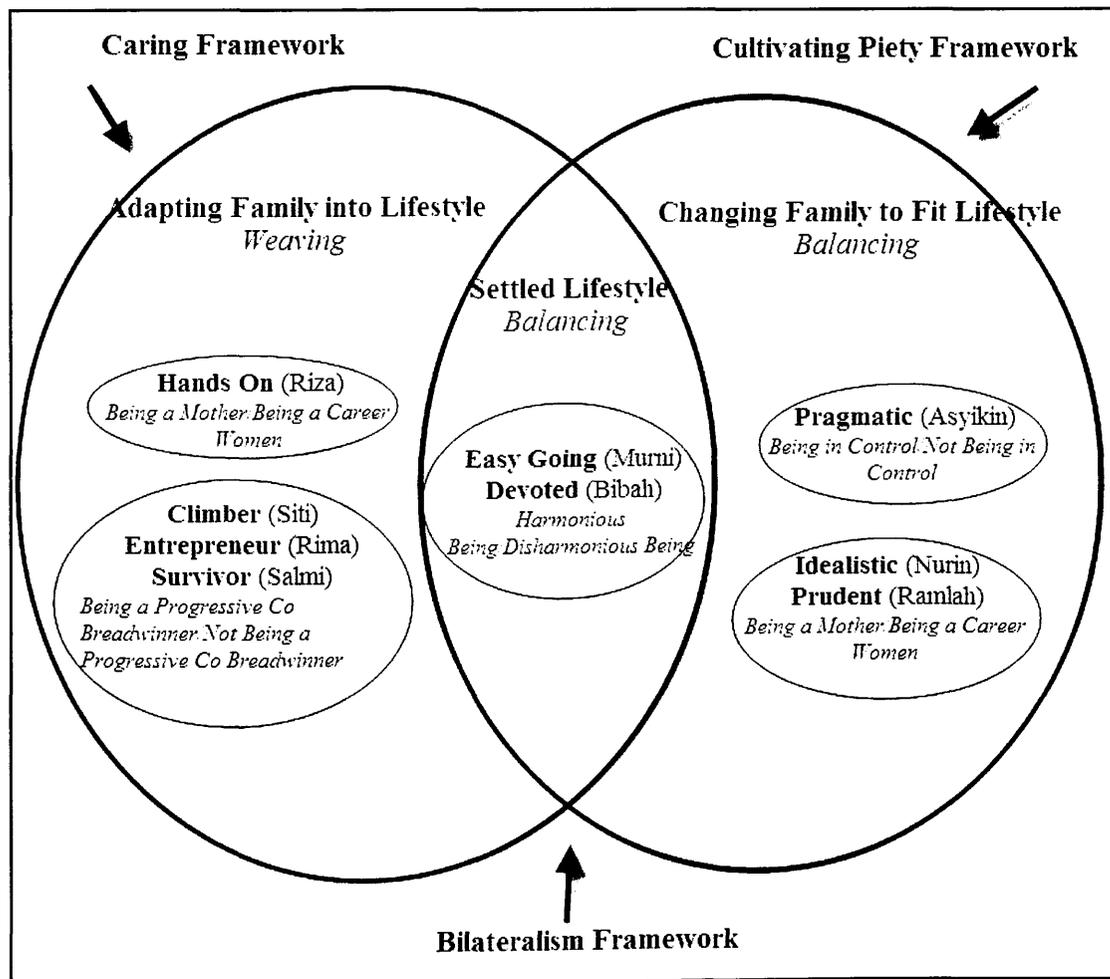
### 10.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge. It also presents a discussion on the directions of future research.

### 10.1 Contribution to knowledge

This section discussed the insights uncovered by the study through exploring women’s meaningful experience of everyday consumption which also reflects the empirical and theoretical contribution added to the existing knowledge in relations to consumer lifestyle. Figure 5 below illustrates the conceptual framework of women consumer’s lifestyle established from the study which summarizes and ties in all the findings elucidated from the study.

**Figure 5: Women Consumer's Lifestyle Framework**



### **10.1.1 Context of study**

Generally studies on consumer lifestyle using emic approach have particularly been conducted in the West with very limited studies conducted in the non-Western context. However studies particularly on societies of the Southeast Asia are under researched - studies from this region (with different context such as ethnic composition, economic and social development) are usually tagged on countries such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Japan. These countries are implicitly seen as representative of Eastern consumers (Hashim & Woodruffe-Burton, 2006; Wong, 2007; Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010). Consequently exploring Malaysian (Malay) women consumers' lifestyle represents an interesting and insightful context to fill this void.

### **10.1.2 Elucidating Genres of Lifestyles – Beyond the ‘Juggling’ Lifestyle**

My study extends the theory on lifestyle by elucidating that a more nuanced difference in consumption could indeed be discerned by exploring lifestyle through the cultural meaning consumer give their consumption. Findings demonstrate empirically the existence of various different genres of lifestyle across similar categories of women consumer's (Hands on Lifestyle, Idealistic Lifestyle, Pragmatic Lifestyle, Prudent Lifestyle, Climber Lifestyle, Entrepreneur Lifestyle, Easy Going Lifestyle and Devoted Lifestyle). In contrast had the 'behaviourist' or 'universalist' model been applied (Holt, 1994; , 1997 see also Section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 ; Thompson & Troester, 2002) these women consumers would be categorized under the same type of lifestyle e.g. the Caring Lifestyle

(all these women have the 'caring' value) which abstract away any nuance or subtle meanings that is available across these women's consumption and lifestyle.

Whilst women's lifestyle have been studied widely in the field of sociology, in consumer research much of what we know of women's lifestyle and consumption still rests on the issues of the 'juggling' lifestyle between work and family (Casey & Martens, 2007; Thompson, 1996). My study moves forward this pause in consumer research literature and extends the information we know about women's lifestyle and consumption from two aspects; Firstly besides 'juggling' between work and family, women consumer's employed 'weaving' as a strategy to integrate and connect this two spheres of their life in line with the sociological studies such as (Garey, 1999; Halpern & Murphy, 2005; Hattery, 2001) e.g. in the 'Adapting Family into Lifestyle' snapshot (Riza-Hands on Lifestyle, Siti-Climber Lifestyle, Rima-Entrepreneur Lifestyle and Salmi-Survivor Lifestyle) these women didn't described their work and family as oppositional instead various ways of consumption was employed in weaving or integrating the two spheres to ensure they achieve a win-win situation. For these women their participation in employment didn't result in them feeling guilty or having sense of doubt instead they see it as a positive factor and necessary particularly in helping them secure a better standard of living for their children currently and in the future.

Secondly besides balancing or juggling work and family, my study illuminates that women's lifestyle can involve balancing other issues such as balancing the worldly/material life with spiritual life e.g in the Settled Lifestyle snapshot (Murni-

Easygoing Lifestyle and Bibah-Devoted Lifestyle) these two women described of being concerned with issues beyond work and family. Alternatively these women's concerned was on balancing between their worldly affairs and commitment to God which they believed would give them a balanced physical and spiritual health.

### **10.1.2 Illuminating Lifestyle as project and narrative of self identity**

Generally my findings were able to capture the nature of lifestyle as a concept and space for consumer's to construct their self-identity as theorized by disparate of scholars e.g. (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Featherstone, 2007 [1991]; Giddens, 1991; Slater, 1997; Wattanasuwan, 2005). My findings shows that each women's distinctive and creative ways in achieving the lifestyle they aspire are reflections of the (re) presentation and (re) fashioning of their self identity. Consequently these women's lived experience demonstrates juxtaposing both consumption and non-consumption as an important aspect of constructing lifestyle and reflecting our sense of being (Dobscha & L.Ozanne, 2001; Thompson & Troester, 2002; Wilk, 1997). For example Riza (Hands on Lifestyle) and Nurin (Idealistic Lifestyle) were very selective in choosing consumption activities and experience that they felt were suitable for their children. Both these women rejects consumption which only provides tangible material benefits, alternatively they opt for consumption which could bring with it positive and knowledgeable experience to their children and their family as a whole such as watching children's film at the cinema, story telling events and going to the aquarium. These women were very critical of the shopping mall as a place for leisure, for them shopping mall is one of many capitalism

strategy constructed to seduced ‘vulnerable’ consumers particularly children to consume unnecessarily. At the same time women’s lived experience also showed that they embraced consumer culture; for example Asyikin (Pragmatic Lifestyle) treats the shopping mall as one of the places for her and her family to go for a retreat or vacation to enjoy as a whole family. Meanwhile Salmi (Survivor Lifestyle), Siti (Climber Lifestyle) as well as Nurin (idealistic Lifestyle) sees the wide array of commercially produced food such as those at fast food chains and restaurants as a blessing as they are convenient outlet to help these women when they don’t have the time to cook.

In addition to this, my study shed light on the reflexive process of constructing lifestyle in line with (Featherstone, 2007 [1991]) and (Giddens, 1991) theorization about lifestyle as a site for constructing self-identity. These women lived experienced demonstrate that they are not passive receptors of their contextual background instead they are able to reflexively shape their own lifestyle through various creative strategies (Bourdieu, 1984; Gans, 1999 [1975]). Although my study showed that their lifestyle were to a certain extent bounded by particular factors such as – the amount of income/ wealth, these women demonstrated immense effort to increase or acquire this source in the quest to better their life and secure their children’s future e.g. Rima (Entrepreneur Lifestyle) and Salmi (Survivor Lifestyle) focused towards increasing their source of income or wealth in order to create better condition or opportunities for their family. In addition money and education were seen as an important source of capital to guarantee a secure future as described by Siti (Climber Lifestyle) and Rima (Entrepreneur Lifestyle) when discussing about their children education expenses.

Further to this although these women consumers were to a certain extent free to move across dynamic space of lifestyle my study showed no evidence that these women were competing for a high status lifestyle for others to see as suggested by (Bourdieu, 1984) and other classical theorists such as (Weber, 1946/1958) and (Veblen, 2007 [1899]), instead these women's consumption and lifestyle were directed towards self realization to achieve goals and motives for the self and in relations with their significant other. This is in line with the findings of (Longhurst et al., 2000; Longhurst & Savage, 1996) whose studies found that consumers appear to reject to be categorised under any class instead they were inclined to define their own individualized identity.

### **10.1.3 Dimension of the caring self**

My study further contributes to the theory of the gendered self (section 3.3.3) by elucidating more than one dimension of the 'caring self' related to the feminine identity. According to scholars (e.g. Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Stern, 1990) feminine identity revolves on ideals of care which means women emphasized on relationship and connectedness in their self concept. My study illustrates different dimension of the 'caring self'. First is the 'conflicting caring self' - in the 'Changing Lifestyle to fit family' snapshot these women expressed overwhelmed and frustration in their process to fulfil competing needs of themselves and the needs of their significant others (e.g. their family, children) thus resulting them to precariously 'Balance' both these needs as shown in their

balancing strategies between work and family (their consumption experienced revolves around reconciling or alleviating their ‘conflicting caring self’ (see Chapter 8).

Secondly is the ‘connecting caring self’ – which is shown through the ‘Adapting family into Lifestyle’ snapshot where women described the needs of the self and significant others as a connection. Consequently their stories depicted them ‘Weaving’ both these needs (their consumption experienced focused towards integrating their work and family).

Furthermore, my study show demonstrates that the connecting caring self can involved a need for connection with spiritual or religious matter – through the ‘Settled Lifestyle’ snapshot these women described the need for relationship and connectedness with God. They described the importance of balancing their worldly and religious affairs (their consumption focused on maintaining this balance).

#### **10.1.4 Uncovering Cultural Frameworks**

By analyzing consumer life stories my study offer insights into significant cultural frameworks that consumers used to interpret and make sense of their everyday consumption. My study also adds to the current theorization on these cultural frameworks (as discussed in Chapter 9), some of the life stories reinforces existing theories and some of them extend by adding new themes under the cultural framework for example under Cultivating Piety framework the theme ‘guarding of aurat’ saw women’s concern going

beyond the issue of veiling (see Chapter 9). Besides ‘the ethics of care’(Gilligan, 1982) or the caring consumption framework’ (Thompson, 1996) my study elucidate other significant cultural framework that contextualizes these women’s consumption and lifestyle, they are ‘Cultivating Piety Framework’ and ‘Bilateralism Framework’. The consumption practices that were influenced by the ‘Cultivating piety framework’ are consuming Islamic products, participation in religious classes, guarding of aurat and emphasizing religious value. While consumption practices that were influenced by the Bilateralism Framework are financial administrator and investor of the house, maintaining strong kinship relations, avoiding direct confrontation and not putting up with unsatisfactory marriage.

Consequently my study shed light that being women and practicing the same religion doesn’t mean applying the same monolithic consumption practices, instead these women consumers carry out creolised consumption practices – where they carefully appropriate and select suitable consumption by juxtaposing from the traditional and modern, local and foreign sources in their daily lives to articulate their self-identities. Equally important is how this ‘local’ form of consumption practices demonstrates that consumers are actively negotiating the conflict, ambivalence and changes they experienced in their daily lives which shapes and influences their lifestyle. Accordingly these plural consumption practices are not simply a rejection or resistance response to capitalism and modernity. Alternatively these new hybrid forms of consumption practices is a result of consumer’s negotiating their own modern identities drawing from the old, new, the local and the global.

### 10.1.5 Lifestyle and Life Themes

My study adds and reinforces previous knowledge on consumer lifestyle and life themes by showing that life themes are important in giving meaning and driving consumer's lifestyle (Anbascher & Anbascher, 1956; Csikzentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979; Mick & Buhl, 1992). This is reflected across women's stories where life themes repeatedly emerge and these women expressing attempts or efforts in resolving them through their lived lifestyle. These women gave their own meanings and interpretation to the life theme in relation to their life world. For example Riza's unresolved life theme/goal (Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman) translates as striving to be with the children and be a career woman, meanwhile Nurin's unresolved life theme/goal (Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman) translates as striving to be a perfect wife and mother while at the same time strive to be a perfect daughter. In addition some of the consumption described by these women that was directed to resolved their existential life goals consumption these women attempted to resolve their existential life goals are for example to fulfill her existential concern of Being a Mother/Being a Career Woman simultaneously, Ramlah resorts to employing a helper so she could prioritize consumption that makes children happy and managing the family's financial, Murni and Bibah's strive to achieve their life theme of Harmonious Being through living an Easy Going Lifestyle (Murni) (e.g. making sure her consumption activities are not stressful, indulging in serious health consumption activities) and living a Devoted Lifestyle (Bibah) (e.g. prioritizing her consumption for her children's need and also maintaining her relationship with God).

## 10.2 Limitations and Future Directions

The purpose of this thesis was to understand and investigate the lived experience of women consumers' lifestyle from an emic approach within a qualitative paradigm. This necessitates a small sample size to enable the depth and nuance of consumption pattern to be captured. Although this limited sample size provided invaluable insights into women's lifestyle and consumption pattern; it is also recognized as one of the potential limitations of this study. This research cannot claim to offer generalizations as studies with larger sample population are able to, instead the findings of this study are offered for theory building to answer calls from scholars (Bagozzi, 1994; Holt, 1997; J. G. Miller, 2002; Woodruffe-Burton & Hashim, 2010) who espoused researchers to first seek to understand the theoretical difference underlying consumer's lifestyle through 'culturally informed methods'. Consequently the Local Cultural Framework of the Malay women consumers established from this study (e.g. Cultivating Piety Framework and Bilateralism Framework) which provides an alternative from the Western devised lifestyle framework, can be used as a basis to build upon future research work investigating local consumer lifestyle in a bigger scale involving a large survey research where generalisations can be made.

A second possible constrain of this thesis relates to the fairly similar background of respondents. My study was limited to women consumers from Malay middle class, well-educated and who were living in Selangor. Consequently the study does not claim to have developed an exhaustive account of women consumers' lifestyle framework. There are

possibilities that when looking from different settings, will lead to different insights or discoveries. Future research will have the potential to explore different avenues of consumer settings such as looking at lifestyle of consumers from different backgrounds such as those with less/inadequate resources or those from affluent background. Future research could also broaden the age of participants to be inclusive of women consumers from various age categories, particularly those from the age 50 and above and also women from the age 20-30 years of age, this would help contribute to a breadth of lifestyle experiences in addition to seeking insights. In addition it also rests with future research to extend this study and investigate the lifestyle of women consumers from other cultural frameworks for example Chinese or Indian consumers.

Another possible limitation relates to the method employed in the interviews. Single interviews had been carried out with each participant which undoubtedly produced detailed insights of consumers lived experienced of lifestyle. However it is recognized that future research could gain more insights by carrying out two sessions of interviews. Subsequent interviews or follow-up session would be useful to discuss further, issues that the participant's may highlight in the initial interview.

Other potential research that could be done in future work that have been recognised from this study is women's lived experienced of domestic help services particularly employing helpers which was an issue that had significant implication unto women's lives in this study. Furthermore it would be interesting for future work on consumer lifestyle to include women and their spouse to gain more insights.

**Appendix A: Paper presented at the Association for Consumer Research, Gender, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Conference, Edinburgh (2006)**

**Nurturing Mother and Wife: Re-examining the Concept of Lifestyle in the context of Non-Western Consumer Culture.**

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## **Nurturing Mother and Wife: Re-examining the Concept of Lifestyle in the context of Non-Western Consumer Culture**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The concept of lifestyle and values has received much attention in the literature (e.g. Rokeach, 1973, Kahle, 1983 and Schwartz, 1994) but it can be argued that analysis of lifestyle from a non-western perspective is a much neglected area. Exploration of the extant literature shows that even though there were some lifestyle studies using the traditional frameworks in non-western countries and cultures, these were carried out borrowing lifestyle frameworks or typologies from the West (e.g. Tai and Tam, 1996, Tai and Tam, 1998), despite some contemporary researchers highlighting the need for lifestyle to be considered within a cultural framework (Holt, 1997 and Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, little work has been done on gender effects and lifestyle. This paper seeks to redress the balance, albeit in a small way, by arguing for exploration of the concept of lifestyle within a cultural context and presenting a case study to illustrate why this cultural context- and gender - is so important.*

## **Nurturing Mother and Wife: Re-examining the Concept of Lifestyle in the context of Non-Western Consumer Culture**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research regarding social patterns of consumption and their connection with lifestyle has been the domain of interest from researchers from diverse disciplines ranging from sociologists (e.g. Veblen [1899] 1994; Bordieu 1984) to market and consumer researchers (e.g.; Holt 1997; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001). In marketing, social consumption patterns have received much attention because they serve as a foundation for market segmentation which is referred to as lifestyle/psychographic research (Ziff 1971; Wells 1975; Gunter and Furnham 1992; Vyncke 2002). However this particular approach has been criticized by researchers for not being able to successfully explicate the differences in consumption patterns, consequently alternative frameworks for conducting lifestyle research are offered (Holt 1995, 1997; Thompson and Troester 2002). As a result there has been a growing amount of research which uses alternative frameworks to analyze consumer consumption patterns and lifestyles (e.g. Thompson et.al 1990; Thompson 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001 and Thompson and Troester 2002). Despite such developments, however, it can be argued that analysis of lifestyle from a non-western perspective is a much neglected area. Exploration of the extant literature shows that even though there were some lifestyle studies using the traditional frameworks in non-western countries, these studies were carried out borrowing lifestyle frameworks or typologies from the West (e.g. Tai and Tam 1996; Tam and Tai 1998).

Further to this, the literature also reflects a need for research into the gendered nature of consumption phenomena and also a consumer research which will represent women fully and fairly, avoiding masculine ideologies and gender biases (e.g. Bristor and Fischer, 1993, Woodruffe, 1996). However developments in marketing and consumer research still frequently present works which are based on masculine ideologies and fail to represent women completely (Catterall et.al 2000). Consequently for consumer research to contribute to more valuable and accurate knowledge Bristor and Fischer (1993) assert that *“the discipline must be highly sensitive to sex and gender including issues such as race, class, culture and sexual orientation, therefore it must support a plurality of approaches capable of capturing rich and complex consumption phenomena, as well as engage in ongoing and critical self-reflection”* (pg 533). In a similar vein, there have been calls for marketers and consumer researchers to not only conduct their research for the marketer or business interests (Holbrook, 1987) but to place the ‘voice of the customer’ or to benefit the interest of the consumer from their research (Griffin and Hauser, 1993; Olander 1993).

Building on these gaps in the literature, the current research aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge by re-examining the concept of lifestyle in the context of non-western consumer culture through analysis of the lifestyle of women in Malaysia and their lived experience of consumption. In this paper, we present an overview of the literature on the concept of lifestyle and argue for the (re-)inclusion of cultural frameworks in understanding lifestyle; to this end we present an in depth case study of a Malay women based on a phenomenological interview conducted from a feminist

perspective (which at this stage breaks from the boundaries of a value-neutral approach) to illustrate and support our position. The longer term objective of the research, then, will be to construct a lifestyle typology from the consumption experience of Malaysian women in order to redress the balance somewhat between traditional western lifestyle concepts and alternative cultural frameworks.

### **FEMINIST APPROACH – THE ‘OTHER’ PERSPECTIVE**

In the context of exploring consumers’ lifestyle, a new framework or approach must be adopted for the resulting knowledge to lead to meaningful structures of lifestyle and generate real insights. Consequently a feminist perspective can offer researchers alternative ways of doing research which embrace experiential aspects of consumption and free the researcher from the inadequacy of traditional approaches (Woodruffe, 1997).

In adopting this perspective however, the researcher will attempt to avoid a Western universalism of feminism as proposed by Karim (1995) in which she cautions researchers not to apply Western feminist perspectives when researching gender from non-Western culture in which she posits *that ‘ the assumption that one should begin with the premise of unequal power generating gender hierarchies is not necessarily relevant in non-Western civilizations in Southeast Asia, which derive theory of knowledge from concepts and values of bilateralism: the need to maintain social relationships through rules of*

*complementarity and similarity rather than hierarchy and opposition, and the need to reduce imbalances in power through mutual responsibility and cooperation rather than oppression and force'*(pg16). Nagata (1995) further extends this stance by emphasizing that *'to avoid a brand of cultural hegemony in the form of Western scientific analysis there must be a niche for more than one kind of feminism, allowing for culturally appropriate interpretations, and informed by the views of the subjects themselves, thus becoming the product of an interactive exercise'* (pg102).

Accordingly a feminist perspective which is adopted will also contribute to methodological pluralism in consumer research within which Woodruffe (1996) succinctly explain that *'....the researcher must be personally involved with the subject, must experience the subject, if humanly possible...and the research must be emancipatory in nature and must take in the individual's perspective.'* (pg:333) As co-researchers, we represent two diverse voices; Western and non-Western. However, as women and feminists we approach our research from a unified perspective. Reflexively, we recognize how our role shapes and influences the nature of the research and, in particular, western and non-western interpretations of feminism and women's roles and we believe this is an important dimension of our research.

## **MALAYSIAN WOMEN – CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLES**

In order to examine the lifestyle of Malay women it is first useful to introduce a brief background of women consumers in Malaysia and further link it to the broader aspect of lifestyle research in the light of existing literature. Traditionally, women have been related to consumption through their role as caretakers in the family. Women were acknowledged as playing a prominent role in influencing the purchase on household goods. However, significant changes in women's role and status in the economy and society have shown that women can no longer be seen as the secondary consumer to their male counterpart.

The contemporary situation in Malaysia is that the female market is increasing in terms of independence and spending power and hence attracts significantly more interest from marketers than previously. The 2000 Population Census indicates that half of Malaysia's total population (49.1%) or 11.4 million of the total population were women. After close to fifty years of Independence, profound changes in women's roles and status such as rising affluence and education levels have brought about changes in their consumption patterns and practices. Generally purchasing power and the standard of living is higher and there is heightened consumerism and materialism. As social and structural changes affect women and their consumption patterns, it is anticipated they will also influence the lifestyle of women.

## THE CONCEPT OF LIFESTYLE – A REVIEW

The subject of lifestyle has received widespread attention within the literature, with various approaches to the concept of lifestyle arising from different disciplines and research traditions. Ironically, one of the most common features of lifestyle in the literature is that there seems to be no clear consensus about the definition of the term 'lifestyle'.

The usage of the concept of lifestyle emerged from the interest of sociology researchers to understand how consumption relates and reproduces social groups and institutions within societies (Holt, 1995). According to Trigg (2001: pg 110) there is evidence of the existence of the concept of 'style of life' or lifestyle in the writings of Veblen ([1899] 1994) in which he posits that *'although he may have not have used the word 'lifestyle'..he came very close, however, referring to 'changing styles' (174) and 'schemes of life' (84)'*. Meanwhile Bourdieu (1984) uses the concepts of cultural capital and habitus to define a theoretical framework of lifestyles. Habitus explains how lifestyle exists through particular principles that influence the behavior of individuals, meanwhile different types of lifestyles are related with particular combinations of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu cited in Trigg 2001). Anderson and Golden (1988) credit psychologist Alfred Adler as *'playing a major role in developing the lifestyle concept and integrating it into our idiom and thought'*. Adler's concept of lifestyle is: *'The organismic ideas of the individual as an actor rather than a re-actor; ...the purposiveness, goal directedness,*

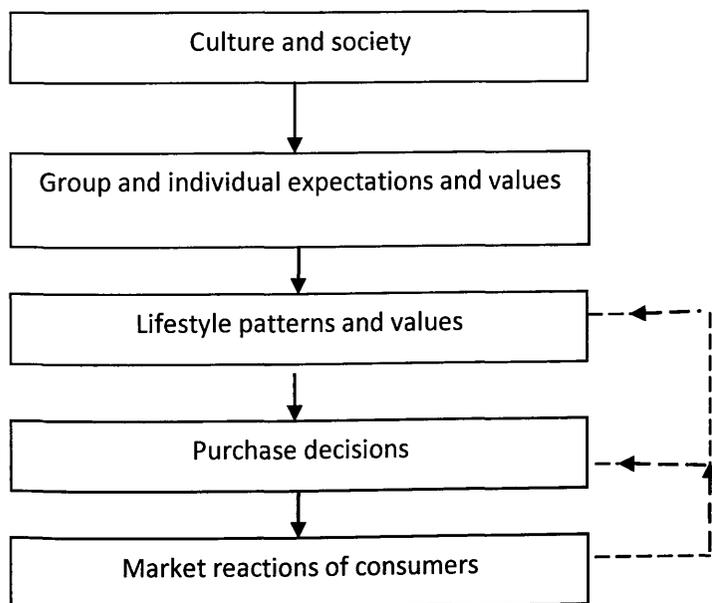
*unity, self-consistency and uniqueness of the individual; and...the ultimately subjective determination of his actions* '(Ansbacher, 1967: 191, cited from Anderson and Golden (1988)).

Generally within the consumer and market research, the 'lifestyles' concept is usually linked with the concept of psychographics and values with the exception of Holt (1997) who examines lifestyle within a cultural framework and Arnould and Thompson (2005) who broadened the cultural framework further in his discussion. The term 'lifestyle' has been linked with psychographics in the literature, with much confusion still exists between the two terms within the marketing literature. Anderson and Golden (1984) in their critical review and recommendation on lifestyle and psychographics criticize on the lack of clarity between the two terms. They argued that much of the literature has variously defined the term 'psychographics' and has included 'lifestyle' as part of psychographic variables or at least did not attempt to distinguish the term 'lifestyle' and psychographic.

The concept of lifestyle patterns and their relationship to marketing was introduced by Lazer (1963) and this definition is one of the most widely used and accepted (Lawson and Todd 2002) which is; *'Lifestyle is a systems concept. It refers to the distinctive or characteristic mode of living, in its aggregative and broadest sense, a whole society or a segment thereof. It is concerned with those unique ingredients or qualities which describe the style of life of some culture or group, and distinguish it from others. It*

*embodies the patterns that develop and emerge from the dynamics of living in a society. Lifestyle, therefore is the result of such forces as culture, values, resources, symbols, license and sanctions'* (pg130). Lazer (1963) also proposed a lifestyle hierarchy (see Figure 1), which shows that the concept of lifestyle is linked to other concepts such as values which are derived from a broad cultural and society framework. Referring to the figure, it can be said that lifestyle patterns and values emerge from group and individual expectations and values. Consequently this lifestyle pattern and values then will determine purchase decisions and market reactions. The figure also shows that this connection is reciprocal in which market reactions of consumers can also have an influence on purchase decisions and on lifestyle pattern and values.

**Figure 1: Lifestyle Hierarchy**



Source: Lazer, 1963; pg 131

Apart from linking the lifestyle concept to a broader framework, Lazer (1963) emphasizes the importance of lifestyle as a concept which is significant in understanding and investigating consumer behavior and also a point of combining marketing and other disciplines as he aptly puts *'Lifestyle therefore, is a major behavioral concept for understanding, explaining and predicting consumer and business behavior. It is a more generalized concept than existing concepts of consumer behavior that have been advanced in marketing. Such topics as mobility, leisure, social class, lifecycle, status, conformity, mass and the family as a consuming unit are all part of the life-style fabric. As a result, life-style study could foster the unification of findings and theories related to consumer behavior. In fact, life-style is a point of interdisciplinary convergence among marketing and such subject-matter areas as sociology, social and cultural anthropology, psychology, demography and social psychology'* (pg 132).

In our opinion, the definition given by Lazer is the most appropriate because it captures the essence of what lifestyle is about; surprisingly much of the work done (with reference to previous lifestyle approach e.g personality/values and object significant research) on lifestyle since this definition from over 40 years ago seems to have overlooked the two important elements of **culture** and **dynamics of living**.

## PRELIMINARY STUDY OF LIFESTYLE IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia society consists of a population of mixed ethnic background comprising of three main groups which are the Malays (65.1%), Chinese (26%) and Indians (7.7%), the remaining 1.2% are other races (Department of Statistics, 2002). The Malays are usually Muslim by religion, which is also the official religion of the country. Meanwhile other ethnics practise other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism and Confucianism. *Bahasa Malaysia* is the official language in Malaysia, however English is widely spoken. Other languages spoken are Mandarin, Cantonese, other Chinese dialect, Tamil and Punjabi. The reason to study Malay women consumers (as opposed to Chinese or Indian people living in Malaysia) is because this ethnic group represent the largest percentage of women in Malaysia hence this group has been chosen as the focus for our research in developing underlying insights of their consumption experience and thus lifestyle themes.

This case study is based on an in-depth interview which was carried out in the UK with a Malaysian woman consumer in her late 30's whose ethnicity is a Malay and who will be referred to as Z hereafter. Z is currently doing her PhD (hence is living in the UK just for the duration of her studies) and is married with 5 children. Most of the field work for the research is actually being conducted in Malaysia among women from diverse social backgrounds and across a wide age range; however, it was felt that the fact that 'Z' is currently residing in the UK should not preclude her from participating in the research.

## Z'S STORY AND DISCUSSION

One important cultural theme emerging from the consumption patterns of Z is a lifestyle around the framework of nurturing or caring. This category of lifestyle theme was also identified by Holt (1997) and Thompson (1996) in which the nurturing or caring consumer consumption or lifestyle revolves around the house. In Z's case, most of the time she refers to act of consumption which is centered in the home and focused in buying for the household, pleasing the children or husband. The nurturing or caring theme in Z's life can be seen emerging in her description below where she repeatedly linked shopping with/for her husband, children or for the house in general.

*I am not a type of person who loves shopping ok....i.....shop when I feel that I need something, I need to look for something and that is since Malaysia ok and urrrmm...and of course when you have the fund to shop and yeah like I said because you need something then I'll go I'll go shopping and I will decide on a date to go...and usually urmmm my husband will come along as well. Its like when I want to go shopping...urm (laughing a bit) its always because...even when I go shopping sometimes with my friends....but 'jarang' (not all the time). I go shopping with my husband just because its like he can give me ideas of whatever and usually things that I buy is not...its always things for the house or things for the kids or things for.....me I still need him to..let say ok...if I want to look for clothing urmm I still need him to say eeh I want to go and look for this one then my husband will say...ooo ok lets go and look for it.*

*In Malaysia ok... if I go shopping for ex...sometimes I wait shopping for ...where if I want something that's not urgent...I just ok..for the house...I see that duvet covers needs changing or to have spares so I'll wait for the sales so when the sales comes ok I'll tell my husband that we need some duvet covers. My husband will say ok let's go and look for it, then we'll go together but will not bring the kids. You know what shopping is like in when sales in Malaysia. So that's the shopping I would not take my kids..definitely.*

Another view shows Z as a caring mother in which she mostly runs and manage the household, although in Malaysia a paid helper who usually lives with the family is a commonly used resource for women juggling between career and home roles.

*.....ok...ok I just take my life, yes you get your husband doing, helping you out with cooking or hovering, I think that's about it maybe the main bulk of it, but...looking after the kids work urmmm looking into the kids eating, what they're eating, what they like, what they don't like, sending them of to classes, all these things.....urmm going to parents day or whatever...its always the mom's whose more concern and that's a task.*

In a traditional Malay household, although women's responsibilities are mostly domestic while men's are mostly public (Strange 1981; Karim 1992) it would be a mistake to

assume that women are without power or influence (Raybeck, 1974) (cited in Stimpfl 2000; pg170). In her description about the decision to hire a helper, the excerpts shows that the decision was influenced by both Z and her husband, where she repeatedly used the term 'we';

*Ok, so let's start with that because I have four kids right and they all have grown up, I have relied on maids before this...and we both me and my husband we understand some people think that they don't want a maid because it invades their privacy which can be true, but me and my husband have our priority is that our children come back to their own house, when they go to school and our priority is not to wake them u in the morning when they're sleeping, when hey were babies we both agreed we had to live with this until the kids are grown up. So as much as I don't like to have a maid or whatever but my husband you know just told me we have to tolerate this because he feels that he doesn't want the children to be babysit elsewhere, he wants the children to come back from school, to sleep in their own beds, to eat in their own house and to be comfortable. So we have decided that we have to have a maid alright. And urmm...if you ask me whether I like to have a maid because not everybody likes to have a maid but a maid does help except that for you will have another person in the house right.*

*So I have to live with that, we both decide we both don't like to have a maid as much because it invades our privacy right, but at the same time you can't actually*

*cope with a lot of things because your house will be sooo in a mess. When you go to work, both of you...its like so much in a mess and its so soothing to come back and knowing that somebody is taking care of that you know that's one thing. But both of us understand that when the kids grow up we don't have to have maids anymore.*

Much of Z's narrative focuses on how there are certain chores which she definitely thinks should not be done by her husband in public and also there are chores her husband would not let her do in public but this would conversely be acceptable if they were undertaken in a private situation (which to her means invisible from the public eye or in a totally different country outside Malaysia). This can be identified and linked with the Malay culture and gender social interaction which reinforces the view put forward by Karim (1995) that in Southeast Asia in particular (including the Malay society), women allow men to dominate religious and political life in formal and public activity but continue to uphold important areas of decision making in the informal sphere Karim (1995).

*Of course you always want to feel ...that...if you don't have a maid definitely you'll need your husband's support to help you around at least with little little things but I have this thing about the things that my husband can help me out with these are things which I.....like in Malaysia wouldn't imagine him.....ok....this is me I don't know about others but I can't imagine him hanging the clothes outside like he can't imagine me washing the car (right-H). These are things...I don't*

*know whether it's the pride or whatever but you know my husband wouldn't like I seeing me washing the car you know..like don't do it and I wouldn't ask my husband to hang clothes outside with the neighbours looking and things like that. Its what's kept in the house is in the house. You know you don't reveal this kind of things. Personally I don't find me washing the car is a problem but I realize he doesn't like it when I wash the car, its like I won't ask him to hang the clothes but in the house I can see things like cooking or hovering which I don't mind him doing (yeah-H), maybe just because like you have men chef so that kind of thinking.*

In the above excerpt, Z views washing a car as a masculine responsibility while hanging out the washing is a more feminine task and therefore thinks it would ruin her husband's image as the leading man of the house or her own image alternatively as the lady of the house. Z's views could be linked to the Malay cultural background of Z which holds that man is the head of the house. Z's views her husband act of hanging out the washing for the household as degrading her husband's 'masculine' role as per the excerpt below.

*I think..ok my concern is that actually between me and my husband it won't be a problem because we understand and its nothing...urmmm its not something...a crime that you do it but maybe it's the culture in Malaysia that you just don't want you, you feel that your husband portrays the man of the house and you just don't want to let other neighbours for example say 'hey his doing the house*

*chores, its like he's being control by the wife or something like that'. I think that's the main thing and the same thing when he doesn't let me wash the car its like it to be a macho task not a lady's job. And a woman washing the car is a bit too tough isn't it, a bit tough right. Mean he doesn't want other man for example or other ladies (starts laughing) to see me doing it. But yeah you just do it behind close doors right.*

From the interview there also emerges an important theme of custom or 'adat' which Z says influences her behaviour to a certain extent. This concords with Malay life in which Islam and 'adat' has a powerful influence. According to (Omar 2003), "... 'adat' or custom control norms, values and behaviours, and Islam institutionalized these behaviours' Adat is defined as custom and tradition which include accepted ways of doing things by the Malays." Further to this it is seen as a basis for appropriate behavior that all Malaysians should follow (Ong 1987; Karim 1992).

*I..I.consider..ooo yes I do consider what other people...the culture is something that I do respect and well I must say right and (urmm we still live in a culture where we have to consider others?-H) yes because your asking me Linda so this is my believe. So the culture thing I will not chuck it out the window you know, I will take..consider right, but wouldn't say Im a person who totally hang on to it until it becomes not reasonable, like for example men don't cook, men don't Hoover the house, men don't do this...I won't do that but maybe to look after his*

*ego also. I just feel its not appropriate you know to let him hang the clothes for example even if he doesn't mind. People might think and that's in my mind, people might think that he's being controlled or whatever and going back to your question whether I do things because of religion, religious reason yeah urmm if you ask me, that...I strongly believe.*

Another theme emerging is between balancing the importance of Islam as a religion and also doing things living life to the very best in which Z explains the importance in the excerpt below. This theme can be linked with the middle road of Islamisation advocate by the State as explained by Karim (1995) where she elaborates that '*conceptually and metaphorically, this middle road oscillates between the practical working arrangement of Malay custom (adapt) in everyday family and social life..the middle road is again expressive of the bilateralism in Muslim in Southeast Asia which means doing things in the Malay...way rather than the Arab or Western way*' (Karim, 1995, pg 41).

*You know what I think religious believes in Islam, being a muslim you have extremist practicing Muslim just like Christians right...you have to the left wing, to the right wing or to the centre. So I believe in that terms that we have to be in the centre but.....more.....improve yourself as you go. (try to be a good practicing muslim you mean?-H) yeah try to be a good practicing one which means you move towards that, not going in the centre goint to the negative side, so you go into the right side and that I feel that.....and then because of that you can perhaps*

*enjoy life because you must understand that people give up this interesting part of life just to be very strongly practicing ...Muslim for example. So they let go lots of things, but if you ask me I'm not saying you shouldn't.. I think we can balanced it up...yeah balanced it up.*

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This paper has presented an overview of some of the literature relating to lifestyle and has argued the importance of exploring the concept of lifestyle within a cultural context and recognizing cultural difference when seeking to understand lifestyle. The case study has shown how narrative – life stories - can depict many constructions of lifestyle from an individual's lived experience and, equally, it demonstrates how important the influence of culture – and cultural difference – can be when interpreting what the concept of lifestyle means in a non-western context. Although the 'nurturing' lifestyle that emerges from the narrative (and discussion) seems common to any lifestyle of a married working women, the lifestyle of this particular Malay women shows how the meaning of these experiences such as shopping, housework and other aspects of life are constructed from different values and cultural factors. This particular woman has accommodated her life to maintain the balance of her Malay and Islamic values in where she holds strongly to her role as the dutiful and caring wife and mother despite the fact that she is educated, financially independent and holds an important position in her career.

The longer term research project from which this paper is drawn has specific objectives regarding the concept of lifestyle and gender and future research is planned to construct a framework of lifestyle from non-western women's consumption experience. Within this, our goals are to examine the values desires , motivation and self-concept of women in the realm of consumption activities and experience; to examine the symbolic meaning of consumption experiences in the context of women's life goals and other priorities; in particular, to examine the socio-cultural context that stimulates the consumption experience and influences lifestyle.

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**Appendix B: Paper Presented at Academy of Marketing Conference,  
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**Cross-Cultural Consumer Research: A Conceptual Review and Critique**

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## **Introduction**

As consumer markets across the globe are reshaped by technology, social, economics and political forces coupled with dynamic cultural forces, the consumer landscape becomes diffuse and increasingly multicultural (Luna and Gupta, 2001). In order fully to address these issues, there have been calls for consumer researchers to change the focus of their research by providing an alternative or integrative framework in studying and investigating cross-cultural consumer research (Craig and Douglas, 2006; Craig and Douglas, 1997; Luna and Gupta 2001). This paper builds on two previous review studies (Sonka and Tansuhaj, 1995, which covers the period from 1970-1990 and Sin et al., 1999, which covers the period from 1991-1996) to provide a critical assessment of developments within more recent cross cultural research in terms of methodology and research context and to highlight issues for future research.

## **Article Selection and Review Method**

The selection of research to be studied follows certain criteria. First, this study will define cross cultural consumer research as any study that investigates consumer behavior in any culture or subculture. Further, a computerized search of the Social Science Citation Index was carried out under the keyword *cross cultural consumer research*. This analysis shows which journals have the highest concentration of cross cultural consumer research articles. For the purpose of this research journals that had four or more articles relating to cultural consumer research were selected. The journals were *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, *International Journal of*

*Research in Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research and Psychology and Marketing.*

Then 26 articles from these publications were selected for the review on the basis that these articles had the term 'culture' in their title.

This section presents a summary of all the studies from the six publications selected (see Appendix 1). Eleven articles were selected from International Marketing Review. The following studies all used a survey data collection method. Cunningham et al. (2006) developed a service classification scheme based on how respondents in US, France and Korea perceived and classified a set of 13 services. Three countries were chosen to represent different cultures based on Hofstede (1980, 2001) cultural dimension and student (university) samples were chosen based upon availability. Malholtra and McCort (2001) also used a university student sample, testing the Behavioral Intention Models' (TRA, Triandis and Lee) universal applicability across two cultures represented by USA and Hong Kong. Knight et al. (2001) tested a flexible model of country of origin across two countries (US and Japan). Both the above studies conducted an exploratory study on student samples before starting data collection to determine items that were appropriate to include in their questionnaire, where Malholtra and McCort (2001) used focus groups and interviews while Knight et al. (2001) conducted interviews. Meanwhile Malholtra et al. (2005) examined differences in perception of service qualities dimensions between developed (USA) and developing (India and Philippines) economies. Surveys were based on the fourteen service quality dimensions (banking service) developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) combined with Hofstede and Maslow socio-cultural factors. Cornwell et al. (2005) examines Forsyth's (1980) ethical positioning scales in three major religions in

five countries (US, UK, Austria, Brunei and Hong Kong) to see how the construct of idealism and relativism differ. Manrai et al. (2001) compared consumers from Eastern Europe on two dimensions of style which is fashion consciousness (capturing individualism) and dress-conformity (capturing collectivism).

The following studies were based on conceptual discussions. Studies by Craig and Douglas (2006) and Luna and Gupta (2001) had a common theme of discussing culture and relevant literature on cross cultural consumer research and suggested ways in improving research framework/design for cross cultural research and its impact on consumers. Smith and Reynolds (2002) are based on similar discussions of cross cultural research but with a focus on service quality. Relevant service quality literatures were reviewed and methods for detecting and correcting cross-national response biases were discussed. Meanwhile Hermann and Heitmann (2006) discussed cross cultural differences in preference for variety in the domain of cultural and marketing psychology. Penz (2006) utilized the theory of social representation to study consumers' perception and use of mobile phone services.

Three articles were selected from Journal of Business Research. Two of the following studies used survey as a method for data collection. Griffin et al. (2004) tested the measurement equivalence of the materialism scale among western and eastern European consumers. Results led to the researchers concluding that a new scale is necessary to measure materialism in cross cultural context. Gregory et al. (2002) tested the moderating

role of attitude functions in the value-attitude relationship. Survey was based on Schwartz (1992) values survey with adaptation of Triandis et al. individualism/collectivism scale. Finding supports the moderating role of attitude functions. Mooradian et al. (2006) in their study used personality traits (extraversion) and (word of mouth) and culture as a descriptor for national traits.

Both articles from the International Journal of Research in Marketing were conceptual studies. Parker and Tavassoli (2000) presented the use of physiological model to explore consumer behavior across cultures. Douglas and Craig (1997) discussed the changing dynamics of consumer behavior and the implications for cross cultural consumer research. Alternative research designs for cross-cultural studies were also discussed.

Three articles were selected from the Journal of Consumer Research. Wong et al. (2003) tested the cross cultural applicability of the mixed-worded scales using the Richin and Dawsons (1992) Material Values Scales as an exemplar. Two studies were carried out, one were conducted on samples of 800 general consumers from US, Singapore, Thailand, Japan and Korea and the other study on 400 samples from US, Thailand and Japan. Findings suggested that the structure of the mix-worded Likert scales is culturally biased and that the cross cultural applicability of such scales can be enhanced by replacing Likert scale's statements with set of questions. Aaker and Williams (1998) examines the effect of emotional appeals on members of individualist versus collectivist cultures. Two different experiments were carried out on a different set of university student samples.

The results indicated that the generation of and elaboration on a novel type of thought account for the persuasive effects found in the research. Finally Applbaum and Jordt (1996) extend the notion of 'cultural categories' (McCracken 1986) to interpret aspects of consumer behavior in Japan.

From the four articles selected from Psychology and Marketing, three used university students as samples. Wang and Waller (2006) tested the vanity construct in two different cultures represented by US and China. Cultural differences were developed from individual and collectivism dimensions. The results provided rigorous cross cultural validation test of the vanity scale. Pons et al. (2006) investigates the influence of cultural differences (North America and Middle East) on consumers' reaction to a crowded-retail environment. Singh et al. (2003) investigates how consumer socialization differs across major ethnic groups in America. Chang and Chieng (2006) conducted a comparative study on sample of real consumers at coffee chain stores in China and Taiwan.

Three articles were selected from the Journal of Advertising. Cho and Cheon (2005) examined interactivity of corporate web sites cross culturally based on Hofstede cultural dimension. Findings indicated that Western web sites highlight consumer-message and consumer-market interactivity while Eastern websites highlight consumer-consumer interactivity. Murray and Murray (1996) compared the use of music and lyrics in commercials run in the US and the Dominican Republic. A set of propositions about cross cultural differences in music and lyrics in commercials were developed. Findings

supported the propositions and indicated a need for sociological and interpretive approaches to the study of the role of music in advertising. Stern (1999) presented an overview of the theoretical relationship between evolutionary stages of gender research and multicultural research and situated the current trends in advertising research.

## **Results and Discussions**

The review indicated that most of the cross-cultural consumer research examined still adheres to the tradition that draws from cross-cultural psychology, where the primary purpose is testing the generalisability of models, concepts or constructs developed in one country to other societies or contexts (Douglas et al. 1994). Overall the researchers' approaches focus on identifying universal (culture-free) theories and concepts (or models) where data are compared across different countries or cultures to examine (mostly through experiment or quantitative methods) the universality or the applicability of these theories, concepts or models. From 26 articles, with the exception of 7 which are conceptual papers, nearly all adopted an etic approach and the concern was with testing the models, frameworks or measurement scales' generalisability or applicability across cultures using questionnaires or surveys as a tool for data collection with no or (only) minor adjustments. It can be discerned that from the studies conducted, that some researchers did make some adjustments or incorporated adaptive techniques on their measurement tools; such as using focus groups and conducting interviews to help develop items in their survey or questionnaires (see Knight et al. 2000; Malholtra and McCort, 2001). Apart from these minor adjustments only one researcher goes so far to as test and

suggest an alternative measurement scale that is more culturally appropriate (see Wong et al. 2003). Meanwhile one researcher devised a new model and tested it across cultures (see Knight et al. 2000). On the other hand, only two studies were conducted using an emic approach; Penz (2006) and Applbaum and Jordt (1996). The emic approach focuses on understanding phenomena from the viewpoint of the subject being studied or from within (Douglas et al. 1994). Luna and Gupta (2001) elaborate further on the emic perspective which they describe as follows: *'this approach does not provide 'culture-free' measure that can be directly compared instead they provide 'culture-rich' information.'* (pg46)

Of some concern therefore, is the ongoing tendency of consumer researchers to assume implicitly or explicitly that the models developed in the US or the Europe are universally applicable when researching other cultures. A salient example would be the application of Hofstede's individualism and collectivism cultural orientation. Even though this paradigm provides an easy and unproblematic framework of cultural orientation among consumers, it is generally a broad societal construct which negates the diversity of meanings that may exist in society and also downplays the importance of context or situational variables in understanding cultural influences on behavior and cognitive processes (Briley et.al 2000; Hong et al. 2000; Miller, 2002; Oysermann et al. 2002). Furthermore this assumption of consumers' cultural values based on a binary dimension could underestimate the possibility that consumers may differ due to the influences of the global forces and the dynamic nature of culture (Paek et al. 2004). Gorn (1997) and Bagozzi, (1994) are among those who have cautioned against adopting 'imported'

constructs to other cultures and suggest that while researchers can learn something by taking existing theories and measures from one culture into another, there is potentially far more to be gained by identifying theoretical differences and then working to develop measures valid across cultures. However, it was encouraging to see that some of the conceptual work reviewed focused on improving research frameworks and/or research design for cross cultural research (e.g. Craig and Douglas, 2006 and Luna and Gupta, 2001) but significant change has yet to emerge in terms of empirical work.

Another limitation of the cross-cultural (consumer) research highlighted related to the research samples frequently and largely taken from student populations (Gorn 1997; Sin et al. 1999 and Oysermann et al. 2002). Despite calls to abandon such approaches, most consumer research on cross-cultural issues (as the review shows), still relies on students as the sample. Although students provide a less costly and more convenient sample source, the generalisability of these studies is questionable especially when surveys or questionnaires are used as a method for data collection (Douglas et al. 1994). Apart from the tendency to sample exclusively from university students, most of the cross-cultural research comes from a comparison of American students as the representation of Western consumers with students from either Hong Kong, China, Korea or Japan as a representation of Eastern consumers. This overrepresentation of certain countries to represent cultures will not only limit the understanding of cultural variations and consumer behaviour but may restrict us from identifying new concepts or constructs of culture that are pertinent if we are to progress our knowledge of culture and its role in shaping consumer and consumption. Most of the cross-cultural consumer research

included in this review is still more focused on examining culture at a country level or on a national culture basis (see Appendix 1). As markets and consumers become increasingly fragmented with complex cultural influences, reliance on national boundaries as a focus of research could be deemed less useful as nations frequently differ on many cultural dimensions. An alternative approach suggests that cultural researchers should focus their attention on other cultural levels such as the culti-unit (Craig and Douglas 2006) or the micro culture (Steenkamp 2001) to acquire deeper understandings of the underlying differences (or similarities) in consumers and cultural dimension.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

The emergence of many conceptual papers on cross-cultural consumer research with a common call for the need for a methodological change in research approach indicates recognition of the need for cross-cultural research to move away from confines of traditional approaches in order to enrich and enhance our understandings of culture and its linkages to consumption or consumer behavior. Craig and Douglas (2001) invoke marketing researchers to *'create and make imaginative and thoughtful use of new approaches to understand the changing marketplace.'*(pg83). They further promote the use of qualitative research techniques as a means of understanding and interpreting trends in diverse cultural contexts; they succinctly posit *'qualitative research techniques offer a number of advantages in international market research as they are unstructured and do not entail the imposition of the researcher's pre-specified conceptual model or terminology on the respondent'*(p. 83). Venkatesh (1995) proposed the usage of textual

information in comparative research as an alternative to applying uni-cultural concepts to cross-cultural settings. Devising and using a country's or society's own models or measurement that are more culturally appropriate is another way.

The aim of cross-cultural research is not merely to increase knowledge about the differences (or similarities) in consumer behaviour issues between two nations, rather information on the 'cultural dimensions' or 'contextual factors' that cause the differences (or similarities) is also pertinent (Sin et al. 1999; Early and Singh, 1995). Consequently researchers have to go beyond national culture by taking into account different levels of culture such as microculture or the culti-unit (Steenkamp, 2001; Craig and Douglas, 2006). Also important is the need to broaden our samples from students towards taking real consumers such as housewives, shoppers or families as research participants in order to broaden our knowledge about consumers. Equally important is to move from overrepresentation of certain culture groups or certain countries and look beyond this cultures and nations in our quest to understand cultural phenomena. To capture deeper insights and understandings of culture and its manifestations, researchers could broaden their methodological lens to include an emic or qualitative approach incorporating methods such as in-depth interview, ethnographic, projective or elicitation techniques rather than to rely principally on the survey as a data collection method. Alternatively research could also be conducted by using a single culture setting, then the findings from this research (secondary data) could be compared to or with other cultures such as using triangulation (Penz, 2006).

Table 1: Summary of Cross Cultural Consumer Research Reviewed

Author and Research Title	*Journal	Culture studied	Research Methodology/Approach	Sample
Wolcott (2006) Researching in the socio-cultural context: Putting social representations theory to work	IMR	Austria	Focus Group & Free association technique (Emic)	consumer
Cham et. al (2006) Customer perceptions of service quality: A cross-cultural comparison of dimensions	IMR	USA, France & Korea	Survey	Undergraduate
Douglas (2006) Beyond national boundaries: Implications of cultural dynamics for international marketing research	IMR		Conceptual study	
Heitmann (2006) Providing more or less? Accounting for cultural differences in consumers preference for variety	IMR		Conceptual study	
Chen et al.(2005) A cross-cultural study of religion in consumers ethical position	IMR	Christians, Islam and Buddhism	Survey	consumer
Reynolds (2002) Measuring cross-cultural service quality- A framework for international marketing research	IMR		Conceptual paper	
Chen et al.(2005) Dimensions of service quality in developed and developing economies: A cross-cultural comparison	IMR	USA, India & Philippines	survey	consumer
Chen et al.(2001) A cross-cultural comparison of service quality in Eastern Europe emerging markets	IMR	Bulgaria, Hungary & Romania	Survey	consumer
Gupta (2001) An integrative framework for cross-cultural consumer behavior	IMR		Conceptual paper	

International Marketing Review    **IJRM** = International Journal of Research in Marketing    **P&M** = Psychology and Marketing  
 Journal of Business Research        **JCR** = Journal of Consumer Research        **JA** = Journal of Advertising

ed; Appendix 1: Summary of Cross Cultural Consumer Research Reviewed

s) and Research Title	*Journal	Culture studied	Research Methodology/Approach		Sam
t al. (2000) A flexible model of er country of origin perceptions: A cross- investigation	<b>IMR</b>	US & Japanese	Survey		univ
m & Jordt (1996) Notes toward an ion of MCcracken cultural categories	<b>JCR</b>	Japan		Ethnography	
an et al.(2006) Personality and Culture: of national extraversion and word of	<b>JBR</b>	12 nations in 5 continents	Secondary data		cons
t al.(2004) A cross-cultural ation of the materialism construct- g the Richins and Dawson's materialism	<b>JBR</b>	Denmark, French & Russia	Survey		Univ fami
et al.(2002) Attitude functions in er research: comparing value-attitude s in individualist and collectivist cultures	<b>JBR</b>	US & Columbia	Survey		
nd Tavassoli (2000) Homeostasis and er behavior across cultures	<b>IJRM</b>		Conceptual paper		
and Craig (1997)The changing dynamic mer behavior	<b>IJRM</b>		Conceptual paper		
t al. (2003)Do reverse-worded items d measures in cross-cultural consumer ? The case of the Material Values Scale	<b>JCR</b>	1) US, Singapore, Thailand & Korea 2)US, Thailand & Japan	Survey	consumer	



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