



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Department of Tourism and Northern Studies, Campus Alta

The Rise of the Asian Female Digital Nomad

Patricia Aida Linao

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Abstract

This feminist thesis contributes to our understanding of tourist experiences by exploring the constraints and empowerment of Asian women digital nomads. It investigates the complexity and the diversity of Asian women digital nomads and elucidates the issues of gender and race in the women's quests for a nomadic lifestyle. The empirical data were drawn from mixed method techniques of semi-structured interview and photo-elicitation, which gave the seven women opportunities to share, reflect, and discuss their thoughts and experiences while being digital nomads. The findings are presented as three overarching stories of reasons, constraints, and empowerment. Most of the women experienced constraints in various forms in their search for professional, personal, and spatial freedoms which evidently shaped their digital nomadic experiences. In the midst of their constraints, the women were resilient and robust in their negotiations of westernized digital nomad discourses and were able to transform themselves. The diversity and complexity of the Asian women digital nomad experiences revealed that their experiences were also shaped by the intersection of gender and race.

Keywords: Asian women, digital nomads, intersectionality, feminism

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my project which explores the lifestyle of female Asian digital nomads and how this lifestyle can reflect modern representations of Asian women. In the following sections, I discuss the rationale for this topic, identify research gaps, introduce the research questions, discuss the importance of the study, and outline the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Digital Nomad

In the advent of technology, ironically perhaps, society has fallen back to one of human's earliest migrations – nomadism. The development of information and communication technologies has made a great impact on how to perform this traditional lifestyle (Reichenberger, 2018). Such technology has revolutionized our lives and has provided an opportunity to escape a sedentary 9-5 work life and its bureaucratic working relationships – to become location independent workers in pursuit of leisure and tourism activities. Tsugio Makimoto and David Manners were the visionary authors, who wrote about the rise of a mobile professional in their 1997 progressive book entitled "Digital Nomad". They anticipated and predicted the rise of these digital nomadic individuals in a way that gave a deeper vision and understanding of a lifestyle of the future. They sparked a movement that inspired professionals to become location independent, to work wherever they wanted with and from their computer. At that time, this revolutionary lifestyle was known as digital nomadism.

Digital nomads conduct their work through online environments (Hall et al., 2019). In that sense, they are remote workers (Reichenberger, 2018) or freelancers (Schlagwein, 2018a), often employed in professions that relate to the fields of technology, programming, marketing and entrepreneurship (Thompson, 2019a). These workers take advantage of flexibility to travel domestically or internationally. Their passion for exploring the world is a blend of tourism, leisure, and professional activity that conjures a unique lifestyle that is based on travel, remote work, and a multiplicity of habitats (Mancinelli, 2020). Collectively, digital nomadism has promoted a lifestyle of utopian freedom that is driven by economic and personal reasons.

Current scholarship on this novel lifestyle lies within the prism of technology, mobility, and work/travel/leisure (Hermann & Paris, 2020), which has highlighted a neoliberal order

(Mancinelli, 2020) where digital nomads were seen as the privileged few. This may hold true to most studies, however, Thompson (2019a) study on privilege and inequality within the community of digital nomads showed that there was more to be discovered and researched related to digital nomadism. This thesis uncovers some of these inequalities, thereby illustrating some of the practical realities of a digital nomadic lifestyle.

Research on digital nomads mainly involves western professionals and thus allows a space for my research to question its exclusivity. Most studies on digital nomads are founded on western and male perspectives (Aydogdu, 2016; Schlagwein, 2018a; Thompson, 2019a). This current research steers away from this notion and thus focuses on a specific and diverse group of digital nomads – the Asian female digital nomad. In this thesis, I explore Asian women’s travel and leisure experiences from a digital nomadic perspective, issues that have never been studied together. Thereby, this thesis will not only contribute to research on Asian women but also, add diversity and complexity to the study of digital nomads in leisure and tourism studies. In the next section, I introduce the Asian woman traveler wherein I uncover a history of oppression and inequality that leads Asian women to awaken their empowered selves.

1.2 The Asian woman

Pre-Covid-19, the growing economic prosperity of Asian countries pushed Asian tourists to the forefront of travel and leisure in the 20th century (Yang et al., 2017). Following this growth, an emerging market of travelers has been observed – the Asian woman traveler (Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang et al., 2019). In documented history, representations of Asia-ness can be traced back to Greek literature (Yang & Mura, 2016). Here, the term Asia is associated with the east, the mysterious and the other. Therefore, the term “Asian” is an identity construction imposed on us (Bui et al., 2013). The implications of such a homogenous characterization of identity can be studied through the experiences of Asian female travelers. Historically, femininity in Asia is synonymous with submissiveness (Yang & Mura, 2016) and patriarchy has had a dominant hold on society. In addition, in Confucian and Muslim societies, the subordination of women are characterized as a life of domesticity (Yang et al., 2017; Yang & Mura, 2016). Thus, Asian women’s opportunities for leisure have been haunted by stigma and constrained by sociocultural norms, gender and cultural power relations (Yang et al., 2017). Gender acts as a major limitation to women's travel making. As a social construct, gender stereotypes illustrate the social and cultural representations of what

is expected from an Asian man and woman in a tourism context (Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, 2020; Khoo-Lattimore & Mura, 2016).

Patriarchy in Asia is still prevalent, however with the rise of educational access, employment, economic and financial independence has slowly changed the travel and leisure scene in Asia (Yang et al., 2017). In the past decade, changes in familial structures and the progression of individualistic lifestyles has increased the number of women solo travelers (Yang et al., 2019). The changing female demographics in tourism entail a monumental cultural shift where women demonstrate the highest percentage of solo travelers. According to Hostelworld (2019), since 2016, there has been an 88% increase in women solo travelers. Similarly in 2015, TripAdvisor (2015) survey on solo travelers, revealed that 79% were solo South East Asian women travelers. And in 2016, Asian travelers in general rated solo travel as one of the most popular activities (TripAdvisor, 2016). To cite examples, Japanese, South Korean, Chinese and South East Asian women travelers had increased in the pre-Covid-19 tourism market (Teo & Leong, 2006; Yang et al., 2017). According to Bui et al. (2013), Yang et al. (2017) and Teo and Leong (2006) the women's main motivating factors for traveling were a form of escape from sedentary work and personal life, pursuit of relaxation, knowledge and new learnings. Concomitantly, traveling for an Asian woman is deeply connected with their search for autonomy, self-discovery, and transformation (Osman et al., 2020).

Surveys and research demonstrate that solo Asian women travelers are a thriving tourism market (Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang et al., 2019). This growth has posed a challenge for the tourism industry to create more inclusive activities for solo women travelers. Further, it poses a challenge towards gender and tourism scholarship, which mainly has been Asian blind (Yang & Mura, 2016). My research on Asian women digital nomads is a perfect example of what Pritchard et al. (2007, p. 7) identified as gaps in sociocultural analysis, the inclusion of the body and embodiment, and the material with the symbolic. My aim with this study is to explore Asian women's travel and leisure experiences from a digital nomadic perspective. Mirroring, Pritchard et al. (2007), a gender-focused study of digital nomads may encourage a more inclusive understanding which can embrace new approaches to this novel concept. Having gender-focused research calls for a challenge on the researcher to "break the glass borders" (Pritchard et al., 2007, p. 8), to become one of the handfuls of revolutionary researchers whose desire to make the marginalized voices be heard and challenge the symbolic and material inequalities.

Nomadism is about the constant movement of people (Schlagwein, 2018b). In contemporary society, nomadism can be associated with globalization, capitalism and individualism (Mancinelli, 2020). Asian women's independent travel contradicts the sociocultural characterization of femininity, as submissive and dependent (Yang & Mura, 2016) and family caregivers (Muldoon et al., 2021). In other words, this research will attempt to fill the knowledge gap on Asian women and digital nomads by giving importance to the socio-cultural aspect of Asian women's travel experiences. With this focus, I hope to open a Pandora's box of the other social and cultural identities that shape their experiences. The intersectionality of race and gender may deepen and explore different structures of power in their narratives (Yang & Mura, 2016). The focus of my study attempts to address issues that concern both gender and race in Asian women's quests for a nomadic lifestyle.

1.3 Research question

Based on this introduction to my topic, in my research, I sought to explore and understand Asian women's diverse leisure and tourist experiences as digital nomads. Specifically, my research questions were:

R1 – How do constraints shape Asian women's digital nomad experiences?

R2 – How does Asian women's "Asia-ness" shape their gendered experiences?

R3 – How does empowerment shape Asian women's digital nomad experiences?

R4 – How does intersectionality of gender and race shape their reasons for becoming a digital nomad?

1.4 Personal rationale

I wanted to study Asian women digital nomads because I once was one. I lived a digital nomadic life from 2017 – 2020. In this period, I not only acquired skills in my chosen profession of customer relations and administrative work but also learned more about my capacity to adapt to changing environments. This was hard for me before becoming a nomad. While being a digital nomad, I was surprised by the kind of freedom I was able to acquire – freedom from working in a four walled cubicle, freedom to be open to new social and cultural experiences and to freely explore my individuality. In the midst of this freedom, I also learned self-discipline and found comfort in structured working states. This was definitely the most

surprising skill I learned. Also, becoming a digital nomad led me to witness some of the constraints and the empowering experiences of being an Asian woman while in pursuit of leisure and tourism. I noticed, that being a woman traveling alone was hard and that it became harder when you were considered as a racial minority. Such experiences inspired me to investigate other women's experiences, to narrate their stories, and to let the voices of other Asian women be heard.

1.5 Thesis structure

In this introductory chapter, I have explained the context for my research as well as presented my research aims and research questions.

In Chapter two, I present my literature review. In this review, I overview the relationship between gender and tourism. The concept of feminist intersectionality is introduced and is used to illuminate different aspects of women's gendered experiences. Additionally, digital nomad topics are addressed to highlight their diversity and complexity.

Chapter three focuses on my feminist epistemology and methodological framework. In this chapter, I also explain and discuss my qualitative research design which elaborates on semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation techniques. Additionally, in this chapter, I expand on how I analyzed my data and also discuss ethical considerations and the role of research reflexivity in my research.

In Chapter four, I narrate the findings of my study and provide a detailed analysis of my data. The chapter is structured in a reflexive way, in that the insider and outsider identity of the researcher is explored. It is divided into three sections: Reasons, constraints, and empowerment.

In the penultimate chapter, Chapter five, I discuss the findings and connect them to the theories presented in Chapter two.

Finally, in Chapter six, I summarize the key theoretical findings and contributions of my research as well as address future research directions.

2 Literature review

Asian women digital nomads are the inspiration for this thesis. Interdisciplinary approaches were used to explore the different facets of their digital nomadic lifestyles. In this chapter, an overview of the relationship between gender and tourism through the feminist notion of intersectionality is presented. In addition, the chapter explores the diversity and complexity of digital nomads as well as highlights their cosmopolitan behavior and their search for a holistic balance between bonding and solitude. Lastly, the chapter introduces and suggests a concept of nomadism that is based on women's experiences.

2.1 Asians, the (In)visible women in tourism and feminist studies

Gender plays an important part in the shaping of travel and leisure experiences (Seow, 2020). Gender can be understood as a system of practices and beliefs which created a difference between men and women (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It also refers to the different behaviors, activities and roles, that a society deems acceptable for men and women (Seow, 2020). These studies proposed that gender is learned through social interactions. As a result, society has imposed that a woman should be feminine and men masculine, and thus have treated these roles and responsibilities as norms. These gender norms reflect how gender identities have limited and constrained the experiences of individuals. However, the silver lining of social interactions and socializations is that it can result to the opening and formation of other gender identities (Seow, 2020), in which an individual defines him/herself as a man or woman or either or both. This suggests that gender is a complex construct of social and cultural aspects between women and men that transcends beyond biological differences (Pritchard, 2001).

Gender, tourism and leisure studies are mainly dominated by western perspectives (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Henderson & Gibson, 2013). Within the prominent diversification and growth within studies of gender and tourism, Asian gender studies are still marginalized. This is evident from the research of Yang and Tavakoli (2016, p. 34) in which they argue that “only a handful of papers concerning Asian, gender and the tourist experience” have been published in international tourism journals. Seow (2020) also emphasized that western perspectives of women, gender and leisure studies differ from Asian women's travel experiences because of cultural differences. While western feminist studies have been recognized as a burgeoning area of academic research, Chen (2007) and Seow (2020)

question and critique the differences inherent in “Asian women under western gaze[s]”. According to Chen (2007), Asian women are invisible because of a lack of diversity and the homogenous categorization of women – black women represents women of color and white women represents all women. Asian women’s invisibility is then a product of feminist indifference to the differences amongst women (Seow, 2020).

According to Hirschmann (1998) within the discourses of feminism, there has been an ongoing debate on the issues of sensitivity to cultural specificity and differences. She has explained that the importance of feminism is to recognize the importance of context, differences, and specificity. However, as western feminist has been resisting cultural imperialism, they have also grown blind to the importance of gender equality and women’s power with other culture (Hirschmann, 1998). This argument was also mirrored by Chen's (2007) reflection and critique of the universality of feminism, where she calls for a feminist movement of collective resistance to western dominance of de-colonization and de-imperialism. She has promoted an Asian movement that would highlight the forgotten and excluded the voices of the marginalized others and has challenged the westernized assumption of the feminist movement, in which feminism is not a privilege of the west, rather feminism has roots in other areas and cultures of the world (Chen, 2007; Seow, 2020).

The invisibility of Asian women within the discourses of tourism and feminism was a result of indifference to the differences in culture within and among women which ultimately highlights the color of feminist discourses (Chen, 2007). Furthermore, Seow's (2020, p. 28) critique on the (in)visibility of Asian women in western feminist studies has also sought to break the “cliched” representation of Asian women. In essence, the study of women’s lived experiences can be embraced in different ways, and such feminism then is a global resistance to women’s oppression that can be seen and felt in different forms and contexts (Seow, 2020). Chen's (2007) resistance and objection to the universality of western feminist study is a call to realize that there is no all-encompassing feminist theory for all cultural and racial backgrounds. This is a call for diversity and openness that has to be developed and redeveloped within feminism. This section aims to not disregard the western contributions of gender and tourism studies, but rather reinforce in the discussion that these studies can be applied and seen in various contexts. Therefore, to understand the Asian woman digital nomad's lived experiences of constraints, empowerment, and their journey towards self-transformation, this research will adapt a framework that is rooted in subjectivity and

acknowledging the different social dimensions that can affect their leisure and tourist experiences.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Feminist intersectionality

Prior to Veijola and Jokinen (1994) seminal article 'The body in tourism', tourism scholars lacked a focus on how gender shaped the tourist experience. In the wake of this criticism, several Western feminist tourism researchers sought new knowledge (see for instance Aitchison (2006); Pritchard et al. (2007); Swain and Momsen (2002), by focusing on gender power relations, constraints, empowerment, and resistance (Heimtun (2010); (Jordan & Gibson, 2005); (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008); (Wilson & Little, 2005). These studies showed that gender must be understood contextually and relationally as well as engage with intersectionality, sexuality, self-surveillance, and control.

This study is guided by a feminist intersectional lens. Crenshaw's (1989) seminal article on demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex, spoke about a concept of multidimensionality in understanding Black women's experiences and contrasting the universality of women's lived experiences. Mirroring such a concept, with Asian women as the focus of this research, exposes their complex and diverse experiences that were largely ignored theoretically (Chen, 2007). The concept of intersectionality exposes the dominant and discriminatory conceptions of women's lived experiences within a single categorical axis – which is gender (Crenshaw, 1989). In other words, the study of women's experiences is not homogenous but rather proposes interdependence and interconnections with other social dimensions (Valentine, 2007).

Social categories influence a woman's experiences, and such categories are intertwined and produce distinct lived experiences. The feminist concept of intersectionality repudiates the belief of gender is the only social dimension that shapes and dominates women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Heimtun, 2012). Specifically, intersectionality is a concept that presents the difference within the study of women's experiences (Heimtun, 2012). The concept then theorizes the relationship between different social dimensions such as gender, race, or ethnicity. It also highlights how women are unequally treated based on their social differences (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality exposes the multiplicity and obscuring of discrimination and power relations (Valentine, 2007). This concept is an expression that as humans, we are complex beings, grounded in different identities, influences, and beliefs that hold a multitude of truths.

2.3 The female traveler constraints

Research on Asian women's travel experiences reveal that they face a significant number of constraints compared to men (Seow & Brown, 2018). This signifies that gender plays an important limiting role in tourism opportunities for women (Wilson & Little, 2008). In turn, this represents an underlying inequality of power and women's oppression in a patriarchal society (Wilson & Little, 2008). Previous research on Asian women travelers' constraints have revealed that constraints and risk are intensified because of the different sociocultural narratives related to them (Teo & Leong, 2006; Yang et al., 2017). Historically, Asian women's role in society revolves around her household and limited social interactions. Women were taught values that would constrict them to become submissive and endure a life of maternal duties (Seow & Brown, 2018), which makes them not suitable for independent travel. Furthermore, according to Chen (2007), western feminist discourses of Asian women stereotyped being Asian as followers of Confucian beliefs of obedience and dependency. In spite of the modern advancement in economy and technology, today, Asian women are still negotiating sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial challenges, making solo travel a taboo for most societies where women are confronted with different risks and constraints (Seow, 2020).

The study of Asian female solo travel constraints was inspired by Wilson and Little (2005) seminal review on the impact of constraints on solo women travelers. To exemplify, Seow and Brown (2018) study of Asian female solo travelers, identified constraints that flow in the same vein with the sociocultural, personal, practical and spatial challenges identified by Wilson and Little (2005). However, needless to say, there are identifiable differences in both research which can be explained by Yang et al. (2018) research on power and empowerment and Teo and Leong (2006) study of Asian female backpackers. Both the latter two studies explored and identified that not only gender affects Asian female tourist experiences but also their race – their Asian-ness. These studies exemplified that both gendered and racial double standards exist in contemporary tourism and leisure spaces. In the following sections, I identify and elaborate further on such differences.

Interestingly, Yang (2017) research concentrated on how women perceived and negotiated risk rather than constraints. She argued that risk is a social and cultural construction that is embedded within power relations. Yang (2017) identified her four rationales for using the concept of risk in her research on Asian female solo travelers. In her research, she relates

safety and security as the main constraint and concerns of solo female travelers wherein the female body is subjected to sexualization and unwanted male attention. She also identified that risk was constructed to be part of solo female traveler experiences and contributed to women's sense of adventure or excitement. Yang further explained that by resisting gendered risks can contribute to self-transformation and empowerment. She also found that perceived risk differs between men and women and thus reflects the unequal power relations embedded within patriarchal society. Lastly, the perception of risk is magnified when race, culture and ethnicity intersects with gender (Yang, 2017, pp. 74,75). These findings tell us that gender and cultural risk are the dominant narratives of Asian women independent travelers (Yang, 2021, p. 474).

Constraints refer to the elements that impede women's ability to attain desired levels of satisfaction, and participation in leisure activities (Wilson & Little, 2005). Such constraints were identified by Wilson and Little (2005) as sociocultural, personal, practical and spatial restrictions wherein all can be experienced while traveling (*in situ*) or pretravel. Sociocultural constraints are referred to as restrictions in the social and cultural contexts in which women live and/or encounter when traveling (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 161). These constraints can be exemplified through family members or friends discouraging their travel plans by tales of danger and fear (Seow & Brown, 2018). Family members or male friends can act as protectors which inherently highlights a woman's need for male protection (Wilson & Little, 2008). Such a protector role can also augment perceived danger by women when they are alone, which serves to magnify the masculine belief of women as fragile beings (Wilson & Little, 2008). Similarly, an Asian woman is subjectified as being meek, dependent and weak which places them in greater danger (Yang & Mura, 2016). *In situ* travel constraints can be exemplified by unwanted male attention and harassment and were and are considered as one of the prominent constraining factors of women's travel experience (Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang et al., 2018). This tells us how deeply rooted patriarchy is in our modern society. Further, as we have moved forward into becoming more globalized, it also highlights the obtuseness of most societies' thinking regarding Asian women and independent travel.

Personal constraints involve a woman's personal limitations and restrictions that are based on their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Wilson & Little, 2005). This means fears and doubts come into play before and while traveling, where vulnerability can be translated into feelings of isolation and loneliness. Prior research on Asian women travelers has disclosed other constraints such as the feeling of isolation, wherein being alone has a negative connotation

(Yang et al., 2019). Being a lone traveler on a women's holiday has been stigmatized as an absence of social connection (Heimtun, 2010), and is heightened in collectivist cultures (Yang et al., 2019). As a result, marginalized groups such as Asian women solo travelers, who do not conform with social and cultural norms of holiday making, have experienced negative stereotypes. Female roles in a holiday space are bounded by traditional gender identities, especially in Asian cultures wherein the image of mothers, dutiful wives, and daughters (Yang & Mura, 2016) are the accepted cultural identities. According to Heimtun (2010), holiday spaces are constructed for sociability and familial activities within which aloneness can lead to social exclusion. Negativity surrounds the idea of single or solo women travelers as they are socially imagined as being a lonely loser (Heimtun, 2012); whereas a man's bachelor status is romanticized. From an Asian perspective, this aspect of solo travel can be strongly felt due to social stigmas associated with being single in Asia (Yang et al., 2019). Despite the social stigmas and the constraints in their experiences, Asian women still choose to travel, breaking social and cultural norms in search of their true and transformed selves (Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019).

Spatial constraints exist in women's movement within travel and leisure destinations (Wilson & Little, 2005). In other words, women while traveling are restricted into spaces, or places that are deemed safe across which they can traverse (Wilson & Little, 2008), which translates into restriction of their movements. Women apply additional caution whenever they travel alone. They are restricted to spaces that favor femininity or are considered as safe places (Wilson & Little, 2008). This exemplifies that tourist and public spaces are still "considered and constructed" as a masculine domain, that is fashioned for a man to enjoy the frivolity of movement (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a), wherein women are excluded and isolated. In an Asian solo woman travel context, research shows a similar indication of spatial constraints, as their Asian appearance is magnified in a predominantly Caucasian country (Seow & Brown, 2018). They are viewed as easy prey which makes the women vulnerable to verbal or physical harassment (Yang et al., 2018).

Yang's (2017) research on risk perception of Asian solo female travelers exposes cultured and gendered risks are the main risk for Asian solo female travelers. Her research has surprisingly indicated the correlation of these risks to the constraints mentioned above. Furthering such thought, her research refers to gendered risks as socially constructed consciousness of gender and can be identified as street harassment, the unwanted male gaze, and sexual advances, while her cultured risks relate to the negative circumstance that is influenced by Asian

woman's cultural origins, which includes stereotypes, unfair treatments, and discrimination (Yang, 2017). This further signifies that sociocultural, personal, spatial constraints can also be identified as risk and also strengthen the heterogeneity of women's lived experiences. In sum, the constraints identified by Wilson and Little (2005) and the cultured and gendered risk of Yang (2017) are considered interrelated in understanding and exploring women's constraints. Through the intersectionality framework, we are given a façade of how Asian woman traverses cultural and social narratives. In the findings chapter, I go deeper into such experiences and highlight how a woman's gender and race can affect their travel experiences.

2.3.1 Sexualization of Gaze

Solo travel allowed a space for Asian women to express their agency, however, tourism as a gendered and racial space exposes them to the multiple gazes of men (Yang et al., 2018). Women as subjects and objects of male gaze have significantly impacted on their lived and embodied experiences. Further, Pritchard (2014) identified that sexualization can be explained through the value of a woman's sex appeal. Specifically, such appeal refers to an imposed standard of attractiveness which relates to being sexy, being sexually objectified, and that sexuality is unseemly imposed. This suggests that the exertion of male power and dominance can be felt through the sexualization of women (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008).

Sexualization of women is another constraint that can affect women's travel experiences (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). Furthermore, existing literature has indicated that women's bodies and presence are subjected to or may invite unwanted male attention, covert and overt sexual advances thereby exposing them to sexual harassment (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Yang et al., 2018). As a result, women travelers can feel restricted in both personal and spatial mobilities (Wilson & Little, 2008). This is reflective of the limited destinations women can choose to travel, their activities being dependent on the time of day, and being compelled to wander within the "safety sphere" of touristic spaces (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 166). Compelled to stay in the sphere of safety, entails self-surveillance, which comes with a sense of responsibility and strategy in navigating the male gaze (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018).

Another result of sexualization is reflected towards women's confidence in their body image and appearance (Small, 2016). The power of surveillance can be exhibited on how women's bodies and appearances are presented and viewed both inversely and externally. This means

that the perception of others affects how one evaluates oneself and influences one's behavior in everyday life (Aitchison, 2013). According to Small (1999), the interiorized gaze can either be treated as an oppressive male gaze (were women self-objectify themselves or are disturbed by the other's perspective) or it can be used as a language of empowerment and resistance were women practice self-enhancement that promotes a positive perspective of themselves, protects their worth as women and boosts their self-esteem. According to Pritchard and Morgan (2011), the body relates to the language of empowerment wherein the body symbolizes a sense of self and identity. In other words, the body is a site of symbolic significance of women's freedom.

Sexualization as a constraint is a result of what Pritchard and Morgan (2000b), Pritchard (2014) and Jordan and Aitchison (2008) expressed regarding how tourism spaces are both gendered and sexualized. They exposed how sexualization, harassment and sexual surveillance affected women experiences and were considered as one of the major constraints and regarded as risk in their independent travel (Pritchard, 2014; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang et al., 2018). Reports from harmless jokes such as catcalling, being constantly stared at, being followed, to being sexually harassed are examples of women's harrowing stories in previous studies. These experiences were then defined as street harassment where it is considered as a symbolic representation of violence in which men are free to subjugate and assault women (Pritchard, 2014). These situations are heightened when race overlaps with gender.

2.3.2 Racial constraints

The landscape of contemporary tourism is gendered, sexualized and racialized which is ingrained in western and male perspectives of space (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000b). Pritchard (2014) considers tourism as "hot climates" were sexual harassment and gender discrimination are evident especially towards women of color. Based on the notion of risk and constraints, Yang et al. (2018) argued that traveling alone in gendered spaces especially for Asian women is magnified because of their gender and culture. In their quest for freedom and flexibility, they are subjected by social norms specifically designed for western and male audiences. Similarly, the image of a backpacker or solo traveler has been designed for the western male – the search for the "other" in exotic places which may transform self (Teo & Leong, 2006; Yang et al., 2018). Asian women in this context do not fit the perceived image thus when traveling solo they encounter both gender and racial discriminations. In Teo and Leong (2006)

research on Asian female backpackers, the women were identified and mistaken as sex workers because of how they dressed (shorts and sleeveless tops) and because of the color of their skin. Concomitantly, the image of Asian women portrayed in most tourism destinations are related to sex and erotica (Yang et al., 2019). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2018) research on racial risk exposed how Asian women are discriminated against because of their Asian-ness.

Racial constraints can also be experienced through the hospitality industry, the local society, and other western travelers. According to the findings of Yang et al. (2018) in their study of gender and racial risks, women are discriminated against due to their Asian appearance by service providers. The women in their study claimed to receive unfriendly treatment which was not the case for western travelers. This statement can be exemplified by Molz (2006, p. 15) research on cosmopolitan bodies wherein spatial mobility and “fitting in” bodes as a problem for people of color. Molz (2006, p. 15) noted that whiteness is celebrated while people of color’s experiences are subjugated. Teo and Leong (2006) research indicated that most restaurants and bars in Bangkok catered to mostly western backpackers. The interplay of power in sociocultural spaces and relationships, as evidenced in the preceding research, reveals that being western and a white traveler is believed to be of greater importance. Asian women’s racial constraints are also demonstrated in heightened social disapproval from local society. This can be exemplified by Yang et al. (2018) findings on racial risk, stating that their participants’ Asian identities intersecting with their gender exposed them to greater risk (p. 39).

To conclude this section, sociocultural, personal, and spatial constraints are amplified when gender intersects with race. Therefore, feminist intersectionality should be more present in research on Asian women’s lived experience. This would further explore how oppression and discrimination shape their travel experiences.

2.3.3 Empowerment: Transformation of self

Self-empowerment is closely connected with the search for self and identity (Wilson & Harris, 2006). In particular, research on solo traveling has unraveled that resistance and empowerment are the dominant benefits that can lead to transformative aspects (Seow & Brown, 2018). Transformation of self in traveling also comes with challenging experiences, especially for Asian women. The search for self by Asian women is a complex combination of multiple identities, in which their gender and race intersects with sociocultural norms imposed on solo travelers in tourism (Yang et al., 2019). In backpacking research and

discourses, it was shown that the search for “self” can be found by leaving one’s western community and journeying towards the third world, to primitive and exotic destinations (Bui et al., 2013; Huang, 2007; Teo & Leong, 2006). This proposes that the concept of independent travel can be argued as western-centric, and a form of neo-colonialism which encourages the continued subjugation and western domination of developing and past colonized countries (Yang et al., 2019).

The perceived notion of travel and tourism as merely the quest for the "other", the sacred, or the unique; severely contrasts with emerging discourses regarding travel and tourism experiences as a realm of educational, self-formative, spiritual, and creative significance (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Leading from this thought, Asian women's digital nomads' travel experience has a rich content of self-transformative experiences, which can be envisioned in Wilson and Harris (2006) meaningful travel of women.

Meaningful travel is a concept that refers to the travel experiences of women that recognizes the quest and the unearthing of their self-confidence that leads to their empowered self (Wilson & Harris, 2006). In other words, independent travel can enable women to become confident in their decisions and resilient and robust in facing challenging situations. The transformative travel experiences of Pung et al. (2020) explained that this transformative travel experience is regarded as a celebration of woman’s independence and empowerment. Independent travel for women can also be connected to their quest for both hedonistic and eudaimonic well-being. Hedonistic well-being involves short-lived pleasures, while eudaimonic well-being focuses on the meaning of life and self-realization (Bauer et al., 2008). Eudaimonic well-being in women's travels emphasizes personal growth and views their challenges and constraints as transformative experiences. The concept of eudaimonic well-being speaks to people about living authentically, living following their true self or daimon (Hamid et al., 2021). Independent traveling embraces both of these concepts, which encapsulate both the need for pleasure and self-realization. The power of solo travel brings the feeling of freedom, happiness, creativity, self-development, creates diverse social relationships, and gives them a sense of empowerment (Hamid et al., 2021; Seow & Brown, 2018).

2.4 The complex and diverse digital nomads

The growing interest in independent travel has engaged researchers in discourses on nomadic lifestyle and technology. The notion of the digital nomad adds to the complex and blurry

relationships between tourism and other forms of lifestyle migration (Williams & Hall, 2002). It also expands Uriely (2001) classification of four types of working tourists by including those who, for various reasons, do not get a job at the destination or engage in tourism on business trips, but who can continue their work responsibilities in any destination with internet technology. The growth of digital information technology has played an important role in the development of tourism (Wiranatha et al., 2020).

Digital nomadism is a phenomenon that involves professionals that uses information technology in performing work in a digital format which enables them to become location independent (Mancinelli, 2020); Schlagwein (2018b). These professionals can also be identified as tourists because of their involvement in touristic activities at their travel destinations (Hall et al., 2019). Thompson (2019a) demonstrated the similarities of nomads travel behavior with tourists, wherein their choice of location was interdependent with their leisure activities in order to satisfy their hedonistic pleasures. Nomads' passions for exploring the world are a blend of tourism, leisure, and professional activity that conjures a unique lifestyle that is based on travel, remote work, and a multiplicity of habitats (Mancinelli, 2020). Digital nomads then celebrate a utopian freedom and mobility that blurs the relationship between professional and personal life (Mancinelli, 2020).

The terminology of digital nomads has been defined and redefined in accordance with the nature and identity of the research subjects. An example would be Aydogdu (2016) cultural hybrid which she termed as neo nomads. Naz (2016) dissertation on interactive living spaces also used the term neo nomads which she identified as cultural hybrids whose resilience and adaptability helped them establish a sense of belonging which is not bounded by place. Interestingly, the neo nomads of D'Andrea (2006) research suggest an embodied self, that embraces the possibility of new experiences that creates a space for creativity. He suggests that neo nomads can be treated as both a phenomenon and a philosophical concept that allows a space for subjectivity. The common feature of these terminologies is the quest of alternatives and subjective ideology in both work and life (Mancinelli, 2020). The term has inspired tourism researchers interested in lifestyle mobilities to explore the movement of individuals who concomitantly used technology while adapting a postmodern way of thinking and finding the meaning of life (Cohen et al., 2015; Hannonen, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018). Therefore, the term neo nomad is a metaphor for the mobile identities and lifestyles governed by globalization and portable media technologies (Aydogdu, 2016).

Reichenberger (2018) three levels of digital nomadism explain the hybridity of such tourists. The categories involve different levels of mobility, which supports the idea that cultural and social capital is shown by frequent travel (Cook, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018). The three levels also highlight that international or local travel is neither a requirement nor a necessity of being a digital nomad, but rather traveling is another way of using mobility (Reichenberger, 2018). In the first level are digital nomads whose location independence revolves around their native environment which limits them in terms of a spatial level. These are remote online workers who chose to be close to home, spending time in cafes and establishments with high-speed connections. The second level includes nomads who travel and work periodically but return to their native environment. These nomads choose to have a permanent residence but also choose to travel substantially. Lastly, the third level is constituted of nomads whose work, and travel choices are the personification of mobility. They are constantly traveling and working and consider the world as their home (Reichenberger, 2018, p. 371). These levels introduce and somehow organize the complexity of their lifestyle which I find important.

2.4.1 Digital nomads as cosmopolitan

Digital nomads' self-imposed freedom and mobility give them the ability to travel and become citizens of the world (Cook, 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Hannonen, 2020; Mancinelli, 2020; Reichenberger, 2018). Cosmopolitanism is a term being used in a variety of ways to understand identity constructs, different worldviews, and globalization (Swain, 2009). Mirroring Salazar (2010b) cosmopolitan explanation provides space to explain the cosmopolite digital nomads in my study. His definition of a cosmopolitan relates to the acceptance and relationship towards diverse cultures. From the perspective of a lifestyle mover such as digital nomads, they willingly engage with the local society (Aydogdu, 2016; Cook, 2020; D'Andrea, 2006), their openness towards new and different cultural experiences is a representation of their search for contrasts and gives them space to question or value their embodied social norms.

The cosmopolite traits that Swain (2009) described, resembles Salazar (2010a) cosmopolitan. Swain briefly described a cosmopolite as an individual whose mobility traverses both global and local in body, imagination, and virtually, with a profound curiosity about the local culture. The cosmopolite's encounters with locals are embraced using a diverse cultural mindset and interpreted and critiqued through both local and own country lenses. In other words, a cosmopolite through the lens of digital nomads is sensitive and open-minded

towards other cultures, they are interested in explorative geographical and social experiences which reflects in their leisure habits. Digital nomads can then be an example of a cosmopolite – their experience allowed them not only to amass knowledge of cultures and societies but also to learn from them which can lead to positive social connectedness on a community and society level (Gössling et al., 2018). Reflecting on these qualities, digital nomads display their embodied cosmopolitan competence through their consumption of culture, places, and goods (Germann Molz, 2005).

However, even if the cosmopolites can be subjected to universal cultural experiences, contemporary cosmopolitans are faced with challenges that concern gender and race (Aydogdu, 2016). Men and women in the construction and consumption of tourism are seen and treated differently (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a). As my research is grounded in feminist research and as a researcher, I cannot help but reflect on these descriptions of cosmopolitan mobility which are strongly associated and based on one's race, gender or how strong their passports are. The sentiment has given this research a space to reflect on how cosmopolitan ideologies and concepts are formed. It is shrouded in a complex weave of political and social systems of a western-centric approach (Beck, 2008) that caters only to the privileged and turns a blind eye towards marginalized groups.

It is ironic to think that tourism and cosmopolitanism studies encourage openness to other people and cultures despite the inequalities posited in being a woman and race other than western white but calls unlikely cosmopolitans as non-elite or subaltern cosmopolitans (Swain, 2016). Sharing a similar sentiment on cosmopolitanism is Swain (2009) whose description of Germann Molz (2005) subjects as the elite, privileged, western and white contradicts to the existence and representation of Asian women digital nomads .

2.4.2 Motivations

Reichenberger (2018) article on digital nomads' quest for holistic freedom unfolded digital nomads' motivations for choosing a nomadic lifestyle. Wherein she concluded that the main motivating factor for choosing a nomadic lifestyle related to escaping from the bureaucratic structures of traditional working environments. In contrast, Mancinelli (2020) stated that digital nomads are culturally motivated and personal agency is a motivating factor, with an emphasis on the search for meaning over any other factors (economic or political). Therefore, digital nomads desire to escape from their traditional and sedentary work and life, and venture towards a location independent workplace that enables them to experience new culture and

places (Cook, 2020; Schlagwein, 2018a). Digital nomads' search for meaning is related to Reichenberger (2018) term of freedom, wherein she discovered that the term was used to exemplify different underlying individual intrinsic motivations for adapting to a location independent work lifestyle. In other words, motivations can come in different forms, it could mean an escape from sedentary life, from traditional work environments or freedom in pursuit of self-development.

Interestingly, Thompson (2019a) research has a prefixed type of freedom in which she relates it to having a greater balance in off-work activities and online work. The flexibility of online/remote work enabled this possibility for digital nomads and in effect, achieved for them a deeper understanding of themselves. The newly gained autonomy in both professional activities and spatial movements is a result of personal freedom (Hall et al., 2019; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021; Reichenberger, 2018). Individual freedom is when one understands that he/she can almost do anything, that they are an independent agent able to freely achieve their individual goals. Freedom is about realizing and resharing our dreams and potential in the type of life we want (Korpela, 2014). The importance of personal freedom to digital nomads is the cultivation of self-development (Reichenberger, 2018). This encapsulates their motivation to expand their knowledge, enhance their skills and themselves on both prisms of professional and personal life. Self-transformation is enhanced by exposing themselves to different ways of living, other cultures, having confidence, and applying autonomy to their economic and personal decisions. These motivations also add to the possibility of enhancing their self-expression (Mancinelli, 2020). All these motivations are interconnected with aims to achieve a balanced and holistic way of life.

2.4.3 The constraints: Freedom, Discipline, and Loneliness

Compelling research by Cook (2020) suggests that digital nomads' lifestyle is not always free and autonomous, but rather is governed by a high degree of self-discipline. The freedom paradox is an important addition to the study of digital nomads' lifestyles. Different academic and journalistic research has sprung up regarding digital nomads which paints a picture of utopian freedom (Cook, 2020; Kuzheleva-Sagan & Nosova, 2016). The imaginative descriptions of their techno-mobility lifestyle failed to highlight the other side of this mobility. According to Cook (2020) research on discipline brings a more practical approach to the imagination of this lifestyle. His study indicates that digital nomad's constant change of location requires strategic planning, effort, and having sets of structure and self-discipline,

describing the reality of working in paradise while working on their deliverables while maintaining a balance between work and social interactions (Cook, 2020). Interestingly, Reichenberger (2018) level 2 and 3 digital nomads follows the realms of traditional work relationships in order to achieve what she called personal freedom.

The importance of this paradox solidifies the context of personal responsibility in the study of digital nomads. Their motivations of escape and search for freedom came with responsibilities in attaining daily work practices (Cook, 2020). Concomitantly, Reichenberger (2018) quest for holistic freedom has determined an interrelationship between professional freedom, personal freedom and spatial freedom, wherein one cannot work without another. This offers a challenge towards the concept of blurring of boundaries between leisure and work. The challenge is exploring the complexity of digital nomads lived experience, in that way the scholarship of this novel concept will expand and embrace a more embodied approach. What was interesting in Cook (2020) study was in viewing digital nomads' lifestyle especially within the context of freedom that self-discipline, time management, work/life balance resembles traditional work environments. Equally, Korpela (2014) expressed similar sentiments regarding lifestyle migrants embracing freedom, she stated that in the end, they are not free agents, there are no freedoms only dead ends. In other words, having a mobile lifestyle that celebrates freedom, is shrouded by the same governing bureaucratic system.

Studies show that the road of the digital nomad is a lonely one, behind the excitement of constant traveling, experiencing new cultures and people, and enjoying hedonistic pleasures there is a lingering feeling of loneliness (Cook, 2020; de Loryn, 2022; Hall et al., 2019; Hermann & Paris, 2020; Mouratidis, 2018; Thompson, 2019a; von Zumbusch & Lalicic, 2020). This can relate to their search for community, deep connections, and friendships. Isolation and loneliness are one of the determining factors as to why nomads seek community-based activities both online and offline (Thompson, 2019a). To combat loneliness and isolation, many digital nomads search for like-minded people in the places they visit, they may be fellow digital nomads or local people (Hermann & Paris, 2020). They seek and join networking and meet-ups, as a result, they gain more acquaintances and possibly find deep relationships. Consequently, there has been an exponential growth of co-living, co-working spaces, and global digital nomad events. Digital nomads seek these constructed, all-inclusive communities (Thompson, 2019a), wherein their choice of location is dependent on such collective activities (von Zumbusch & Lalicic, 2020) which can be expensive and isolating for marginalized digital nomads. For some, they go into relationships to fill the void of loneliness

which according to Cook (2020) can provide stability and rules in their life. The contrasting cultural structures and ideologies of individualism and collectivism, explains that even mobile individuals such as digital nomads, who are the heroes of individualism and self-autonomy, at the end of the day, are social beings who crave intimacy and social togetherness.

2.4.4 Individualism and the search for bonding

The individualistic nature of digital nomads is dictated by their desire for freedom, independence, and self-autonomy. An individualistic standpoint on social ties promotes autonomy, agency, detachment and separation (Hartung et al., 2010; Meng, 2010); thereby placing the self in the center and gaining a sense of control in one's life (Korpela, 2014; Mancinelli, 2020). Considering this reflection from a digital nomad perspective, similar to the lifestyle of migrants studied by Korpela (2014), becoming a digital nomad is a choice, in which an individual is actively making choices that is a representation of a free self. In essence, digital nomadism and other lifestyle mobility movements are a product of our neoliberal and individualized societies.

Digital nomads are a great example of individualism (Mancinelli, 2020) and thus originated from western ideology (Schlagwein, 2018b). Further, like lifestyle migrations, they constantly create and recreate themselves. This signifies the importance of varied choices in lifestyle movers such as digital nomads - they can freely choose and narrate their unique biographies. An important aspect of digital nomads' lifestyle is the ability to choose one's desired lifestyle and in that process, they find their unique self-identity (Korpela, 2014). This image of freedom, finding your true self and self-transformation has added to the utopian concept of digital nomads (Hermann & Paris, 2020). The concept has been romanticized and thus has allured individuals to make such a lifestyle change. However, the consequences of such mobility can lead to isolation and loneliness (constraints highlighted in 2.4.3 section) (Cook, 2020; de Loryn, 2022; Hall et al., 2019; Hermann & Paris, 2020; Mouratidis, 2018; Thompson, 2019a; von Zumbusch & Lalicic, 2020). This further exemplified that despite their search for freedom and individualism, nomads still search for communities and togetherness (Cook, 2020; Heimtun, 2007a; Hermann & Paris, 2020).

Due to the mobility of digital nomads, research shows that friendships and connections are fleeting and thus creates a dearth of human connection (Thompson, 2019b). The birth of online and offline communities seems to bridge the gap but also raises the issues of entrepreneurialism, wherein the relationship between friendship and business is a mirage of

superficial connection (Mancinelli, 2020). This is then the tradeoff in the mobility lifestyle – instead of breeding meaningful and embodied experiences, it has become superficial and impersonal - like constructing a business deal (Cook, 2020). My research calls for an embodied approach to this concept – wherein connections should be invested in friendship and meaningful experiences.

From an Asian perspective where the value of collective behaviors is mostly followed, individualism or solo traveling is not seen as a possible entitlement especially for women (Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016). Asian culture promotes a collective behavior that resonates with dependency, harmonious behaviors, compliance with duty and obligations, and conforms with social norms (Rhee et al., 1995). These characteristics are the opposite of individualism which promotes emotional independence, confrontative behavior is developed (not afraid to speak their mind) and values the importance of developing their personal goals (Hartung et al., 2010). However, the movement of Asian women digital nomads is a contradiction to such claims – that they can be a movement of women that seeks balance within professional, personal and spatial freedom (Reichenberger, 2018).

2.5 Female Nomadism

The metaphorical notion of the nomad has been debated and argued in both tourism and leisure migration studies. The nomad is a symbolic representation of contemporary lifestyle to which Bauman (2013) refers as a “liquid society”, where the concept of “on the move” appeals to sedentary societies (Müller, 2016; Reichenberger, 2018). The manifesto of digital nomads celebrates capitalism and entrepreneurship, which failed to see the male-biased representation of the lifestyle (Aydogdu, 2016; Thompson, 2019a). The privilege and the inequality in Thompson (2019a) research resonate with the Asian women digital nomads in this thesis. In Thompson’s study of the digital nomad lifestyle, she highlighted the inequality of digital nomads of color and the privileges of the major demographic. To the best of my knowledge, Thompson (2019a) is the only researcher who studied partly these inequalities towards nomads of color. Her findings on digital nomad conferences has problematized the existing male-oriented digital nomad culture, which allowed her to highlight the inequality of the lifestyle (Thompson, 2019b). This section now respectfully critiques the existing concept of digital nomads and suggests a fresh perspective that is rooted in feminist embodiment.

Aydogdu (2016) frame of the new nomad states that the study of digital nomads concentrates on the “phallogocentric and technology-driven notion of progress... digital nomads retained the male-biased flavor”. Similarly, Thompson (2019a, p. 16) study of the digital nomad lifestyle, delved into inequality and the privileges of a certain demographic of digital nomads and claimed that the development of "self" in a digital nomad context is part of a western consumerist process wherein an image that is portrayed by a " 25-year-old white, a tech industry employed guy, who quit his job and went to Southeast Asia to live and work”. This solidifies the claim of heterogeneous experiences of Asian women and digital nomads. There is a complexity to these nomadic travelers that goes beyond their digital nomad lifestyle. Interestingly, their complexity lies deeper than their desire for a hedonistic lifestyle. These women are challenged by sociocultural stereotypes, their quest for community and solitude, finding structure in work/life balance, and loneliness.

Braidotti (1994) description of nomad is located within the axis of feminism, where in contemporary subjectivity intersects with other social identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender, which is synonymous to the feminist concept of intersectionality. “The new feminist nomadic subject ... is an entity defined and affirmed by women in the confrontation of their multiple differences of class, race and lifestyle” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 30). On this note, this research used the nomadic subjects and the nomadism concept of Rosi Braidotti (1994) to provide an embodied and feminist approach to digital nomads. In her seminal book, *Nomadic subjects*, Braidotti (1994) calls for a change in thinking and understanding nomadism. I mirror such a change in my research of Asian women digital nomads. It can be considered a revolution and a critique against the traditional (and novel) understanding and knowledge of digital nomads. Nomadism to Braidotti (1994, p. 5) is a new way of thinking a - “critical consciousness” that resists the acceptance of social norms of behavior and thought. Her image of nomadic subjects is inspired by women’s experience and culture which argues that not all nomads are world travelers and added that it can also be the overthrowing of old belief systems, of conventions that define the nomadic state and not just as an act of mobility (Braidotti, 1994). This can also mean that mobility and the concept of a digital nomad can be viewed as a new perspective of what work and life can be. It can also be the opposition of bureaucracy and social norms, rather than just a concept of digital hyper mobility that celebrates utopian freedom. Her nomadism offers a new way of thinking where it welcomes experience and knowledge from unexpected types of individuals and sources (Braidotti, 1994) – such as Asian women digital nomads.

Her concept of nomadism opens up a space for new perspectives on digital nomads from both a feminist and embodiment perspective. She explains that a woman's experience can be complex and contradictory because of the intersecting social variables of race, class, ethnicity, age or lifestyle (Braidotti, 1994). Viewing digital nomads through this concept, allows a space for transition, creativity (Braidotti, 1994) and a change in the approach of male-centric views on contemporary nomadism (Aydogdu, 2016). Similarly, this resonates closely with Crenshaw (1989) feminist concept of intersectionality, in which both concepts want to understand the multiplicity of women's experience not only by gender but other intersecting social identities such as race, class or lifestyle. In other words, it has encouraged this research of digital nomads to work in the realms of intersectionality and reminds us that as human beings we are made of complex identities, influences, and limitations that contribute to multiple truths (Swain, 2016). Proposing Braidotti (1994) concept on nomadism adds depth to the novel exploration of the notion of who and what is a digital nomad, allowing a modern subjectivity, where in the nomad description breaks away from its masculine identification and embraces an embodied representation.

The Asian woman digital nomad's desire for freedom traverses work and life, societal and cultural constraints; the concept of digital nomads has an allure, an influence to break away from a sedentary lifestyle and bureaucratic systems. The experience of being a digital nomad provides an opportunity to delve into new possibilities of embracing remote professional work and also questions the imposed normal notions of family and life. Digital nomads can then be a revolutionary and empowering embodiment of an alternative lifestyle – a diametric opposite to the norms (Hannonen, 2020), which allows them to nurture and develop their transformed selves.

3 Research Methodology

This research stems from the need to understand and explore the experiences of Asian women from a digital nomad perspective. In this chapter, I commence by exploring feminist research by defining epistemology, methodology and methods. I then discuss in detail my methodological position which was inspired by the socio-cultural nexus of Aitchison (2005). Lastly, I outline my research design and reflect on the ethical dimensions of my research.

3.1 Feminist research: Epistemology, Methodology, Method

The rising consciousness of women started the feminist movement, a movement that allowed the sharing and receiving of knowledge between women (DeVault, 1996). Women's lives and experiences are at the heart of feminist studies, and its aims are both critical and transformative in order to challenge the malestream tradition of tourism research (Heimtun, 2007b; Liu & Li, 2020). Before the inception of this study, my cognizance of the feminist way of doing research, ways of knowing or how it contributes to research was seemingly embryonic. In this section, I briefly elucidate the meanings of epistemology, methodology and method in feminist research.

Since 1994, there has been an increased gender awareness in tourism research (Aitchison, 2005; Pritchard, 2001; Swain & Momsen, 2002), that proposed a challenge against malestream or phallogentric research traditions (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015) subjugating women's way of knowing (Braidotti, 1994). Feminist epistemology rejects phallogentrism where in it advocates traditional epistemological theories (Aitchison, 2013). Feminist epistemologies focus on women's experiences and women's ways of knowing (Alcoff & Potter, 1992; Letherby, 2003). Such epistemologies focused on how gender influences the creation of knowledge, who counts as knowers and paved the way for guidelines on and justifications for how to conduct research (Anderson, 2020, p. 1). Feminist epistemologies are about the nature of "women's knowledge" (p. 1); how it is acknowledged, how knowers are identified and how knowledge is chosen, why it is chosen and why other ways are rejected (Heimtun, 2007a). In a tourism context, a feminist epistemology has also been used to reject the exploration and understanding of social phenomenon where men's experiences are considered the norms and women's experiences are considered secondary, an anomaly, and the "other" (Aitchison, 2013).

According to Aitchison (2005), feminist epistemologies can be categorized into feminist empiricism, standpoint theory and post-structural feminism. In this thesis, I do not discuss feminist empiricism because it is not relevant.

3.1.1 Standpoint Feminism

Underpinned by Marxism, feminist standpoint theory advocates that women are an oppressed category, who have the ability to know their own oppression and also understand the oppressors' perception (Letherby, 2003, p. 68). It argues that research about women's experience gives diversity and a deeper conception of truth because women's knowledge is developed through their struggles against the oppression of males. The goal of standpoint feminism is to address marginalized categories by adopting different standpoints or positionalities (Aitchison, 2005; Hartsock, 1998). Standpoint theory allows space to generate alternatives, and new and fresh perspectives regarding women's experiences. Social movements about race, ethnicity or any oppressed groups produce themes in standpoint theory (Harding, 2004). It tackles the multiplicity of truth, uncovering deep surfaces by viewing them through experiences and how social order is viewed from the perspectives and struggles of the oppressed majority (Hartsock, 1998).

The idea of situated knowledge is knowledge that reflects the perspectives of the knower (Anderson, 2020). Knowledge is influenced by many factors which is why a researcher cannot be an objective observer (Heimtun, 2007c). Social structures and systems in gender or race can affect and complicate knowledge production. For Haraway (1988), situated knowledge is grounded in a change of approach towards objective ways of knowing and thus promotes subjectivity that deconstructs and contests absolute knowledge. Similarly, standpoint feminist epistemology rejects objective knowledge as omnipotent and focuses instead on the knowledge from women's lived experiences (who are considered marginalized and oppressed) (Aitchison, 2005). Therefore, standpoint feminism is constructed within the lives and experiences of oppressed women.

It could be argued that standpoint feminism is objective, however as argued by Heimtun (2007c), standpoint feminism may not reject the concept of objectivity, rather it claims that it needs to be strongly applied, in which the subject of knowledge becomes equal to the knower. My research starts from the perspective of Asian women, which subsequently provides avenues to alternative knowledge and new ways of knowing. Using my research as an example, standpoint feminism liberates and legitimizes the voices of Asian women as

knowers (Aitchison, 2005). Discovering Asian women's struggle in representing and expressing their ethnicity and authentic self may help other marginalized women in recognizing that their lives and experiences can become new sources of knowledge and can break systemic repression. Similarly, Heimtun (2007c, p. 29) research on midlife single women also reflects ways of knowing, explaining that the "subjects of knowledge are both embodied and visible ... and are similar to the objects of knowledge which are both shaped by the same social power". In other words, standpoint feminism builds knowledge through women's lived experiences.

3.1.2 Post structural Feminism

Poststructuralism and feminism have a common advocacy – to promote the importance of subjectivity in shaping power relations and its inter-relationship between ideology, cultural construction and material power (Aitchison, 2005, p. 216). Poststructuralism has opened a Pandora's box of uncertainties and alternatives to our ways of knowing, as well as emphasized the existence of multiple truths in both social and cultural contexts. However, Aitchison (2005) proposed a new feminist epistemology, that places importance on the dualistic influences of social and cultural feminism, that acknowledges both patriarchy, capitalism and cultural representations in the production and consumption of women's experiences.

Feminism and poststructuralism are advocates of subjectivity in shaping power relations (Aitchison, 2005). It is the critical study of power relations that are innate in the systems and structures that shaped modernity (Aitchison, 2005, 2013). Poststructural feminism focuses on repudiating the notion of a single grand narrative that explains women's position throughout society (Aitchison, 2005). Specifically, poststructural feminism challenges the principle of the existence of a single logical truth and reason. By using poststructuralist studies in the study of gender and leisure, Aitchison (2005) argued that poststructuralist theory offers alternative views and ways of knowing and seeing. In our modernized society, the westernized philosophical search for a single fact and reason is becoming unsuitable due to the diversity of human life. Thereby theories that embody objectivity are rejected while instead theories that are subjective in their quest for truth are embraced.

Poststructuralists identified the existence of multiple gendered identities rather than the simplistic binary relations between a man and a woman. Furthermore, this recognition of multiple gendered identities has led to the conclusion that tourist experiences cannot be

separated from other social constructs such as ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, or gender (Yang & Mura, 2016). In this research, the use of poststructural feminism is seen as a critique of the masculine philosophy and latter's position of deconstructing truth and dichotomies as male-female, male/mind, female/body (Aitchison, 2005; Heimtun, 2007a). Poststructural feminism has unraveled the maleness of tourism practice and language, which has opened up the identification of cultural relations of gender (Pritchard, 2014). Traditional tourism research is mostly male dominated in concept, which in this research I steer away from and thus adapt a focus on women's ways of knowing. From this perspective, feminism claims that attaining knowledge is not through objectivity but treated as one of many "truths" – a subjective truth that is based on women's perspective, opinions, and experiences.

3.1.3 Feminist Standpoint: Postcolonial Feminism

In standpoint feminism, the focus is on marginalized groups of women (Hartsock, 1998), such as those divided by race, class, and sexuality. Studies on gender that are conducted within westernized societies may not always apply to the study of gender from an Asian perspective. This idea has challenged me to acknowledge postcolonial feminism as my standpoint in this research.

Postcolonial theory in this research can provide a useful reference of historical representation of women as the "other" and at the same time can provide an analysis of colonialism's gendered effect on the culture and structure of our society (Aitchison, 2013). Postcolonial feminism challenges and criticizes the lived experiences of women that belongs within the sphere of Eurocentric westernized and white middle-class representation of feminist studies (Aitchison, 2005, 2013). It is the lived experiences of women who do not belong in this context that postcolonial feminism concentrates its studies on. The theorization of postcolonial feminism has been detrimental in questioning the difference between "white other" and third world women. In my understanding, the conceptualization of the "other" is in line with power and status. In its essence, as developed by Aitchison (2005), the construction of the "other" is defined in a contrasting and dualistic manner. It draws attention to the dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized, the powerful and the powerless, the marginalized and the celebrated. Such discussions enabled me to reflect critically on the construction of tourism's exotification of its destinations and the making of its local people as the "other".

Feminism and postcolonial studies are considered by Harding (2009) as parallel social movements that offer alternatives that are grounded in a realistic understanding of knowledge production and which argues that their perspectives are not presented equally in western ideologies. The postcolonial feminist is engaged in denouncing western and male supremacy (Wearing, 1999), and explores the complex power relations (social and political) that create the culture and knowledge of the colonized (Yang et al., 2017). Postcolonial feminism is a fusion of standpoint theory and poststructuralist theory (Aitchison, 2005). Harding (2009) also proposed that postcolonialism is similar to standpoint feminism and suggests combining the conceptual frameworks of feminism and postcolonialism in producing an analysis that explores and highlights issues of interest in both intellectual progressions. The studies of feminism and postcolonialism are intricately connected with each other and suggests their strong correlation wherein male supremacy and colonialism have represented racial/colonial/gender relations (Harding, 2009). Harding explained that both frameworks have an abundance of resources to advance and strengthen discourses (Harding, 2009), which can be used in exploring and highlighting the complexity of Asian women's experiences.

3.1.4 Feminist methodologies

Methodology is the theory of research practices which parallels the chosen epistemology. Methodology is a framework that involves the discussion and analyzing of the methods used in research. It is about the reflexive relation between the process and the product (Letherby, 2003). Therefore, feminist methodologies shift the focus from a malestream or androcentric approach to research practices and propose and acknowledge the principles of feminist research founded on power reduction and inclusivity (DeVault, 1996). The power of feminist research lies in its critical engagement in the knowing and doing relationship (Letherby, 2003). Feminist methodology aims is to create an approach to research that is parallel with the aims of feminism which is to empower women and challenge inequality (Taylor, 1998). For example, in this study on Asian women digital nomads, their narratives need to be heard, not because it is important to speak about why we are different, but because of the stories we want to share with the world and about why we need to be acknowledged.

Feminist methodology has no single, all-encompassing research method but rather it is multi-dimensional and united in its inclusivity of the different lives and experiences of women (Heimtun, 2007c). Both DeVault (1996) and Taylor (1998) have summarized that the core of feminist methodologies is privileging the voices of women to find out what has been

dismissed, discriminated or suppressed. By doing so the diversity of women's experiences is revealed. Furthermore, both the researcher's and participants' reflexivity can lead to social action or change which benefits women. In this study of Asian female digital nomads, my goal resonates with the aims of feminist methodologies. My overall goal is to bring in the voices of Asian women, who have been ignored and suppressed in the scholarship of tourism and feminism, which has a domino effect in highlighting not only my participants' reflexivity but also my own. My academic contribution to the study of both Asian women and digital nomads is a social change that can be felt at a micro level.

Methods and methodology can be misunderstood and confusing in their inception and usage (Heimtun, 2007c; Letherby, 2003). Further, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) have acknowledged the synonymous usage of methodology and methods in research and have called for a distinction between both. Methodology is the theory used in research practices that helps discuss and analyze methods (Letherby, 2003). Methods on the other hand are the techniques and tools for gathering or collecting data in research which can include interviews or surveys (Letherby, 2003). Methods can be used in feminist and non-feminist research, therefore, methods are not linked to any feminist research (Heimtun, 2007c; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). It is a common understanding that methodology and method can be used interchangeably, and thus places the significance of a contextual framework in the researcher's philosophical position (Letherby, 2003). These different assertions of research philosophies call for an awareness of their importance and interconnectivity. To conclude, my epistemological position reflects on how I, as a researcher, treat the scope of knowledge, I honor multiplicity and interdependence, which therefore reflects a feminist methodology being used to capture nuanced experiences of Asian women. Methodology is the procedures or theories that validate the knowledge that is uncovered. Methods are the procedure or technique used to answer my research question.

3.1.5 Summary

Knowing and doing in this feminist research study intersect with standpoint feminism of postcolonialism and poststructural feminism without mitigating or reducing the other. This means identifying women's subordination within material and cultural structures without being reduced to either. This approach mirrors Aitchison (2005) proposal of synergy between different frameworks, that help explore the collective informing nature of the social and cultural in forming both relations and materialities of women's tourist experiences. The

framework of the socio-cultural nexus integrates material and cultural analysis that accommodates the elements of standpoint and poststructural feminism. This approach by (Aitchison, 2005) has helped deepen my understanding of Asian women digital nomads in a theoretical way by recognizing the different perspectives of poststructural, standpoint, and postcolonial feminism and has made me acknowledge that these perspectives can be combined to co-create a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

It was indeed challenging putting together different frameworks/ideologies due to their complementary relationships in their ways of knowing thus making it challenging to piece together their importance to my research subjects. However, it was eye-opening, as it has allowed me to conclude that different philosophical perspectives can be combined to create a stronger research claim and prove the interconnection between material and cultural relations. The sociocultural nexus framework by Aitchison (2005) has acknowledged that these perspectives can be combined and enable an exploration of the diversity of Asian women's experiences and the co-creation of a deeper understanding of our evolving society.

3.2 Qualitative research design

My goal for this research is to identify and analyze the travel experiences of Asian women digital nomads. As this is an under explored topic, I have chosen a qualitative research method to study the complexity and diversity of the women's experiences. Qualitative research is used to emphasize the words spoken by participants (Bryman, 2016). It is a method that collects and analyzes data taken from personal observations, interviews and written documents (Patton, 2014).

There are a variety of reasons why qualitative interviews are suitable for studying women's experiences. Such conversations have the ability to produce stories creatively and subjectively (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and they can give access to data that are considered sensitive (Seow & Brown, 2018). In this study, intersectionality was used as a framework to understand the Asian women digital nomads travel and leisure experiences. Thereby, it required sensitivity, respect, and creativity to make meaning and interpret their diverse experiences.

The key tenet of this research lies within the belief of multiplicity and intersectionality which resonates with my epistemology and methodology. My mindset of multiplicity and intersectionality was inspired by a feminist poststructuralist approach, whereby it argues

against western positivist discourses, and instead calls for a detachment from singularity of systems and structures (Liu & Li, 2020) on explaining the social and cultural power relations that construct women's travel and leisure experiences. In line with the stated research lens, the research on Asian women digital nomads employed multiple qualitative methods to help collect, explore, and analyze the different facets of the women's experiences.

3.3 Data collection

To collect data, I used semi-structured and photo-elicitation methods. Employing mixed methods has been proven in feminist research as an effective way to elucidate views into different power relations (Heimtun & Morgan, 2012) in shaping the tourist and leisure experiences of Asian women digital nomads. My goal for using mixed research methods was to present a creative and richer understanding of the complex phenomenon of female Asian digital nomads (Greene, 2007).

Qualitative interviewing is a well-known method that was employed to “see” what cannot be observed (Patton, 2014). Through interviewing, I was allowed to listen to other people's perspectives and search for meaning behind it. I decided to use semi-structured interviews as they are one of the most versatile and flexible qualitative methods that allow me to use open-ended questions to engage in conversations with the interviewees (Kallio et al., 2016). The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to discover different experiences and unique realities that relate to answering this study's the research question (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semi-structured interviews have allowed my participants to guide me through their different insights, experiences, and issues. When I was devising the interview questions, my aim was to explore their past and their present experiences of being an Asian female digital nomad. Through my questions, I was able to uncover different facets of their digital nomad lifestyle and discovered unexpected challenges they faced in being a modern Asian woman.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted using an interview guide. The latter is prepared to warrant that the same basic lines of inquiry are followed with each interviewed person (Patton, 2014). This data collection technique allows reciprocity between researcher and participants (Kallio et al., 2016), which opens a space for the interviewer to generate follow up questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). My goal was to establish a conversation style interview to make my participants feel comfortable with my inquiry, however, with the foresight to focus on the subjects or topics that were valuable to my research.

Collecting the data while living in Alta and aiming to interview Asian women during their time as digital nomads, I produced the interview data via the internet. The increasing availability of technological communications has presented new opportunities on how to collect qualitative data (Hampton, 2017). I partly used the video conferencing system in conducting my interviews, which gave an illusion of the physical presence that often is important to qualitative interviews. Using this type of technology was considered highly applicable to my research because the participants were situated in different parts of the globe. Online interviews are likened to traditional face to face interviews except both parties are in different locations and use technology as a mediator for communication (Nehls et al., 2015). One of the many advantages of online interviews are their convenience and cost-effectiveness for conducting research interviews, compared to the traditional interview which can be expensive and time consuming (Mabragana et al., 2013). However, disadvantages such as poor video and sound quality and internet broadband quality can affect the interview experience. On that note, only four of the seven participants used video conferencing, due to the disadvantages mentioned. The rest of the interviews were conducted online but minus the video. The important part for me was to establish rapport and trust before the interview especially the tackling of sensitive issues that could emerge during our respective conversations (Hampton, 2017).

The interview guide (see Appendix C) was designed to unpack the experiences of Asian women digital nomads. The first part explored their past and present experiences of becoming a digital nomad, which helped uncover their motivations. The second part explored the negative and positive experiences of being an Asian woman digital nomad. The last section was about investigating their acquired insights and what they had gained in becoming a digital nomad.

Before the scheduled interview, I sent a pre-interview form (see Appendix B) that the participants answered before the scheduled interview. The main reason for this data technique was twofold. First, I wanted to know about their background: current and previous professions, and how many years they had been digital nomads. The background information was important to learn the participants previous experiences which I could use during the interview (Ellis et al., 2011). I also asked the participants to submit a photo of their choice that represented an important and valuable digital nomad experience for them. In their respective interviews, I used their photograph to engage each in a more intimate and deeper discussion (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Copes & Ragland, 2022).

Moreover, I wanted the participant-driven photo-elicitation method to empower the women, by giving them the ability to take the lead in the conversation and give them more power in their self-representation (Copes & Ragland, 2022). Cederholm (2011) argues that authority is given to the subject through choosing their own images, thus photo-elicitation allowed my participants the freedom in describing the importance of such memories. In my research, by opening the interview with some questions about their chosen image, I wanted them to be the drivers of the interview. My aim was for the women to share and openly reflect on their lived experiences. This reflexive way of researching is also a great example of the feminist framework (Heimtun, 2007b) stated in the methodology part of this chapter.

The photographs that I collected from the participants were used to evoke emotional responses and openness by looking back into the past. The images that the participants shared were taken from their previous travels and thus gave a sense of nostalgia where memories and reflections can be brought back as the interview process progressed. In tourist experience research, photographs hold more value because they can be used to understand and analyze the different facets of their experiences (Cederholm, 2011). Furthermore, I decided to add the descriptions of their photographs in the findings section of the research. I did this to fulfil my aim to connect readers to my participants' lifestyle and personality which evokes a personal approach and response to their stories (Copes & Ragland, 2022).

In sum, the combination of semi-structured interviews, and photo-elicitation allowed me to dig deeper into their gendered and racial experiences. I was able to probe additional questions that allowed me to explore the depths of my subjects' experiences and memories. Even when some of the participants did not use the video option for the interview, I believe, I was able to build rapport that was both founded on respect and trust. Establishing rapport was important because it helped build trust - which resulted into an array of emotions, shared experiences, understanding and joy (Weller, 2017). There was spontaneity and genuine connection which led to a mutual and organic disclosure of information. In the next section, I briefly discuss the recruitment process, the construction of pilot study and introduce the participants.

3.3.1 Pilot study

There were several aims with the pilot study. I wanted to test if the questions gave input to the research questions, and second, I wanted to know which approach was best to the recruit participants. These reasons were also advocated by Wray et al. (2017). I also wanted to build competency and enhance my confidence as researcher. For Sampson (2004), doing a pilot

study gave new insights into the unexpected and the obvious and how the least problematic becomes more harder to learn. As a novice researcher, I expected that the answers would mirror my own experiences as a digital nomad with regard to the different constraints, empowerment, and resistance. However, I learned the uncomfortable reality that my experience was not similar to all the participants. This made me reflect before proceeding to my other interviews. It also made me rephrase the instructions on the type of image/s they should submit and rephrase and add questions, and shift the order of the questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). I rearranged the structure by starting from general questions about the participants experiences, which then led to specific questions regarding their experiences. An aspect during the pilot interview that I was vigilant about was making my participants feel comfortable during the interview and to encourage an exchange of dialogue that was free-flowing rather than forced (Wray et al., 2017). I believe making the participants comfortable is an important task for any qualitative researcher conducting interviews.

3.3.2 Recruiting the participants

Most qualitative research is done face to face, however due to the geographical diversity of the participants, I decided to conduct the research digitally. The recruiting process can be a challenging process that requires an immense amount of time and effort and may only produce very small results (Wray et al., 2017). In this research, I had to go through different channels to recruit the women. As Asian women digital nomads are very difficult to locate and contact, I had subscribed to both Facebook and Instagram and started looking for participants. I sent them a message about the research project with my email address which resulted to sometimes days of no responses or unopened messages. I sent numerous generic messages and I did not get any response. I learned to make my introductory messages more personalized (Wray et al., 2017) and I conducted a small study on how active they were on social media and what their lifestyles were like based on the images and stories they posted. It was time consuming, however in the end, I was able to recruit my participants. I learned that impassioned messages can be reflected through online platforms, thus novice researchers should be strategic in their approaches. Overall, my main strategy in recruiting participants was by searching online and using media outlets.

One way to recruit hard to find participants such as Asian women digital nomads, is through snowballing (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Also known as “chain sampling” (Noy, 2008, p. 328), in that a participant gives or introduces the researcher to another potential research

participant. In this research I used two snowballs. First, I asked a family member to help me locate Asian woman digital nomads, second, one of the participants introduced me to her digital nomad friends. I sent personal messages through Facebook and emails to contact those participants. In sum, I had a total of seven participants. Four participants were found and contacted through online and media outlets, and three were recruited through snowball sampling.

3.3.3 Presenting the participants

From November to December of 2021, nine Asian digital nomads were located and seven decided to participate. These Asian women digital nomads were thoroughly informed about the research and a project description was sent together with a consent of anonymity form (see appendix A). The participants were a diverse group of women coming from different social and cultural backgrounds. To adhere the Norwegian Centre for Data, Norwegian center for research data (NSD) anonymity requirement, Table 1 provides an anonymous introduction to each participant's background.

Pseudonyms were employed to guarantee anonymity and were associated with popular Asian names. Table 1 shows that four of the women were born and raised in Asian countries specifically in Southeast and East Asia, while three of the Asian women were born and raised in the US and Canada. The women were in between the ages of 29-34 years old and single.

Table 1: Participant demographic

Pseudonym	Age, Status	Occupation as digital nomad	Country of origin	Current country	Visited countries	Number of years as a digital nomad
Kai	29, Single	Technical writer/QA Engineer	Philippines	Philippines	France, Italy	3 years
Eui	32, Single	Currently on sabbatical	Canada	Canada	Austin, Cancun, Miami, China, Calgary	6 months
Ishana	30, Single	Technical writer	USA	Morocco	Morocco, Portugal, Italy, Vietnam, Taiwan, Nepal	3 years

Zhu	26, Single	Head of Community	Singapore	Singapore	Myanmar, Croatia, Hungary, Estonia, Sweden, France	2 years
Seiko	34, Single	Graphic designer	Vietnam	Malaysia	Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Philippines	4 years
Sukhi	32, Single	Freelance Software Engineer	USA	Argentina	Argentina, Columbia, Peru, and Chile	3 years
Akemi	29, Single	Marketing Consultant	Taiwan	Taiwan	New York, South Korea, London, Amsterdam, Berlin	3 years

The women in this research had various online professions that ranged from quality engineers, technical writers, to marketing consultants and as Table 1 also indicates all the women were seasoned digital nomads. This exemplifies that these digital nomads are from the generation that claims attachment to information and communication technology (Reichenberger, 2018) and that their profession as a digital nomad has contributed to their quest for self-transformation. Most of the women had travelled extensively in both Asian and western countries. The most popular were Southeast Asia, Europe, South America, and North Africa. Most of the women had travelled overseas, which is costly and expensive, and this thereby says something about their privilege in terms of economic and financial aspects.

3.4 Analyzing the Data

I digitally recorded and transcribed the narrated stories. The interviews lasted between 57 minutes and 3 hours 8 minutes. In analyzing the data, I had to categorize them into sets and patterns then try to find what connected them together. In this research, I used thematic analysis for my analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to interpret, identify, and analyze different patterns of meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This approach helped

generates codes and themes in the qualitative data with the use of thorough and systematic procedures.

Codes and themes are essential in identifying, analyzing and interpreting different patterns within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2014). The relevance of identifying the themes in the data is to capture something important that connects and helps to answer the research question or questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) have identified six phases of analysis which I followed (see Table 2).

Table 2 Thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006), as used in my research.

Phase	Process description
The researcher must familiarize herself with the data	Transcribing the narrated stories, repeatedly listening to the transcriptions, and reading the data multiple times and formulating initial/potential topics
Generate initial codes	Systematically code interesting features of the data, organize and assemble the data into each code
Looking for themes using the codes	Gathering and organizing codes into their potential themes
Review themes	Check if themes work with the associated codes, repeatedly review the data again for additional themes, and generate a thematic map
Define and name themes	Continue analyzing to refine the themes Generate names of each that gives a clear cut of definitions and names for each chosen theme

Produce the report	Relate the analysis to the research question and literature
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The first process that I undertook was to familiarize myself with the data. Re-listening to the recordings and transcribing their stories allowed me to be re-immersed in the data and made me familiar with the depth of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was tempted to be selective in my data, however I decided against it and chose to re-read the data and listen to the recordings multiple times. This also allowed me to see through some information that I missed during the interview. I transcribed the data and wrote my notes in MS word.

Generating initial codes was the second phase. I followed Braun and Clarke (2006) advice in coding which is to code for as many prospective patterns and themes, organize and assemble the data to each code and lastly to reserve the data and codes that are far from the dominant narrative. The importance of the last advice is that it may become relevant in the later part of the process.

<p>KAI - After 6 years with corporate, I got burned out. At that time the globalization and culture <u>was</u> booming so I got addicted to the lifestyle when you have your own time, flexible... I prefer flat hierarchy; I can manage my own time and then I don't have to feel rushed I just want a lenient lifestyle.</p> <p>EUI - I used I just ended my time with my <u>job</u> but I was with that company for five years and we were fully remote whole team was remote... I would always contact on a week of travel and some days of remote working onto those trips so highly flexible where we could be</p>	<p>Want a lenient lifestyle. Got burned out of corporate and realized she wants a different lifestyle. Self-awareness</p> <p>Her work is remote. Gave her flexibility and freedom to travel</p>
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Figure 1 Extracted data with codes

Looking for themes using the codes was the third phase in my analysis. At this point, I had fully coded and accumulated the data. I then created the first version of my thematic map/table. In this phase, I started to analyze the codes and how their difference could be integrated, analyzed their relationships, and formed an overall theme. At the end of this phase, I determined my possible themes and sub-themes. However, these were not considered as the final themes.

Reviewing the themes was the fourth phase in my thematic analysis. Through the entire process, this was the most difficult part. I had to go back and read the dataset again and made sure that I had not missed themes relevant for my research question. In this part, I had to remove themes that did not coincide with the bigger data because they were too diverse or there was not enough to support the said theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was a dilemma because I had a rather small number of participants and I felt that to uncover all the facets of their experiences should be included. Figure 2 presented below represents the structure of codes that I followed in determining my main themes. I had identified transformation of self, empowerment and becoming a digital nomad as codes that appeared constantly in the interviews. The codes eudaimonic tourist experience, resilience, racial and male gaze were interconnected to the three overarching codes identified.

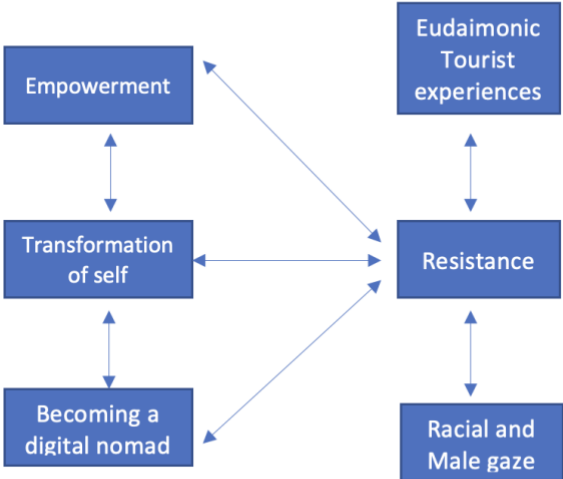


Figure 2: Initial code and themes

The fifth phase was defining and naming the themes. I continued analyzing the data to refine the themes, identifying the sub-themes and determining the core of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the sixth phase was producing the report, this means the final themes were now finalized. It narrated the diversity of my research and provided what was interesting in their experiences. Figure 3 below overviews the final themes identified.

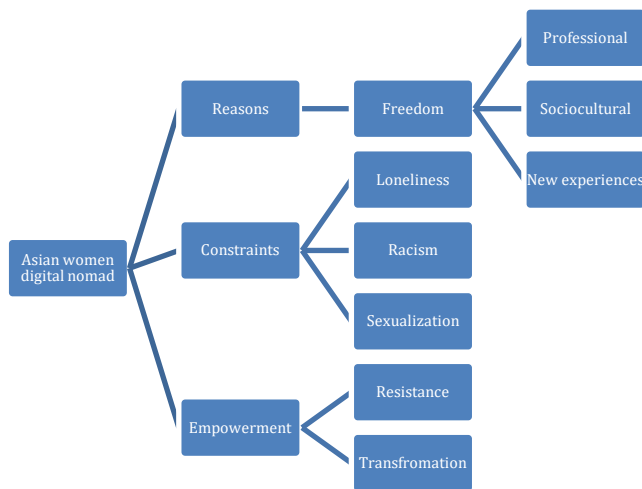


Figure 3: Final themes

3.5 Ethical consideration

My research was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Data (NSD) in the fall of 2021 and this research has followed its stated guidelines (NSD Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata, 2022). In this study, I had constant communication with the participants via email and sent all my participants information about the research including its academic and personal rationale. Throughout this thesis from the documentation to the analysis of data, the identity of the women participants has been kept anonymous. Their names, and other identifiable data were removed and replaced by fictitious names. Furthermore, according to NSD Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (2022), under de-identified personal data, other indirect identifiable data should be categorized broadly, which in this research is represented in a tabular form (Table 1). I made sure to only include information that maintained the participants anonymity in order not to break the agreement with NSD. In storing the interview files and transcripts, I saved them in a password encrypted, school approved data base. In this research, I used Office365 Microsoft teams to conduct and record the interview. This was the university approved digital platform in conducting, recording, and storing interview data.

In regard to the consent, obtaining participation consent was the first process that was completed before doing any interviews (see Appendix A). The consent form was sent by email and was signed electronically by the participants. Inside the consent form were the different avenues to contact myself and my supervisor. I also indicated that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Before starting the interview, I also informed the participant that the call would be recorded, they would be

named anonymously, and the recorded data would be deleted at the end of this thesis program.

3.6 Reflexivity

My goal for this thesis was to respectfully narrate and capture the seven Asian women's digital nomad lived experiences and validate that their voices are considered sources of knowledge (Deutsch, 2004). As this thesis is founded on feminist research, it is highly important that both the researcher's and the participants' voices are heard (England, 1994). Being a reflexive researcher is someone who understands that research is an interactive process that is shaped by my own and my participants' experiences, gender, race, and ethnicity (Ateljevic et al., 2005). Traditional science has been known to follow a strict dichotomy between object and subject which adheres to objectivity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017; England, 1994). However, this research of Asian female digital nomads has made me realize that I could not have a distant position in analyzing their experiences (Lykke, 2010). On the contrary, my subjectivity or subjective experience has influenced the production and interpretation of this research (Taylor, 1998).

Becoming an insider and outsider in this research has opened my views to both the traditional, dominant worldviews and women's subjugated perspectives. It has allowed me to see Asian women's inequality and discrimination which enhanced and validated the production of knowledge for this thesis (Taylor, 1998). Furthermore, it has allowed me to question my being an outsider and insider in the research process. Being an insider and outsider within research is difficult to balance (Deutsch, 2004) because both experiences mirror mine and may make me somewhat biased in my views and the data I wished to collect. This dilemma came to me when I was analyzing my interviews and I kept wondering if I have not been an Asian woman, would I see and understand their experiences differently? In searching for themes, I kept wondering if I was blind to other issues that may be deemed important to this research. In the end, I realized I would never get out of this dilemma if I did not recognize that we as researchers have our own biases and at the end of the day it was my interest, my passion and my curiosity for knowledge that would determine the course of where I placed my sight and attention (Lykke, 2010).

The main principle of feminist research is recognizing the social location and standpoint of the researcher which influences one's observation and interpretations (Taylor, 1998, p. 369). Becoming an insider posed a difficulty with respect to removing myself to become the

researcher/outsider. However, becoming an insider in this research has also provided me with another view of what and who is an Asian woman. I was able to ask questions, that an outsider would not be able to think to ask or be comfortable in asking (Deutsch, 2004; England, 1994). In the end, I came to the realization that being an outsider and insider in the research maybe difficult to balance but then also I was able to understand discrimination, inequality, and racism in a more personal way.

4 Findings

The findings chapter is based on the stories of the seven female Asian digital nomads, who participated in my research. Based on my thematic analysis, first, I explore their heterogeneous experiences that highlight the women's motivations for becoming a digital nomad. Second, I expand the study by navigating through the different constraining factors that affect their experiences. Last, I highlight how their experiences of constraining factors contributed to their cultivation of their empowered self and feminine intelligence.

4.1 Stories about Becoming a Digital Nomad

It was an unusually bright sunny day in the cold and sleepy town of Alta when I meet Kai. Kai is a technical writer and quality analyst engineer who left her corporate job in the Philippines in exchange to become a digital nomad. When I met Kai, she had a quiet and sunny disposition which made talking to her easy and fun. We were laughing at some story we heard from a common friend and that's when the ice was broken. I asked her about her most current memorable travel experience as a digital nomad, and she pulled a picture from her Facebook account and showed me a picture of her on the Amalfi coast. She recalled the feeling of the sun hitting her face, the salty and warm sea breeze from the Mediterranean, the feeling of content and peace. Kai narrated how constrained she felt in her corporate job. She decided to resign and take a leap of faith to become a digital nomad. Becoming a digital nomad gave Kai the lenient lifestyle she wanted.

I feel it was nice, I feel that I have chosen the lifestyle I really want, that I manifested before. If I was in the corporate, I can't just travel and fly anytime I want because I had to file my vacation leave and ask for approval, there is just so much bureaucracy (Kai).

When I met Eui, we both connected as if we knew each other for a long time. She shared that she was on sabbatical and had resigned recently from the company for which she had been working for five years. Eui and I had an instant connection which made it easier for her to share her experiences with me. Eui started by sharing one of her Instagram photos, in which she was standing on a big rock surrounded by a body of water in a remote cave in Suytun Cenote, Mexico. She intimated that the picture brought back a feeling of wonder and mystery and reflected on the picture, thus,

It felt like a very spiritual experience it just felt like this ancient energy was in that cavern and I just remember my jaw dropping as soon as I walked down and saw the place, so that moment definitely stands out (Eui).

For Akemi, an image took her back to 2018, the year she decided to travel solo for the first time. She is in the middle of a bustling city, surrounded by buildings, and importantly, she is with fellow adventurers ready to discover a new city. In the picture, she is smiling together with other travelers that she met at a hostel. Akemi has a bubbly and very outgoing personality, which makes it easier for her to connect with new people including me. I asked both Eui and Akemi if they chose to become a digital nomad. I was surprised when they both told me that becoming a digital nomad was not a choice but rather an opportunity offered to them. Akemi is a marketing consultant based in Taiwan. Her profession allowed her to travel and work at the same time, while Eui was employed in a company who operated remotely. These women used the freedom and flexibility of their professions to explore different communities, meet other travelers, and get inspired by their stories. Eui always wanted to experience the world, to collect stories of people, and expand her knowledge in both cultural and social aspects.

I love collecting stories of people. ... I just really like learning about the history and culture and the way people think and why they are the way they are ... I always like talking to people and I like even talking to my Uber drivers. ... So, stories and history and what I like collecting (Eui).

Similarly, Akemi also used her freedom and flexibility in being a digital nomad to get inspired and feel connected with the world “By talking to other solo travelers, I feel, I’m more connected to this world. There are always good stories waiting for us to discover”. Zhu shared her memorable experience as a digital nomad with a picture of a rainbow taken from an airport window. The first time I met Zhu, she had this silent confidence and intelligence in her that radiates when she passionately narrates her experience. Zhu shared the significance of a picture which reflected her positive personality.

I would honestly say that rainbows are significant for me because you know what comes after the rain, generally, rainbows are always positive for me in that sense, because you always have the downside, but you also see the bright side of things (Zhu).

Zhu choosing to see the positive, made her reflect on her reasons for becoming a digital nomad. First, she saw traveling as a digital nomad as an opportunity to cure her cabin fever, and the remedy was to get out of the cabin and make a choice to leave what constrained her – in her case she wanted to leave Singapore and go overseas. She saw the feeling of cabin fever not as an obstacle but rather an opportunity to focus on the positive – she treated her cabin fever as an opportunity to widen her experiences by traveling.

It was a huge remedy to cabin fever for me ... I think the easiest thing to reconcile with this is that you have choices, whether you want to stay or go, that's a choice and for me, I was tempted and I wanted to go abroad and getting out of the cabin is the best remedy for the fever – if that makes sense ... you having that ability to decide what is best for you, what is better for you at this juncture in life. Hence, the decision to depart (Zhu).

Traveling as a digital nomad has not only cured Zhu's cabin fever but also made her reflect on the positive symbolic representation of the rainbow to her digital nomad life, she is reminded by her passion amidst her hectic schedule and constant traveling. Zhu is driven by what the world has to offer, she constantly invests in experiences. She narrated that investing in experiences is also one of her reasons.

I think the first one is – is to invest in experiences, time doesn't stop, time waits for no person, and the same with life. Even though the pandemic is trying to teach us to slow down and everything. For me honestly, our time is scarce and going back to *carpe diem* ... you just must embrace the moment, which is fundamental to digital nomading, like why people travel and work at the same time, it's to experience the world out there (Zhu).

I noticed that Ishana's complexion had a deep, olive tan. I then asked her if she had recently been to a beach or someplace warm and sunny. She shared that she had been spending time on a beach lately and she loved to surf. Ishana then shared a picture where she was carrying a big pot, with a smile that radiated contentment and happiness.

To me, that picture, is everything I truly enjoy about this life, there is sea salt in my hair, I just came back from a surf, I'm ready to cook a Tanjine that's the pot I'm carrying, a Moroccan style dish, and the sun is setting in the background, it's the perfect evening kind of vibe and it's everything I love in this lifestyle. There is this

autonomy and self-sufficiency and yet a sense of adventure and trying something new (Ishana).

I realized that moments such as this were what Ishana considered as perfect moments – moments that made her reflect on the lifestyle she has chosen. Ishana who considered herself more of a traveler than a digital nomad, took a year off work to focus on writing a creative nonfiction book while on the road. It's a novel of her travel adventures and untangling a mother-daughter relationship. In doing so, she unraveled her reasons as to why she decided to become a nomad. She narrated that she wanted to experience the world outside her own. She wanted personal or intellectual growth and through traveling, she was able to expand her perspectives. "I've always just wanted to see what is out there, I've always wanted to explore whether it involved being intellectual or academic or pushing your limits in extreme sports".

It was Sukhi's turn to share her memorable experience. When I first met Sukhi, she greeted me with a smile that radiated warmth like a sunshine. Sukhi's picture had a backdrop of a Peruvian mountain close to Cusco, with her boyfriend, a llama farmer, and his Alpaca. She recalled how cold she was at that time – (maybe not colder than in Norway), but it was still freezing cold. Sukhi who had been a freelance digital nomad for three years shared that when she was growing up, her family constantly moved around continental US and she realized that she felt at home every time she traveled. She decided to become nomadic because of the reason of feeling at home and to experience new culture and places.

I enjoyed just getting to know places ... there are new things to see all the time. So, I really enjoyed that, and I thought maybe if I became nomadic, I could have that, where I feel like I'm always at home, but I'm also always traveling and exploring new places and leaving before I get bored with a place (Sukhi).

When I met Seiko, she had a reserved personality. However, once we started talking, she slowly opened up. She shared a picture of a backpack, a laptop and clothes packed in smaller bags. She shared that she only had a backpack with her when she decided to lead a nomadic lifestyle. She recalled her feeling of excitement after packing her things and just waiting for her first flight as a digital nomad. Seiko came from a small town in Vietnam, where she recalled how she longed for not only adventures but people who were different from whom she was used to meeting. "I didn't really meet people who were open-minded, and I was also thinking of escaping literally, it's more like to go out and see people, not feeling trapped in a

place”. She was also heavily inspired by the nomadic individuals she met during her travels. She recalled the people she met and how they all were living the life they created for themselves. She remembered her excitement on embarking on her first journey. Seiko’s reason was simple – “I just want to learn new stuff, to experience a new culture, meet new people – I think that’s all.”

Reflecting on their stories and my own reasons for becoming a digital nomad, the motivations could have been a form of escape from traditional work environments or a desire for new cultural and social experiences. However, I couldn’t help but wonder, in their quest for freedom and new cultural and social experiences, as Asian women, what kind of challenges did, they face? And how did they handle them?

4.2 Asian women digital nomad constraints

4.2.1 Loneliness

I clearly remembered during my first few months of digital nomading, I was in a state of “utopian freedom”, however after a year of digital nomading, I started to feel a certain heaviness in my heart, and I started to miss my parents, my siblings, and our Sunday lunch gatherings. I constantly reminisce about my family’s constant exchange of chitchats at our dining table and the smell of delicious food my mom used to prepare. I decided to ask a question that had been in my mind since the inception of this research –How do you cope with loneliness?

Seiko reflected on her loneliness and how it affected her relationships while being a digital nomad. She recalled her whole dating experience and realized that she accepted unhealthy relationships because she was lonely, she said:

It's easier to find dates than friends. It is easier to have dating apps and find a date rather than finding a friend. Being a digital nomad, being lonely, is one of the biggest negative experiences, I think. It can even lead you to cling to people who are not good for you, or who don't respect you (Seiko).

Seiko also shared that she liked to spend time alone and that she was an introvert, however she also shared something that contrasted to her prior statement.

But at the end of the day, I also want to talk with someone and share about my day, and just talking, or just watch funny stuff or share trips for example, so that is when I feel lonely. Most of the day I'm really OK, just doing my stuff, and if I'm being active, I feel energetic and don't really feel lonely, but if I just stay 2 weeks without talking closely with anyone, I would definitely be lonely, and loneliness will grow (Seiko).

Reflecting back, I realized even in their quest for freedom and independence, they still craved for close friendships and companionship. They're being a digital nomad, the search for freedom and autonomy does not sever their desire for bonding.

Akemi also shared that she used her podcast to combat loneliness. In her podcast, she shared and talked to other nomads who had similar feelings of loneliness. Akemi used her podcasts to share her experiences and shed light on the importance of friendships; "Extremely and constantly ... being a digital nomad, you don't have that real-life human connection and company and that's pretty lonely". And she went on narrating that being a digital nomad was not all sunshine and rainbows, there were tradeoffs and sacrifices.

I feel like, many of my friends, they all have this in - office jobs ... and they always say you are having a great life as a digital nomad! But I mean, there are benefits from that, but it's not like all things positive you know, you don't have that real life human connection and company, and that's pretty lonely. And you don't want to be that kind of person who complains of how bad being a digital nomad is because it's not that bad, but you still feel lonely (Akemi).

Seiko and Akemi gave their advice in navigating loneliness. Passionately, they recalled what they have done and are still doing:

You know what I will do? ... I will talk to someone who has a similar experience, it's super helpful. Even if you don't have a friend with a similar experience, take a look at someone else's, like an article or join an online group to see what people are talking about, it can so be helpful (Akemi).

And most importantly ... Don't put yourself out there just out of loneliness, find a place that will nurture you and care about you, because loneliness is a dangerous combination of being an Asian woman alone on the road (Seiko).

Ishana recalled how it used to be lonelier before smartphones. She was thankful for the connectivity today because, if she felt lonely, she could call her friends anytime. Ishana shared that she was independent at a very young age. When she was 18, she moved to New York to pursue academic studies. However, holidays such as Christmas make Ishana yearn for her close friends and family.

Well ... Smartphones make the world a little less lonely because I could be in the middle of nowhere ... or I could be in a cafe in the countryside in Spain. As long as I have data, or Internet that I can connect with ... If I'm lonely and eating lunch by myself, I can call a friend or text my friends ... then in a way it's like having a wormhole through time in space and I could feel like I'm sitting in New York or something with them ... I didn't realize it's close to a decade since I have seen some friends that I've been close to. A digital nomad said to me in Vietnam that maybe a part of me is a little broken because let's face it, it takes a certain kind of person to be able to leave their loved ones behind to aimlessly wander. When I think about it, it's kind of true, I've missed my brother's graduation because I chose to go climbing, I've missed a really good friend's wedding because I was climbing in Nepal ... In a way, I've missed so many other pieces of the lives of the people who I have lived with and I care about (Ishana).

I was writing my notes and I realized Ishana's experience showed her deep sense of self-reflection about the truth and reality of her choices. Being a digital nomad requires sacrifice and tradeoffs. Interestingly, Zhu reflected on her experience with loneliness associated with being a digital nomad. She recalled that there were times that she had to give up socializing and work instead:

Oh yeah absolutely! You're a digital nomad, you chose either to socialize or not. You can't always have the best of both worlds and sometimes you have to work and give up socializing or sometimes you have work to do in a prolonged period of time and you need to be in a certain space, and you can't always be like to be on the go and stuff like that. You kind of miss out on potential connections to meet people or potential deeper connections with people (Zhu).

As I took a moment to reflect, the road that these Asian women digital nomads tread is full of external and internal challenges. However, they did not run away from it, instead, they embraced their feelings of loneliness and found ways to remedy them. It showed their resilient and robust nature – the challenges they face, they overcome them.

4.2.2 Between Freedom and Discipline

In this section, the other side of being a digital nomad is unraveled. The women elucidate on their experiences and the challenges they encounter and how they manage their work and leisure life.

Eui recalled that in every trip she made, she approached her work/life balance differently, “I’m not so great at splitting my days between like work and play. I’d rather get all of my work done first and then play later so that’s always my preference”. Zhu said “Honestly, time management is the number one greatest challenge and apart from that trying to make ends meet”. Zhu’s profession as the head of a community in a startup company allowed her to meet and interact with the other digital nomads who were into entrepreneurship. She recalled how hectic her schedule was when she was in Croatia, and realized it was all about finding balance between work, leisure, and personal life.

I was digital nomading in the day, I was meeting people, and, in the evening, I do follow ups and at midnight, I was doing another job ... it was really crazy. But essentially, I think about really trying to pace yourself and constantly remind yourself not to burn out, and when you burn out, you ask yourself, what exactly is your measure for recovering? ... That for me was structure, too much work then remove yourself from the environment and start all over again So, it’s always a bit of a mix and to find balance ... you have to make space for yourself and space for other people and your goals (Zhu).

Seiko voiced the same struggle with time management and structure as Zhu, she said “Oh my god that was hard! It took me a year to finally find a structure to rearrange myself ... my structure is not fancy but works for me”. Seiko also shared that if she did not set a goal for her day, she tended to procrastinate a lot, “I set a goal ... like I go out at 3pm for sightseeing and then I work very fast in the morning and then I know that something better is waiting for me”. Seiko continued by sharing that she only set a goal to sightsee and balance work and leisure

when she was staying for a short-term period, for long term occupancy in a place, she changed her plans. She wanted to keep it varied.

When you combine sightseeing with work, I feel like doing a script ... it's not efficient for me. I cannot keep that very long, after a week or so I feel burned out. That's for the short term. For the long term, where I stay somewhere longer, I just go out on the weekends or in the evenings, and that works better for me (Seiko).

Ishana also shared that changing workspaces or places worked for her. She recalled when she went to the northern part of Morocco, she left her van/beach life for a month and checked in to a coworking space.

I was kind of getting tired of being in the desert ... Dakhla is where the Sahara meets the ocean, so it's really windy, really sandy, and really beautiful and yet there is nothing. It's a city in name only, it's this little town ... So, when I can't find a good working schedule, I go to a working space, and I get convinced to work hard there (Ishana).

Akemi told me about her struggles during her first year of being a digital nomad. She had that mindset of being constantly available to prove to her bosses that she was being productive and realized it was slowly taking a toll in her health, "I felt like I had to change my mindset ... I'm working remotely now, and I can still use the traditional office life/ structure to evaluate my performance" When reflecting on their stories, I realized that a good structure was essential for being a digital nomad. The utopian freedom and flexibility were paradoxically still engaging in traditional work structures. To achieve work, life, and leisure balance it had to be grounded with a strong work ethic, self-discipline, and structure.

4.2.3 Racial and Sexualization of Asian women

As an Asian woman, when I asked questions relating to sexualization and racism during the interview, I started to reflect on my own experiences and realized that we had similar experiences of oppression and inequality.

Kai recalled her experience with unwanted men approaching her when she traveled to Europe. She confessed her fascination and attraction to white men. When in Italy, she was approached by an Italian man and asked for her number and if she was alone, there were flashbacks of what she read about women traveling solo and she immediately said, she was waiting for her

friend and the man walked away. She recalled her feeling of being distraught in a joking way, but she seriously valued safety over pleasure.

I wore a fake wedding ring because I read about how to solo travel because it was my first-time solo traveling, and of course of all the anxiety, if someone asks, if I'm traveling alone, I will say I'm traveling with a friend or family... without being pretentious, It's OK because I'm into Caucasian guys (laughing) but safe wise NO. The negative part is you are compromising your safety as a woman, you are an easy prey (Kai).

Zhu shared her experience and how it put her in the spotlight, as an Asian woman digital nomad she felt like she was “sticking out like a sore thumb” and as she continued to reflect:

I just want to say it, like an Asian female solo traveller, not so much as digital nomad, just in general, a caution, at the end of the day not everyone can see beyond your gender, especially sometimes in interactions with opposite genders... it can be quite sad sometimes, But I mean that's the reality of things (Zhu).

Seiko and Akemi had also experienced harassment when they were traveling. Akemi was slapped on the buttocks and never knew who it was, at that time “I've got no one to back me up or talk to when traveling alone”. She continued by sharing her experience when she tried to hang out in a bar. Akemi recalled how she was constantly being asked if she wanted a drink. She refused politely and was aware of the dangers of being a solo woman traveller. Akemi's intuition was telling her that there was more behind the offer of a drink.

I was in a bar, and there was a guy who keep buying me drinks and at first, I felt like OK, I just realized why he keeps buying me drinks. ... you can sense there is a bad intention, they try to get you drunk and do something more than just you know, and I am not into that (Akemi).

Seiko, in sharing her harrowing experience, recalled that even though she was being social and very careful at the same time in not accepting offers of drinks by men, when the gaze of men fell on a woman, they had the power to restrain them.

I was traveling on a motorbike and around a beachside and mountainous area.... Most of the people I meet were nice and I go to this place, it's like a yacht house in the most western part of Vietnam. I also visited that place because it is a very scenic place, a very beautiful place and a lot of people go there for sightseeing and to take photos. Then I was talking to the people there, I was just so happy, and everyone was so nice. Then they invited me to dinner... but I didn't know later, the top manager was thinking of something else. So, he was the one who initiated the party ... he offered to walk me back to where I was staying and I started to have a bad feeling, so I asked another guy who I think was friendly to kind of go with us as I'd rather have two of them and not just me and the manager. It seems like they already agreed on something, and that the guy was like afraid of the manager, so the manager was walking me back to my place alone, then he started to try to hug me, and I was super scared, and I was trying to get out and I screamed! (Seiko).

Seiko also continued sharing her experience of being sexualized. She used to date a western guy and she remembered how offended she was by how the guy treated her. She recalled the feeling of being not treated as a person, as an individual.

I have a bad experience dating with a westerner digital nomad and then he started making a lot of offensive jokes, about me being Asian ... so this guy started to think it's funny to just tell how he paid for sex or how he said something like that so we kind of play into that stereotype, wherein being with an Asian woman, she is a gold digger, or she is a hooker. ... I'm just saying that some guys can have a racial idea about dating an Asian woman in their way. I'm like not an individual for them, I'm just an Asian woman here and they feel it's fun to make up those things ... I'm dating someone, after a while they are like, OK, I'm just an Asian woman, I'm just someone who has an Asian feature, the stereotype that I'm submissive, with good skin, staying young, flexible and that kind of stuff.... this guy started to think it's funny to just tell how he paid for sex or how he said something like that (Seiko).

Seiko's experience in dating provides an example of both racism towards and sexualization of Asian women. Her reflection exemplified that Asian women are considered as exotic or someone to conquer and a representation of the effects of colonialism. For Seiko, it took a long time to recover from that experience. In a similar vein, Ishana recalled her own experiences regarding negative racial remarks while she was Denmark. Ishana reflected on

the different racial challenges she faced during her travels. As an Asian woman traveling, she received different kinds of racist remarks, the most common one was what she termed as ignorant racism.

There are like tiny racisms that you experience as you go abroad ... There is like ignorant racism where you just like ignore, and you can be walking down the street and people yell China? China? But now they yell Korean because they all watch the squid game (Ishana).

Sukhi also had experienced ignorant racism when she was walking in the streets. Sukhi said she just ignored people who try to racially profile her.

For being Asian, some people are calling you from the across the street ... like konichiwa or NiHao ... and I feel like they're like trying to reach out or something but in a very racist kind of way (Sukhi).

Reflecting on those racial comments, both Ishana and Sukhi acknowledged that it was done unintentionally without being racist and maybe the only way those people could communicate with them. Reflecting back on their experience, they both viewed this from another perspective, that maybe they just really wanted to connect with them in a language or in words with which they were familiar.

In Serbia, like they ask Thailand? I'm like no, Taiwan. But you know its curiosity.... just say how are you, and I can tell you where I am from, I know you don't say that in a judgmental way, you just really just want to know where I am from, because you don't see many Asian people in this town ... (Ishana).

It's kind of interesting to me to see what they think I am or what ethnicities they know of or what kind of language can they say... I felt like when I was in Morocco everyone seemed to think I was Japanese, I don't know if there's a lot of Japanese tourists or if they've never seen Chinese people before or what ... like why? I don't speak Japanese (Sukhi).

Ishana recounted another racism experience in Copenhagen that related to indignation and animosity towards people of Asian descent. She remembered little acts and blatant racism while doing regular activities. Ishana reflected on the lack of cordiality towards Asian females, especially in a predominantly white western place.

I was riding my bike on the other side of the street and then someone just shouts, Go back to China! ... I was in the bike lane ... then there are two ways where you can go, either go this way (left) or that way(right) so my bike stopped and then a woman just likes stopped and then she rams her bike into mine on purpose and then refuses to meet my eye and I was like, really? ... On another incident, we were at a friend's summer house just outside of Copenhagen there was a lady who lived next door to us, and she told us Denmark is only for Danish you only live here because you speak Danish! (Ishana).

Seiko who had travelled extensively within Asia, had experienced racism from a westerner and locals: "I kind of see that judgmental look ..." Reverse racism was the term Seiko used when locals have prejudice towards Asian women with a western man/woman.

If I hang out with a foreigner, I feel prejudice in my face. In Bali, they have foreigners who are white, with blue eyes right? Then I found out that if I hang out with a westerner like that, I feel like they comment, they give me a look or something, but if I'm alone it's OK when I'm alone it's nice, or when I hang out alone with locals its nice. But when I hang out with a westerner, I feel that... (Seiko).

Seiko felt sadness while reflecting on the experience. A sadness towards her fellow Asians, wherein racism can still be very present and omnipotent towards other Asians. She felt that Asians treated other Asians differently compared to their white counterparts.

Asian people they treat foreigners and white people very well, they are not very open when it comes to other Asians, so it's also a kind of reverse racism, where you treat other races better than your race. It's more like you are putting down your race and hanging on to people whose race you think is better (Seiko).

Ishana witnessed these interactions in Cambodia. She reflected on her feeling of being uncomfortable because she felt too close to them to witness acts of servitude.

It's taken me a long time to figure out how to put words to it but so there's a certain way that in the hospitality industry that they treat western tourists with an extra degree that in a way it almost comes across as like servitude... Living in the US, I've never really thought about my Asian identity so much on the surface, it's always there in the back of my mind, I knew of course that I'm Asian, I have these cultural habits,

etc. but, it wasn't until I started traveling, like wow! Like I'm being aware of the whole Asian aspect (Ishana).

As I write my notes and reflections, my goal was to understand, explore and analyze the different facets of their experiences in racism and Asian women's stigmatization. My reflections sent me to the views of the societal privileges of being white and the racial inequality that is deeply rooted in being of Asian culture who have been colonized and enslaved throughout history. Acknowledging that there is a white privilege can help motivate societies to combat these injustices. The voices of these Asian women can be used as an advocate for reform and change towards racial and gender advantages. However, I began to realize how all of them narrated their experiences in a such a way that resilience and their feminine intellect pervades. In all of their stories, I always felt a sense of their positive personalities, facing challenges with humor with a splash of ingenuity and female intelligence.

Ishana addressed the role of image and appearance by describing how she used to dress and carry herself: "I used to wear motorcycle boots and faux leather jackets". Ishana used to wear her toughness on the outside. She reflected how she wanted people to see her beyond the fragility of being an Asian woman. She realized that it did not invalidate the other aspects of her personality by dressing in what she was comfortable with. She started wearing clothes that made her feel comfortable and look good. "It was the style I both liked and also, I felt like I wanted to wear my toughness on the outside, so people would look at me and think that I'm not fragile".

One of Ishana's leisure activities was climbing. She narrated how guys did not believe her when she said she could surf or climb, etc., because she was too girly, or she was a woman.

you're too girly and they'll ask you; do you know how to do all the things you say you know how to do? Are you good at climbing or biking or anything? So, I feel like in the male world sometimes you have to tone it down a little but at the same time if it's part of your personality like why not (Ishana).

Zhu also said she was learning from Mark Zuckerberg who likes to wear the same thing every day, "I mean it's helpful because you don't have to think about what you are going to wear ... I don't put on a lot of makeup, and I don't dress up". Eui had had a similar attitude in that she chose comfort over anything.

When I'm out like, I don't dress very cute like ... I just put on whatever like it's comfortable so part of it is like, I just like, I get like literally I'm just like not that attractive when I'm traveling, I know it's weird (Eui).

They both narrated that their appearance made them blend in more with the crowd averting the dangers most solo women experience. However, reflecting back on these conversations, I consider this as a constraint for women, because women self-objectify themselves or get disturbed by others' perspectives. However, looking at their experiences from a different perspective, this could also be a form of empowerment where they promoted a positive attitude of themselves, protected their worth as women and boosted their self-esteem.

4.3 The road on becoming an empowered woman

Reflecting on their stories, I specifically remembered something that Akemi said in our interview, "I guess I'm kind of like a rebel kind ... even though they have like a problem with it, they can't stop me". Akemi's reflection had a similar tone to Ishana's story about her being independent at an early age. Ishana moved to NY when she was 18 to pursue academic excellence, so her transition into becoming a digital nomad was smooth. She then recalled her mother being stressed out because she was solo traveling to Cambodia.

I said to my mom like I'm going to Cambodia for a week or two by myself, she freaked out ... It's not safe! and said, now I'm so worried, I'm going to be so worried the whole time, next time you think something like this just don't tell me, tell me about it afterward (Ishana).

Zhu started sharing her past and said "Everything they wanted me to do I had already gone against it before, so at the end of the day they also recognize that even if they don't approve, I will still do it". When her parents knew of her decision to live nomadically, they were receptive since she explained that she was still employed and earning but with an added bonus. Seiko shared that her parents were worried about her being a digital nomad and until this day they still tried to convince her to be a conventional Asian woman. However, at an early age, Seiko has always been independent and strong-willed.

They are worried, they always want me to go back to having a normal job, a regular job, steady income, and with a pension. But I have always been deciding what I wanted to do for myself, for example, I switched from business school to design school, I also decided that for myself. I think they got used to that (Seiko).

In my notes, I reflected upon my own childhood. How unknowingly, my parents wanted me to follow a specific path in life. Graduate. Have a job. Get married. Have kids. I can't help but wonder what if I did all of those things, follow a certain linear path. I would probably be a completely different person – a person I would not recognize. The decision of the women, who participated in my research, to become a digital nomad broke with familial and social constructs, suggesting that they were advocates of a modern, independent Asian woman.

4.3.1 Resistance

In the interviews, I often shared my own experiences of being a digital nomad, in particular when we discussed the topic of resistance – against unwanted male attention and norms and values from my culture and others. Ishana was always aware of the dangers, guarded herself from the possibilities and applied caution in all her travel adventures. Her resistance related to her strong sense of awareness that gave her the mobility and courage to traverse norms, stigmas, and the male gaze.

I'm always thinking, if I'm by myself, I probably shouldn't go out drinking alone if I don't know anyone in town and if there are no friends around. I won't do that after dark as you know. I'll never drink if I'm alone and if I'm outside unless it's a place I know well and I won't go into places that are slightly sketchy after dark but it's the same thing I would do in a big city ... So, like I'm always just constantly aware (Ishana).

Ishana reflected that she was not the typical image of an Asian woman that someone would see doing the things she did and further said “which shouldn't be the case because I know a lot of strong independent Asian women but for some reason, we're still not very visible in certain ways”. She continued on retelling that in most of her solo travels “In other places in other parts of the world, I usually experience that more people are trying to take care of me because they think I'm not capable of doing something. That gets annoying after a while”.

Reflecting on her testimonies, it is only one of the many experiences of how society dictates who, what or how to be as an Asian woman, which suggested that these women only belonged in a prism of domesticity. Women like Ishana were constantly proving that they were and could be different from what society dictated them to be. Her independent nature allowed her to experience “male landscapes”, which were synonymous with the untamed and the wilderness.

It was when I was biking through Spain leaving my boyfriend alone for periods and I would just go off and have my adventure ... I was doing this little trail ... suddenly you have like a solo female like Asian traveler who's tiny and riding this like mountain bike which is usually high and is covered in mud, and as I roll into town this little, almost half-forgotten town ... with a bunch of old men drinking coffee after a day's work, and I was not what they expected to see, they had a bunch of questions always in a positive way and I mean they're always a little concerned about my safety or if I feel safe, that's very positive and it's just I never pause to think about what I'm doing as something extraordinary or rare until I get this reaction (Ishana).

In their interviews, Sukhi and Akemi, also shared their practices of being cautious in all their travels. Their awareness and their application of caution may seem like a constraint. However, as for Ishana, their resistance was related to their strong sense of caution and awareness which allowed them to navigate through the male gaze. Sukhi applied her caution by not going alone at night, while Akemi started to make friends and she was learning how to protect herself. She narrated her ways of walking alone at night and how she used objects to protect herself and how making friends was another way of looking out for others and herself.

Ever since I started traveling alone when I walk on the street late at night, I need to have something in my hands maybe it's an umbrella-like I'm holding a knife or something and if someone tried to attack me, I can immediately attack back ... being a female solo traveller, there's a lot of time that you worry about your safety. So, I make friends with other female travellers to make sure that I have company. I'm not embarrassed or anything at least, I have another friend who I can ask for help (Akemi).

Ishana also remembered incidents when men were trying to call her attention, especially in the streets. She recalled how she used snippets of their language to change and break the narratives towards her.

They usually greet me and try to talk to me and imply that they are interested, and I immediately respond in basic Arabic like greeting and phrases, hello how are you, how is your family, etc. Usually, those men who catcall, it's a sport to them, it kind of shocks them because you have broken their narrative, you change the narrative and you have taken control of it (Ishana).

As I was writing my notes for this section, I realized that choosing to become an Asian female digital nomad was already a demonstration of resistance against social and cultural implied norms towards Asian women. In their ways, these women were slowly breaking the societal beliefs of who and what it is to be an Asian woman – traveling alone, venturing into leisure activities and being in professions that were and are male-dominated. Standing up for oneself was one of the many ways these women were shaking the patriarchal cage that they were in.

4.3.2 Transformation

During interviews, everyone wanted to know my story about becoming a digital nomad. They were all interested in my journey and my settling into a small town in Norway for five years. While I was telling them my story, I had an epiphany of how becoming a digital nomad changed me as a person, I couldn't help but wonder how did becoming a digital nomad change them?

Kai recalled how becoming a digital nomad changed her mind set and made her reflect on how a nomadic lifestyle made her see the important things in life and she learned to take a breather. “It made me more open-minded, and I've learned to be when you are traveling you feel like, it's a cure to self-entitlement”. Zhu acknowledged that being a digital nomad made her hungrier for the rest of world, “when you leave a place, it feels sad, on the other hand, I think I'm always excited for my future self, how can I make this replicable and how can I make it more intentional that I want it”. Seiko recalled that traveling within Asia opened her mind to the differences in people and how prejudice towards others was rampant in her community. Being a digital nomad exposed her to not only other digital nomads but most especially to the local peoples.

I illuminated a lot of prejudice that I didn't know ... I think what changed me as a person is I'm more open-minded and more tolerant towards a different culture and everybody is different, every culture has different people and not to stereotype people (Seiko).

Eui recalled how digital nomading and traveling allowed her to make her world bigger and smaller at the same time. She was very reflective on how it made her the person she is today – a stronger and more grounded version has emerged.

Connecting more deeply with yourself is like a tree that grows branches outward and then also roots inward ... like going both ways and I find that travel allows for both. It's seeing more broadly and taking it in even more and appreciating even more, like the full spectrum of humanity and the world and of nature. At the same time if you're traveling on your own even more so the ability to get to know yourself more like, what are the choices, why am I going to these places, why am I talking to these people, what am I asking them what am I looking for and how is that reflecting who I am? (Eui).

Ishana shared that being a digital nomad made her a bit carefree. This kind of freedom reflected her experience in dealing with the unknown and the unexpected. Ishana realized that being carefree allowed her to see and do things from different perspectives. "I would like to think it made me better at not being in control all the time, but I know I still like to be in control most of the time. So, I think it is freeing in a way". In the interview with Kai, she confessed that she was a perfectionist. She reflected on how she wanted to be in control, to always want to know the outcome of things. Being a digital nomad made her trust herself and follow her intuition. Her carefree personality came from her realization that online work was never certain. She used to become so worried if one of her online jobs were done and she had no backup, but now she has mastered the ability of staying calm amidst uncertainty.

Taking a moment to reflect on their stories, I heard their confidence in doing what they were and are passionate about and their tenacity to grab what life can give them. Being a digital nomad made them realize who they were, and they found meaning in their life even in their constant mobility. Being a digital nomad made them reflect on their life, how they were constantly representing themselves through remembering their experiences, and the stories they collected.

Being a digital nomad also came with a realization that even if they had the freedom and flexibility, their time was still limited. Ishana, for instance, found meaning in being a digital nomad because everything was stripped away. She explained that constant travel allowed her to become intentional and to know the very core of who she was as a person.

When all the masks fall away that's who you are ... I've distilled my life down to what I find meaningful ... that you suddenly have the freedom to decide I think it

contributes to the finding of meaning in your life because you don't have room in your life for anything that's not meaningful or intentional (Ishana).

To Akemi becoming a digital nomad allowed her to filter what was needed and what was not, what was important and what was not important. She reflected that knowing what you wanted and did not want in life was having an awareness of how to use time. Becoming a digital nomad gave her the wisdom on what to do with her time “I would say, traveling alone so many times and being a digital nomad for like I guess 3-4 years, you just really need to know the difference between what you want and what you need” (Akemi).

Both Eui and Sukhi talked about how their belief in themselves, their competence in their work made them independent, a sense of autonomy and adaptability that they were able to learn and nurture over time. Sukhi shared that through becoming a digital nomad, she learned to become adaptable and prioritized things differently “I think certain things, I thought were important are less important to me and other things that I thought were mostly things I took for granted are more important to me”. Eui’s constant digital nomading, allowed her to connect with herself. She recalled that she became confident, it made her know what she wanted, what she was interested in – in other words, staying true to who she was.

Travel helped me connect more with myself ... I felt that was a really helpful thing in my singledom. I like trying to find myself and not feel like I'm needing anyone else that I can be independent and very fulfilled and happy in the world which is a beautiful place and is full of beautiful people (Eui).

Taking a moment for reflection, I think that the benefits of being a digital nomad transcend beyond their geographical mobility. The biggest benefit of being a digital nomad was their growing awareness of their capacity for change. They were able to focus on themselves, their emotions, how they valued their time, and their behavior towards others and themselves. In conclusion, I quote Ishana reflections of being on the road, a concept she learned and constantly reminded herself of.

This concept of living aggressively selfish doesn't mean to be selfish in the sense that you're disregarding other people's feelings. It means we are so busy at protecting all the big freedoms in our life, but we often forget the little freedoms in our life, especially everyone in your life who has demands on your time and often you forget to protect yourself in the middle of it all (Ishana).

4.4 The Asian Woman Digital Nomad

Reflecting back on our conversations, I remembered how all of the women exuded a sense of contentment and happiness, and I felt lighter, and more empowered during and after our interviews. I realized in that moment that an empowered woman comes in different forms. For these women, empowerment means knowing your autonomy, knowing your passions, having a great sense of self-reflection and self-awareness.

In the interview, Seiko shared how society prescribes what and who is an ideal Asian woman - a woman bounded by patriarchal beliefs, becoming a mother, dependent and silent. Seiko became a digital nomad not to escape *per se*, but to recreate and explore her individuality, not dictated by what her family or her society believed. The freedom she attained by being a digital nomad was another way of breaking the chain of Asian woman stereotypes and an empowering message for other women. To Seiko, her past and present experiences shaped her femininity. Being an Asian woman digital nomad made her feel powerful – because now she had reclaimed her power to create and recreate herself.

As an Asian woman, our society has a very firm definition of what a woman has to do and how we are supposed to live our lives. If we live in our hometown and stay with our people even though they are very kind and nice people, they still expect you to be a certain type of person (Seiko).

Being empowered, according to Ishana and Akemi, also came with a realization of your autonomy. They came to realize that their autonomy allowed them to become determined in embracing the freedom to pursue their own choices.

At the end of the day, you are on your own, you need to decide and trust yourself that you are capable of doing those things ... I'm proud of myself. I'm financially stable and can travel around the world. So that's one thing to be proud of (Akemi).

I didn't feel lonely, I just felt alone and it's in those moments when you start to become more aware of your autonomy, the ways you do and do not rely on yourself, and learn to be OK with being alone... I respect my schedule and I know if I need my alone time, then, I should take time alone (Ishana).

Zhu had also reflected on her solo travels as a digital nomad and how she became decisive in her time. She recalled being stigmatized for choosing solitude, especially as a woman. She found comfort in being alone because it gave her the mental space for her thoughts.

Especially for females, my friends are like, why do you want to eat alone? I think it's very lonely, are you sad, are you Emo? There is a negative connotation to it ... if you can eat alone, you can drink alone, and it's just so nice because you have that headspace to think whatever you want to think (Zhu).

When Kai decided to become a digital nomad, that was the moment that she chose to become happy. Kai said "Choosing happiness over anything without feeling guilty, choose happiness first. Because of a culture of capitalism, consumerism, material things, it doesn't have to be material things as long as you are happy. Happiness is not linear." The importance of choosing happiness allowed Kai to change her values and beliefs. She chose to be in an environment that allowed her to become the best version of herself. For Kai, her happiness was her true wealth.

Sukhi reflected that her empowerment came from her resilience and her adaptability. Taking that leap of faith and trusting yourself that whatever unexpected things happened, she would adapt, move forward, and rise from above them. "Like thinking about it seems intimidating and I think that doing it turns out to be like a lot more fun than you expect it and that everything just works out eventually". Ishana's reflection on being a digital nomad was also about taking that leap of faith, knowing your present and future priorities, and realizing that the only decision that counts was the decision she made for herself. "If you're waiting around for permission or to feel like you're worthy or that you're capable of doing something, it's going to take way too long, just go do it first and figure it out later."

Being an empowered Asian woman digital nomad was also about having a good sense of self-reflection. Becoming one could be a beacon of change within themselves and others - by looking at their past and how those experiences affect their present and future. For most of the women, being a digital nomad and traveling constantly allowed them to become comfortable with the uncomfortable.

The biggest truth is when you are going solo when you are doing something that disrupts your routine, it's uncomfortable. It requests more effort because everything is designed for comfort and convenience ... And you can have the opportunity to be a

different version of yourself ... if you are solo traveling, you have so much more of that ability on how to be intentional with your time and how you understand it (Zhu).

Seiko was narrating her reflection of just having only a backpack which stripped her of the material comforts to which she was used. However, this did not deter her from embracing her future. Reflecting on her past, Seiko shared that both her past and present experiences shaped her individuality. Through her travels, she explored not only new places and faces but also a place within herself - a place where acceptance of people, culture, and gender thrives. Her past experiences allowed her to reclaim her power, recreating herself into the woman she wanted to become.

I can start with a cliché, yes, I did find myself, but it's not like what other people think like going to a very nice place and then you find yourself. I gradually create myself, and everywhere I go, every experience I have had, I'm creating myself. So, myself now is a creation of my own, because I choose to go out and I choose to challenge myself and I chose to have my beliefs challenged and I changed what I used to be and I think that's very powerful. I find that there is meaning in what is finding myself is - I'm still creating myself in a sense (Seiko).

Zhu shared that her empowerment resonated towards her North Star – her purpose. Being a digital nomad was more than being able to travel to places, being a digital nomad made her reflect on following her North Star. “So, for me, my North star varies from human connections to showing up for people, to just being just hungry to learn and seizing the day”. Like Seiko, Zhu's thirst for becoming a better version of herself resonated with an empowered individual.

Taking a moment for reflection, I realized that an Asian woman digital nomad, had an openness towards cultural divergence, and was a woman who sought diversity, a woman who had a worldly awareness that reflects towards their everyday lives – she was a cosmopolitan woman (Salazar, 2010a). I reflected that for most of the women in this study, they exercised being a cosmopolitan with a deep sense of self-reflection and awareness of their own culture. Narrating their stories allowed me to reflect on these qualities and how it was connected to their empowerment.

Eui, a woman of the world, narrated that she did not only "walk" through the places she visited but she soaked in the beauty and flavor of the places. She considered herself not the

usual traveler who traverses through familiar touristy places, she was drawn towards places that gravitated with her personality – that had character and flavor. She believed in the richness of a place that went beyond the touristy and Instagram-able places.

I enjoy traveling because it also helps me see how we're all very much alike and when we get past those particular traditions and cultures when you hear them talk about their kids and their families and their hopes and their challenges and I realized that there are so many things to relate to ... I think a curious outsider, a little bit of a researcher, and also a connector with other humans - that is the identity I feel I'm drawn to the most and being an Asian or even a woman didn't play a huge role in that experience at least it's not obvious to me how it did (Eui).

Zhu shared that the digital nomad lifestyle aligned with her life goals. Being a digital nomad not only made her meet fellow digital nomads and build a sense of community, but it also allowed her to peek into the lives of the locals. She valued those interactions because it nourished her thirst for knowledge, “I think it's a nice alignment with my life goals because it has brought the essence of meeting locals and having conversations over things that matter to other people” (Zhu).

Seiko's cosmopolitan quality oscillated with her views regarding friendships. Avowed as an introvert, she spent most of her time alone and believed that friendships should practice no attachments; meaning she did not have to be in the same place with them, with our connectivity, deep connections could be formed and reformed.

I usually don't feel much attachment, or I don't feel so much sadness ... I feel that if I have a real connection, that connection will be with me forever ... I just feel like if you are a good friend of mine, we can just call each other from across the globe and it still feels just as good as if we are together having coffee. ... They are like bringing a little bit of me to their place and the same to mine and of course if I visit a new country, I have a friend in a new country and that's kind of cool (Seiko).

Interacting with locals could be another way of being a cosmopolitan. For these women, being and talking with locals allowed them to become part of a community. They learned new things, opened their minds to new perspectives and reflected on social-cultural differences. Ishana's stories of interaction with people on the road, made her appreciate their diversity and how as human beings collectively we are all connected.

Your world becomes bigger and smaller at the same time. It becomes bigger because you have a better understanding of the different people you meet, and it becomes smaller because you start to realize despite all the surface differences, an underlying similarity are the same human needs and desires and peoples and kindness (Ishana).

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the experiences of seven Asian female digital nomads. Becoming a digital nomad was a conscious choice for these women to break away from what constrained them. Their stories have provided a glimpse of their lifestyle and have provided a practical approach to a utopian freedom lifestyle. The practicality of the lifestyle has been unraveled by issues of finding a structure and self-discipline to become productive in their professional endeavors. I have also realized that their gender and race have greatly affected their digital nomad experience. However, in all their diverse experiences, one thing about all of them is common – their resilience in pursuit of attaining and finding their transformed self. My goal is to narrate their stories in such a way that it would also inspire others to break free from what constrains them.

5 Discussion

5.1 Between freedom and mobility

The aim of this research was to understand and explore how constraints and empowerment shape the tourist experience of an Asian woman digital nomad. In this section, I will theoretically discuss their reasons, constraints, and empowerment.

There are many factors that affected the tourist experiences of the seven Asian women digital nomads who participated in my research. However, before I uncover those factors, I must start at the beginning – their reasons for becoming a digital nomad. I believe uncovering their reasons first will provide a foundation for their experiences. My findings indicate that the women's reasons are related to many forms of freedom - freedom from a bureaucratic working environment, the freedom to explore social and cultural experiences in their quest for knowledge and lastly, to escape social and cultural norms and values of being an Asian woman. The first two reasons correlate with other academic research on motivations of digital nomads (Cook, 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018), which highlights the image of a utopian freedom. The idea of a utopian freedom is the catchphrase of the digital nomad lifestyle, which paints a picture of a glamorous lifestyle of traveling while working, however, my findings show otherwise. My findings also highlight a western-centric and malestream approach to digital nomadism. Further, my findings also revealed a more realistic approach to the women's nomadic lifestyle that relates to the paradox of freedom.

Most women in this research were freelancers or had a full-time online job that required dedication and time in order to be productive and provide financial freedom to fund their lifestyle. Their testimonies support the freedom paradox of Cook (2020), which discusses the importance of strategic planning, having structure and self-discipline in achieving a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle. The importance of this paradox allowed my research on Asian women digital nomads to add a deeper sense of practicality to an already heavily romanticized lifestyle. Their quest for freedom allowed them to develop a deep sense of responsibility in following a structured working schedule which resulted in personal and professional development. In other words, to achieve personal and professional development within the lifestyle of digital nomads, the context of freedom, self-discipline, work/life balance and time management closely resembled the same bureaucratic system they chose to leave. This statement then supports Korpela (2014) claim that there are really no freedoms only dead ends - the imposed rejection of structure and the upholding of freedom was then temporary, for

digital nomads to achieve its full potentiality one must have a good sense of self-discipline and structure.

The freedom paradox has also given importance to the women's accounts and highlights the holistic freedom popularized by Reichenberger (2018). The professional freedom of Reichenberger (2018) resembles the women's accounts of creating a professional life tailored and controlled by them. Reichenberger's research led to the conclusion that professional, personal, and spatial freedom were interconnected. She further explained that only when autonomy from professional freedom can spatial freedom be achieved and thus result in the attainment of personal freedom – in other words these freedoms are interrelated and cannot function without the others. Furthermore, Thompson (2019a) has promoted a balance between off work activities and online work in order to lead to self-development. I do agree with this discussion regarding attaining holism which was evident in the women's experiences in my study. However, based on my findings, I argue that the conception of digital nomad holism is gender- and racially-blind negating the women's experience in terms of attaining personal and spatial freedom.

I see this as an opportunity for enhancement within a prism of personal and spatial freedom. As I studied women's experience, it was important to consider how gender and race shaped the digital nomadic women's experiences in tourism and leisure (Pritchard et al., 2007; Seow, 2020). This argument can also be supported by the personal and spatial constraints identified by (Wilson & Little, 2005). They identified that women's beliefs, emotions, and their perceptions restricted travel experiences. This can be exemplified as loneliness and vulnerability, as I demonstrated in the findings chapter. Further, spatial constraints restrict women's movements within tourist spaces which can be exemplified by not venturing into isolated places and not going out during the night (Wilson & Little, 2005). Taking into consideration the women's experiences in my study which demonstrated socio-cultural, personal, practical, and spatial constraints, it was salient to introduce an embodied approach to the study of digital nomads – an approach that considered diverse sociocultural aspects that affected tourism and leisure experiences. This realization opened up for me the topic of the third reason associated with becoming an Asian woman digital nomad.

My study has shown how freedom from social and cultural norms and values imposed on Asian women was covertly hidden amongst the previous two motivations. It was further unveiled in their stories of constraints and empowerment. For most of the women, becoming a

digital nomad meant a growing awareness that the old beliefs, customs, values, and norms no longer supported their quest for personal growth. Hence, they made the decision to become nomadic – breaking away from traditional working environments and breaking away from norms and values of the past. This highlighted greater complexity in the diversity of digital nomad's experiences, previously not acknowledged in research on digital nomadism. Aydogdu (2016) and Thompson (2019b) expressed similar concerns on the phallogocentric, technology driven and malestream approach to nomadism. The thinking of digital nomads is embedded in western-centric individualism, which Asian woman coming from patriarchal contexts do not possess. In these contexts, Asian women are considered as dependent and meek which subjugates them as submissive (Seow & Brown, 2018) thereby making them unsuitable for a digital nomad lifestyle. However, my analysis shows otherwise, these women were and are independent, self-reliant and representations of empowered women.

My findings resonate with research on solo Asian travelers (Osman et al., 2020; Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang et al., 2019). It resonates with their decision of traveling solo, breaking the Asian woman narratives of weakness and dependency. Clearly, my empirical data, demonstrates the opposite to such narratives, the concept of solo travel and digital nomads, is foreign to Asian culture due to its conservative social norms and Asian values (Teo & Leong, 2006). Becoming a digital nomad provides a space where an Asian woman could resist and challenge patriarchal discourses. This made me reflect on the description of what and who is a digital nomad and if there is a way my research could add to an understanding of digital nomadism centered on gender and feminist intersectionality? In the next section, I will be highlighting the importance of feminist intersectionality through the different constraints presented in the seven women's stories.

5.2 Asian women constraints

Within previous digital nomads' scholarship, it was suggested that the main challenge of this lifestyle was loneliness (Cook, 2020; Hall et al., 2019; Reichenberger, 2018). My study supported such thinking. Most of my participants indicated several encounters of loneliness within their nomadic lifestyle. This contradicts the romanticized version of utopian freedom and lifestyle that has led to the belief that a digital nomad's lifestyle is full of endless wandering to picturesque places and constantly meeting and connecting to new people (Thompson, 2019a). While the statement above holds some truth to the lifestyle, it failed to see the other side of this type of mobility. I have shown how loneliness can be encountered

from a lack of deep interactions and friendships which lead to unhealthy relationships. The lack of interaction and friendship that was present in a traditional working space also contributed to the feeling of isolation. Reflecting back on their stories, the women showed a deep sense of self-reflection and understanding that being a digital nomad entails sacrifices and tradeoffs. Most of the women in this study have shown a sense of resilience by using digital technology to find friends and educate other digital nomads on how to conquer loneliness. My analysis supports the personal constraint identified by (Wilson & Little, 2005), which explained how the women's desire for independence also parallels with their strong desire for social interaction within their nomadic lifestyle. Their strong desire for interaction was magnified through their search for personal and online community interactions and friendship.

My findings shed light on the individualistic nature of digital nomads. It reminds us that as human beings; we crave sociability and desire self-autonomy and independence. This realization has brought another practical approach to the idealism and belief of utopian freedom in digital nomadism. Nevertheless, being self-autonomous and independent recognized that the women in my study had choices, which allowed them to create their own biographies rather than following the biography made for them. In this context, they could find their true and transformed self. This was empowering especially as they belonged to a marginalized group of Asian women. Asian cultures are mostly known for their collective behavior, which equates to dependency and conformity with social norms (Rhee et al., 1995). My study of Asian women digital nomads contradicted such claims and rather promoted a balance within their search for self and bonding.

5.2.1 Sexualized and Racialized experiences

The other constraints identified in my study were racial and sexual. These constraints support the constraints identified by Wilson and Little (2005), gendered and cultural risk of (Yang, 2017) and the power of surveillance identified by Jordan and Gibson (2005). Sexualization of women is a constraint that greatly affects women's travel experiences. It explains how a woman's body and presence is subjected and/or invites the covert and overt sexual advances of men. This constraint is adamant in research regarding Asian women's tourist and leisure experiences. Asian women have been sexualized and fetishized and thus bear a great effect whenever they are accompanied by a western man (Yang et al., 2018), wherein they are stigmatized as sex workers – which has led to unwanted sexual attention. In my study, in most

of the women's accounts, they have narrated that their presence, image and appearance in gendered tourist and leisure spaces placed them in the spotlight that features the fragility of women, and which has led to harassment. My findings showed harassment was felt by some of the seven women in social gatherings and public spaces such as bars or in streets. Such leisure constraints bring us back to my argument about personal and spatial freedoms described by Reichenberger (2018), wherein women have been limited to certain spaces and times of the day that are considered safe for women to traverse (Wilson & Little, 2005). A sexualized gaze has also greatly affected the studied women's choices that related to their image and appearance. My data suggested that only one of the women acted and dressed tough in order for people to see past her image of fragility, the others dressed down to the basics, and wore less to no make-up. I see these statements as both a constraint and empowerment because of an interiorized gaze (Small, 2016) which can be viewed in both ways. I would argue that the women had self-objectified themselves due to the male gaze and viewed this as empowerment and resistance, at the same time, the women's practice empowered them and others. In other words, the interiorized gaze was a way for these women to navigate the male gaze.

Sexualization and power of surveillance can be amplified once gender intersects with race. The Asian women digital nomads' quest for freedom and flexibility has been subjected by social norms that were designed for the western male and the stigma of an Asian woman's image projected within tourism spaces. The data suggested that their experiences with discrimination were magnified because of their Asian appearance. The most common source of discrimination came from Asian service providers, local inhabitants, and western male travelers. Most of the women called it "reverse racism" in which service providers seemed to favor the western traveler which made them feel excluded and treated differently. Similar findings of "reverse racism" has been identified by Teo and Leong (2006) Asian women backpackers and racial risk of Yang (2017) research.

Heightened social disapproval from local society was also cited by some of the women who traveled in predominantly white societies. These findings showed that spatial mobility and blending in for Asian and other women of color could add distress into their experiences - as whiteness is celebrated while people of color are oppressed. The concept of racial discrimination is a rarely discussed topic in tourism and leisure research (Yang et al., 2018) and hence the need for more focus on its intersectionality in research on women's tourist experiences.

In this study, the Asian women digital nomads' lived experiences revealed that gender and race were intertwined which amplified effects and created a new form of constraint. I have demonstrated this new form of constraint through the women's testimonies of mistreatment from service workers, local society, and western men, thinking that they were women willing to have sex with foreign western men and/or were sex workers.

The findings show that by becoming a digital nomad most of the participants have encountered responses of disapproval from family members due to Asian gender expectations and norms – wherein women should follow the life of domesticity and dependency.

Therefore, these findings have highlighted the concept of intersectionality, which focuses on the different social dimensions such as race, ethnicity, class etc., and has emphasized the embedded power relations that have given rise to inequalities, oppression, and domination in women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). My exploration of gender and racial identities in the Asian women digital nomads' experiences uncovered the complexity of power and social relations in tourism and leisure experiences. This research has also proven that Asian women's digital nomadic experiences were not homogenous, and that their constraints were a product of social and cultural constructs. Reflecting on the importance of intersectionality, has given this research an opportunity to become culturally and contextually specific in which different experiences and voices of women are acknowledged.

5.3 Resistance, Empowerment and Transformation

My results build upon and resonate with existing research on the resistance, transformative and empowering experiences of women (Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005) that is gained in becoming a digital nomad. From an outsider's perspective, choosing and becoming a digital nomad can be interpreted as resistance. The women in my study, expressed that their ability to have choices in both professional and personal lives allowed them control over their lives and thus made them feel empowered. As discussed in the previous section, the women were subjected to sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial constraints, and, at the same time, they resisted these constraints. The Asian women digital nomads' narratives showed examples of resistance towards malestream and western-centric perceptions of Asian and women in tourist spaces in line with Jordan and Gibson (2005) findings. Most women in my study were engaged in leisure activities that were mostly associated as male activities such as going into clubs or bars alone. Their resistance came from their acquired skills in protecting themselves and self-awareness of their

surroundings. However, what was surprising in my research, due to the women's cosmopolitan backgrounds, was that they acquired the skill to learn new languages. Most of the women needed to adapt to their environment and thus one way to adapt was to speak the native language. This was connected to resistance because they used their linguistic skills to break the narratives of sexualization.

Reflecting on their resistance narratives, with their experiences that dealt with racism and sexualization, why do they still continue digital nomading? I argue that their reason for not wanting to settle into a life of domesticity, or to escape sedentary and bureaucratic work life was to free themselves from Asian social and cultural norms. By doing this, they developed a more empowered self. Empowerment and resistance were also the dominant themes that led to self-transformation in the study of Asian female solo travelers (Seow & Brown, 2018), which resonated with the narratives of Asian women who were digital nomads. The women in my study, developed not only their confidence, but also resilience and robustness in facing challenging situations. Relating to the concept of meaningful travel (Wilson & Harris, 2006), the empirical data suggested that becoming a digital nomad allowed them the freedom to travel which shaped experiences that developed their self-confidence that led to a more empowered self. The result contributes a clearer understanding to the effects of digital nomadism to Asian women. The findings also suggested that becoming an Asian woman digital nomad gave them power to create and follow the life they wanted and not the life that was written for them. Their empowerment and transformation narratives also resonated with the concept of eudaimonic well-being (Bauer et al., 2008) – a concept where individuals live their authentic self and view their constraints as a necessity in the creation of personal growth and transformative experiences. In other words, constraints and resistance were interconnected in the development of the studied women, who transformed and empowered themselves.

5.4 The Female Nomad

Coming into the last section of the discussion made me reflect on whether my research on Asian women digital nomads suggested that the concept of digital nomad was deluded by research linking digital nomadism to neoliberalism (Mancinelli, 2020). Digital nomadism is a movement and concept that is based on globalization – due to its novelty it is considered as an accepted fact. However, upon the completion of my interviews, I continually ask myself, is there another way, another perspective of nomadism that can relate to women's experiences? I

came across Braidotti (1994) nomadic subjects, while I was analyzing the women's reasons, I realized that becoming a digital nomad was a continuous process for these women, a process of abandoning old lifestyles, identities, and beliefs. Becoming a digital nomad was a momentous change which opened themselves up to other ways of living and thinking.

The findings however do not align with the manifesto and ideology of digital nomads. The women's stories contained the importance of mobility but also gave importance to thinking differently and creatively in overcoming constraints and enhancing their beingness. The Asian women's experiences were not homogenous and were embedded with different social dimensions that helped shape their lived experiences. The nomadic subjects of Braidotti (1994) were used as an inspiration for this research because I was and still am interested in a concept that can help creatively change the traditional approach to digital nomadism.

Nomadic subjects are a figure of movement against the traditional nature of theories and philosophical logic (Braidotti, 1994). Such a movement is inspired by women's experiences wherein the movement offers a "critical consciousness" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 5) located within the axis of feminism and post-colonial philosophy, where contemporary subjectivity intersects with other social identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Female nomadism is a figure, a representation of contemporary subjectivity, the space of multiple social dimensions that functions within the prism of interconnections (Braidotti, 1994), which in connection with this research considers that every women's experience is different due to the multiplicity of social dimensions that they embody. I believe digital nomads and female nomads stem from the same source of nomadism however moving along different paths. Female nomads combined with the understanding of mobility, is a new way of thinking that opposes traditional beliefs/theories and using their lived experiences that intersects with other social dimensions that can become a site of creative transformation. In conclusion, the concept of nomadism is not just about physical mobility, but rather that nomadism can also be a mental, emotional, and metaphysical movement – where women can build roots within themselves.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore Asian women's travel and leisure experiences from a digital nomad's perspective. Seven Asian women digital nomads participated in my study. Four research questions were framed to explore and understand the diversity in their leisure and tourism experiences. The study explored how both constraints and empowerment shaped the women's experiences. It also investigated how the women's "Asia-ness" shaped their gendered experiences. And lastly, the study analyzed how intersectionality of gender and race shaped their reasons for becoming a digital nomad. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the answers to the four questions of my study respectively.

My first question was how does constraints shape Asian women's digital nomad experiences. Based on my analysis of their lived experiences, I explored their stories of constraints in becoming and being a digital nomad. The main reasons for becoming a digital nomad were to attain freedom in professional work contexts, freedom to experience new social and cultural relationships and freedom from sociocultural norms. The first two reasons resonated with previous research on digital nomads (Reichenberger, 2018). However, I have demonstrated that the concept of digital nomadic freedom lacked a practical approach. The freedom paradox of Cook (2020) solidified my claim regarding a practical approach, wherein I have argued the importance of strategic planning, having a structure and self-discipline in achieving balance and a fulfilling nomadic lifestyle. My findings have also solidified the claim that a traditional working structure has proven effective in a digital nomadic lifestyle – within which the women developed a sense of responsibility. Based on this, I conclude that the imposed rejection of structure and the upholding of freedom is temporary. For digital nomads to achieve the lifestyle's full potentiality one must have a good sense of self-discipline and structure.

I have also critiqued the digital holism of Reichenberger (2018), in particular, personal and spatial freedom. She concluded that professional, personal, and spatial freedom were interconnected and could not function without the other in attaining holistic freedom. I, however, have argued that the conception of digital nomadic holism is gender and racially blind which negates women's experiences in terms of attaining personal and spatial freedom. My argument is supported by both Wilson and Little (2005) and Yang (2017) research on constraints and risk, who have argued that women's beliefs, emotions, their perceptions, culture and race can restrict travel experiences. Further, my analysis has also identified

multiple constraints in becoming and being an Asian female digital nomad. The constraints that were identified are interconnected to and shaped by the women's heterogeneous experiences. One of the identified constraints was loneliness. In the analysis of Asian women digital nomads, I discussed the challenges of loneliness in their quest for freedom. A romanticized version of a utopian freedom in a nomadic lifestyle has led to the belief that such a nomad's lifestyle is full of endless wandering to picturesque places and constantly meeting and connecting to new people (Cook, 2020). While it holds some truth to the lifestyles of the women in my study, it failed to see the other side of mobility. Feelings of loneliness can originate from a lack of deep interactions and friendships, which then may lead to unhealthy relationships. The lack of interaction and friendship that is present in traditional working spaces also contributed to a feeling of isolation. This loneliness analysis supports the personal constraint identified by Wilson and Little (2005), which helped me explain how the Asian women's desire for independence also parallels with their strong desire for social interaction within their nomadic lifestyle. Their strong desire for interaction was magnified through their search for personal and online community interactions and friendships.

The second question was how does Asian women's "Asia-ness" shaped their gendered experience. The sexualization of Asian women is a constraint that has also greatly affected their digital nomadic leisure and tourism experiences. My research has identified how being a woman and Asian in gendered tourism and leisure spaces magnified their "Asian-ness". I have demonstrated how a woman's body image, appearance and presence has subjected them to covert and overt sexual advances and male harassment. The findings have also suggested that such a sexualized and racial gaze shaped the women's choices that relate to their image and appearance. For instance, some of the women acted and portrayed an image of toughness, others wore less to no makeup. It was deemed important to highlight such experience because it threads between the concepts of constraint and empowerment. Through the interiorized gaze as introduced by Small (2016), the women in my study have self-objectified themselves due to the perception of others and this can also be considered an empowered moment where the women practiced and promoted a positive perspective within themselves and to others. I thus conclude that the interiorized gaze is a form of adaptivity in navigating the male gaze.

My third question was how does empowerment shaped Asian women's digital nomad experience. My findings have resonated and built within the existing research on the resistance, transformative and empowering experiences of women (Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang, 2017). Becoming a digital nomad had allowed the

women in my study to have the ability to make choices and take control of their professional and personal lives, which developed their self-confidence that led to a more empowered self. They have encountered constraints and risks and have also resisted against them. The women have developed not only their confidence but also resilience and robustness in facing challenging situations. Their empowerment and transformation narratives mirrors with the concept of eudaemonic well-being (Bauer et al., 2008). The Asian women digital nomads in my study lived their authentic selves and viewed their constraints as a *sine qua non* in the creation of personal growth and transformative experiences. The study has concluded that constraints and resistance were interconnected in the development of the studied women transformed and empowered self.

The fourth question is about how intersectionality of gender and race shaped their reasons for becoming a digital nomad? I used the concept of intersectionality in analyzing their experiences as a woman and Asian. I argued that race should be studied together with gender to understand the women's lived experiences. These conclusions of sociocultural constraints of gender and race were supported by the concept of feminist intersectionality promulgated by Crenshaw (1989). The concept is an expression that as individuals, we are complex beings, grounded in different identities, influences, and beliefs that hold a multitude of truths. Social categories shape female Asian digital nomads' experiences: thus, gender and race are intertwined in the production of lived experiences.

The focus of intersectionality in this research adds to the discussion on the importance of racial oppression within tourism studies concerning Asian women. My realization in this research was that the women's constraints, and empowerment were interconnected with freedom from social and cultural norms and values. Their empowerment and transformative narratives resonate with the concept of eudaimonic well-being (Hamid et al., 2021). Through becoming digital nomads, the women grabbed the power to live as their authentic self and saw the constraints as important experiences in realizing their transformed self. Choosing to become a digital nomad meant a growing awareness of the workings of their old Asian beliefs, values, or norms being no longer situated within their quest for personal growth. So why do they continue being digital nomads, amidst the constraints and risks? I conclude that they are driven by a desire to eschew a life of domesticity, escape sedentary and bureaucratic working lives, and achieve freedom from social and cultural norms. The women developed their confidence and achieved power, resilience, and robustness in facing challenging

situations. This gives a clearer understanding of what digital nomadism does to Asian women – an opportunity to create and lead a life that was not written for them.

From an outsider and an Asian perspective, becoming and being a digital nomad can be interpreted as resistance. The women expressed that their ability to have choices in both professional and personal lives allowed them to take control which made them feel empowered. The Asian women digital nomads' narratives also presented their resistance towards western-centric and malestream perception of Asian and women in tourist spaces. Their resistance came from engaging in leisure activities that were mostly associated with masculine activities and they adapted new skills in protecting themselves. Acquiring the local language was a form of resistance. The women, as cosmopolites, adapted to their environment by speaking the native language.

One of my biggest realizations in this research was my introduction to the female nomad. I used it as a way to discuss digital nomadism. Due to the western-centric, malestream ideology of digital nomadism, I realized that the female nomad is a concept rooted in women's experiences that embraces feminist intersectionality. In achieving this realization, I was deeply inspired by Braidotti (1994) and the seven Asian women's experiences. Thus, nomadism can be seen, not only through the lens of neoliberalism and globalization, but also through the lens of women's experiences, wherein such lenses can cultivate transformation and creativity in understanding their diverse experiences.

7 Future research

The last two years were one of the best and memorable years in my student life. I have had the privilege and the ability to explore a research topic in which I am and was personally and academically interested. For future research, I would like to further explore and understand how single Asian women's sexuality affects their digital nomadic experiences and how do they cultivate romantic relationships while in constant mobility. The difference between Thompson (2019c) research on digital nomadic romantic relationships and my suggested future research relates to the exclusivity of my participants. Race and sexuality may pose a challenge and thus feminist intersectionality would then be an appropriate lens to utilize.

8 Reference

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Appendix

Appendix A: NSD Information Letter and Consent form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project?

"The Asian Female Digital Nomad"

This is an inquiry about a participation in a research project where the main purpose is to know what constrains and empowers Asian women's experience. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

To explore the different experiences of Asian women digital nomads and to illuminate their narratives on how their culture, gender, and race in the 21st-century address the complexity of the tourist experience.

Objectives:

1. To explore Asian women travelers from a digital nomad perspective
2. To critically examine the feminist theory in gender tourism studies
3. To explore the cultural and social background of Asian female travelers
4. To understand the phenomena of Digital nomads, that captivates Asian women to make transformational decisions

Who is responsible for the research project?

UiT The Arctic University of Norway is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Informant is selected through selection criteria. Through this process, individuals who will participate can provide information necessary in addressing the research question. The researcher was accepted in a closed Facebook group, posted a short description of the thesis and Direct message the women who expressed interest to the project.

What does participation involve for you?

- If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you will take part on a semi-structured interview. It will take approx. 45 minutes. The interview which includes questions about what empowers and constrain an Asian female digital nomad. The interview session will be held electronically, and the researcher will send a secure MS teams link. Your answers will be recorded electronically and will be stored in a secured scholastic space.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data, I will store the data on a research server, locked away/encrypted, etc.

The participants will be anonymous in the publications (name and age, for the occupation a generic position name will be used however, the company name will be anonymous)

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end 30th of June 2022. The personal data will be removed including the digital recordings at the end of the project.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with *UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Patricia Aida Linao*, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *UiT The Arctic University of Norway* via *Patricia Aida Linao*: PH1019@uit.no
Supervisor: *Bente Heimtun*; Bente.heimtun@uit.no, +47 78450293
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: personvern@nsd.no
or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.
- Our Data Protection officer *Joachim Bakkevold* (personvernombud@uit.no)

Yours sincerely,

Student

Project Leader
Bente Heimtun

Patricia Aida Linao

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *The Asian Female Digital Nomad* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in *online* interview
 for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I cannot be recognised

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 30th of June 2022

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix B: Pre-interview form



<i>Name</i>						
<i>Age:</i>						
<i>Marital status and children (please tick one box for marital status and one box for status on children)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Married	<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced/ Separated	<input type="checkbox"/> No Children	<input type="checkbox"/> With Children
<i>Profession before becoming a digital nomad:</i>						
<i>Current profession as digital nomad:</i>						
<i>Country of origin (where you lived before becoming a digital nomad):</i>						
<i>Which country did you or your family migrated <u>from</u>:</i>						
Please tell me about your history as digital nomad:						
<i>Please list up to the last (6) six destinations in which you have been a digital nomad:</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
<i>Length of stay in each of the up to six destination you have been/are a digital nomad:</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
<i>In total, how long have you been a Digital Nomad?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-6 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 years and more

Together with this form, I would like you to email me one **image/picture** that you really like from your time as a digital nomad. In the interview, we will then talk about the memories and reflections that this image/picture arise, in addition to your entries in the diary.

Appendix C: Interview guide

Question about the Photograph

- You said this picture was taken? Can you tell me more about this picture and Why did you choose this picture?
- What memories does this image conjure? What were you doing (if you can remember?)
- Reflecting on being a female Asian, what are your positive memories or experiences?
- Reflecting on being a female Asian, what are your negative memories or experiences?

Main questions

1. What made you decide to live a nomadic life?
2. How did becoming a digital nomad change your mindset (how you thought about yourself)?
3. How did your close family members responded when you decided to lead a nomadic life?
4. How do you handle work and travel/sightseeing time? Can you tell me about how you deal with combining work and leisure activities?
 - How did you adjust to your “new normal” transitioning from a regular 9-5 job to having a kind of unstructured kind of life?
What activities do you do after work? What kind of places do you frequent to relax?
How was it to be a female Asian in this situation?
Being a female Asian, what were your positive thought and feelings during this activity?
Being a female Asian, what were your negative thought and feelings during this activity?
5. Can you tell me about your positive experiences with being a digital nomad?
 - Can you tell me a funny and special experience/s as a woman while traveling that you would like to share?
How was it to be a female Asian in this situation?
Being a female Asian, what were your positive thought and feelings during this activity?

Being a female Asian, what were your negative thought and feelings during this activity?

6. Can you tell me about your negative experiences with being a digital nomad?
 - Do you ever feel lonely? (Yes) - How do you deal with loneliness? (If the answer is No –Being alone and being lonely are two separate things, is being alone in a state of solitude for you? In which situations do you feel lonely?)
 - Have you ever cancelled a flight because you felt a place had become too dangerous?
 - Can you tell me about a dangerous experience/s as a woman while travelling you would like to share? How was it to be a woman in this situation? how was it to be an Asian woman?
 - Do you notice any inequality as being a woman and Asian when traveling? How was it to be a female Asian in this situation
7. What are your strategies in deflecting unwanted male attention?
8. In your experience, what is the best and worst places for an Asian woman to travel as a digital nomad?
9. Tell me about how you get to know people at a new destination? How do you feel when it's time to leave for another country/place and leaving the relationships you have established?
10. How do you find talking to Locals? Is it difficult? Any culture shock you've experienced?
11. What type of accommodation do you choose? Why do you choose this type? How do you make it as your "home"? (If the answer is leading towards that they are alone - Humans seek connection and seek a sense of community, how do you find your community while constantly traveling?)
12. In what ways do you think being a digital nomad has changed you as a person?
13. There is a quote I briefly remembered that says "meaning can be found when everything is stripped away, so how do you find meaning when you are always traveling.
14. To any female Asian who is planning her first nomadic experience, what advice would you give?

15. Can you tell me about a memory in your digital nomad life that made you want to rethink your choices, that made you regret your choice? Thoughts such as having a physical house, and having a family?
16. Do you see yourself living the life as you have right now in the future?

