On Demand:
Digital Platforms &
Class Conflict in the Gig Economy

by

Kristopher George

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2022

This thesis is dedicated to the brave Mujahedeen fighters of Afghanistan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The gig economy represents an ongoing shift in the world of work and can be understood as the most recent attempt by Capital as a class to dominate and undermine the power of workers, collectively known as Labour. Since new forms of work give new structure to how individuals experience this class conflict, drawing on their experiences can offer insight into the larger conflict itself. This thesis therefore interviews 19 Uber drivers in the Greater Toronto Area with the goal of answering how these gig workers experience class conflict and how the digital platform that they work through mediates that experience. Results collected were consistent with previous qualitative research on gig workers. Additionally, workers' experience demonstrates that firms in the gig economy use their monopolistic control over their digital platform to structure the parameters of the job to suit the needs of Capital and undermine the collective power of Labour.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No great work is made alone, and this project wouldn't exist if it weren't for all those who's work and support allowed me to succeed. While there's an uncountable number of people to whom I am grateful, I would especially like to thank:

My mother **Kelly George**, first and foremost, for giving me life and sacrificing so much for me to spend 9 years getting 2 degrees in a subject that she doesn't understand. She wanted me to be an engineer. Sorry Mom!

Dr Karen Foster, my gallant supervisor, who put up with me being a terrible student for YEARS and still tried her best to give me work. She essentially taught me everything I now know, and always believed in me when it seemed like no one else did.

The Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology and its esteemed faculty. Especially my second and third thesis readers**, Dr Elizabeth Fitting** and **Dr Lindsay DuBois**. I can scarcely imagine a better place to spend my undergraduate years. Each professor I encountered profoundly shaped the sociologist I have become. As the saying goes, it takes a village.

My cohort friends and colleagues: **Alyssa Gerhardt**, **Hailie Tattrie**, **Lexie Milmine**, and **Kayla Preston**. They are all brilliant sociologists that have surpassed me in every way, and I'm so grateful that I came to know you all as colleagues and as dear friends.

Briana Kelly, who may as well be my life coach at this point. From practical advice to not infrequent pep talks, I say with confidence that without her, I would have dropped out years ago.

Melissa MacDonald. My #1 fan, and frequent proof-reader.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

> Yeah the gig economy literally, I can't express to you how much it's done for me. It's remarkable. It saved me financially, it saved me psychologically, it's given me a lot. Now I might look back at all this in 5, 10, 20 years from now and say well what I thought I was gaining really cost me because I maybe stunted my career or traditional desk type corporate work. But maybe if I hadn't found the gig economy maybe I'd be back behind a desk somewhere and working my way up again, but for now it's been great for me and I have very little negative things to say, unlike maybe the vast majority. - Markus

In the last decade, there have been substantial changes in the structure of the global economy, particularly in how we understand the nature of work. Amidst news stories of celebrity CEOs and supply chain troubles, a loosely related collection of companies have also been making headlines. Companies like Uber, Lyft, AirBnB, and Taskrabbit are the most notable players in a controversial trend of commercial service provision dubbed "the gig economy" (Healy, Nicholson, & Pekarek, 2017, p. 232). Other terms, such "sharing economy", "on-demand economy", or "collaborative economy" are also used, but over time these distinctions have become blurred to the point that the term "gig economy" will suffice here (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017, p. 1625). Proponents of these companies praise the reliable, convenient, and — most importantly — affordable services they provide, as well as the perceived flexibility and agility of their app-based approach compared to their conventional competitors (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017, p. 1626). Firms in the gig economy position themselves as a break from the past, a radical innovation, with the term "disruptive" attaining buzzword status among both proponents and skeptics (Healy et al., p. 232). Public opposition to these companies usually centers around the safety of their services; the status of workers and their working conditions; as well as the potential for job losses as these new, unorthodox firms outmaneuver their more conventional competitors (Slee, 2015).

The successes and controversies around the gig economy are thanks in large part to its platform model and how that model is used. Firms in the gig economy use the digital architecture of their platform to outsource almost every aspect of their business, including their workers, who are independent contractors rather than employees. Regardless of one's opinion on it, the rise of the gig economy represents a shift in the world of work that affects the lives of the millions of people worldwide who depend on it. On top of that, the high-profile successes of the gig economy mean that its influence is likely to spread, "disrupting" other industries and making more jobs look like gig work (Rosenblat, 2019). These companies are all driven to seek profit But what does that mean? Is gig work really such a unique issue?

Shifts in the world of work are always met with forms of resistance as those being shifted push back on those doing the shifting. These groups – called classes – have opposing interests, and the conflict that arises from the furthering of those interests underpin all forms of work, including the gig economy. But what does that class conflict look like? If we view the gig economy as a form of work distinct enough to talk about, are there distinct forms of class conflict unique to it? It is clear that further research is needed to assess the impacts of the gig economy and the growing number of people who depend on it. This thesis will therefore investigate how workers in the gig economy understand themselves, their work, and the social and material forces that act upon them. In doing so this thesis also aims to contribute to the broader understanding of platform labour and the gig economy in the sociology. In short, in the context of the hyper-precarious world of gig work, this paper will illustrate how workers subjectively experience class conflict by addressing the following 2 research questions.

How to workers in the gig economy understand and experience class conflict?

How does the digital platform of Uber's app shape these experiences?

Roadmap

The rest of this chapter will lay out the concepts, definitions and vocabulary required to understand the gig economy from a class conflict perspective. Chapter 2 offers a brief history of capitalist work relations to deconstruct the image of Uber drivers as partners and expose the unequal power relations at play. In it, I argue like other scholars in this field that the independent contractor is a misclassification that represents the latest in a series of Capital's attempts to undermine labour. This chapter will also briefly highlight a few theoretical perspectives on the flexibilization of labour that are informative when thinking about gig work. The second half of the literature review will focus on Platforms: what they are, where they came from, and why they are necessary for the gig economy to function. Additionally, this chapter will situate just-in-time production as a precursor to the imperatives and data-driven approach that have come to define gig work.

Chapter 3 will bring together concepts and ideas from the previous two chapters and present a model through which gig work can be understood. It will then lay out the study's methodological approach to studying Uber drivers, how data was collected, and an overview of the analysis process. Any noteworthy ethical challenges will also be addressed briefly here.

Discussion and analysis based on findings from the GTA study will comprise the last three chapters, each focusing on a particular aspect of Uber drivers and their experience. Chapter 4 is called "Winners and Losers in the gig economy" and draws special attention to the heterogeneity of how gig work is experienced, and how those experiences are affected by worker's subjective positions. It explores who the ideal Uber driver is in the eyes of the company, while also casting light on the hidden injuries of gig work.

Chapter 5 foregrounds the power struggles and conflicts between drivers and the company and platform of Uber itself. Despite the asymmetrical control over information, and by extension power, Uber Drivers are not passive agents. Rather, as we shall see, drivers actively contest and take part in shaping their work by deploying the knowledge they have – or think they have – and working together to build stability and pride in a job that often offers little.

Chapter 6 is about the rating system, and more specifically about the riders who wield that rating system. The ability to rate gig workers creates a power differential that turns the car into a site of conflict, as customer and service provider each contest for control over the car and by extension the job being performed. This chapter will also explore Drivers' relationships with one another both online and offline, and how the tension and strain between their roles of coworker and competitor gives texture to these social bonds.

Concepts & Definitions

Before turning to the focus of my research, it is worth laying out some of the foundational ideas and concepts that will help illuminate our research question. Some of these ideas will be referred to frequently, and therefore require a degree of familiarity on the part of the reader. Others may not be explicitly referenced beyond this section but are nonetheless important underpinning ideas that give context to the rest of the chapters.

Capitalism

Entire books have been written in an effort to define capitalism and its characteristics (Marx, 2004). For the purposes of understanding the gig economy, a much narrower set of definitions is sufficient. Drawing on Burawoy (1979), for our purposes, capitalism is understood as a mode of production consisting of three characteristics:

a) first, private ownership of the means of production, which is established by enclosure – the processes through which common land is transformed into private property through force (p. 24). In this instance, the means of production are anything that assists labour in the production of a given commodity.
b) Second, those who do not own the means of production must secure their subsistence through the sale of their labour power in exchange for wages (p. 23). This distinction is the basis of class differences: those who own the means of production are capitalists, who will here be referred to collectively as "Capital" and those who sell their labor power are workers, who will here be referred to collectively as "Labour".
c) Third, it is important to understand that for our purposes, Capitalism is a mode of production that is averse to democratic control (Marx, 2004). The capitalist must, by definition, maintain a monopoly on the means of production. What commodities are produced, and the manner and pace of their production are their decision alone. The sum total of these decisions and the architecture for making them form a set of institutions that are known as the internal state, which follows the rules of a top-down dictatorship (Burawoy, 1979, Phillips & Rozworski, 2018).

A key feature of the aforementioned process of enclosure was also one of the most fundamental divisions of labour in early capitalism: the separation of work and home. This distinction was crucial in solidifying capitalist power relations and establishing the internal state. Since the capitalist does not produce goods themselves, they instead must control the labour process of their workers. To achieve this on any sort of scale, workers had to assemble in a single place to be more easily supervised (Braverman, 1974, p. 65). Later, as we shall see,

this ever-pressing need for control will bring about the rise of management, those who do not own capital, but rather serves as its stewards (Chandler, 1993).

Enclosure of common land was not a simple, unidirectional transition, but rather an ongoing and messy history of expansions and contractions. For example, in the new world, where colonists were promised a homestead of their own, wage labour was often used to supplement a direct subsistence from newly acquired land, thus illustrating the complexity of this transition (Bittermann, 1993). In New York City, the then semi-rural areas of Brooklyn and Queens saw men's wage labour supplemented by widespread small-scale agriculture and a high degree of domestic production as late as the 1890s (Braverman, 1974, p. 275). Despite these complications, enclosures and accumulation continued, driven by Capital's power to enforce and reproduce its own dominance. By the beginning of the twentieth century, wage work had firmly taken root in the economies of the west.

Class, class conflict, & work relations

Having defined two primary classes--Capital and Labour--it should be clear from the above discussion that the interests of these classes are fundamentally opposed to one another. Capital unilaterally controls the means of production to create and extract as much surplus value as it can in the form of profits. It follows from this that wages, the portion of created value that is paid to labour to reproduce itself, must remain as low as possible. Labour, on the other hand, faced with only one method to secure it subsistence and social reproduction, seeks to earn as much as possible so as to purchase. This clash of irreconcilable differences forms the basis of class conflict, as each class constantly works to gain footing in a struggle over limited resources.

Related to class conflict, we define work relations as the interplay of power, desires, and interests between employer and worker, with a specific focus on locating that interplay in the workplace. In short, work relations describe the concrete ways that class conflict plays out in the the places and spaces where work happens. While it may initially appear that gig economy workers like Uber drivers have no workplace, in reality, developments in technology have challenged traditional understandings of what a workplace is. Drivers can instead be understood as carrying their workplace with them, or rather as creating their workplace dynamically as they move about their day (Ravenelle, 2019). This remains true as long as they are "online" – willing and able to accept work given to them from their digital app.

The gig economy

The gig economy is a dynamic phenomenon that resists a rigorous definition. The term "gig" was coined by jazz musicians in the 1920s to refer to short-notice, on-demand musical performances (Muntaner, 2018, p. 598). Similarly, gig economy services can be understood as the imposition of on-demand economic exchange onto other activities, such as carpooling in the case of Uber. As the ethos of disruption drives gig economy firms into new industries, it may seem that the only reliable definition is one based on self-selection, where a company is only in the gig economy if they say they are. This is partially because the name emerged not as an academic term, but as a marketing tool, a catchy name that carries with it a set of symbolic associations. The service they offer still matters – nurses are not likely to find themselves counted as gig workers, no matter what anyone else says – but on the edges firms move in or out of the gig economy based on how that set of associations changes, and their desired relationship with those symbols. In fact, the term "gig economy" has, as of time of writing, somewhat fallen

out of favor owing largely to a series of public scandals on the part of Uber's upper management, and waves of worker and activist backlash against various gig economy startups.

Nevertheless, a definition that is sufficiently rigorous for our analysis is possible if one considers their internal structure and how these firms actually behave, as opposed to what they claim to be. The 4-point definition put forth by Juliet Schor and William Atwood-Charles (2017) is one such example. To them, a company must possess these four features to count themselves as part of the gig economy:

1. Peer-to-peer transactions facilitated by proprietary information technology.
2. Compulsory user rating-based reputation systems.
3. Promises of a high degree of worker flexibility and autonomy.
4. Worker ownership of job critical assets through a triangular work relationship that positions them as independent contractors rather than employees.

This definition is suitable for our purposes because it captures those who most loudly proclaim themselves members of the gig economy, while at the same time ruling out other related forms of app-based work, such as YouTubers (Schor & Atwood-Charles, 2017). Additionally, this definition foregrounds the key debates and public issues around gig work, illustrating how those issues arise endogenously from the structure of gig work itself (Healy et al., 2017).

The next two chapters will introduce some concepts and ideas that will contextualize the gig economy in more depth, both as it presently exists and as a product of historical and material forces. Chapter 3 will bring those two major sets of ideas into a theoretical framework that will act as a model to guide our investigation of gig work. From there, analysis of findings will

demonstrate how workers in the gig economy experience class conflict as mediated through the structure of the digital platforms they work with.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Precarious Work and Class Conflict

In recent years, academics and commentators have identified a set of interrelated phenomena related to class conflict that has been collectively dubbed "precarious work". Definitions vary, as will be explored below, but in general precarious work is characterized as work that lacks security and stability when compared to other more rigid and permanent forms of employment which are known as the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) (Vosko, 2010). While precarious work is commonly understood as a modern trend, especially when framed as the erosion of the SER, much of the history of class conflict can be understood in terms of Capital attempting to make work more precarious for more and more people (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2014). The first half of this chapter will situate the gig economy as an extension of that ongoing struggle through a recounting of a brief history of precarious work in North America from the early twentieth century to the 2008 economic recession.

As capitalism developed and proliferated, Labour and Capital would clash over their contradictory interests (Marx, 2004). Capitalists seek profits to sustain themselves, and competitive forces dictate that those profits must grow. The motive to maximize profit implies minimizing costs, which exerts a downward pressure on wages. Labour, without anything to sell but their labour power, will resist that downward pressure and further seek to better their own condition through use of their leverage as producers.

Class conflict, it bears mentioning, may sometimes appear analogous to a war or battle, or it may not. In any singular instance, it may have particular belligerent actors positioned in

opposing sides, and those specific instances may be circumscribed in a finite time and space, with an eventual winner or loser. Take for example, the Ludlow Massacre, where striking mine workers and their families were attacked and killed in their homes by the Colorado National Guard and the mining company militia, at the behest of their boss, John D. Rockefeller (Foster, 2016). However, much of class conflict can be harder to recognize; diffused throughout our daily lives in ways that some may not be aware of. When your boss says that co-workers are forbidden from discussing wages, they do that to undermine you and your coworker's ability to ask for better wages, since you may not even know you are being underpaid. Individualizing policies such as these may even obscure class relations altogether (Burawoy, 1979). This is every bit as much a manifestation of class conflict as the Ludlow massacre. Both examples arise from Capital's same underlying imperative: To accumulate ever-growing profits at an ever-growing rate and, deriving from that, doing so by undermining the collective power of labour. A key takeaway here is that Capital will pursue this imperative through any means necessary, and labour will similarly resist using ever more resourceful methods. Which means that throughout the history of capitalism, class conflict has manifested in a variety of creative, complex and subtle ways.

The rest of the chapter will reflect on a loose collection of early academic perspectives on precarious work, known as the end of work debate, and how those perspectives fall short of capturing the unique problems of gig work.

Padrones, Race, & Labour supply

Around the first few decades of the twentieth century, the structure of work relations that most resembled the gig economy as it exists today was found in the private employment firms common in cities on the east coast of the United States (Hatton, 2011, p. 26). These firms were

headed by a leader referred to as a "Padrone". The term comes from the Italian word for an innkeeper or owner of a rooming house. Newly landed immigrants who lacked other social connections would come into the care of a padrone, who would rent them out as cheap unskilled or semi-skilled workers for a cut of the wages. The crucial point of comparison here is that, in addition to being temporary work without security or benefits, private employment firms insisted that the workers they hired out were not employees, but rather independent contractors. Renting the services as a contractor in this way is referred to as a "Triangular work relationship" (van Doorn, 2017; Muntaner 2018). Not coincidentally, such an arrangement is a defining feature of the gig economy as outlined above. It is a core claim of platform-based gig firms, and a characteristic that they all share (Healy et al., 2017; Slee, 2015; van Doorn, 2017). Eventually, private employment firms were outlawed for their cruel and exploitative treatment of their mainly immigrant and minority contractors (Hatton, 2011, p. 27).

Thus, the parallels also extend beyond class; the padrones, their private employment firms, and firms in the gig economy all rely, to some degree, on economically vulnerable immigrants and racialized populations as a cheap source of labour power with limited capacity to bargain (Hatton, 2011, p. 26; van Doorn, 2017, p. 905). Initial waves of responders to gig economy apps like Uber, Taskrabbit, and Fiverr did generally fit the narrative espoused by their marketing and public relations departments: contract workers were relatively affluent – and often white – individuals who took gigs to supplement the income from their main job (van Doorn, 2017, p. 901). But this narrative became less true over time (Milkman, Elliot-Negri, Griesbach & Reich, 2021).

Certain gig economy firms – depending on their product market – according to scholars like Niels van Doorn (2017) reinvigorate and reinforce a disproportionately racialized servant

class (p. 905). Like the padrones of the early 1900s, gig economy firms have more power over workers who are marginalized – or otherwise have limited economic opportunities – than those who are not and can leverage that power more effectively.

The discussion about precarious marginalized workers also extends to control over the labour supply. When considering the ways Capital exerts control over Labour, it is important to keep in mind that this can mean more than depressing wages and impeding organizing efforts. It can also involve controlling when, where, and how labour power gets deployed (Chandler, 1993). Taking an example from Osberg (1995), some smaller, early mining operations made use of a highly casualized workforce. If you owned the tools, being employed on a given day meant simply showing up at the site for morning job assignments. If you did not wish to work for wages that day – or in the case of a planting or harvest season, you had more pressing work to do – you simply stayed home (Braverman, 1979). This meant that the amount of available manpower would vary day to day in a way that was difficult to predict, making true profit maximizing impossible. As the mining industry formalized and consolidated, additional rules and regulations were imposed that made such flexible arrangements impossible. Broadly speaking, the miners in Osberg's case study were faced with a choice: opt in and abide by rules imposed by Capital – partially relinquishing control over your labour supply – or opt out and go work somewhere else.

Faced with a similar issue of a highly casualized workforce, the gig economy also takes steps to regulate its labour supply. Taking Uber as an example, one of their central objectives is that drivers' response time must remain as low as possible (Slee, 2015). In a large metropolitan area like Toronto, this must involve a large and consistent supply of driver labour power that is responsive to changes in consumer demand. If workers are free to come and go as they wish

and have a solid economic foundation upon which to refuse work if they choose to, meeting this objective becomes almost impossible. Uber has therefore gradually exerted more control over their workers to control the supply of labour directly. They gradually impose new rules on their drivers through updates to its terms of service, such as the requirement to accept at least 90% of rides, or changes to incentives and payment structures (Slee, 2015, p. 72). Failure to comply with the rules put forth in these updates – or a refusal of the non-negotiable terms of service – results in termination through the deactivation of the driver's account. These strict rules effectively mean that existing drivers are faced with a similar choice to Osberg's miners: stay in and put up with ever-increasing control or leave and find work elsewhere.

It is important to consider that this choice is only meaningful if there is other work to be found. Here is where precarious racialized workers reenter the picture; failure to comply with the rules put forth in these updates – or a refusal of the non-negotiable terms of service – results in termination through the deactivation of the driver's account. These strict rules effectively mean existing drivers are systematically pushed out and replaced with less economically secure workers who are desperate enough to follow the rules (Hua & Ray, 2018; van Doorn, 2017).

Class compromise & the SER

Moving ahead in time, the post war period was no paradise; growth and increases in living standards at home meant the expansion of American imperialism and brutal repression of dissent abroad. The compromise struck between Labour and Capital did tip the scales in favour of workers in the metropole who were not otherwise marginalized in the name of luring Labour away from the appeal of Soviet Communism (Phillips & Rozworski, 2018). It was an inherently unstable arrangement and doomed to fail because upholding the class compromise

was not in the interest of the dominant class. Capital had relinquished some of its power to a new Keynesian economic orthodoxy, and a political regime of embedded liberalism, going against its economic imperative of profit maximizing. A compromise like this was overseen and enforced by a government willing and able to regulate or nationalize various sectors of the economy in the name of a vision of the common good centered on full employment, growth, and welfare (Vosko, 2010, p. 51). Thus, the state embedded itself in market processes and corporate activities by constraining and regulating them. Keeping the gig economy on the horizon, the impact of the postwar class compromise on work relations will be briefly considered from the perspectives of both Labour and Capital.

Although the groundwork had been laid by the victories of prior labour movements, what would later become known as the standard employment relationship – hereafter referred to as the SER – rose to dominance in the postwar period (Kalleberg, 2009). Most modern definitions of precarious work define it in opposition to the SER, thus it is worth unpacking here (Standing, 2014, Vosko, 2010). The SER embodies all of the qualities one imagines in a typical good job: High wages, a range of benefits, protection against dismissal, indefinite employment duration with expectations for internal advancement, and a general sense of employees being appreciated as people, rather than simply as workers (Bruce, 2006; Vosko, 2010, p. 68). This was externally enabled by a relatively robust welfare state, Fordist business orthodoxy, and a dominance of human relations management approaches that was highly permissive of union activity (Bruce, 2006; Kalleberg, 2009, p. 5)

The ideal worker of an SER job was assumed to be white and male, with a nuclear family at home to perform the domestic labour crucial to social reproduction (Vosko, 2010, p. 8). The relative economic stability and affluence of a strong – mostly white – American middle class,

combined with innovations in consumer goods and a postwar feminist movement meant that women began entering the workforce *en masse* during this period. This increase in women's labour force participation rates belies the kinds of work they disproportionately took up. Women were still constrained by the gendered assumptions of the SER and the labour unions they represented, and movements into the labour market were not matched with a transformation in domestic division of labour (Vosko, 2010). Consequently, this "pink collar" work tended to be flexible and short term with low pay and few benefits owing to the presumption that women could rely on the income of their spouse (Hatton, 2011, p. 40). As we shall see in the section on temp work below, the systematic exclusion of women from the SER would contribute to the normalization of flexible, insecure work that would later open the door to temporary employment and from there, the gig economy.

The dominance of the SER did not come without downsides. Conflict between Labour and Capital did not disappear; it simply took on a different form as firms reorganized themselves to resolve disputes between workers, owners, and management in-house (Burawoy, 1979). This necessitated an "internal state": a set of institutions that can negate struggles for the relations of production (Burawoy, 1979, p. 110). Human resource departments, suggestion boxes, staff meetings, and the like came to constitute a participatory industrial government that meant workers' concerns were often addressed individually, as a sort of industrial citizen, constructing consent through the appearance of choice and obscuring class relations (Burawoy, 1979). If a worker had a problem with their boss or coworkers, they discussed the issue in private, or at a weekly meeting, dislocating conflict from the site of production, and thus away from one's fellow workers. Management effort was partially redirected towards these mechanisms of conflict resolution, and away from the moment-to-moment supervision of the

work process, with minor decision-making power being delegated to the worker (Burawoy, 1979).

These nominal increases in worker autonomy, combined with mechanisms for airing grievances that obscured class relations, effectively undermined Labour's collective power. The mechanisms and institutions of work relations were still owned by Capital, and ownership of bureaucratic mechanisms constituted a form of power that went unrecognized by unions (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). A later section will unpack how the gig economy replicates this control over the internal state in the digital realm in the architecture of their platforms.

The Neoliberal Turn

After several decades of relatively stable class compromise, Class power would eventually be restored by the actions of particular agents seizing opportunities brought about by broader economic forces, in moves that shaped management and labour relations for decades to come. This was a political project to expand the reach of the private sector and recommodify new aspects of social life and nature, and it is now commonly referred to as neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism has been defined by Harvey (2005) as:

> A theory of economic and political practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

Social good is thought to be maximized when market exchange is maximized. This is a driving force of neoliberal commodification: market logic encroaches on social life under the false assumption that doing so will allow all to prosper (Foster, 2016). A consequence of "liberating

individual entrepreneurial freedoms" was a renewed attack on organized labour, embodied in an emphasis on flexibility and overall, less "sticky" bonds between employer and employee.

This unsticking was symptomatic of the broader economic restructuring that was characteristic of neoliberalization. Free markets and an emphasis on the virtue of exchange accelerated economic activity, but deregulation also meant a removal of protections against economic crises. Bigger economic booms came with bigger busts. Being able to respond quickly to market shocks thus became an attractive survival strategy for both established businesses and new startups (Hatton, 2011). Emerging strategies that emphasize agility meant more than renewed interest in minimizing labour costs: it meant that the strong connections between Labour and Capital that defined the SER had to be loosened. Being agile and flexible meant "trimming the fat", and viewing employees as liabilities, rather than assets (Hatton, 2011, p. 82).

Not all of this trimmed fat came from Labour. The traditional pyramid structure of management began to show its weaknesses in the new economic landscape (Sennett, 1998). Hierarchical Pyramid structures can become stiff, and slow to react to change, both perceived as significant disadvantages in an era of lean business. Pyramidal management structures do still exist, but the perceived need for agility exerts a downward pressure, flattening the pyramid wherever possible, but especially among the ranks of lower and middle managers (Osberg, Wein, & Grude, 1995). As we shall see later, innovations in worker surveillance meant that workers could police themselves and each other, reducing the need for direct supervision. At the same time, the rise of computerization had opened new frontiers to automation and deskilling among middle management as well. This concentrated power at the top, while remaining middle and

lower managers had more responsibilities and fewer advancement opportunities up a truncated corporate ladder (Sennet, 1998, p.55).

Temporary Workers

While these days Uber drivers or restaurant workers are some of the poster children for precarity, the most famous standard-bearer for non-standard work is undoubtedly the temporary worker, or "Temp". Temporary work had its roots in the rise of pink-collar employment in the 50s and 60s. Companies like Kelly Girl Services billed temporary employment as a way for middle class white women to earn some extra spending money while remaining committed to other roles – a refrain commonly referred to as a "side hustle" by proponents for gig economy services today (Hatton, 2011, p. 41; Healy et al., 2017, Ravenelle, 2019). Such a side hustle also implied a degree of flexibility and autonomy when it came to how much a given worker wanted to work, and when. In reality, as temp work become longer term and increasingly embedded in corporate culture, such flexibility gave way to the imperatives of Capital as they had with Osberg's miners. By the 1980s, temporary work was both an international institution that was a product of an undermined SER, and at the same time an erosive force that worked to undermine the SER further through aggressive marketing efforts (Hatton, 2011). Pink-collar temp work was so successful in this regard that the proliferation of precarious work is sometimes referred to as the "feminization" of jobs.

The other key feature of temporary employment is the triangular employment relationship first discussed in the above section on Padrones. Rather than an employer purchasing labour power directly from a worker through an employment arrangement, with all the obligations of security that entails, they can instead lease labour power from a temporary service company who provides workers for them (Osberg et al., 1995). Leasers pay a higher

wage to the temp company, who in turn passes on the standard wage to the leased worker, pocketing the difference (Vosko, 2010, p. 79). Temporary work is undoubtedly the most immediate precursor to gig work, but there are three differences between the two that shape the debates around each and the comparisons made between them. Firstly, temps are in fact considered employees. Temporary employment companies had to argue *in favour* of their workers being their employees to dodge legislation meant to address the private employment firms mentioned earlier (Hatton, 2011, pg 27). Similarly, gig economy companies argue *against* the employment status of their workers to dodge regulations in both the industries they are disrupting, and the temp economy that preceded it (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017). In both instances a triangular work relationship is used to circumvent established legislation put in place to protect workers in the name of increasing profits.

The second major difference is the duration of services provided. In the gig economy, the services provided by contractors are almost always on a timescale of minutes to hours, whereas temp contracts can last days, weeks, or even years (Hatton, 2011, p. 138). Lastly, the market for gig work services is comprised of individuals rather than other companies. Labour power is leased for personal services such as picking up groceries, doing chores, or getting a ride somewhere, rather than to staff a business with cheap workers that can be dismissed on a whim (Vosko, 2010; Muntaner, 2018). Both of these mean gig firms do not tend to encounter regulations meant to address disputes between temp workers and the companies that lease their labour power (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017).

While the temporary employment industry never exactly dominated the economy – making up only 1% of workers in the United States by the end of the 1980s (Hatton, 2011, p. 82) – Capital certainly took note of its appeal. Spurred by the paradigm of corporate agility the temp

industry helped create, employers from every sector of the economy were finding ways to make their workers more like temps. The radical restructuring, downsizing, and outsourcing of this flexibilization process translated to turbulent disruptions in the life courses of workers.

The End of Work Debate

Sociologists started taking interest in these disruptions and perceived disintegration of careers in the mid 1990s, in what is now referred to as the "end of work" debate, after Jeremy Rifkin's book of the same name (Strangleman, 2007). This loose collection of commentators were observing the impacts of neoliberalization and were concerned with how those changes manifested in the lives of workers. Each author, generally speaking, defined their concerns in their own terms. For example, Zygmunt Bauman phrased the problem in terms of a shift in identities; as good jobs declined people would define themselves in terms of their consumption choices, rather than their role as a producer of things (Strangleman, 2007). Unpacking all the perspectives of the end of work debate would be a chapter all its own, but there are a few thinkers worth singling out as especially relevant to both precarious work and the gig economy as it presently exists.

In *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), Richard Sennett explored this disruption and its impact on workers' sense of self. For Sennett (1998), flexible capitalism fragmented careers into a series of short engagements – one might say "gigs" – that leave workers without a solid foundation upon which to build a narrative about themselves and their plans for the future. For the workers he spoke with, this manifested as a corrosion of social connections, values, and mental health. Later investigations into the extent and severity of the psychosocial fragmentation he described have yielded little supporting empirical evidence (Fenton & Dermott, 2006; Webb,

2004; Strangleman, 2007). Nonetheless, the structural features of flexible capitalism are real and measurable (Kalleberg, 2009, p. 7).

Risk

For Giddens, the key term to understanding the neoliberalization of jobs was risk, and how risk can be shifted around or even outsourced to other parties. Fewer and less secure employment obligations means that workers could be shed quickly, reducing risk to the firm in cases of economic shocks. Conversely that leaves workers increasingly exposed to the whims of the market, inflating their burden of risk. This is the underlying essence of precarity; employees are fundamentally seen as a liability and a cost burden, so having them closely bound with job security is a problem. It weighs down business and impedes their ability to react to the competition (Hatton, 2011; Standing 2011, Giddens, 1996). It's not all doom and gloom for Giddens though, who acknowledges that being "stuck" to one career forever may not be what all workers even want. For him, risk entails a double edge. It is a burden, but it can also be an opportunity. He uses the term "reflexivity" which here refers to the capacity of agents to recognize social structures and navigate their places within them. In the context of work, we can take these points to mean that if careers are broken up into a series of short engagements, workers can construct their identities based on how they navigate those engagements. Workers would be freed of the 9 to 5 toil, free to exercise their agency and act reflexively by pursuing jobs not just for experience, but as experiences. The problem with this perspective is that it does not say very much about how these burdens and opportunities are distributed, and who has the ability to act in these ways. This burden of risk would reach new extreme in the hyper-outsourced model of gig work, where nearly all costs associated with performing their job are borne by the worker.

Venture labour

While not a commentor on the end of work debate, Neff's concept of the venture labourer is related to Giddens' risk-centered understanding of precarious work. Neff defines venture labour as "the explicit expression of entrepreneurial values by non-entrepreneurs" (cited in van Doorn, 2017, p. 907). Venture labourers are told to embrace the risk and sacrifice associated with the struggle for success, without any sort of ownership over anything other than their labour power and their personal property. Whereas entrepreneurs take on these risks with the hope of founding a successful business, venture labourers engage in adventurous risk seeking simply to get by. Neff explains the concept in terms of the dot com boom of the 1990s, a point in history which others have pointed out resemble the rise of the gig economy, with rapid advancements in digital technology spurred on by an expand now, profit later model that will be further unpacked in the next chapter (Srnicek 2016). The venture labourer illustrates how precarity is spread through manufacturing consent as well as coercion. Valorizing the burden of risk as a form of consent has its origin in the rise of temporary or flexible employment as a way to entice workers away from their secure 9 to 5 jobs (Hatton, 2010, p. 89). Likewise, in the 90s Neff remarks that lots of ordinary workers left secure, good paying jobs to pursue work in Silicon Valley with an entrepreneurial zeal. In the new economy, risk and reward took the place of job loyalty, and the dot-com boom helped those glorify risks (Neff, 2012). While informative in terms of understanding the marketing and popular hype around gig economy services The reality of the venture labourer today is usually one of desperation, burdened with risk by the jobless recovery of the 2008 recession (Foster, 2016, p. 85)

Gorz & the servile class

Among the end of work commentators, the one who best predicted the rise of gig work is Andre Gorz. In his text *Critique of Economic Reason*, he observes the changes in work of the neoliberal turn, and also remarks that not all work is changing at the same rate. Some jobs are disappearing, or becoming deskilled, or becoming more precarious faster than others. Over time then, one should expect increasingly pronounced segmentations to form among the working class: Those with good jobs, in the core, and those with bad jobs, or without jobs altogether, in the periphery. As these two classes interact, a sub-system develops between them. In this system, workers in the core face time crunches as they struggle to compete for an ever-shrinking number of good jobs. However, they are by definition spared – at least in part – from deskilling and automation, while simultaneously benefitting from the lower consumer prices that result. Thus, core workers boast a higher level of income and purchasing power. This middle class of core workers can effectively buy their way out of their time crunch by paying to have their personal social reproductive tasks done for them for cheap by workers in the periphery – an ideal-typical example of this is a maid or housecleaner. The core is thus free to engage in leisure, which itself further creates jobs among the periphery – an example of this would be restaurant cooks. Gorz dubs workers in these peripheral jobs as the servile class, and in his time was identifying the emergence of jobs like pizza delivery drivers, dog walkers, fast food workers, et cetera. Gorz advances other arguments in the book, but this core-periphery subsystem is certainly his most prophetic insight.

Although it is certainly possible to encounter gig workers in both instances, historically the gig economy has provided social reproductive services moreso than leisure services. Some companies, like the now-defunct Kitchensurfing straddle the line, since hiring a one-night personal chef could be both social reproduction and leisure, depending on the circumstances.

Later confirmatory studies seeking to test theories on both sides of this debate saw mixed results, with both sides overstating a complex issue. However, these debates are worth revisiting. Those confirmatory studies are themselves 12 to 15 years old (Fenton & Dermott, 2004; Webb, 2007). And thus predate the 2008 recession and its reinvigorated emphasis on flexibility and worker risk taking. In a sense, if their assertion is that increasingly precarious work is having adverse effects on the lives of workers, then one might expect their ideas should only become truer over time. As Capital finds newer and more subtle ways to undermine the power of Labour, new forms of work such as the gig economy have made these old questions new again.

Scientific Management: Control over the Labour Process

Before moving on from the topic of work relations and onto a discussion of platforms it is worth briefly touching a small but important technical innovation in the labour process: the emergence of scientific management and the rise of its greatest champion. Enter Fredrick Winslow Taylor. Taylor's (1911) chief concern was in the waste of human effort in the industrial process, which he lamented was a loss greater than any material waste in its curtailing of prosperity – in other words, in impeding profit maximization (p. 7). Managerial orthodoxy at the time emphasized finding the right worker; one who took initiative, was physically and mentally suited for the job, and responded to monetary incentives. In contrast, Taylor insisted that by using the scientific method to rationalize the labour process, gains in productivity and efficiency could be realized by shaping the work process to fit the worker (Foster, 2016, p. 48). Consequently, the intuition and experience of the craftsman or machine operator were seen as inexact, heterogeneous, and locally concentrated. Such ways of knowing were therefore deemed insufficient and subordinate to the comparatively enlightened work planner –the manager. This meant the physical act of performing work was separated from the mental act of imagining work;

the hand had become separated from the brain (Braverman, 1974, p. 125). As a modern example, SkipTheDishes drivers do not plan what orders to deliver nor what route to take, the algorithms of the app are the digital work planner, matching them to jobs and using GPS data to determine their route. This division of labour is vital to understanding capitalist work relations since Taylor's time and foreshadows the dynamic work planning that defines gig economy peer matchmaking services.

While Fredrick Taylor was concerned with the application of a rationalized scientific approach to management, the level of technology in a given workplace was often assumed to be fixed, focusing instead on the "soft technology" of organization, planning, and worker motivation (Braverman, 1974, p. 173; Osberg, Wein, & Grude, 1995, p. 20). It was not until Taylor's successor Frank B. Gilbreth that sophisticated technological measurement of time and space made the labour process knowable in greater detail. Gilbreth devised a system to break down the movement of a worker into its base building blocks, called *therbligs,* using emerging innovations in photography (Braverman, 1974, p. 172). Optimizing a given labour process meant reducing complex therbligs to simpler ones and eliminating unnecessary therbligs. In doing so, the body of the worker is reduced to being understood as a machine, as a means of production under the control of Capital (Briken, Chillas, & Krzywdzinski, 2017).

Although Taylor, Gilbreth, and their contemporaries were innovative and influential, they were also merely avatars and synthesizers of the emerging interest in industrial productivity and efficiency that was gaining steam at the time (Foster, 2016). Scientific and technological innovations were being deployed to rationalize and reform industry, and to do this effectively, productivity had to be made measurable (Thompson, 1967). This rationalization would reach its

apex decades later, as computers and digital platforms became enmeshed in all sectors of the economy.

On the one hand, armed with the tools and apparent objectivity of science, owners and managers could leverage a rationalized work process to better extract surplus value and solidify their dominant position (Briken et al., 2017). On the other hand, formalized measurement of production output and worker effort became possible for the first time with a little help from then emerging government statistical apparatuses, within and across firms and industries. Productivity statistics gave prospective labour movements an unexpected gift: knowledge of themselves, and the manner and extent of their importance (Foster, 2016, p. 68).

All of these perspectives on precarious work, while informative and useful for framing gig work, are fundamentally incomplete. Companies like Uber and DoorDash will insist that they are companies that produce technologies above all else, and that both their contract workers and customers are simply different types of users – Uber's full name is Uber Technologies Inc, after all (Rosenblat, 2019). This claim may or not hold up to scrutiny in the eyes of the public, activists, or legislators but the fact remains that gig work is at its core a technological creation. While it is true that the gig economy exists as it does to undermine the collective power of labour, a deeper understanding of the technology at work will give more insight into the problems and challenges gig workers experience. The next section will thus explore the technological basis for gig work in greater detail.

Platforms & Surveillance

The first half of this chapter outlined what the gig economy is and how it came about historically as a result of evolving capitalist work relations, specifically as an expansion of the

servile class (Gorz, 2011). There is, however, another important history to consider; that of the technology that made the gig economy possible. From GPS satellites to secure payment software, to miniaturized cameras, a collection of technologies combined with the aforementioned trends in work relations to produce the gig economy as it exists. The most important of these, the glue that brings all of those disparate technologies together into a system capable of providing services to millions of people around the globe on a scale of minutes to seconds is a form of software known as the platform. To understand gig work, why it is how it is, and the problems people have with it, we need to first understand the platform.

To do this, this section will first define what platforms are, and then focus in on articulating the different kinds of platforms that exist. Second, it outlines a brief history of platforms and their role in modern capitalism, including their proliferation and maturity in the wake of the financial crisis and Just-in-time production regimes, which prefigure the goals and functions of digital platforms as surveillance tools. The chapter concludes by stepping back and examining some of the key issues around platforms, gig work, and Uber, including the rating system and network effects, and conclude by unpacking the predecessor of modern platforms

At its most general, a platform is simply a digital infrastructure that allows two or more parties to interact; that is, a platform is an intermediary that connects groups of users and acts as the ground upon which their activities occur (Srnicek, 2016, p. 43). While the platform itself may be virtual, it can interact with the physical world through two primary methods of input: those which are entered by users, and those which are detected via a sensor. Users input information via some sort of interface, such as typing words into a keyboard, whereas a sensor is any node or device that can take information and capture it in some useful form. Among other possible examples, a camera records visual information, a thermometer records temperature, and a GPS

records the position of the sensor in space. A sensor then takes the stimulus it receives and transforms it into a form of information that is understandable to digital processes: data.

An ideal-typical platform interaction could look something like this: one group inputs information, which may or may not be supplemented by additional information provided by sensors, and that information is digitized into data, which is recorded and processed for use in any number of ways (Srnicek, 2016). Any relevant data is then passed on to the other party, and the process repeats some number of times until the interaction is over. Using Uber as a concrete example, it works like this: one party, a person, tells the platform that they would like a ride somewhere, that they consent to sharing their location information, and that they authorized payment. Their smartphone collects their location data through its GPS sensor, combines it with the GPS data of potential drivers, and then weighs that against third party traffic data provided by Google to plan the drivers route, and calculate an up-front fare estimate. The driver then receives the request as a packet of processed information – someone is in location X, they wish to go to Location Y, follow this route to get them there for Z amount of money. While it might not be obvious to the user all the time, all of this is accomplished by the platform having data on both parties, and being the middleman that facilitates exchange (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat, 2019; Slee, 2015.)

This positioning is crucial because it gives platform owners a vantage point to collect data from involved parties. Data extraction and manipulation is the *raison d'etre* of the platform. By managing previously unprecedented amounts of data, platform owners can inform their business decisions by, for example, tailoring user experience to fit their perceived preferences, or selling their data to marketing firms. It is helpful to think of data like crude oil. It can be a commodity in itself or can be processed and used as an input in the production of other

commodities. Lastly, gig economy platforms are privately owned with rules unilaterally set by the owner. This means that, while they might appear as empty vessels for interaction and exchange, platforms are political spaces, with a designed core architecture that governs possible interactions and access to information (Srnicek, 2016, p. 47). One need only consider the warnings of Harry Braverman, who reminds us that the power of technology to either emancipate or oppress lies not within the technology itself, but rather in who controls the technology, and the interests it is made to serve (1974, p. 212).

The implications of this feature cannot be overstated. The inability of users to influence the rules and structure of a private platform is what gives weight to most other issues surrounding gig work. Granted, if Uber were to come under democratic control tomorrow, it would still have problems, but being at odds with the rules of a digital platform matters a lot less if those affected by the problem have the ability to take action against it. We can see the desire for such control at the heart of the many collective actions being organized against Uber around the globe, and how this conflict plays out among actual drivers will be the focus of chapter 7.

Towards a Typology of Platforms & Platform Labour

While all gig economy companies rely on platforms, not all platforms are related to the gig economy. The generic idea of the platform manifests in a variety of ways, each with its own features and purposes. Nick Srnicek (2016) delineates five different types of platforms. Each is an extractive apparatus for data, with the distinction lying in how data is extracted, and how it is used. The five types are listed below, with representative sample companies in parentheses:

1) **Advertising platforms –** Designed to extract information from users, process that data, and use that data to inform the sale of targeted advertisements (Facebook, Google)
2) **Cloud platforms –** Centered around renting hardware and software solutions to digital-dependent businesses. (Salesforce, Amazon Web Services)
3) **Industrial platforms –** These platforms use data to inform more traditional manufacturing processes and control quality, differentiate products to suit consumer demands, or improve productivity (Siemens, IMP Aerospace)
4) **Product platforms –** Treats goods as services by providing access to those goods in exchange for a rent or subscription service fee (Netflix, Spotify)
5) **Lean platforms –** Service providers that engage in radical cost cutting measures by outsourcing as many of their critical assets as possible to other parties (Uber, TaskRabbit)

These types are not mutually exclusive; if a company collects and uses data in multiple ways, they may fit into several categories at once or shift between them over time as their business model changes. Gig economy firms may use advertisements, and rumors abound of driver location data being used to design other products or services in a similar manner to an industrial platform, such as informing machine learning systems for Uber's perpetually upcoming autonomous car division (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017). Nevertheless, the gig economy is largely the domain of lean platforms or product platforms, depending on the particulars of who owns what and who works for whom – for example, regional competitors to Uber will pride themselves in owning their vehicles, employing their drivers, or both, placing them squarely in the category of a product platform. While this is a worthwhile distinction to make, the rest of this paper will

effectively treat the gig economy as the sole domain of lean platforms, since this is the category to which the vast majority of them belong.

This typology raises an existential question for this thesis: if the gig economy is typically built upon a mixture of lean and product platforms, and these are just some of several types of platforms, each with their own challenges and problems, then why zoom in at all? The diversity of platforms and the functions they deliver implies that a more generalized form of platform labour is the larger social issue. While this is certainly true, and further research is needed to understand the implications of all forms of platform labour, the lean platforms of the gig economy are worth special consideration for three primary reasons. First, while gig economy firms are largely the domain of lean platforms, gig work is certainly the face of platform capitalism, driving the majority of public and political discussions around the subject (Rosenblat, 2019,). This is despite the fact that the gig economy makes up just a fraction of platform labourers. This echoes Hatton's thesis around temp work (2011) in that while gig work may not actually be dominating the labour market, its high profile gives it an outsized influence on larger employment trends compared to other forms of platform labour (Rosenblat, 2019).

Second, the lean platforms of the gig economy are, by Srnicek's own admission, the most recent type of platform to emerge (2016, p.75). From this, one might instead argue that the other types of platforms represent a prior stage or stages of technology, with lean platforms being the most recent refinement in information management business models. In reality, the sequence of events is not so simple and linear, but lean platforms generally emerged later, to address a need not filled by previous platform designs and are thus worthy of study and understanding in their own right.

Lastly, lean platforms are, more so than any other type, a platform comprised of other platform parts. Their hyper-outsourced model, where fixed costs are offloaded onto users, extends to the back end of the system as well. At the time of writing, Uber's servers are rented from Amazon Web Services to process data, Google provides their street map technology, internal messaging is handled by a third-party company called Twilio, and payments are processed by Braintree, a subsidiary of Paypal. While lean firms can be understood to unilaterally control their platform in the context of the conflict between them and their contractors, in reality gig firms like Uber often barely own themselves. Thus, research on lean platforms and their hyper-outsourced model may yield insights into other types of platforms.

Platforms have existed in some form for about as long as computers have, and they have proliferated in fits and starts throughout various economies and cultures ever since (Burawoy, 1982). Even before that, analogous systems of information collection and management are as old as industrial capitalism itself (Marx, 2004). However, when seeking to understand why the gig economy came about when it did, in the form that it did, there are two major chapters in the story of platforms that deserve special attention: the 2008 financial crash, and the rise of Just-in-time (JIT) production regimes. The latter laid the groundwork for data-driven, surveillance-based management that made the lean platform model possible, while the former was a combination of events that provided the funding, the demand, and the economic conditions that made platform labour into a global issue (Healy et al, 2017).

Both phenomena have a history of their own, and those histories have histories which are all very complicated. Nevertheless, understanding the material conditions of the two particular moments of the crash and JIT is useful, as long as one acknowledges that these are not isolated chains of events, but rather culminations of several complex trends.

The Perfect Storm

All of the major players in the gig economy came about either as a direct result of the great recession, or as an indirect result by following the success of that first group of start-ups. The literature suggests three key ways that the 2008 financial crisis facilitated the gig economy: the jobless recovery, which was discussed earlier but is worth briefly reiterating here; the proliferation of smartphone technology; and decisions made in American domestic monetary policy. This section will briefly discuss each in turn.

`Jobless recovery

The 2008 economic recession, as discussed above, had both a widening and a deepening effect on precarious work (Hua & Ray, 2018). But more specifically, it illustrates the ways that technology can be used to undermine and casualize labour. When markets crash, capitalists tend to respond by replacing labour with capital – i.e., workers with machines – to cut costs and minimize losses. When those markets recover, that labour saving capital remains in place in the name of profit maximization. Jobs disappear, more jobs became precarious, and jobs that already were precarious become more so (Kalleberg, 2009; Srnicek, 2016). Jobs may appear elsewhere in the economy, but firms entering into those markets or expanding within them must compete with those already in. Thus, even when new jobs are created during or after a recession, unless there is some intervening variable such as high demand for labour, they are systematically less likely to be "good" jobs. In and after 2008, this economic stability cast many workers into the periphery of the economy, swelling the industrial reserve army of unemployed and underemployed. This reserve army provided the budding gig economy with a supply of labour willing to do piecework jobs from their phone, and also stoked the demand for cheap goods and

service that the gig economy provided. In sum, the jobless recovery of the great recession made the gig economy possible, and at the same time made its presence necessary as proverbial belts tightened across the globe.

Advances in consumer tech

The second factor that enabled the gig economy was the proliferation of smart phones and supporting technologies. Platforms live on data, and collecting that data requires a physical sensor or input apparatus, something to translate user behaviour into manipulable information. Smart phones are exceptionally well suited for this, since their hardware is comprised of a variety of sensors, and ever more powerful microprocessors and memory cards. Such storage space also allows dozens of platforms to exist on the same device thanks to their modular app-based program model (Brikken & Chillas, 2017). Smartphones are also carried on or near one's person almost constantly, making its location a suitable proxy for the user's when tracking movements. All these tools mean that modern platforms can silently harvest incredibly detailed data on the behaviour of both consumers and their workers (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43). This unspoken asymmetry of power is the core concern of a paper authored by Ryan Calo and Alex Rosenblat (2017). For example, they found that senior management at Uber are allowed unrestricted, gods-eye access to the entire system, allowing them to know the real-time location of anyone currently running the app (p. 1648).

But where did smartphones come from? Well, the first iPhone launched in January of 2007, and if Apple's own mythology is to be believed, the smartphone was born from the mind of Steve Jobs, and made manifest by Apple's team of engineers. In reality, most of the hardware technologies that eventually came to comprise the smart phone were developed by exploratory research backed by public money (Larson, 2019). These technologies were then handed over to

private tech companies as a way to stimulate economic activity. One of the conditions of this arrangement was that the final product be sold to the public at reduced cost, since Apple also saves money on research and development, and should therefore pass those saving on to the consumer (Benenav, 2021; Jones, 2021). This is the first way government action had unknowingly set the stage for hyper-precarious gig work. The second lies in their attempts to jump start a recovery from the crisis, where they used monetary policy to stimulate and direct investment spending (Larson, 2019)

Interest rates & investment

The third material factor that gave rise to the gig economy was and is zealous venture capital and the broader financial climate that directed it in the right places. In response to the crash, central banks lowered their interest rates. Such low rates, it was believed, would lower the cost of borrowing and jumpstart an economic recovery. For this, and many other reasons, including lax corporate tax policies and the aforementioned boom of consumer tech, several large corporations with a particular interest in technology came out of the recession with large and growing amounts of corporate savings (Jones, 2021; Larson, 2019). Low interest rates meant that secure and conventional investments promised small and slow returns. This led these companies to seek out riskier yet promising investments – like gig economy platforms, which are able to entice large, continuous amounts of investment from venture capitalists by giving the promise of expansion in the present leading to massive monopoly profit in the future. Promising delayed return on investment in new technology linked to future market domination is also a strategy that was deployed in the dot com boom of the late ‘90s and early 2000s (Srnicek, 2016, p. 87). The secret to selling this idea lies in the fact that platforms are especially well suited to benefit from network effects. An examination of network effects is found in the section on key

issues below. The point for now is that big corporations flush with cash and hungry for worthwhile returns saw potential in the vision of the future the gig economy espoused.

Data & Surveillance in the Factory

Enter the Just-in-Time production process (JIT), developed by garment producers in northern Italy as a method of cooperation along supply chains that allowed businesses to respond to market demands quickly (Sennett, 1998, p. 53). JIT processes were further refined in post war Japan in the 1960s and '70s to address the dual scarcities of cash and warehouse space. The key words to describe JIT processes are *agile* and *lean* (Osberg et al., 1995, p. 48). JIT regimes are defined by a high degree of control over the labour process; inventory is procured to fill specific orders rather than kept on-hand in predetermined quantities, and buffers between work stages are minimized, with the goal of perfectly aligning supply with demand (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 277). No inventory and minimal waste mean minimal down time for the minimized workforce.

For the JIT process to function, technological surveillance and information apparatuses of heretofore unprecedented sophistication were necessary. Every second of manufacturing had to be quantified; worker performance was measured and displayed with a firm-wide ranking, promoting self-discipline through the digital panoptic gaze (Moore et al., 2018; van Dorn, 2017, p. 903). Crucially, JIT surveillance is horizontal as well as vertical. Stations are typically comprised of work teams that are semi-autonomous (Osberg et al., 1995, p. 49). They are given a production quota to meet and disciplined collectively for failure. Direct interference from top management is therefore rare, as collective punishment holds individual members accountable to each other (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 275). Most insidiously, sufficiently complex JIT surveillance systems can not only discipline workers but also further optimize the labour process by appropriating worker ingenuity. In the words of Sewell & Wilkinson (1992. p.286):

> Management uses techniques of surveillance to bridge the gap between the workers' responsibilities as represented by contractual arrangements and their actual activities… on the shop floor, a process [Townley] describes as 'creating the industrial subject.'

Surveillance and disciplinary power are therefore not just used to watch subjects of management's gaze; they habituate industrial subjects into managing themselves and each other.

Issues & Debates

This chapter has so far outlined what platforms are, a typology of their differences, and a brief history of their development and proliferation. Throughout this process, several problems and issues have emerged, intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of the impact platforms have had on the economy and the larger cultural climate. Perhaps most notable is that platforms, like all technology, are not politically neutral, but rather amplify the power of those who control them (Braverman, 1977). This final section will give further attention to some of the more salient issues and key debates surrounding platforms, while narrowing in on the lean platforms of the gig economy and the problems peculiar to it. This will finish setting the stage for a model of gig work that will be articulated next chapter.

Rating system

To elaborate on the idea of the industrial subject outlined in the previous section, recall from the definition of the gig economy outlined in chapter 1 that a defining feature of gig economy services was user ratings-based reputation systems. This section will unpack the rating system as a method of surveillance in further detail.

Firms in the gig economy used their data management technology to automate traditional management structures with the goal of creating a digital panopticon to minimize costs (Moore et al., 2018). To do this effectively, they also outsource quality control to the consumer in the form

of a ratings-based reputation system (Slee, 2015; van Doorn, 2017). Upon completion of the provided service, consumers and workers will rate each other, usually on a five-star scale. If a worker's average rating drops too low – in the case of Uber, below a 4.5 – they are given a warning. If there is not timely improvement, their account is deactivated, which is tantamount to being fired (Slee, 2016, p. 100). Appealing deactivation is difficult and often downright impossible because barriers to entry across the gig economy are low to the point that firms prefer to let contractors be replaced, rather than invest time and money in the quality of their workers (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonverta, 2017).

Proponents of this system claim that it keeps service quality high and both parties safe and honest, and even acts as a cheaper alternative to market regulations. As it stands, a five-star rating system is wholly inadequate as a substitute for regulatory oversight. Users can only rate based on what they observe, missing problems beneath the surface. An Airbnb unit could have walls full of mold or asbestos without guest's knowledge, as opposed to hotels, which are subject to building codes and periodic auditing (Slee, 2015). As a form of quality conmtrol, social norms of courtesy distort honest assessment. Five-star reviews are not objective evaluations; rather, they are thank-yous. Firms typically respond to this bias by raising the minimum rating threshold, hence the high average rating for Uber drivers (Slee, 2015). Despite these shortcomings, the rating system still functions as an intensification of the horizontal surveillance techniques observed in JIT production. Workers are observed, assessed, ranked, and disciplined, exerting a pressure to obey platform rules and always be on their best behaviour, all while the vast majority of contractors will likely never see or even speak to a human manager from the company they contract for, let alone receive any constructive feedback on their performance from one.

Some JIT regimes may incorporate rating or ranking systems into their disciplinary surveillance apparatus, and some may not. Likewise, a rating system may or may not be a feature of any platform, but they are almost always a feature for the lean platforms of the gig economy and are key to understanding their hyper-outsourced approach (Rosenblat, 2019; Slee, 2015). Customer reviews of restaurants or other businesses are an obvious precursor, even before websites like Yelp brought it to the digital realm. Proprietors can read these reviews, but these reputation systems are externally oriented, meant as informational exchange between consumers concerning a third party, and the proprietors are not directly disciplined based on their rating – TripAdvisor cannot fire an entrepreneur for bad service (Slee, 2015). Gig economy reputation systems are instead internally oriented and meant to assess the behaviour of the worker as a service provider (van Doorn, 2017, p. 902). eBay popularized this internal rating system in the platform's early days as an online auction house. Sellers were not employed by eBay, and so had to be vetted quickly at a massive scale with minimal workforce (van Doorn, 2017, p. 903).

Horizontal surveillance like this tends to have more of a human face – the driver can see the person who has power over them, the tasker enters the home of their employer, et cetera. Conversely, vertical surveillance occurs through faceless emails and impersonal app notifications. In effect, the owners of the app, the ones who actually hold power over the worker, are obscured from view. This leaves riders, vested with a fraction of the power of a capitalist, as the most pressing source of conflict for gig workers. How this intra-class conflict plays out on the ground level is the subject of Chapter 8.

Hyper-outsourcing

As mentioned above, the lean platforms of the gig economy are called that because the companies involved do not own the assets required to perform their core customer service. Uber's cars are owned by its drivers, AirBnb rents other people's property, and TaskRabbit relies on its "Taskers" to provide their own tools (Ravenelle, 2019). The first problem with this model, from a worker's perspective, is the flip side of the coin; if they own their assets, they are also responsible for all costs associated with that asset, including but not limited to fuel, insurance, and maintenance. This is closely related to the issues associated with independent contracting discussed above, but it bears reiterating and further exploration here because of how the surveillance architecture of digital platforms enables this arrangement at scale and distance.

On its face, the gig economy seems to push back against conventional Marxian analysis. Workers use their own property as capital to create a profit, with their partner, the owner of the digital platform, taking a cut. This is further grounded in promises of worker freedom, and the ability to be one's own boss, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Muntaner, 2018, p. 598). In reality, the asymmetry of information and power inherent to platform ownership allows proprietors to continue to extract surplus value, and actually solidify their position relative to their workers. This is what Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) refer to as "technology as means of surveillance" (pp 331).

The means of production and surveillance are interrelated: the more loosely a capitalist grips one, the more tightly it must grip the other to secure profit (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). For instance, imagine a workplace where the means of production are controlled to the point where a worker need only push a button to produce commodities. In this extreme case, the need for

surveillance would be practically nonexistent. The worker would only have one course of action, and therefore need little oversight or discipline. The gig economy is the reverse. A *complete* monopoly on the mechanisms of surveillance that comprise a platform, allows a high degree of worker ownership of critical job assets. Taking Uber as an example, in essence, without the means of surveillance that is their platform, an Uber driver's car ceases to become the means of production altogether. If they are no longer able to receive requests to locate and pickup riders, the independent contractor's vehicle stops being capital, and reverts back to being a mere commodity that they own. The material realities of the car, i.e. its maintenance, fuel, and insurance costs are born by the driver, while the means of surveillance allow Uber to control one's ability to go out and circulate that commodity in the market in pursuit of profit

Network effects

The last major point of concern to be explored in this chapter is perhaps less obvious, but underlies several other issues, and is an important component in the initial rapid success of the platform generally, and the gig economy more specifically (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017; Jones, 2021; Larson, 2019; Srnicek, 2016). Economists refer to the phenomenon as demand-side economies of scale, more colloquially called positive network effects (Mankiw & Scarth, 2010). In simple terms, a positive network effect means that the more people who buy a product or use a service, the more valuable that product or service becomes to other users. A great non-platform example of this is the telephone. If only one person you know owns a telephone, then the value of a telephone would be relatively low, since you could only use it to talk to that person. If everyone you know owns a telephone then there is greater utility in owning one, since you can now talk to whomever you like. This is opposed to negative network effects, such as those seen in city streets, where when more people using the roads, the more congested the roads become.

This negative network effect in particular is one of those aforementioned underlying issues, as research suggests that Uber worsens traffic congestion wherever it goes (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017). The consequences of platform network effects will be further discussed in chapter 7.

Digital platforms are also uniquely equipped to benefit from positive network effects because of their very low barriers to entry; new users only need to create an account, which is usually free. Additionally, once platforms reach some critical mass of users, a fear of missing out may compel existing users to stay, and further entice prospective users to join (Srnicek, 2016). Over time, many platforms have the implicit goal of becoming integrated into the fabric of social life, effectively recreating the town square in the digital realm, with social media sites like Facebook and YouTube perhaps being the most famous success story examples (Slee, 2015). All the while, user data is harvested. This model of short-term rapid growth transitioning into a monopolistic social forum is what drove investment into gig economy start-ups from the beginning, and what sustains much of Silicon Valley to this day (Jones, 2021).

This chapter has unpacked the gig economy, its features, history, and issues from the dual perspectives of technological advancement and work relations, respectively. Next, we will conclude the review of relevant literature by proposing a theoretical framework for understanding the gig economy that draws from both of these perspectives. From there, the reader will be fully equipped with the knowledge and vocabulary to comprehend the experiences of gig economy workers.

CHAPTER 3 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODS

So far, the literature review has defined the gig economy, situated it in a history of capitalism, and outlined some of the key concerns and debates around it. While all of these aspects are informative and crucial for understanding what the gig economy is and how it works, there remains the need for a framework; a theoretical model with which to narrow our focus and make sense of the data. It was established in Chapter 2 that the independent contractor that is a hallmark feature of the gig economy is an extension and intensification of temp work, insofar as it represents the latest instance of capital exercising its monopoly power over the internal state to undermine the power of Labor. Furthermore, the use of digital platforms to gather data with the goal of better coordinating the distribution of goods and services is an elaboration of just-in-time production regimes. These data driven systems also prefigure the automation of middle management and supervisory roles through both vertical and horizontal surveillance meant to discipline Labour into managing itself (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992).

Thus, building on these distinct yet overlapping areas, I assert that the gig economy can be understood as a combination of these intensified trends. Workers sign up as service providers for a gig economy app and the work they do resembles that of a temp. Their labour power is then deployed dynamically in real time in thousands of cities around the world, using Uber's platform model to engage in surveillance of all its workers simultaneously and allocate work in a dynamic way. Workers are then disciplined through vertical surveillance by Uber's tracking and asymmetry of information and through the horizontal surveillance of the rating system. The reality of the gig economy is extremely insecure work distributed to insecure workers with the efficiency and agility of a data driven surveillance system. Thus, they are Just-in-time Temps,or JIT Temps, for short.

A further strength of the JIT Temps model is that it remains consistent with and builds upon Schor and Atwood-Charles' definition of gig work outlined in Chapter 1 (2017). Recall that for a company to be part of the gig economy it must meet 4 criteria:

5. Peer-to-peer transactions facilitated by proprietary information technology.
6. Compulsory user rating-based reputation systems.
7. Promises of a high degree of worker flexibility and autonomy.
8. Worker ownership of job critical assets through a triangular work relationship that positions them as independent contractors rather than employees.

Points 1 and 2 are characteristics that are inherited, so to speak, from JIT systems, while points 3 and 4 are features that are also closely associated with temp work and the marketing surrounding it. At this point these connections should be clear, and so shall not be recapitulated here.

A note on JIT

In its conventional usage, JIT typically describes an approach to factory production, one where the manufacturing process is rationalized and made more efficient through the use of surveillance. However, when positioned as a precursor to the data driven algorithms of gig economy platforms, JIT regimes are referred to as a system of distribution, one that uses data to direct people and things to their needed places. This apparent disconnect is resolved by understanding that conventional JIT regimes boost production by more efficiently distributing inputs across productive elements. For example, a JIT system may be used to optimize the distribution of materials between workstations of varying productivity such that each workstation

is perfectly supplied with the exact amount of materials they can process in a given time. Production is optimized because the distribution of inputs within a system is optimized. Similarly, a platform like Uber distributes work and coordinates the movement of service providers who then produce the commodity precisely when and where it is desired. Thus we see that both instances entail the coordinated distribution of inputs within a productive system.

There are shortcomings to this model that, in the interest of pre-empting criticism, should be addressed here. As John Law tells us, imposing order onto the "messy" complexity of social life only creates more mess (). In particular, this model downplays the differences between firms in the gig economy and accentuates differences between gig-firms and otherwise closely related non-gig counterparts. For example, this paper has been hesitant to discuss AirBnb which, despite fitting squarely into the 4-point definition, has a whole set of issues that are unique to it, owing to the unique characteristics of it trading in property and accommodation (Larson, 2020; Slee, 2015). There may be other instances where the nature of the good or service being exchanged significantly shapes the underlying analysis that this model cannot capture. Similarly, firms may be part of the gig economy in all ways except one or two, such that the JIT Temps model may offer insight into their condition, but they are not counted. The clearest example of these are regional competitors to Uber, who often differentiate themselves from the gig economy in an attempt to stand out. This usually means the drivers are employees, but there are known instances of apps that do not use rating systems, or those that take steps to secure driver flexibility and autonomy, such as collectively owned platforms. These examples could all reasonably be called gig work based on how similar they are, but by definition they are platform laborers, not gig economy workers.

Methods

The methods used for a given study prefigure what sorts of information can be obtained, and each methodological approach comes with its own ethical and procedural challenges that must be overcome. This chapter will outline and justify the methodological choices made during this project; it begins by briefly exploring the benefits and limitations of qualitative interviewing, then outlines the processes of participant recruitment and data collection, and then concludes by outlining the study's exclusion criteria and discussing how ethical issues were addressed in compliance with the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement on ethics (TCPS).

The gig economy, as previously outlined, is a large and constantly shifting collection of firms and services that is impossible to examine in its totality. This study therefore focuses on just two of these companies and their contractors: Uber and Lyft. At time of writing, Uber is the largest firm in the gig economy in terms of market valuation, number of contractors, and public profile, making it the *de facto* flagship company of this new app-based form of work. Lyft is a smaller competitor, but evidence suggests that, when available, drivers contract for both apps simultaneously (Rosenblat, 2019; Slee, 2016). Past research has also used Uber drivers as synecdoche for the gig economy, as Uber has led the charge to normalize platform work in the public imagination since its inception in 2009 (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat, 2019; van Doorn, 2018, Milkman et al, 2021)

The GTA was chosen as the location for this study for two primary reasons: First, it is the metropolitan area in Canada in which Uber has operated the longest, allowing for longer views in terms of driver experiences and personal biographies. Secondly, a mass effort to unionize Uber drivers had taken place in Toronto approximately 6 months prior to data collection. Although

unsuccessful, this effort is likely to leave a lasting impression on drivers, providing a unique set of circumstances not found elsewhere in Canada.

Data collection, qualitative interviewing, recruitment

To investigate the research questions, 19 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with Uber and Lyft drivers in the GTA in August of 2019. Each interview took place at a location and time chosen by the participant and was planned to last around 60 minutes. In reality, times ranged from 17 minutes to 103 minutes. The question guide used during all interviews is included in Appendix The objective in using qualitative interviews was to collect data on the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of Uber drivers in order to investigate how gig economy workers experience class conflict. Guided by an interpretivist approach, the data gleaned from interviews is not presented here as the whole truth, rather, it is interviewees' interpretations of the aspects of events that they have perceived first-hand or second-hand from other sources. These subjective interpretations are the raw material with which individuals build narratives about themselves, making an interview-based methodology the most appropriate for answering this research's guiding questions. Such interview guides exist on a spectrum of structure, with fully structured guides at one end and completely unstructured guides at the other. Structure here refers to the degree of standardization of the questions asked, the order and context in which they are asked, and the degree to which digression from the written list of questions is allowed, and even the degree to which an interview guide is comprised of pre-formulated questions, rather than a set of broader themes (Bell, Bryman, & Teevan, 2009).

The interview guide used for this research was "Semi-structured" in that, while there was a core set list of questions that every person was asked, there was room allowed for unscripted digressions, and questions were often asked out of order based on the flow of conversation. A

semi-structured approach effectively combines the strengths of structured and unstructured questioning. This approach also gives the researcher the ability to ask spontaneously created follow-up questions based on any received information, as well as dive deeper into a given answer through probes such as "What do you mean by that?". Unstructured elements of qualitative interviewing also provide participants with the opportunity to identify the issues and elements that are important to them, while structured elements temper this with a certain ability to compare answers from different participants (Bouma, Ling, and Wilkinson 2016). In the context of my research, interviews allowed me to ask participants questions that get at their perspectives on their daily work, the people they interact with, and the aspects of the job they found most important, all in their own words. Comparing responses across interviews enabled me to search for underlying patterns and themes in the data about the ways that hyper-precarious platform labour structures participants' lives.

Lastly, the choice to use qualitative interviewing was a personal one. Prior to the 2019 publication of Alexandra Ravenelle's book *Hustle and Gig* and Alexandra Rosenblat's book *Uberland*, relatively little of the scholarship on the gig economy centered the voices of workers themselves. It is my belief that qualitative methods are especially well suited to give voice to those who so often go unheard and gives the subject the ability to define a given issue in their terms, producing information that they deem most important. This can give workers a sense of control or agency over their jobs that they may not otherwise have; the ability to name and shape their condition in the perceptions of others. This desire to elevate the voices working people was inspired by the work of Studs Terkel, whose groundbreaking work as a journalist gave light to the daily realities of the American working class in a period of great technological and political change (Terkel, 1974). In an era where such technological and political change is accelerated to

the point of becoming the norm, academics and journalists alike would be remiss to exclude the voices of workers on the forefront of those transformations.

An exploratory study using semi-structured interviews such as this means that no minimum sample was required for purposes of validity. The main constraints on the sample size of this study were therefore time, available resources including money for travel and participant compensation, and saturation, which refers to the point in qualitative data collection where the new information gained from each subsequent interview approaches zero. Given these parameters, and general expectations for a masters-level thesis, the target number for recruitment was 20 participants, with an actual sample size of 19 participants. All participants were current Uber drivers or had been so in the last month, and all but 1 participant had been driving for at least 6 months.

Since the investigation was self-funded, I personally recruited all participants and did so using three sampling frames. The first sampling frame was through a large Facebook page for Uber and Lyft Drivers that, at the time of data collection, had over 5000 active members. An open call for participants was posted in this group with the permission of the page moderators. This post consisted of a single image with text describing the goal of the project, the steps taken to ensure confidentiality and mitigate risk to participants and will end by providing a secure method of contact (see appendix 1). From there, participants were recruited on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to approval based on a pre-set exclusion criterion (see below).

The second sampling frame that this study drew from is the rideshare waiting lot at Pearson International Airport. The airport is a hotspot for rideshare activity, with thousands of riders landing in the city every day. To manage congestion and the chaos of picking up passengers, the airport designated a small parking lot as a place where rideshare drivers could

gather while waiting for a ride, with a bespoke first-in-first-out queue system algorithmically distributing fares. This system means that on busy days a driver could expect to queue in the lot for upwards of 90 minutes. This made them quite receptive interview candidates, as they were sitting idle and waiting for long periods while not getting paid. Recruitment began with walking up to a prospective participant's car and administering an oral script similar in content to the call for participants Facebook post, with my business card to further legitimize claims of being a researcher. Prospective participants were selected based on the lead researcher's perception of their willingness to interact with strangers. For example, anyone who was asleep, listening to music, or congregating with a group of friends was not considered. Once they agreed, the interview would take place inside their car, with their permission. Four participants were recruited through this method.

The third frame used for sampling was recruitment by riding, using a convenience sampling approach. The Greater Toronto Area is enormous, and traveling considerable distance was necessary to conduct most interviews. Therefore, Uber was used to hail rides to each meeting, and for personal purposes. At the end of each ride, an oral script was administered (see appendix 2) offering the same information contained in the Facebook post, and driver was given a business card with contact information, should they choose to reach out and participate. This was done at the end of the ride to minimize any risks associated with distracted driving. Both plans ensured that only members of the appropriate study population were recruited. In practice, this approach was found to be ineffective, and was abandoned during the data collection process. No participants were recruited through this method.

Exclusion Criteria

Recruitment for interviews was shaped by two exclusion criteria, the first of which was English fluency. Prospective participants had to speak and comprehend at least enough English to converse with the interviewer and understand and answer the questions asked. In theory this approach disproportionately exclude racialized, migrant, and francophone workers, as it obviously privileges people who are white, anglophone, and without significant speech impediments. This methodological shortcoming is inherent to qualitative interviews, and I acknowledge it as a significant limitation to this research, as other studies have shown that immigrant and racialized workers are overrepresented in the gig economy (van Doorn, 2017). It is worth noting that despite the fact that several workers were excluded based on this criteria, the actual sample was comprised of mostly non-citizens and racialized people for whom English was not their first language. Fluency was assessed by each driver's interaction with the researcher before recruitment, and in the case of the first sampling frame, asking them to self-report their fluency directly.

The second exclusion criterion concerns the duration of the potential participant's contract. To be eligible for the study, contractors must have driven for Uber for at least six months. To ensure rich data, I decided that participants must have been contracting long enough to have accrued some experiences, opinions, and perspectives. Previous research suggests that driver turnover rates are very high, with just over half of all drivers lasting more than one year (Slee, 2015), and thus a six-month threshold strikes a balance by ensuring that drivers have accrued enough experience, while at the same time retaining a large enough study population.

Data Analysis

Interviewees were recorded on a secure recording device with no internet capability, so as to be safe from any outside security breach. This recorded information was the only field data used for analysis, except for any handwritten notes from the interview. Once data was collected, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim into text and analyzed using ATLAS.ti coding software with a grounded theory approach, a process through which theory emerges from the data, as opposed to using data to confirm or refute an existing theory (Bouma et al, 2016). While transcribing the interviews special attention was paid to initial themes that could develop into larger ideas further on in the analysis, and then multiple rounds of coding were conducted on the completed transcripts.

Coding is a means for analyzing qualitative data that essentially sorts, labels, and summarizes data into themes and subthemes. This rationalizing process (referred to as "open coding") allows qualitative data to be managed and interpreted by reducing large amounts of information into labelled, manipulable chunks (Bell, Bryman, & Teevan, 2009). These chunks can then be further organized into various categories and compared to other data to construct and identify the overarching themes and patterns contained within participant's words (referred to as "axial coding") (Bouma et el, 2016; Bell, Bryman & Teevan, 2009).

This specific approach to coding is generally referred to as an inductive approach, which Bryman, Teevan and Bell (2012) describe as a form of open and exploratory coding where themes and categories emerge from analysis, as opposed to having a set of prior concepts to apply to the data or producing the data through highly structured instruments or measurements (p. 356-357). At the same time however, it is important to acknowledge the influence of a semi-structured interview guide on this inductive process. Since the themes, topics, and even the

framing and wording of each question are decided by the researcher and baked in to the interview guide early on, such influence ought to be expected to emerge when coding said interview (Bouma et al., 2016). Through the iterative use of these inductive coding strategies, where emergent themes are themselves grouped and coded into sub-themes, raw verbal information is constructed into a theoretical framework, and new knowledge is created that addresses the research project's guiding questions.

Ethical Considerations

The processes of recruitment and data collection entailed some risks for the participants involved. While the project was subject to ethical approval through Dalhousie's Research Ethics board, that approval only applied to issues that were anticipated before data collection began. This subsection will therefore explore the unforeseen issues that were encountered in the field, as well as issues that were foreseen but whose solutions differed in practice, and outline how these risks were addressed in accordance with the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement.

Potential recruits from all three sampling frames had received some information about the nature of the project from the call for participants – that it was voluntary, entailed minimal risk, and that the interviews would be confidential. However, recruitment by riding entailed its own issues of informed consent. As discussed in the review of the literature, the performance of Uber drivers is assessed by their rider at the conclusion of each ride through a five-star rating system, if a driver's average rating drops too low, they will be dismissed without appeal. These conditions create a power differential between the customer and service provider. To address this, special care was be taken to inform drivers that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they would receive a five-star rating for their service, even if they did not choose to participate. The business card was critical in this regard. By giving them a card with my contact

info, the moment of recruitment was moved beyond the temporal boundary of the service provided. This freed the potential recruit of any professional obligations of courtesy and the risk of receiving a poor review for non-compliance, and therefore ensured that consent was entirely voluntary and non-coercive. Although, as mentioned above, no participants were recruited by riding, their choices not to participate were informed decisions based on the information provided.

The data collection process and both recruitment methods outlined above involved inherent issues of confidentiality. For recruitment via Facebook, participants were asked to contact me via email, a method deemed sufficiently secure. In practice, despite being instructed to only reply via email, all recruited participants reached out via Facebook itself, via private messaging or commenting on the post containing the call for participants. While less secure, this was deemed acceptable because prospective participants had been informed of the risks to confidentiality and chose to reach out anyway, indicating that a more lax approach to confidentiality limited the degree to which participants were overburdened with responsibility, which is itself an important ethical consideration. Although anyone viewing the post could see who was interested in participating based on the comments, they could not know who was actually interviewed for the study, thus confidentiality was maintained while reducing what was demanded of each participant.

Perhaps the most important ethical decision made in the field concerned the issue of participant compensation. Initially, no monetary or gift compensation was to be offered for participation due to a perceived lack of available funds. However, initial phases of recruitment from all sampling frames yielded insufficient numbers of participants, and so compensation of $20 per interview was offered in all further recruitment efforts. Uber driving is extremely

precarious, and as was discovered, drivers often had to work long hours to even have a chance at hitting their daily goal. In fact, the hyper flexible nature of the job effectively means that all hours of the day are potential work hours. Given this time crunch, any time spent sitting down to be interviewed is theoretically resulting in lost money. Based on this evidence it is no surprise that offering compensation greatly boosted recruitment efforts.

The stage is now set. The gig economy has been properly contextualized, our theoretical model has been established. From here, the experiences of actual Uber drivers will put the model to the test, as we explore what contracting for an app that spies on you actually means at the ground level.

CHAPTER 4 – WINNERS AND LOSERS IN THE GIG ECONOMY

Despite the apparent objectivity of class relations, workers experience their jobs in a variety of complex ways. Indeed, as we will see, the exploitation and alienation inherent to the labour process under capitalism does not stop many people from reporting liking their jobs. For some the demands and parameters of a job align with, or even transform their priorities and tastes in a way that is desirable. This rhetorical construct is common in monograph studies in sociology, and for good reason; as a pattern in the data it is often too big to ignore, it helps to break data into easily understood chunks, and any prescriptions or calls to action can be framed as keeping the beneficial aspects of a social phenomenon while targeting activist energy or legislation on the aspects of the parts (Hatton, 2011; Standing, 2014; Rosenblat, 2019; Ravenelle, 2019). In other words, a plan to transform losers into winners.

Although helpful as a catchy phrase, the popular dichotomy of winners and losers is best understood a shorthand for the patterns of experiences and degrees of satisfaction that workers experience. Some winners win in different ways, and some losers lose more than others, et cetera. For others still the net benefit of gig work is hard to parse altogether. This chapter has the broader aims of introducing the sample and a few important characteristics of its members and demonstrating how those demographics sort my drivers into the broad categories of "Winners" and "Losers". From there contextualizing their situations as being derived from problems inherent to gig work, and by extension its predecessor, temp work.

Losers

As discussed above, the sample for this project consisted of semi-structured interviews with 19 Uber and Lyft drivers. While this sample is too small to be statistically representative of all

gig workers or even all Uber Drivers, it is in many ways consistent with other reports on the demography of gig workers (Holtz-Eakin, Gitis & Rinehart, 2017). The gender distribution in this sample is comprised of 18 men and a single woman, all of whom were cisgender. This is roughly to be expected, as this proportion is about consistent with the gender breakdown of both cab drivers, who are 85% male (Rosenblat, 2019) and of gig economy workers more broadly, who are more varied but still male dominated at 75% (Holtz-Eakin et al., 2019). What remains interesting is that the sampling for this project was non-random, and at one point I specifically sought out additional women to interview, but few responded, and none agreed. I asked Darla about this, and her answers hinted at how gender has a stratifying effect even among the most insecure and vulnerable workers.

> There's a very small percentage of female drivers in the group. The vast majority of {Group Members} are newcomers to Canada, and they don't have a very positive attitude about females, and a vast majority of them are misogynists, they piss me off to no end. But they all respect me for being the [WITHELD].

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked Darla what the women who drive and if they do not feel welcome on the Facebook group. She said that they had a secret closed group of their own where they felt more comfortable. This gendered segregation will be further explored in the next chapter, when the utility of social media groups is unpacked in greater detail. For now, it is worth noting the ways in which workers are stratified, even in the most precarious jobs imaginable. It also highlights an aspect of the gig economy that often goes unremarked upon; workers have no protections shielding them from co-worker harassment. This is often overlooked because the architecture of Uber's digital platform does not allow its drivers to talk to each other. While this could theoretically function as an anti-harassment measure, in reality it simply pushes the harassment into the periphery. If drivers cannot meet and discuss matters

concerning their work within the app, they will meet somewhere else. These unofficial online spaces are beyond the jurisdiction of Uber, leaving them utterly incapable of acting in the event a driver engages in harassment of another driver.

Drawing on a seminal study done by Korcyzyski and Evans (2013), the social creation of customer abuse in service work has been theorized as lying *within* the organization of the service economy itself. Abuse, in this framework, is related to three main factors, all of which are endogenous to the work relations underpinning the gig economy, and in fact gig work can be understood as an intensification of these factors. The factors are: 1) the weak collective power of labour, 2) the weak social status of workers relative to customers, and 3) the structuring of service interactions as one-off encounters (Korcyzynski & Evans, 2013).

The first point is perhaps the most obvious. As contractors, Uber drivers do not have the right to form a union to bargain collectively. On top of that, the architecture of Uber's app means that drivers cannot see or interact with other drivers; the design of the platform isolates them from each other (Srnicek, 2016). These digital and legal barriers to collective bargaining combine with a lack of protection against dismissal to ensure that gig workers have as little power to resist their conditions as possible. Point number two is a bit more subtle and has to do with social conventions around the status of service workers. In short, workers are viewed as having a lower position in the social hierarchy than customers. Korcyzinski and Evans relate this back to management, who will often de facto side with the customer in instances of worker abuse, since customers are a source of revenue, and employees are seen as liabilities (Hatton, 2011, p.11) This social convention is reflected in the rating system which was unanimously cited by drivers as being heavily biased in favour of riders, who are almost never deactivated or disciplined for bad behaviour. Moe explains:

> I give them a rating, but it's not affecting them. it's not all the same, we know that. Sometimes I get a rider with a 3 point something rating. If you are an Uber driver and you have a rate of 3.90 you get fired. So it's not the same at all.

The 3rd factor is especially relevant when understanding the abuse of gig workers. Not only are gig economy services a one-off encounter where the worker and the client are unknown to each other, but each job is distributed semi-randomly based on a variety of factors including the location of each party. A rider could, in theory, hail an Uber from the same spot every day for a year and not be matched with the same driver twice. This further anonymizes the customer, shielding them from the long-term consequences of their behaviour, which has a permissive effect enabling worker abuse.

As an example of how this differs from more conventional service work; If I were to abuse the cashier at my local McDonalds, the one-off nature of the interaction means I have no social ties or obligations to this person, and will not likely face any real consequence, but I might still be reluctant to show my face in that store again, as this could make our encounter more than a one off. Now consider if I were to stay home and have my McDonalds delivered and verbally abuse my delivery driver. The algorithm, combined with the sheer number of drivers, means I may never see him again, and therefore I am less likely to care about his feelings and what he thinks of me, and it becomes easier to treat them as targets of my negative emotions.

These lack of protections against abuse has unintended consequences for all concerned parties. If drivers are left with only their judgement to protect themselves, they pick and choose where to avoid driving (Rosenblat, 2019). This means drivers can unintentionally replicate structures of bigotry and discrimination in an effort to protect themselves. 5 drivers admitted to avoiding driving in known "bad neighborhoods", Justifying it by claiming that if anything were

to happen, no one would have their back. Kyle, who was very analytically minded when it came to the cost-benefit analysis of gig work, reluctantly acknowledges this:

> Yeah umm I'm ashamed to say […] like high crime neighborhoods, I won't go or I won't hang out in those areas. Or even like after the last call, I'll avoid those areas… I just don't wanna pick up in those areas if I don't have to […] it's just, it's just far more conducive to safety.

Atul, a recently "retired" Uber driver from Pakistan, was the most vocal about his experiences of abuse from riders. He claimed multiple instances where he felt helpless and scared, but he described one particularly extreme instance that reflects all three factors of service sector abuse quite vividly:

> Two years ago, in winter I got harassed by a group [of people], and they broke my DVD in the car, and the ask me to do [a] gangbang inside my car, and I didn't let them. After that they became aggressive with me and they hit my DVD in my car two times. I start to call to the cops and they took my phone. So there was no [other] option, I was on the highway, there was snow, it was dark. So finally I decided [Pause] Ok you know what guys, if you're hitting my car I'm going to hit another car on the highway, and let's go to hell. After that they became worried and very respectful like "ok ok don't hit any car" but I said "no I'm going to hit another car and let's go hell". I complain to Uber about them, and about my DVD player, and after two weeks I got a call from the insurance company, they said "hey if [it's] anything less than thousand, that's your responsibility."

In denying their demands, Atul was asserting his status as being equal or greater than that of the customer, inciting their aggression. He did so without the backing of a union or his own management, and since a ride is a one-off encounter with a randomly selected driver, the passengers were not concerned with ever seeing him again to suffer any consequences. It was only when Atul 1) fully asserted his authority as the driver of the vehicle, with 2) the power to commit an act of defensive violence, and 3) the consequences of their behaviour were shifted to the immediate present did the abuse stop and the passengers relented.

Atul's story highlights another issue with gig work that came up often: Thanks to Uber's hyper outsourced model, drivers are by and large responsible for their own expenses and any amenities or perks in their vehicle (Slee, 2015). This includes routine expenses like fuel and insurance, which will be explored later. It also includes sudden, unexpected expenses like Atul's

smashed DVD player. A frequent complaint was passenger vomit. If a passenger is sick in their car, drivers are the ones who must ensure that their car is clean to the standard that Uber sets for them, which means professional cleaning only. Drivers can charge their rider a cleaning fee to cover this cost, but this risks a retaliatory low rating, and Uber's bias toward customers discussed above means that several drivers I spoke to saw this as no guarantee. Regardless of the cleaning fee, vomit in your car means the end of their work day, and possibly multiple days of lost earnings if professional cleaning is not promptly available. Farouq says:

> Sometimes on the weekends around 1am or 2am I start to feel [like] its time to go back home. Because as much as you make, you receive very drunk bad riders. If they throw up in your car now, Uber doesn't pay you the cleaning fees. They just give you $20 bucks or they just ask you to fill out invoice. So you lose your nights, you cannot drive anymore, that has happened to me, and you have to pay like $100, $150 for detailing, and then you don't know how much they will pay back. $20-$80, it depends. Some people will throw up in the car, and you charge them the cleaning fee, they rate you bad! How is this my fault?

The cost of these stochastic expenses are borne by drivers in a way that most of them considered to be unfair. These can be frustrating setbacks, especially when Uber and its available supports can seem so uncaring and distant, and driver earnings are tending to decrease over time. What is perhaps more concerning is that the costs of driving can sometimes leave gig workers trapped on a treadmill of expenses that it can be difficult to escape from. For example, to drive for UberX in Toronto, a car may be no older than seven years. This means that all drivers must incur the cost of a new vehicle at least once every seven years. Darren, a French immigrant, made the mistake of leasing a new car to drive with:

> I didn't know so I got the car and I started in September. But for sure when you have a lease you have like a four-year contract and 96,000 km for 4 years. So It's been a year and I have 50k mileage. That's why I had to stop, you know? The thing is, now the car, if I want to give back the car to Honda dealership, I have to give them money now. Because you know the price of the car went down.

Darren made a costly mistake, but he is fortunate to be able to delay that expense until he returns the leased vehicle, and at time of writing he was doing much better at his new job as a private chauffer. His brush with financial devastation was luckily no more than a wake-up call; he realized the burden of risk was more than he cared to deal with. One driver I spoke with was not so fortunate. Many drivers expressed concern that gig work was like a treadmill, that working ever more hours to offset ever diminishing earnings meant that they did not have time to spend doing other things. Family time was the most common sacrifice, followed by time spent working on side projects or searching for other jobs. While many drivers felt like the time squeeze of gig work caused them to struggle to get ahead, one driver had suddenly found themselves in a desperate battle to even stay in place after an accident on the job. They specifically requested complete anonymity for this quote:

> I'm driving a rental right now. I'll be honest I was in a car accident while I was Ubering. My passenger was fine. But my car was a write-off. It was devastating. I almost ended up in a homeless shelter, I still owe money on the vehicle, and I could if I wanted to, but I don't want to finance another vehicle only to drive it into the ground, right? Cause you end up underwater. […] I'm basically working for the rental and gas and I have not much left over. I struggle every single month for the last 6-7-8 months to pay the rent and almost every month I'm paying the rent at least a week late because I don't have enough.

Winners

When it comes to examining who the "winners" in the gig economy are, it is useful to first look at who Uber themselves want to succeed. These are the people whose success stories best play into Uber's marketing and public image. Of those I spoke to, the one person who mostly neatly fit the image of Uber's ideal driver was Raul, a 39-year-old marketing agent. He lives with is wife and son in an apartment in the heart of downtown Toronto, the only driver I spoke with who lived in the central core of the city. Since Raul came to Canada ten years prior, he has spent

much of his time making a career in marketing and social media. He started driving for Uber full time when his company went bankrupt and stayed on driving part time once he found a new job; just a few hours on the weekends and evenings. While the money is nice, Raul could survive without it. However, the security it provides has given him the confidence to pursue some side projects, including launching his own social media agency. Above all, he appreciates the flexibility, and he says so as if he stepped straight out of an Uber advertisement:

> It's very easy to balance because that's the most important, interesting aspect, positive aspect about Uber is I can do it anytime I want. I don't have a schedule, so I do it when I feel like it so uh it doesn't interfere with my regular job at all.

A few others shared similar sentiment, and indeed Uber's marketing seems to either be telling the truth or manufacturing its own consent; The flexibility of choosing precisely when, where, and how long to drive was certainly the most commonly discussed positive aspects of gig work, and this is consistent with previous studies and ethnographical accounts (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenblat, 2019; Slee, 2015).

Relatedly, Uber positions the freedom to be your own boss front and center in its marketing (Ravenelle, 2019; Rosenlat, 2018, van Doorn, 2016). What is often left out of that messaging is that being your own boss also comes with obligations and responsibilities, namely all of the procedures and expenses that come with self employment. Abdul explains:

> [Uber] will be like "you can make $1000 a week" right? But they will never tell you the cost that you will pay. Everybody that comes in, they think that they will get paid for the gas too. Like the general conception is- like if I tell someone about it their first question is "oh, do they pay for the gas too?" but they never tell you that the more you drive, the more you wear and tear, more maintenance, right? Uber [just] gives the perception that "oh you have a car, start earning right now".

Recognizing the skills required to be self-employed and being able to navigate those obligations was an important distinction between those who thrived in gig work and those who just survived. Uber business model centers around a philosophy of hyper outsourcing and data driven distribution derived from Just-in-Time (JIT) management regimes. Because of this, Uber tends to invest very little in the training and quality of its drivers, supplying them only with the knowledge and training they need to do their job, and contact support should there be any issues they cannot handle themselves (Slee, 2015). Thus, those that had know-how to be their own business tended to be those who had run a business prior to driving. This is the flip side to the downwardly mobile business owners discussed above, and immigrants or refugees were very much overrepresented in this group. While Faisal would certainly prefer to be back in Syria running his own jewellery store where he "lived like a king, I tell you", that past experience gave him a leg up when Uber threw him in the deep end of independent contracting.

> From my previous business I'm a very accounting kind of person, so I want to keep track and keep note of everything. So, I'm very good at maintaining my own expenses. So, I take out the data from the [Uber app] dashboard, [I] have it in my Excel sheet, and then I have my expenses in order to calculate my income vs expenses and do all those kinds of analysis… wear and tear. So yeah, I keep track of my expenses.

As explained previously, the Uber app offers a variety of services, intended to micro-target certain segments of the transportation market. Historically, one segment of customers are difficult to accommodate in a for-profit framework; people with disabilities, especially those who require the use of a wheelchair. This segment of the population is small, not particularly concentrated in any one area, and require expensive infrastructure to accommodate them comfortably (van Doorn, 2017). That is why the City of Toronto entered into a public-private-partnership with Uber Technologies to create the Uber WAV program (WAV is here short for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle).

Briefly, Uber WAV offers leasing options for wheelchair accessible vans from companies approved by Toronto City council. Drivers can lease a WAV vehicle for $950 per month, plus expenses. On the flip side of this, Uber takes a 0% cut from any fares, and pays an addition flat bonus of $20 per ride. On top of this, WAV drivers receive $275 per week to cover the cost of the van, on the condition that they commit to doing at least 40 trips per week on any of Ubers services, not just WAV. Since the client base and the number of drivers are both relatively small, WAV drivers report a high degree of repeat customers, building trust with a clientele through repeated positive interactions, rather than the impersonal surveillance of a rating system. While this program still relies on independent contractors that have no access to the rights and protections of employment, the nature of how the program is structured and the specific needs of the riders coalesce to remedy many of the common problems drivers had with Uber.

Two drivers I spoke to were fortunate enough to be a part of the WAV program; Markus who had been on board since the program started, and Mohammed, who had just started the week I spoke with him. The differences between driving for UberX vs WAV is reflected in their attitudes, as both drivers had nothing but glowing things to say, despite acknowledging that they were in a position of special privilege. Markus elaborates;

> For me it's a blessing. The whole program. I don't promote what I do because Uber is such a competitive place right now, if I were to go on Facebook groups and brag about my earnings and my system before you know it I'll have 10 guys doing the same thing in my own area, so I keep it selfishly to myself just because I know what the struggle is like.

We will revisit the finer points of Markus' system later, but for now it is clear that UberWAV is, relatively speaking, a good job nestled within a bad job. A smaller, repeat clientele reduces the risk of worker harassment, the cost of your vehicle is roughly covered if you work full time, and once again, we see how the rules and digital structure of a gig economy platform shape the material conditions of drivers and their jobs. The quality of work is dictated by the

structure of the platform. This calls attention to the fact that many of the issues that characterize gig work could be treated by reorganizing the architecture of the platform to make it more equitable. WAV makes it alarmingly clear that when it comes to platform Labour, changing the rules means changing the outcomes.

Throughout this chapter, and indeed the whole of this thesis, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that while Uber can still be lucrative, returns to driving are diminishing all the time. It is perhaps unsurprising that some of those self-reported "winners" who find success and satisfaction in gig work, are sometimes those who drive for primarily non-economic reasons. Bad pay matters less if you are not in it for the money.

Take, for example the case of Howard, a Romanian immigrant who came to Canada in the 1980s after fleeing the Soviet Bloc. For much of his life in Canada, Howard alternated between aspiring entrepreneur and small business owner, spurred on by the expertise and curiosity associated with being an engineer. Five or so years prior to our meeting, his business venture, a travel agency, went under and he lost a fair amount of money. Howard, now in his mid 60s, found himself cast into forced retirement, which he took poorly: "I got into a case of very bad depression, and I tried just about everything, medication, meditation, therapy, and nothing really worked. My wife kept telling me to get out of the house more and do something. I was unemployed, it was kind of an early retirement for me". Eventually, after hearing about Uber from an advertisement, he took his wife's advice and he found relief in the form of gig work. "On my birthday, I started driving. Two weeks later I realized it was making me happy, and slowly but surely, I got out of the depression because of that". When asked why driving made him happy, he said that he felt as though he was once again useful to others.

Faraz also found utility in the social aspects of gig work. He was a practicing lawyer in Iraq before he came to Canada with his family as refugees. 6 years later the only thing that stood in the way of his reinstatement was an exam designed to assess his ability to speak English. He had failed once before and was determined to not repeat his mistake. In his previous job as a pizza delivery driver he was not making enough money to support his family, and his busy schedule made studying English cumbersome. When he switched from delivering pizzas to delivering people, his fortune changed.

> I started to do this to make money, but I also want to improve my English too, like to practice speaking with people. Because I am [a] student, I need to improve my English to continue my education. This is important point for me, to chat with people. So when I am driving I can converse with people.

Markus, the WAV driver, combined the sentiments:

> I had an 8 year relationship with a woman that just ended abruptly, I wasn't prepared for it… Uber was an awesome thing for me because not only did it just get me out of the house and get my mind off of the present, it allowed me to speak to people, and that social aspect, for me at least, was so important because at the time I wasn't very social and I think that was a huge thing for me in my recovery. I would say probably better than any other shrink I ever had.

There are others that illustrate this point further, such as Jonesy, the math teacher who drove as a way to keep his mind off of his gambling problem. Overall, it is worth pointing out that none of these motivations are derived from features inherent to gig work itself. Howard liked to drive and feel useful to people, but surely he could just as easily feel useful to others in an employment relationship. Likewise, Faraz liked using driving as a chance to practice his English, but if he had a good job he could take classes taught by a professional. Many of the intangible benefits people listed can be incidental to the performance of work in general but are not characteristic of gig work specifically. Conversely however, the ways in which losers lose are often baked into platform and how it operates. Uber's hyper outsourced platform approach

enables worker abuse and leaves drivers holding the bag in the event of unexpected expenses and of routine operating costs that those unfamiliar with self employment.

Gig workers who succeed often do so because they find themselves possessing skills, money, or motivations above and beyond that which are required to perform the jobs they do; The skills to know how to account for and navigate the bureaucracy of self employment, the capital to have other ventures about the side, or the motivation and support to drive anyway, regardless of conditions. In short, winners could be successful in more conventional jobs, but there are not enough of those better jobs to go round, and thus "winning" can look more like working a job they are overqualified for, or a job for which they have the capital or know-how to alleviate its worst elements.

These findings are consistent with research done by Alexandra Ravenelle (2019), who interviewed New Yorkers working for a variety of gig economy apps. One of her key findings was that although their feelings on their work varied, those who found success within the nonstop hustle of the gig economy often already had the tools and skills to succeed outside of gig work (Ravenelle, 2019). This raises the question: if even the "Winners" of gig work are better off outside of it, then what are they doing there in the first place? Addressing this leads us to one last characteristic of my sample of drivers, a common element of their experience that huge majority of them shared in some form; people come to the gig economy at a point of disruption in their lives. This disruption can take on a variety of forms and can vary in intensity; a sudden breakup, displacement due to violent conflict, a layoff from one's job, the chronic illness of a family member. Regardless of how they came to it, gig work was a readily available to people in times of personal or social upheaval. Looking at it one way, one might say Uber can catch people when

they fall, giving them an easily accessible way to earn money and achieve, or reclaim, a sense of self worth. Markus would certainly agree with this.

> Yeah the gig economy literally, I can't express to you how much it's done for me. It's remarkable. It saved me financially, it saved me psychologically, it's given me a lot. Now I might look back at all this in 5, 10, 20 years from now and say well what I thought I was gaining really cost me because I maybe stunted my career or traditional desk type corporate work. But maybe if I hadn't found the gig economy maybe I'd be back behind a desk somewhere and working my way up again, but for now it's been great for me and I have very little negative things to say, unlike maybe the vast majority.

Looking at it another way, however, tells us that the gig economy sustains itself, at least in part, on the economic anxieties of the vulnerable. When I asked him if he would recommend driving to others, Ali retorted:

> No, never. I had a lot of family asking like even now my brother-in-law is asking and everything, but no. And they are asking me "hey what [do] you make?" and [I think] no… don't come this side. I'm in trouble I don't want you guys to be in trouble. So I'll never, ever suggest to anyone "Hey come to Uber driver yes this is good".

This is symptomatic of a broader problem in the labour market; one of polarization and increasingly rigid segmentation, where a shrinking core of good, meaningful jobs are held by relatively few successful workers, and a growing periphery of people are left to compete for the leftover work that remains. At some point, in order to spend more effort to maintain their status, workers in the core are pressured to outsource non-work activities, such as their own social reproduction, to members of the periphery, who are under economic pressure take what work is available.

Temp work and Gig work are themselves both outcomes of and contributors to this segmentation; Historically, temp agencies filled with workers cast out into periphery, and the subsequent success of their business model inspired other companies to treat their workers more like temps (Hatton, 2011). Gig work recreates a similar process today; broadly speaking, those

cast out by post-recession economic flux are forced to make ends meet by performing cheap highly insecure service work for those in the core, who are themselves increasingly subject to the surveillance, increased casualization, and algorithmic management that makes that gig firms tout as their key to success (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017; Rosenblat, 2019). This process of outsourcing of one's own social reproduction creates what Andre Gorz refers to as the "servant class" (2011).

At this point it is worth acknowledging a key distinction; In this above framework, both temp workers and gig workers are positioned in the outer periphery of those without "Good" jobs. However, when describing the servant class, it would be more accurate to focus discussion on gig workers specifically, since gig firms are almost exclusively oriented around customer service provision (Muntaner, 2017; Slee, 2015). To understand this distinction, recall that JIT production involves the distribution of productive elements in a dynamic, data driven manner (Osberg et al., 1995; Moore, 2018; Sewell and Wikinson, 1992). Conventional temp workers are found in all sectors of the economy but are often "stickier" than their modern gig work peers, working for the same client for days or weeks or months, rather than minutes or hours. In these jobs, training costs and the premium of on-the-job experience mean that it still makes sense to hold on to the same worker and save primarily on not paying out their perks or benefits (Hatton, 2011). Once those temp workers are deployed using algorithmically based piece work on a just-in-time basis, the nature of the services they provide are themselves transformed by their digital JIT framework; the work they do is shaped by how that work is distributed to them.

CHAPTER 5 – VERTICAL AND DISTANT

The previous chapter explored the circumstances through which the JIT Temps came to gig work, and roughly sorted them into a framework of winners and losers. This chapter will now look at their relationship with the company they contract for and its associated digital platform. In other words, if Uber controls its digital platform, and it is known to be in class conflict with its labour force, this chapter will examine the ways in which that vertical power relationship plays out in the daily lives of gig workers. As the title implies, this chapter is therefore broadly "vertical" in its orientation, in the sense that it centers on how drivers navigate, resist, feel about, and manage the top-down power structures of their job and the rules that derive from them. It is also "distant" in the sense that drivers are by their very nature remote workers who will almost never interact with a traditional manager or supervisor. Even Uber's driver support line is outsourced to call centers in the Philippines. Drivers are thus physically and socially distant from their bosses, with the structured interactions of the platform maintaining a degree of separation between them.

Knowledge & Surveillance: Working for a Black Box

A platform's owner determines the rules of interaction, and can therefore release information selectively, and on their terms, influencing what workers can know about their work or each other (Moore, Upchurch, & Whittaker, 2018). For example, the platform used by Uber gathers immense amounts of GPS data, including up to the second analytics on a driver's acceleration and breaking. This information was available to the driver at one point, and even

summarized into a daily report. Howard, our resident engineer, saw great potential in such a system.

> When I started doing this they had other things that were actually very good, for instance they would track and they would let you know the rate you are accelerating, the way you are braking […]. They were encouraging you to drive properly […] this information on acceleration, braking, and everything else, it's not there anymore, they don't track that anymore. But I enjoyed it. They would send out everyday statistics for the previous day, and I would see that I did 270 brakings and accelerations and 99% of them were good. Not too fast, not too slow. That's good for me, you know, I was getting feedback.

While this cannot be independently verified, other scholars like Calo & Rosenblat (2017) have asserted that Uber uses data collected from drivers to inform the machine learning system that would power their self-driving cars. As of Dec 7, 2020, Uber has sold off their entire self-driving car division and all its assets to Aurora Technologies (Jones, 2021). It is therefore possible that they do not track such information anymore, although they almost certainly did long after Howard thought they had stopped.

Howard's blasé attitude toward surveillance was not uncommon. Most drivers were accepting or at least indifferent to the idea of Uber recording what they were doing. When pressed, reasonings varied from it being helpful to drivers – Darren liked that if he ever got in trouble or in an accident, Uber could share his information with the authorities – to it being too late to matter since as Moe argues, Facebook and Microsoft are already spying on you. Most drivers had a reasonably well thought out opinions on why it was acceptable for Uber to monitor their actions and harvest their data, but none of them voiced any opinions or concerns for what was done with their data after it was collected, since that information is rarely disclosed. In other words, drivers understood that they were under surveillance, but only rarely did they understand

or recognize this surveillance as being a key feature of the top-down power relationship they were a part of.

This is illustrative of a problem with surveillance and discourses around the pervasiveness of data collectors like security cameras or smartphones. Workers were often aware *that* they are being watched but showed little awareness of the consequences of that watching. The presence of a security camera is simple enough to spot, just as a notification where Uber asks if it is allowed to access your location information appears clearly. The data collection devices themselves are always present, allowed to become banal, a quotidian aspect of daily life. Conversely, where that data goes and how it is used once collected is obscured, the platform does not disclose that information, except in the infrequent instances where an outside body like a government or court compels them to. Rumors abound regarding what Uber does with the data it collects, and no concrete accusations will be leveled here, but the point remains that one of the ways that Uber uses control over their platform as a tool of class conflict is to control the conversation over surveillance and big data in the first place. By confronting users with the data collector while obscuring the purpose of such collection, Platforms in the gig economy take surveillance from a method of power and control and reduce it in the eyes of their workers to the harmless act of looking. An act which seemingly carries no lasting consequences once one moves beyond the immediate gaze of the sensor.

Asymmetry of Information & Pay

It is worth digressing briefly to give some special attention to Uber's work distribution and payment system, since one of the most pressing concerns among drivers was uncertainty over money earned, and the asymmetries of information that exist throughout the transaction process. More specifically, the form of task distribution, and the digital architecture through

which compensation is calculated, displayed, and dispersed, both shape the work that they perform.

In the realm of economics, entire academic papers have been written in an effort to reliably calculate the typical hourly wage of an Uber driver (Milkman et al., 2021). Aside from obvious variations in region, time of year, and geography, computational difficulties often arise due to large amounts of unpaid down time in between assigned tasks. Calculating an hourly wage is difficult if drivers spend most of a given hour sitting in their cars waiting for work, especially if they fill that time with non-work-related activity, like Faraz, who studied for his law class in between pings. While the purpose of calculating equivalent wages is to make gig work comparable to other occupations, these computational challenges signal that gig work is better understood as piecework, where workers are paid per unit produced, rather than by any measurement of elapsed time. Matching drivers with riders through the platform system is simply a matter of distributing piece work orders (ride requests) to workers on a just-in-time basis. There is the distinction that the pace at which pieces are received is out of the worker's control, making down time obligatory and hustling through work nearly impossible.

Scholars since Marx have pointed out that piecework is the ideal form of payment for extracting surplus value (2004). Since compensation is agreed to in advance, the amount of surplus value is fixed, and the per-unit rate does not vary based on the intensity of pace or the skill with which the work is performed. The worker is paid precisely for the task at hand and nothing more, with all other moments beyond the act of production or service provision being unpaid down time. Additionally, when combined with the quasi-random distribution system of a gig work platform, a piecework system will have the effect of increasing time spent online on the app. The worker will tend to extend the working day by their own accord, since they cannot be

sure when the next work request is coming. As we have seen and shall see again below, drivers all had steps that they took to increase their chances receiving a request, but the reality is, under a digitally distributed piecework system, one of the only ways to reliably increase the number of rides one receives is to increase the time spent online.

Uber also has a feature where a rider can modify their route in the middle of a trip, changing their destination or adding stops on the way. In these instances where the initial fare price is quoted to the rider has changed, Darla claims that the fare switches from its precalculated quote to an active calculation based on time and distance, similar to conventional taxi meters. This could not be verified, and only one other driver shared this belief, but once again it illustrates an alternative vision of gig work, and hints at how platform rules shape the realties of work in ways that further the interests of the platform owner. Ultimately, the reason why a given fare is calculated in advance and not something alterable through the driver's effort is rider convenience; the luxury of being able to see the cost of a ride and be able to pay up-front necessitates piecework behind the scenes.

This all, of course, assumes that Uber is transparent and honest about how drivers are paid, an idea disputed by multiple drivers, who claim that Uber takes more than its stated share. In several instances these complaints were likely a misunderstanding of Uber's fare structure and how their end pay is calculated. Howard explains the misunderstanding:

> When I started they were taking 20% from the fare. Then they said 25%. For shorter trips they probably get 50%. Because of the calculation. For instance, if a person pays 10 dollars, out of the 10 dollars I think it's a $2.75 base fare, the booking fee. So, we are talking $7.25 after the base, Uber takes the whole base, the booking fee. From this, they take another 25%. 25% of this, is about 2, or 1.87 but let's say 2. So, $5.25 left. And then you have tax, but we'll leave that aside. So, the driver is getting $5.25, and Uber is getting $4.75. But that's from $10. If it's $6 they take their [$2.75] booking fee, and then their 25% so that's $4.50. So now the driver is getting $1.50, and the driver is getting now upset. But yeah, you have to get into the mathematics to make sense of it, to really

> understand why drivers are saying Uber is taking too much. They are saying Uber is taking over 50% when Uber is saying 25%, how? And there are other things, but I don't know that for sure, I've heard people saying you know when they calculate the 25%, it's not always there. Because you have experience. The person pays $60, I'm only getting $30, and that doesn't compute. So there are some fishy things that I can't grasp because I don't do things like to ask a person how much they are paying for this ride. I don't to that.

This is not to say that all disputes around pay are simply misunderstandings. Rather the point is that Uber's black box of a platform creates a scenario where drivers sometimes do not know for certain what they should be paid in the first place. This creates the ideal conditions for wage theft; where the worker is limited in their ability to know what they ought to be paid in the first place. Thus, the Uber /driver relationship is one based on uncertainty at a fundamental level: uncertainty over when the next ride is coming, where that ride will be, and how much the driver is getting paid. None of the drivers interviewed could prove that they were missing money, or that Uber was taking more than they claimed. What Uber does do is create conditions of uncertainty, and then leverages that uncertainty to undermine the power of labour where workers can never fully be certain over what their boss is doing to them. Drivers remain in a work arrangement where their work provider undermines their ability to understand and advocate for themselves by controlling the integrity and flow of knowledge. Platform labour can therefore be understood as an intensification of precarious work; one where the digital reality of the job itself is insecure, a sort of epistemic insecurity. While this may be a characteristic that is present in previous instances of precarious work, platform labour – and gig work more specifically – are characterized by a more generalized epistemic insecurity, where the inability to be certain of the rules and information that apply to you permeate all aspects of one's work.

Loopholes & Exploits: Gaming the System

Uber pays their drivers through a piecework system because it wishes to do so. They could design their system to work on a wage system and have done so in past instances, as discussed below. Gig economy apps unilaterally set the rules and structure of their app, but these rules and structures are not permanent. Uber and its app are in a constant state of change, rolling out new features, removing old ones, testing new ideas and running limited time offers. Such constant change can be frustrating for drivers, who would prefer if the parameters of their job were not in a state of flux.

Additionally, although they are subject to the capitalist imperative of profit seeking in the long term, in the short-term constant inflows of venture capital gives them a certain degree of leeway to spend money on ideas that may not turn out. When these two factors combine, it can lead to emergent opportunities that drivers can leverage if they are savvy enough. Most notable amongst the savvy drivers was Jonesy. He lives in Niagara Falls and drove for a wide variety of services, always on the hunt for ways to get a leg up on the system. He describes to me a trick he and some fellow drivers came up with for getting the most out of UberEats, the company's food delivery service:

> you had to accept a lot of your requests… I think it was 75%, and they would give you so much money per hour. But, if you were in a town like Lincoln, or outside the tourist district, you wouldn't get any pings, but they'd still pay you. So there are guys, one guy I know made $10,000 one summer never getting a ping. He was in West Lincoln and he sat there and we talked online about it. He had it set up so his app would come on automatically, so he was still getting paid even though he never got a ping. He'd be out with his kids all day or at his apartment and make $20/hr or whatever it was, it might have even been more. So you could sit there and make $150 dollars a day and never get a ping and never have to work, but then they shut that off.

In an aggressive bid to expand its services and recruit new drives, Uber left itself open to exploitation, inadvertently paying thousands of dollars to drivers like Jonesy and his friends, who had no intention of actually doing any work.

There is a distinction to be made here between workers seizing upon opportunities that arise from the rules as intended as told by Uber, and workers trying to game the system based on what they think they know, although making that distinction on a case-by-case basis is often difficult. Both are avenues through which drivers can attempt to gain an advantage and build stability for themselves, but the most obvious and egregious exploits like those reported by Jonesy tend not to last as long. In one sense this seems to be the only reliable way to distinguish between the two: if an exploit is real and easy to identify then it will tend not to be around for very long, on the other hand, if an exploit is not real, or at least if information about it is sufficiently obscured such that it exists only in the minds of drivers as a rumor or superstition, the exploit may remain.

Uber Superstitions

Because the core of their digital platform is a black box to all outside observers, drivers often cannot know very much for certain about the completeness or validity of any information given to them. Nonetheless they act upon the beliefs they have about the system. Those beliefs may be widely held and accepted as fact, some of them may even be substantiated to some degree by Uber themselves, but without any sort of ability to independently verify a given statement they remain beliefs, things drivers think they know. To paraphrase from symbolic interactionist William I. Thomas, if individuals define a situation as real, that situation is real in its consequences. Thus, the job of driving for Uber is full of superstitions, rumors, and folk knowledge. Some of this has already been demonstrated, such as with disputes and discussions

over pay above, so this section will explore some of these phenomena and the claims drivers make about them.

An obvious yet perhaps more innocuous example of these superstitions is ghost cars. In Uber's app, when a rider is looking to book a ride, they are shown a map of their local area, centered on them. Around them on the map, the local area is populated with several digital images of cars that represent potential drivers near to the user, these car shaped pins move about as real cars would. The purpose of this is to create a sense of abundance in the mind of the rider, and to make them feel that an uber driver is never too far away. From a driver's perspective, this perceived abundance poses a problem. Those cars are competitors, people who might snatch up any prospective riders. Drivers would thus be incentivized to move away from these other cars, to get some distance so they do not get any requests stolen. In reality, these cars can be and often are fake, or a mixture of fake and real drivers. The use of ghost cars has since been confirmed by other authors (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017) but remains in the realm of superstition as long as drivers continue to believe they are real. Abdul was the one that was convinced of the above, and that these cars were visible to drivers so as to incentivize drivers to redistribute themselves, since for many a common strategy to get more requests was to move where these other "drivers" were not.

Honeymooning

The most common superstition among drivers was called "Honeymooning". This refers to the supposed practice of new drivers being given higher priority than older drivers, all else being equal. New drivers are given more rides – and better rides, depending on who you ask – with the intention of luring them in and getting them to commit to ridesharing. They become excited about the large influx of cash in a relatively short amount of time and may even consider

quitting their jobs or reducing hours to drive more. Then, once they have become habituated to driving, they are gradually deprioritized. This claim came up often when drivers were asked if Uber was honest with them about how their app works, Faisal said:

> I've known since last year that they are giving priority to new drivers, to lure them in for them to see value in driving for Uber. Older drivers, they don't get priority anymore, so let's say we are parked next to each other, you're a new driver, I am an old driver. Maybe my rating is the same as yours, but since you are a new driver, you'll get a ping earlier than me.

Faisal claims to know this because it happened to him, and his experience has been echoed by drivers he has spoken to online. It is easy to see why drivers might think this. If it is true, it is entirely consistent with Uber's revolving door attitude it has towards its workforce, where older potentially more disgruntled drivers are replaced with newer ones that are more eager. It is known that Uber uses techniques like surge pricing to boost their labour supply. Honeymooning is a similar technique used to compel worker behavior that has the added benefit of not costing the company any additional money, since they are just redistributing the existing revenue from fares, rather than increasing it.

False surges

Surge pricing as a method of labour supply manipulation still exists, although other sources suggest the practice is in decline, owing to widespread criticism from riders claiming they have been victims of price gouging (Rosenblat, 2019). But since surge pricing is a tool to control drivers, not riders, it continues to be implemented in certain situations. Several drivers claimed to have experienced "fake surges"; instances where their app told them a surge was occurring, only to find there are few or no passengers to be found on arrival. Bashir explains the problem well:

> According to my observation, sometimes there are fake surges. When you go to an area that is a surge, you never get it. Maybe you will get it after 30 minutes, but there is no surge. They'll say you are in this area, and there is a surge in my platform, it is showing me there is a surge. I'm in the surge area, so I should get a request with a surge, not without. Maybe they are charging riders with a surge price, but not paying that to the drivers, I'm not sure.

In the last sentence, Bashir also connects his concern about false surges to uncertainty and opacity in the payment process discussed earlier. Without seeing what the rider paid, he has reason to treat fake surges – or half-fake surges, where the elevated fare is paid by the rider and pocketed by the company – as a reality of his work.

The truth behind these claims is also dependent on another factor: the degree to which the interacting technological systems work together as intended. Although the particular issues are hard to pin down, in reality every step in a given technological process is fraught with the potential for failure and error. In other words, Uber may just be wrong, rather than untruthful. They may be underestimating the time a trip takes to underpay drivers, or it could just be that their planned route was based on inaccurate information. Markus first clued me into this when he pointed out the prevalence of superstitions among members of the Facebook group:

> From my experience with WAV, because don't forget I do scheduled rides, so I see that it comes to me, I'm the closest driver, and there's only a couple of dozen of us on the road, sometimes there's only 4 or 5 vans out there in all of Toronto during the evening or whatever, so. I mean you have to understand there's so many things that come into place when you get the request. Like if you're with Freedom and I'm with Telus and the ping goes out, and like a couple hundred meters might not mean that you get it. There's drivers that will say they had a rider in their car and told them to request a ride, and they get another Uber. Part of me wants to say that's just the technology. The fact that there's 40 cars within a 40-metre radius. Also, if you get a request, people don't realize that you're actually offline for 5-10 seconds if you don't accept it. Honestly who knows? The only way to know is to be a software engineer

The fact that this source of uncertainty is rarely considered is also an outcome of Uber's black box, since one of the characteristics of the platform that is hidden from view is its capacity

for error, or the degree to which its systems function as intended. The information Uber uses to present itself to the public is thus also curated. A perceived level of confidence in their platform system is valuable when dealing with outside parties and is evidently especially important when attracting perspective drivers. Several drivers remarked that at least part of their reasoning when choosing Uber over any other gig economy service was its "good business model", despite the fact that Uber has, as of time of writing, never posted a quarterly profit and is frequently mired in lawsuits and other legal challenges across the globe (Calo & Rosenblat, 2017).

The Airport Waiting Lot

So far, with the exception of Uber's WAV service, the experience of drivers has been framed around the assumption that for every Uber driver their job is fundamentally similar. Drivers wait for a ping while doing what they will, they then have a piecework job algorithmically assigned to them based on proximity, they accept the offer and off they go. The airport waiting parking lot is different. I was directed there early on in my investigation by a couple of surly members of the Facebook group I was recruiting from - Something to the effect of "Why don't you go waste their time instead of ours?". I had seen a few passing mentions of it, most of them very dismissive and some downright ridiculing drivers for wasting their time there. So I went, clipboard in hand, tape recorder in pocket, with a fresh supply of business cards, ready to see what was up.

Airport facilities cannot let drivers wander around the property waiting for a ping. The number of private cars hired out of Toronto Pearson International Airport would quickly result in chaos and widespread congestion in a place where the efficient flow of people is critical. Instead, all rideshare drivers are asked to park and wait at a nearby lot. Since drivers are clustered together in a single place, distributing rides based on proximity would be nonsensical, so Uber

instead implemented a queue system, where drivers are matched with ride requests from new arrivals on a first in, first out basis. The busier the lot, the longer one could expect to wait in the queue. The waiting lot could hold perhaps 60 people at once comfortably, but on busy days nearly a hundred drivers could squeeze in if they were creative enough with their parking. I was told by those present that this was normal, and that one could expect to wait up to 2 hours in the queue.

This presented a unique scenario for gig workers; one where many drivers gathered in the same physical space for long periods, waiting for work to come to them. The utility of the airport lot as a social space will be explored further in the next chapter. For now, the airport lot illustrates how changes in the rules and architecture of the app can transform the on the ground reality of gig work in unexpected ways. Simply switching from a proximity-based system to a queue system has created a subset of drivers who see their fellow drivers every day, and who make their money from one or two very long trips per day, instead of many typically shorter ones. Following from our framework, these insecure workers are algorithmically distributed, then the airport lot shows how particular methods of distribution change the nature of their work.

Uber PRO: Gamed by the System

The most prominent example of Uber's constant introduction of new features is the Uber Pro system. This feature allowed drivers to attain ranks for driving regularly and with good quality service, as well as hitting key target metrics such as high acceptance rates and low cancellation rates. These thresholds are stated publicly on Uber's website as a star rating of 4.85 or higher, a cancellation rate of 4% or less, and an acceptance rate of at least 85%. Once they qualify, drivers climb the tiers by earning points at a rate of 1 point per ride, or 3 points per ride at designated times, which can vary by city. The four tiers are as follows, in ascending order with

the requisite point values in parentheses: Blue (0 points), Gold (500 points), Platinum (2500 points, and Diamond (7500 points). Tier placements are reassessed every three months, and every tier grants the benefits of the tiers below it – diamond has access to the features of gold, and so on. At the time of data collection, the UberPro program had been active in Toronto for less than a week. As a result, drivers tended to have relatively little to say about it, and some, such as the then recent ex-driver Darren, were not aware of it at all.

The first thing to remark upon is perhaps the most obvious: The UberPro system is a program made for boosting and stabilizing the labour supply of drivers, as a way to remedy the side effect of promising a high degree of flexibility and driver autonomy. This is similar to Uber's long standing quest program, where drivers are paid lump sum bonuses for hitting weekly targets. Darla spoke about the quest system last chapter, and when I asked her to compare it with the new Pro system, she remarked:

> It forces you to be on the road more time, to be full time, even more than 40 hours a week in order to reach the status in order to receive those rewards. It's a carrot dangled in front of drivers and it's only going to get worse because now it's forcing drivers to be on the road more often and longer hours, and they don't want full timers? And they say that this isn't meant to be a full-time job? So why are they dangling this carrot and so many drivers are biting?

If a driver wishes to keep their rewards, they must drive often and maintain rider metrics that act as a proxy for high quality. The actual effectiveness of those metrics, as well as their vulnerability to tampering, will be further explored next chapter. For now, it is worth briefly unpacking some of the rewards and examining how they further Uber's above goals and how these rewards are made possible by Uber's platform monopoly. This will not be an exhaustive list, since the list of rewards is region dependent and subject to change. Instead, it is a selection of the rewards that were talked about the most, and those that are especially representative of Uber's propensity to control its casual workforce.

The first set of perks worth bringing up are a collection of perks which all fall under the classification of some kind of rebate, they are: Cash back up to 6.5% when filling up at select stations with their Uber Gas card, Discounts on detailing and cleaning from select companies, and free repair for minor dents and scratches. Faisal thinks this is a good enough start, but reminds us that if you require detailing or dent repair in the first place, something has likely happened to you to make you "lose your night", a term which here means something that for whatever reason forces drivers to stop working until it is resolved.

> If they throw up in your car, Uber doesn't pay you the cleaning fees. They just give you $20 bucks or they just ask you to fill out invoice. So you lose your nights, you cannot drive anymore, that has happened to me, and you have to pay like $100, $150 for detailing, and then you don't know how much they will pay back. $20-$80, it depends.

Cheap dent repair is all well and good, but it is small comfort if the accident that caused the dent made you miss a whole night of work.

In terms of cash equivalent value, the biggest and most eye-catching perk was undoubtedly the offer of 100% tuition coverage. Uber partnered with Arizona State University, an accredited institution, to offer 100% coverage for tuition and fees to any of their 100+ degree programs. This benefit is also transferrable to an immediate family member. Several drivers brought this up as something that they thought too good to be true, and it is easy to see why; This perk represents a cash value of about $15,000 per year and can be extended to up to 150 credit hours, which is more than equivalent to a four-year undergraduate degree.

So far, these perks that are intended have had the effect of helping drivers earn more by covering operating costs and providing tangible material benefits to improve their lives. Of course, benefits beyond simple compensation have been a hallmark of even precarious work for decades, and these perks are notably less secure than most job benefits, since they can come and

go with a driver's tier, and all tiers are dependent on that triumvirate of metrics; Rating, Acceptance rate, and cancellation rate. The insecurity of these benefits reminds us of their function in the eyes of Capital. Even in the Standard Employment Relationship, when cash equivalent benefits such as employer sponsored health insurance are paid out by Capital on the condition of continued employment, this has the effect of making workers more materially dependent on their boss. When applied to a hyper precarious work arrangement analogous to temp work, this dependency is magnified. Since workers can be deactivated without warning or due process of appeal, they are further incentivized to follow the platforms rules and act in a sanctioned manner towards customers. Ali had few nice things to say about Uber, UberPro, or any of its so-called rewards, and was rather cynical about the program:

> You have to accept terms and conditions, there is no reject, no cancel, no disagree. You have to agree with their term and condition, the way they are pushing the driver to go on road and do these things with the quests and for UberPro and those things, it is seems it totally, totally, if you check, it's nothing. You work so hard and harder and harder, but riders still complain and then no more Uber, no more [Gas] card, this is it for you.

The perk that was brought up the most by drivers was by far the "distance and direction" feature. Once drivers reached platinum tier, all incoming ride requests would also indicate the rough direction and distance to the rider before they accept the ride. For example, a ping might say something to the effect of "2km north". Without this feature, drivers would not know anything about where they were about to be sent, the rules of the platform leaving them proverbially blinded, with incomplete information leaving them with less able to make decisions about their job. It was not uncommon for drivers to get on to a highway only to receive a ping that sent them in the opposite direction out of their way or required to drive a long distance for only a short trip. Now they could see where they were headed and plan accordingly, to an extent.

The problem is that while one could see approximately where they were going and how far the trip was, the other structures of Uber's platform limited the actual usefulness of such a perk. Recall that in order to maintain one's Uber Pro perks, they must maintain an 85% acceptance rate. If a ping comes in and the direction and distance were not to the drivers liking, they would refuse the ride, since this is the feature's purpose. However, doing so would reduce one's acceptance rate, and if their acceptance rate falls too low a driver loses their UberPro standing and all their rewards along with it. Thus, any advantage or any empowering bit of information on the part of the driver can be structurally mitigated or rendered inert. Knowing more about their work gives the appearance of increased agency and being able to refuse a bad deal of a ride every so often made some drivers like Bashir happy. The reality, however, is that the empowering potential of having access to information about one's work is undermined and neutralized by the very parameters required to access it. Drivers can see where they are going to pick someone up, but if they act upon that information too often, it gets taken from them.

The distance and direction reward is distinct from the other benefits in that it does not provide the driver with material benefit or cash equivalent discount. Instead, the feature gives the driver information about themselves and the job they are doing. These rewards are information that Uber must already collect as a by-product of the app's normal operation, with information simply being withheld from drivers unless they make enough points to achieve a given rewards tier. This is an excellent representative example of Uber's platform as an extension of Just-in-Time surveillance regimes. Uber uses their sovereignty over the platform and the data it collects to withhold information, and selectively disclose that information to drivers. Yet even with the information given to them, drivers are still limited in their capacity to act on that information by the set of choices that the platform leaves them with. For an analogous example, in a JIT factory

observed by Osberg Et al, work teams were told how productive they were in terms of absolute production levels relative to their assigned quotas but were not told about the relative productivity of the other work teams on the shop floor. No work team could say for sure that they were doing better than any other, at least through official channels (1995). In the long run this had the effect of workers being less likely to ask for pay increases, since they could not fully know the extent of their contribution relative to everybody else.

So How do Drivers Feel About it?

The previous few sections in this chapter have emphasized the structural aspects of Uber's platform and the ways it uses its position to exploit and control its workers, and while Drivers had things to say about those aspects, their experience and how they dealt with them was secondary. This section will explore drivers' perspectives on Uber and the imbalance of power that exists between them.

On the whole, drivers' attitudes toward Uber ranged from transactional to hateful, and all but one driver – who will be discussed later – did not feel like they were a part of the company. Kyle was on the former end,

> No, no I work for myself. No well I guess from a brand standpoint, yes […]. So branding yes, other than that there's no loyalty. I feel like they… I really feel like they use other people's resources to grow their company, so I just try to take what I can.

Bashir felt that something was wrong and brings up the rhetoric of drivers as partners. "Driver partners" being the official term Uber uses when referring to its workers:

> [..] I think it's supposed to be like we are being partners, but they treat us like we are working for them. We are not one of them. I mean, [It is like] we are family, but we have our own houses, our own supports, incomes, expenses, but we have never met each other. Brothers and sister that have never known each other. I don't feel like I'm a part of

> it, like I'm working for them, but I am not one of them, a partnership means that you have a share in it, you know.

In contrast with the public rhetoric, the reality is that Uber drivers are in a limbo state: neither independent contractors, nor employees. The rules of the platform interact with the law to deny them the benefits of either arrangement. The sole exception is the flexibility which, while heavily undermined by Uber's efforts to discipline their workforce, remains technically true. Echoing a point from Alexandra Ravenelle (2019), drivers are still afforded the flexibility to choose when and where to be overworked. Drivers thus expressed frustration in both directions, those wanting the flexibility of an independent contractor will find Uber driving lacking since, in addition to being able to set one's hours, a real independent contractor can do things like negotiate payment, and parameters of the job being performed. Drivers like Faisal found this contradiction to be a key source of frustration.

> Feel like this is total BS, like you know for the namesake they have signed a licence with us to protect their backs that we are contractors, but they treat us more like their employees. This is what the treatment is. If Uber is just saying that they're just a technology service provider, why are they negotiating fares on our behalf with the riders? Why don't we have some say in that? So for instance, I told you about my incident last night, that I took a rider to Niagara, and I came back empty. Uber gave then $160 fare all the way to her house, but Uber did not take into consideration that I will be coming back empty. So I should have an option then I should negotiate something with the rider, she has to put some amount on top of it, so I don't come back empty all the way, I should have some say in that.

And those who long for the security of employment are famously left wanting.

> Of course, of course, yeah. [Being an] Employee mean you belong to somewhere, right? So that one is responsible about you kind of, you have your duties, and they have their responsibilities about you, right? Now we are contractor whenever they want, they say ok go I don't need you, whatever, they cancel you. And I'm the one doing everything, paying everything, they are not doing just they provide us the technology or whatever but I'm driving 10 hours daily, accidents happen, we need protection.

This is if course a false dichotomy, one engineered by Uber to save the costs of paying benefits to drivers. Since Uber sets the rules of its system, they could theoretically engineer an arrangement where workers could come and go with relative flexibility and still maintain some of the protections and legal ramifications that a traditional employment relationship implies. Instead, they use their ability to construct the choice sets of others and their asymmetry of information as a means to manufacture consent by implying that such equitable arrangements are at best undesirable and at worst impossible. Drivers, by and large, did not want to be independent contractors, they simply tasted the appeal of flexible work and would like to keep it, much like the temp workers that came before them (Hatton, 2011). Meanwhile Uber and other gig economy companies use this as leverage in their ongoing class conflict, as ransom to secure greater proportions of surplus value.

The Company Man

As we have seen, Uber has a complex relationship with its drivers. There are those we have seen that are critical of Uber and condemn its practices, but as we also saw last chapter, despite their feelings many remained thankful that gig work was an option to them when they needed. These attitudes make sense as a reflection of how uber treats their drivers, since when it comes to the hyper-outsourced model of lean platforms Uber and other rideshare companies are historically averse to investing in their drivers. Instead, they prefer to let the surveillance apparatus of their platform discipline workers, and simply deactivate and replace anyone who is too much trouble. It follows from this that very few drivers would have cause to actively enjoy Uber or be willing to sing their praise and defend them against nay-sayers. While some, especially the “winners” had complimentary things to say, it was often towards the idea of the

gig economy or the form of gig work more generally. Rarely were these compliments directed at Uber or Lyft themselves, until I met Deon.

I was already sitting in the Tim Hortons when he arrived. I spotted his Kia Sorento as it pulled up, hard to miss with the large hot pink "LYFT" sticker splayed across the top of his windshield that matched his LYFT baseball cap. When we were finished, he gave me a promo code for five dollars off my next four trips if I went with Lyft. When I asked if any of that five dollars came out of the pocket of the driver, he was unable to give me a confident answer. What he was confident about was that Uber and Lyft have good business models, and that most problems that one encounters driving for either was simply an oversight waiting to be fixed, and not a feature of the system meant to increase profits. He claimed he felt like his own boss – a businessman, as he put it – because no one could tell him when or where to work. At the same time, he viewed himself as part of the company, as his pink hat implied. This was because Deon was part of a "Driver council" that was run by market researchers at Lyft. As he describes it:

> So basically, […] with Lyft, like they send out Emails and that and they have people that are on a council that talk about things like how they can get information across to the drivers and what's happening, what's up and coming. So basically, a platform for information for the drivers and whoever so they can learn about what's going on in the community and that, promotions and changes that are coming along, if people have any concerns or whatever we can forward it to the head office. It's five drivers, and then we have a couple people that are from the head office that are from the committee, we meet every couple of weeks, or we have a conference call, talk about what's going on, this and that.

Deon was certainly a singular outlier among the 19 drivers I spoke with, and this presented challenges when analyzing his account. While a single case study can have broader significance and be epistemologically meaningful, one runs the risk of generalizing the quirks of a single person. However, his perspective is important because it hints at a possible alternative

model for gig work, or at least a longing for one; one where drivers are engaged with directly and given a chance to provide input on the work that they do.

Deon's satisfaction with his job is reflective of a desire for recognition, and for a management style more akin to that of the standard employment relationship. A similar desire was expressed by over a dozen drivers in some way. I asked everyone what they could say to Dara Rhosworksi, the CEO of Uber, if he was there to listen, and the issues raised almost always called for recognition of their situation and for their grievances to be addressed. Uber drivers are very much on their own, with their independent contractor status lacking any protection from the market. Xavier wanted to be heard, as well as protected.

> To be treated- we want to be part of the family of Uber and we want to feel like Uber is our father, if something happened there was someone to protect us, but there is no one- for now- there is no one protecting us. They say we are partners, we are family, we are blah blah but in the fact no one care about us. I want them to take care of drivers more, what they need, what they ask for.

Ari shines a light on his frustrations by recalling his own previous experience as a manager when criticizing how Uber ignores Driver's voices when settling rider complaints

> When I was managing the fitness facility, I came across like so many problems and first of all, like when I heard customer side of story, I was like okay what employee is doing like this … they shouldn't be doing this. But when I listen to their side of story then I get the whole picture of okay what exactly happened right. So it's so important when it kind of comes into those kind of conflicts and arguments or whatever you want to call it. It's better to hear like both sides of story and then to reach a conclusion and not to give like one star right away or something.

When viewed in this way, Deon goes from being a notable outlier to someone whose feelings are widely shared, unique only in the sense that he was – to some degree, having his needs addressed. As a member of the Lyft council, he was not only asked to give feedback and suggest changes, he was also given information and allowed to ask questions, which he could

then pass on to other drivers, imbuing him with a degree of authority, at least in his eyes. Additionally, all of these interactions were in person with a human representative of Lyft – whether this person was an employee, or a contracted market researcher is not known – and he was paid for his time and input as a consultant. Such an arrangement might also remedy the problem of epistemic insecurity discussed above. Drivers could clarify the ambiguities of the platform work by asking questions and receiving direct answers from authorities within the company.

This chapter has explored the vertical class-based power relations of platform labour, and how drivers navigate and respond to those relations. Relations which form the reality of class conflict for gig workers and touch on every aspect of their work, from concerns over payment, to the hidden costs of independent contracting, to surveillance, to how work is distributed to them. The common thread of all of this is that Uber uses its control over its platform to obscure the realities of independent contracting itself. In doing so, they are better able to promote their own narrative of what gig work is and ought to be. Emphasizing some aspects of gig work while downplaying, obscuring, or outright lying about others allows Uber to essentially construct their own idea of what an independent contractor is and tailor it to suit their needs.

If we recall that platforms are political spaces, and that owners control the rules and architecture of their platform, then the vertical power relations of Uber, and their attempts to rewrite the rules of work can be understood as an ongoing political project, one where the very definition of what a worker *is* is redefined to suit the needs of Capital. Here the SER is not just eroded away, it has been designed out of the process altogether. When recreating the precarity of temp work through the data-driven digital platform that is derived from Just-in-Time regimes,

what results is a form of work relations that is more intensely precarious and more closely surveilled than its component elements.

While the vertical relationship between Uber and drivers is an important dynamic to consider, there are also other parties that inhabit the digital political space of the platform, namely riders and other drivers. The next chapter will examine the power struggles between riders and drivers, how this struggle is mediated through the platform, and how this conflict manifests in both online and offline spaces.

CHAPTER 6 – HORIZONTAL & PROXIMATE

The previous chapter explored the top-down, digitally mediated power relations that Uber drivers negotiate within the gig economy. Interactions with their bosses were impersonal and infrequent, and their lack of job security meant that the frequent changes to the parameters of their work were ultimatums. Information flowed upward as Uber's platform collected data on a world's worth of drivers, using its power of mass surveillance to distribute labour where and when it is needed.

This chapter, by contrast, is horizontal and proximate in its orientation, focusing on riders and other drivers. Horizontal because of the peer-to-peer surveillance of the platforms rating system, which disciplines drivers by turning riders into supervisors, vesting them with the power of performance assessment. Riders are proximate in contrast to the perceived distance of Uber; they are most often encountered in the flesh, without the impersonality of a screen to set them apart from drivers. Being horizontal and proximate meant that drivers talked about riders more than anything other subject, and were more likely to bring them up unprompted. The first half of this chapter will focus on these conflicts, how drivers navigate them, and how existing customer-worker hierarchies are intensified by the platform structure of gig work.

Drivers are also horizontal to other drivers, and so this chapter will also give attention to how drivers interact with each other. Independent contractors, like many workers, are in tension with their coworkers; They are made alien from them by the demands of Capital, despite the social bonds created through the recognition of their shared struggles and interests. They are forced to compete with each other over a scarce amount of labour demanded. Yet, as we shall see, drivers also depend on each other, share knowledge of their experience, and support each

other when needed. The second section of this chapter will explore these tensions of contractor relationships both online and offline.

The Power of Appraisal

First, it is worth reiterating the mechanism through which riders become imbued with authority over drivers. Recall that under a JIT production regime surveillance and technological systems are deployed to flatten management structures to reduce costs. Much of this flattening comes from lower and middle management, those whose primary role is supervision of workers and allocation of discipline. Under JIT regimes those roles have been automated or made unnecessary by the surveillance systems and internal structure of the labour process, since workers operate in teams and are disciplined collectively for failure. This conditions workers who are of otherwise equal standing to watch themselves and each other, engaging in what is referred to as horizontal surveillance.

Similarly, firms in the gig economy use the surveillance and organizational capabilities to achieve the same goals of supervision and discipline, and are driven to do so by their hyper outsourced business model. Since gig workers almost universally work alone and not in teams, the gig economy builds upon the existing traditions of customer primacy by investing riders with the power to rate and discipline via in-app systems. Just as Capital has historically empowered management to act on its behalf, in this scenario riders have been vested with class power in a limited capacity to carry out the interests of Capital. In effect the role of customer and supervisor have become fused, which greatly increases the extant power inequality present in all customer/service provider interactions. Ari highlights a particular example that emphasizes the fusion of customer and supervisor: the fact that riders can re-rate drivers. That is to say, they can go back and alter a rating previously given, something that drivers cannot do.

> So let's say I give you a ride, you're not very nice, you get out of my car, I low rate you and complain about something, you were disrespectful or whatever, or you dirtied up my car or something. You can turn around and give me a low rating because I complain about you, so it's retribution kind of thing. And you can make false complaints. You can also rate me 5, find out I rated you low, you can go back in and rerate me low in retribution. We can't rerate.

Here the primacy of the customer, the assumption that the customer is always right, spills over into their role as quality controller, with unintended consequences for riders and drivers alike. This is just one example of how the rating system is biased in favour of the rider, leaving drivers at the mercy of Uber's tech support to sort out any false or extortionate accusations. Such an arrangement enables customer abuse of workers, and the power imbalance it creates is enough to set riders and drivers in conflict with each other.

Drawing on a seminal study done by Korczyzyski and Evans (2013), the social creation of customer abuse in service work has been theorized as lying *within* the organization of the service economy itself. Abuse, in this framework, is related to three main factors, all of which are endogenous to the work relations underpinning the gig economy, and in fact gig work can be understood as an intensification of these factors. The factors are: 1) the weak collective power of labour, 2) the weak social status of workers relative to customers, and 3) the structuring of service interactions as one-off encounters (Korczyzynski & Evans, 2013).

The first point is perhaps the most obvious. As contractors, Uber drivers do not have the right to form a union to bargain collectively. On top of that, the architecture of Uber's app means that drivers cannot see or interact with other drivers; the design of the platform isolates them from each other (Srnicek, 2016). These digital and legal barriers to collective bargaining combine with a lack of protection against dismissal to ensure that gig workers have as little power to resist their conditions as possible. Point number two is a bit more subtle and has to do with social conventions around the status of service workers. In short, workers are viewed as

having a lower position in the social hierarchy than customers. Korczynski and Evans relate this back to management, who will often de facto side with the customer in instances of worker abuse, since customers are a source of revenue, and employees are seen as costs or liabilities to be minimized wherever possible (Hatton, 2011, p.11). This social convention is reflected in the rating system which was unanimously cited by drivers as being heavily biased in favour of riders, who are almost never deactivated or disciplined for bad behaviour. Moe explains:

> I give them a rating, but it's not affecting them. it's not all the same, we know that. Sometimes I get a rider with a 3 point something rating. If you are an Uber driver and you have a rate of 3.90 you get fired. So it's not the same at all.

The 3rd factor is especially relevant when understanding the abuse of gig workers. Not only are gig economy services a one-off encounter where the worker and the client are unknown to each other, but each job is distributed semi-randomly based on a variety of factors including the location of each party. A rider could, in theory, hail an Uber from the same spot every day for a year and not be matched with the same driver twice. This further anonymizes the customer, shielding them from the long-term consequences of their behaviour, which has a permissive effect enabling worker abuse.

As an example of how this differs from more conventional service work: if I were to abuse the cashier at my local McDonalds, the one-off nature of the interaction means I have no social ties or obligations to this person, and will not likely face any real consequence, but I might still be reluctant to show my face in that store again, as this could make our encounter more than a one off. Now consider if I were to stay home and have my McDonalds delivered and verbally abuse my delivery driver. The algorithm, combined with the sheer number of drivers, means I may never see him again, and therefore I am less likely to care about his feelings and what he thinks of me, and it becomes easier to treat them as targets of my negative emotions.

These lack of protections against abuse has unintended consequences for all concerned parties. If drivers are left with only their judgement to protect themselves, they pick and choose where to avoid driving (Rosenblat, 2019). This means drivers can unintentionally replicate structures of bigotry and discrimination in an effort to protect themselves. 5 drivers admitted to avoiding driving in known "bad neighborhoods", Justifying it by claiming that if anything were to happen, no one would have their back. Recall that Kyle, who was very analytically minded when it came to the cost-benefit analysis of gig work, reluctantly acknowledged this:

> Yeah, umm I'm ashamed to say […] like high crime neighborhoods, I won't go or I won't hang out in those areas. Or even like after the last call, I'll avoid those areas… I just don't wanna pick up in those areas if I don't have to […] it's just, it's just far more conducive to safety.

Atul, a recently "retired" Uber driver from Pakistan, was the most vocal about his experiences of abuse from riders. He claimed multiple instances where he felt helpless and scared, but he described one particularly extreme instance that reflects all three factors of service sector abuse quite vividly:

> Two years ago, in winter I got harassed by a group [of people], and they broke my DVD in the car, and the ask me to do [a] gangbang inside my car, and I didn't let them. After that they became aggressive with me, and they hit my DVD in my car two times. I start to call to the cops, and they took my phone. So there was no [other] option, I was on the highway, there was snow, it was dark. So finally I decided [Pause] Ok you know what guys, if you're hitting my car I'm going to hit another car on the highway, and let's go to hell. After that they became worried and very respectful like "ok ok don't hit any car" but I said "no I'm going to hit another car and let's go hell". I complain to Uber about them, and about my DVD player, and after two weeks I got a call from the insurance company, they said "hey if [it's] anything less than thousand, that's your responsibility."

In denying their demands, Atul was asserting his status as being equal or greater than that of the customer, inciting their aggression. He did so without the backing of a union or his own management, and since a ride is a one-off encounter with a randomly selected driver, the passengers were not concerned with ever seeing him again to suffer any consequences. It was

only when Atul 1) fully asserted his authority as the driver of the vehicle, with 2) the power to commit an act of defensive violence, and 3) the consequences of their behaviour were shifted to the immediate present did the abuse stop and the passengers relented.

Atul's story highlights another issue with gig work that came up often: Thanks to Uber's hyper outsourced model, drivers are by and large responsible for their own expenses and any amenities or perks in their vehicle (Slee, 2015). This includes routine expenses like fuel and insurance, which will be explored later. It also includes sudden, unexpected expenses like Atul's smashed DVD player. A frequent complaint was passenger vomit. If a passenger is sick in their car, drivers are the ones who must ensure that their car is clean to the standard that Uber sets for them, which means professional cleaning only. Drivers can charge their rider a cleaning fee to cover this cost, but this risks a retaliatory low rating, and Uber's bias toward customers discussed above means that several drivers I spoke to saw this as no guarantee. Regardless of the cleaning fee, vomit in your car means the end of their workday, and possibly multiple days of lost earnings if professional cleaning is not promptly available. Farouq says:

> Sometimes on the weekends around 1am or 2am I start to feel [like] its time to go back home. Because as much as you make, you receive very drunk bad riders. If they throw up in your car now, Uber doesn't pay you the cleaning fees. They just give you $20 bucks or they just ask you to fill out invoice. So you lose your nights, you cannot drive anymore, that has happened to me, and you have to pay like $100, $150 for detailing, and then you don't know how much they will pay back. $20-$80, it depends. Some people will throw up in the car, and you charge them the cleaning fee, they rate you bad! How is this my fault?

However, other more pedestrian forms of driver abuse were more common. Having been vested with the power of supervision and discipline, passengers would leverage that power and use the threat of the rating system to not only further the goals of the company, but their own immediate interests as well. The most often reported misuse of authority was riders demanding alterations to an ongoing trip, usually an unscheduled stop or change in dropoff, or a drunk

passengers requesting McDonalds drive-thru. Depending on the car service being used, routes can be altered mid-trip through the rider app. Obviously this change will cost the rider, and the new destination feature can be hard to locate. Instead, if riders are impaired or simply impatient, they will demand drivers make a stop that they will not be paid for, using the threat of a bad rating or the promise of a good one to force drivers to capitulate. Faisal was frustrated and claimed that this behaviour was symptomatic of a broader culture of disrespect for drivers, who often view drivers as lesser or stupid.

> Some riders, the thing for them is "do this for me and I will give you five stars". Like make these stops and take a detour and things like that, stop at this gas station for more that five minutes, especially McDonalds on the weekends at night. They just try to tell you to stop at a drive-thru for 5 stars. It's just a general attitude of being ungrateful. They think that you are stupid because you are driving an Uber, and they're sitting in the back seat as the rider, so they're the boss. They can tell you something and you have to agree with them on everything, and you're a complete idiot. They do all this stuff that they think is funny, but is actually annoying you, but you have to bear all of that, because they are paying money, and they are the ones giving you a rating.

Other riders could misuse the rating system to get free rides when they did not feel like paying. The primacy of the rider meant that any complaint they made was often treated as serious by default. Uber's process in such cases is issue a refund and suspend the driver while they conduct their own investigation. The details of the investigation process are unknowable to anyone outside Uber, but drivers are given little information and have little recourse but to await a verdict. If the driver was deemed wrong, their account could be flagged, limiting their features, or deactivated permanently. If the driver is deemed to be in the right, they are not compensated for the time they spent suspended, unable to accept rides and earn money. Faraz said that this system made him feel like he was losing either way, and that Uber did not have his back because no matter what happens in a dispute, the driver loses. He is correct, and he was not alone, in fact,

when I asked Abdul if he thought that Uber had Drivers' backs when reporting abuses of the feedback system, he had this to say

> No, the customer is always right, that's what their policy is. One time, like UberPool is pick up, drop off, fixed rate, right, so I cannot make stops, they have already calculated that from stop to stop takes 10 minutes, and this is how much it will be. I am not allowed to make stops, I cannot change the address, and because Pool is cheaper than UberX, they will be like "I want to go to McDonalds" but they already know I cannot make this stop, that's why they choose this cheaper option. And then they will complain that oh the driver was drunk, and then Uber will either put you on hold or just deactivate you without any proof or anything.

Not all were so negative about the feedback system, in fact several drivers were confident enough in the rules and procedures to invoke the reporting feature on unruly riders. Deon, our company man, was unsurprisingly the most vocal when recalling a dispute with a rider over seatbelts.

> I had a lady last week with the seatbelt thing. It wasn't a far ride and I asked her to put her seatbelt on, right? And she didn't, and we stopped at a light and I said you didn't put your seatbelt on, she said oh I don't need it and I said yes you do. She goes no, you don't need it, I said yes by law you do, right? And she still refused. At first I was going to report her, at first I was gonna say that the rider made me unsafe, but then they were looking, and I mean that's only for like threatening you or whatever, so there was another one saying my rider was rude, and I explained what happened. They wrote me back and said ok, they understand, so they said I'll never be paired with her again. So if you ever come across anything like that, if you give someone a low rating and give then a reason, they make sure that you never get paired with that rider again.

Sometimes conflicts such as these took place over text, either before or after pick-up, but as we have seen so far, these confrontations largely took place in person, locating the conflicts between drivers and riders within the car itself, making the vehicle a contested space that riders and drivers would vie for control of. Aside from those conflicts already discussed, drivers noted that certain common microaggressions that were also based in the car and emblematic of riders misusing their authority. Drivers very often brought up aspects of the car in discussions of rider misbehaviour, as if some unspoken boundary had been crossed: Passengers would reach for the

radio without asking, put their feet up, shake or kick their seats, or even jump and move around while the vehicle was moving. Although they may not think of these interactions in this way, these actions are all little assertions of power. Each of them communicates that the car is in the passenger's control and that they hold the dominant position in this situation. If drivers chose to challenge that authority, they had to put their foot down.

> Sometimes they want to stick five people in the car, well there's only 4 seats. They want to bring their vape out- they asked "can I vape in here? Can I drink beer in here? Can I bring my"- and I sometime have to put my foot down and say "No" And some it too, some of it my initially low rating were you get annoyed with people right? You'd be like- you kinda had to draw the line in the car cause it's your car and like I'm not gonna sit there and tolerate someone cranking the radio up to a hundred or someone's being flippant or y'know.

This is in effect one instance where Uber's hyper-outsourced platform model breaks in driver's favour. They own their car and are legally responsible for the safety of their passengers. Thus, when in conflict with passengers making rude or unreasonable demands, drivers could evoke the legal authority that comes from that ownership.

It is worth stressing once again that most drivers claimed the majority of their interactions with riders were positive. Faraz loved to practice his English through pleasant conversations with people from all walks of life, and Moe would love sharing his knowledge of the city with visitors. Even when recounting conflicts with riders, Faisal denied experiencing any sort of discrimination based on his ethnicity. However, the fact remains that conflict and abuse involving drivers are baked into the systems of insecurity and power that comprise capitalist service work interactions. Such inequalities are widened in the gig economy, since customers are further imbued with the power of management, and the exercising of such power is a routine aspect of the service provided. This first half of this chapter has explored driver/rider conflict and how class conflict is expressed through the otherwise horizontal relationship of a service

transaction. Through the unification of supervisor and customer, Uber sets drivers and riders into a structurally antagonistic relationship. Since riders are also likely workers themselves, this structural conflict actually works to divide labour against itself and obscure their mutually held interests. Because of the rating and feedback system and the latent class power that holds, workers may confront each other not as members of the same class, but as opponents.

Drivers Hanging out in Real Life

In the last chapter I briefly introduced the drivers waiting lot at Pearson Airport, where drivers would park and wait for a ride request. The point there was to illustrate how the daily lives of gig economy workers are transformed by the rules of Uber's platform; the queue system forces drivers to stay in one place, and therefore created one of the few reported instances where drivers gathered in person and were able to mingle for an extended period. By contrast, recall that Uber's app does not allow driver profiles to interact at all, the platform has no messaging feature or community support whatsoever. It is therefore worth briefly offering an account of the rare instance where drivers are proximate with each other. While the words of the 19 drivers I interviewed did comprise the bulk of the data, my firsthand experience of the airport waiting lot is valid information given the topic, and no one's words outside those of my participants were used in my analysis.

As I approached the waiting lot the sun was making sweat run into my eyes. The asphalt caught and held the heat like cast iron. I saw that one driver had come prepared, with desk fan blasting in through his passenger window as he sat propped up in his seat, arms crossed, eyes closed, napping. Outside various bits of junk and garbage blew around without someone responsible for picking them up. In the corner of the lot a pair of prayer mats were weighed down by rocks, slightly faded by the sun. I never found out if they were still in use.

There were other drivers beyond the napper, including several other nappers, all with some combination of a window rolled down, seat back, and sunglasses on. While this does evoke associated rumors of long overworked drivers sleeping in their car, without talking to them there was no telling if their mid day nap was induced by heat or overwork, or some combination of the two. Xavier, one of the lot regulars I talked to, pointed out that mid day is often a slow period for drivers, so he came to the airport lot around this time to take a break while still being online, and thought others did the same:

> After 10-11 o'clock it's gonna be so quiet so whenever I come here, I drop a passenger I need some rest so I get the rest… when I come here it's kind of break for me. It's not very… you can't count on [the trips] to come here to take a passenger because the minimum waiting time is gonna be 2 hours so it's not worth it. And your trip never know maybe it's gonna be from here to Brampton, er no not Brampton, Burnhamthorpe, so it's maybe 5 kilometers so 2 hours for 5 bucks. But at the same time people here know that I think, they are just kind of taking a break.

Xavier's account highlights another way the queue system shapes the reality of their work. Since the down time between rides at the waiting lot was long and fairly consistent, usually between one and two hours, that also made it *reliable*. Drivers could plan to come to the lot and be reasonably sure they had time to relax while still online, confident that they would get some sort of ride when their number reliably came up.

Other drivers were awake, chatting out the window at a friend they parked next to. Other drivers stood in groups outside their cars, the biggest of which sat on the guard rail on the far side of the lot beneath some trees. These groups were not receptive to recruitment, perhaps not wanting to miss any quality time around the proverbial water cooler. Kyle told me his close friend, the one that introduced him to Uber driving, was a regular to the lot. The two of them

would spend their wait times hanging out and do some people watching. It was in discussing this people watching that Kyle told me something I did not expect to hear.

> Oh yeah there's fights here, people hit each other's cars, not on purpose just cause they can't drive or park. Um but uh like there's fights, literally like two, three, four times a week there's a fight here and like um I'm kind of surprised at this time how it's not busy like it typically, like the lot is so full of cars.

While extreme, these altercations are perhaps not surprising when one recalls the burden of risk drivers are under. Visible damage can make one's vehicle ineligible to drive, and precious days of work can be lost while waiting repair.

The Facebook Page

Moving away from the airport lot and back into the digital realm, Drivers would also gather in online spaces like Facebook or Instagram. Since I was mostly recruiting from the Facebook group already. It was clearly an important feature to most drivers, since they often brought it up before I did. I asked a few of them what they felt like the Facebook group was for – what function did it serve? This section will explore some of the drivers' reflections on that question, but Darla, as an admin for the group, gave the best answer.

> The main function is for drivers to be able to find a place where they can actually get answers that hey can't seem to get from Uber. And to be able to get it from people who have the experience on the road and can sympathize, and understand where they're coming from. And it's a place for us all to come together, since we have a non-traditional workplace, and we don't have co-workers who we can you know chew the fat with and say "you know what kind of shit I go through right?!" that's what the group is.

There is, however, a clear tension among drivers on the Facebook page. On the one hand they clearly recognize the need to stick together and help each other succeed, offering advice based on years of experience and filling in newcomers on the things that Uber does not tell you. On the other hand, drivers seemed to know the value of their knowledge, and the unregulated labour supply means that competition has gotten stiff recently. This means that information is

shared selectively, and new drivers logging on to the Facebook group were likely to catch an earful Markus if the asked the wrong questions.

> Yes you know when you help each other out with respect to rules and regulations, "what do I do about this?" and in the beginning people would say "oh where should I drive or when should I drive" you know people used to give that information away, but it stopped, because it's so much more competitive now and more and more often you will see people say "No one is gonna give you our secrets". You know what we worked our asses off out there through trial and error and that's exactly what you need to do, go out there and trial and error and figure it out for yourself because we're not gonna give away our little honey holes and our little hot spots and everything else because you're competition, you're out there taking money from my pocket!

Managing this tension, and decisions on which information should be added to the public pool of knowledge, and which bits remain private was a process that drivers I spoke to were mindful of. In some cases, if tips, tricks, and potential advantages cannot be shared they can still be sold. Some drivers used the Facebook group to post advertising for services and products that might help drivers, while at the same time the poster through some sort of commission. For example, Jonesy told me about a side hustle he had found when the company approached him.

> Actually, there's a company that I'm going to do a post tonight for, they're installing tablets in the back of cars. In the back of the front seats for rider experiences. Games and media content, they're going to hookup unlimited internet for the user and the tablet will read the API of the cell phone, and sort propose content that they feel might be relevant to that user based on the API. I'm not sure how it'll be received, but there's a kickback that I'm getting off it. It's not going to be huge money, but like you know.

As other research has shown, Facebook groups and forums like these have also been key to the various attempts at organizing and unionization gig workers across the globe (Ravenelle, 2019). Drivers in my sample were mostly in favour of some form of collective organizing, with a few exceptions. A few of them, like Ali, even articulated the importance of worker solidarity, even as he lamented that drivers were not unified.

> Regarding to Facebook page, as I told you, if you follow for 1 month, 2 months, 3 months, you will figure out the driver are not respectable with each other, and they are not in unity. If you post them "Khey tomorrow we have strike, you will get a lot of… like

> uh incomers go "okay, we are with you!" but in the meantime you will don't find anyone… you know! And with – in my life experience, if you are together, nobody can beat you, nobody. But if you are separate everybody can play with you, and that's our condition now. Everybody is playing with us.

Unfortunately, those last two sentences seemed to be a fairly accurate description of organizing efforts on the Facebook page, or at least consistent with what the other drivers said about it. Many drivers saw the utility in collective bargaining, and almost everyone wanted the benefits that drivers in other places had won for themselves – most popular was New York's then recently set limit on the number of drivers allowed in the city. Most drivers were in favour of measures that reduced their burden of risk and made their jobs more secure and reliable, illustrating that the hyperflexible contractor model is not as well liked by workers as Uber's market would have you believe. The problem, as Ali said, was getting people to actually show up and put in the required work

Trying to determine why one organization attempt failed and another succeeded is an exercise in futility, the number of variables makes even broaching the matter difficult, but any effort to organize will be fighting an uphill battle against the individualizing structure of Uber's platform. Echoing from Marx, one of the mechanisms through which class consciousness forms is by a proximity and familiarity with one's fellow workers. In this classical view a labourer looks to their left and right and finds they are alongside people in a similar situation to themselves, people with common problems, shared lots in life. Through discussing their experiences and comparing notes they eventually realize they hold a common interest, and that realization can then abstract to workers in general (Marx, 2004). Uber's platform, by contrast, withholds the presence of other drivers and gives no means for them to communicate with each other. Some drivers fill this need through the Facebook group, as we have seen, but it is important to note that that only represents about 5,000 of the 90,000+ currently active drivers in

the GTA. Darren was sometimes active on the group, but never took it beyond the occasional comment, and overall viewed his work as a solitary affair. I asked if he ever met up with anyone from the group in the real world before.

> No, no never, because you know like I said people drive for themselves and that's it. It's not a… maybe I'm wrong maybe in the group on Facebook people are going for lunch together I don't know but… not for me, it's not a social job. You don't have coworkers really.

Combine this with the fact that drivers are not allowed to use their phone while on the road and of course the deluge of marketing from Uber emphasizing the virtues of entrepreneurialism and it becomes clear that the structure of the job systematically decollectivizes labour by controlling the flows of information and communication through their platform. Obviously, drivers in other cities have been able to overcome those differences, but it remains true that the structure of uber's platform systematically individualizes the worker, obscuring class relations and promoting entrepreneurial values. Any attempt at organizing should recognize this and the other methods through which Uber uses its digital platform to individualize its workforce.

While several drivers had a notion of a need for driver unity, and expressed the need or desire to unionize, evidence of action was far less common. Of those spoken to, only Darla was willing to put her time and energy on the line to further the interests of Uber drivers as a group. She told me this story when I asked her why she thought.

> I have no idea. I mean I've tried, I've put myself at risk of being deactivated by being outspoken and they know, Uber Knows I'm outspoken, I've been on the news five times. I went to city council and spoke to city council right in front of Uber employees. They know I'm a shit disturber and I'm willing to fight but nobody wants to stand with me. You know I did a survey on the group, and I asked people would you be willing, you want change to happen, you want us to group together to fight for change, how would you be willing to help? Hundreds of responses came in, I only had two people who said they were willing to help organize. One day I posted when I went to city hall, I took the day off to go to city hall to speak on behalf of Uber drivers, requesting that they cap the number of drivers, and I posted on the group "I took a day off to fight for you all, all of

> you. One guy said, “Hey I really appreciate you taking the day off, I think we should all kick in a little gift to her for taking the day off and not getting paid to fight for us”. He sent me 10 bucks on Paypal. Not a single other person was willing to help kick in. and you know what, I would fight, I would become a full-time activist against this kind of stuff if I could, but I can’t, I can’t keep affording to take time off and fight for this if I have no support.

It is important to acknowledge this work from Darla. Unpaid women’s work underpins the entirety of the class system and has always done so. The archetypal image of this support is the housewife that works to reproduce the labour force, both socially, through helping her – assumed male – spouse stay fed and clothed, and in a more literal sense through giving birth to and raising future workers. Using a more concrete example, Darla’s volunteer work represents a long history of women’s unpaid labour being deployed in service of labour movements (Dollinger, 2011)

Not only was the work unpaid, but the flexible nature of gig work also means that she did not have a set day off to go observe the proceedings. Instead, she was forced to forego any pay she could have made by driving during those hours. This a noted problem in precarious work that gig work’s contractor model intensifies; if one has the ability to work whenever one wishes, then no matter what they are doing, they could always be working. Contrast this with an SER job, where a relatively stable schedule sets a clearer distinction between work and leisure. For example, no matter how much you would like to pick up some extra hours, if the office closes over the weekend, then you cannot work, and if you cannot work, you are not sacrificing work to do other things like unpaid volunteering. In the gig economy, and especially for Uber drivers, all waking hours are potential work hours.

While this only happened to one person that I talked to, Darla’s situation highlights an issue that effects all gig workers: When combined with the unpaid work that women so often perform, the flexibility to work whenever they like means that that unpaid work comes at a higher price. Economists call this the “opportunity cost” or how much you could be making from

your next best option. The effects of this interaction present an opportunity for future research into flexible work, since the account of Darla, no matter how important, was not rich enough to draw further conclusions.

This chapter focused on how drivers navigated the horizontal and proximate relationships they have with both riders and other drivers. We further demonstrated, through highlighting the experiences of drivers, how the structures of the gig economy place drivers in opposition to both of those groups, giving rise to a tension in those relationships. Since those structures exist to serve the class interests of Uber as a company, they can be understood as tools of class power that, intentionally or not, function to undermine the collective power of labour.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

Let us return to our research questions:

How to workers in the gig economy understand and experience class conflict?

How does the digital platform of Uber's app shape these experiences?

As we have seen, the clear cut and opposing interests that comprise class relations are present and powerful but are filtered through the lens of worker's subjective experience, and are transformed in that process. This is likely true of all workers in our class society, and to be sure the gig economy does simply recreate many of the conflicts that other workers – especially precarious workers – experience every day. The distinctions are thus twofold: the gig economy represents an intensification of the existing forms of exploitation that characterize precarious work, while at the same time posing problems unique to it. If left unchallenged, as Rosenblat (2019) argues, both of these distinctions will spread as Capital furthers its own interests by making more and more jobs resemble gig work.

While some enjoyed their work as an uber driver, and each driver had their own motivations for doing it, it is abundantly clear from their experiences that Uber, and the gig economy writ large sustain themselves on the insecure and vulnerable. Often, people came to gig work at a turning point brought on by personal or social upheaval. These disruptions are made more impactful by larger socioeconomic conditions, since more secure workers would be secure against the disruptions that led so many drivers to gig work in the first place, such as layoffs and stagnant wages. Even those who succeeded in the realm of gig work found themselves stuck within it, since those with the skills and abilities to succeed within gig work often have tools to

succeed outside of it, but the wider instability of the labour market left them with few options for better employment.

The Gig economy's biggest claim to novelty is its hyper outsourced platform model. The appeals of this approach are obvious on the surface, lower costs for both labour and infrastructure. there is, however, a feature of platform labour that Capital recognizes, but often goes unchallenged by activists and regulators: the ability to set the rules of what is possible, including what information is available to whom. Drivers experience this control as a sort of epistemic insecurity, where what they know and their capacity as knowers are themselves subject to the whims of Capital. This top down yet distant positioning also leaves drivers longing for more traditional management and employment relationships, since the hyper outsourced business model combine with the social distance created by the platform leaves workers' needs underserved and without the ability to have their complaints heard.

An effect of this top-down control is a power differential between drivers and their passengers. The hyper outsourced platform model means riders are imbued with some of the authority of lower management, namely the ability to discipline workers through the use of the rating system, and even fire them through written complaints. When combined with the fact that riders – as customers – are given preferential treatment by Uber, riders are able to abuse this power to further their own immediate personal goals, coercing the driver to do things outside of their responsibilities and sometimes even break the law. While it is important to note that most drivers claimed their interactions with riders were largely positive, the frequency and intensity with which they complained about them shows us that this power imbalance is baked into the structure of the platform. In effect, drivers experience class conflict by proxy, since the

privileging of riders both saves Uber money through the outsourcing of supervisory duties and makes them money, since a sovereign customer is more likely to be a repeat customer

Based on my participant's experiences attempting to organize, any such attempts by platform workers should recognize the above-mentioned political nature of the platform and its efficacy as a tool of class power. Many drivers, echoing Burawoy's (1979) factory workers, failed to fully grasp the ways which the internal structures of their job and the company they work for were arrayed against them, instead viewing them as neutral features required for the app to function. If gig workers, and platform labourers more generally wish to fight for a more secure and equitable future, they must draw upon their own experiences and understand these ways in which Capital controls digital black boxes to redefine the rights of workers to suit their interests, and undermine the ability of workers to know about themselves and each other.

REFERENCES

Bouma, G. D., Ling, R., & Wilkinson, L. (2016). The Research Process.

Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and Monopoly Capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Bryman, A., Teevan, J. J., & Bell, E. (2009). *Social Research Methods: Second Canadian Edition.*

Burawoy, M. (1982). *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Calo, R., & Rosenblat, A. (2017). The Taking Economy: Uber, Information, and Power. *Columbia Law Review*, *117*(6), 1623–1690.

Chandler, A. (1993). *The Visible Hand*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press

Fenton, S., & Dermott, E. (2006). Fragmented careers? Winners and losers in young adult labour markets. *Work, Employment and Society*, *20*(2), 205–221.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford university press.

Gorz, A. (2011). *Critique of Economic Reason*. Verso Books

Graham, M., Hjorth, I., & Lehdonvirta, V. (2017). Digital labour and development: impacts of global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, *23*(2), 135–162.

Hatton, E. (2011). *The Temp Economy: From Kelly Girls to Permatemps in Postwar America*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Healy, J., Nicholson, D., & Pekarek, A. (2017). Should we take the gig economy seriously? *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work*, *27*(3), 232–248.

Holtz-Eakin, D., Gitis, B. & Rinehart, W. (2017) *The Gig Economy: Research and Policy Implications of Regional, Economic, and Demographic Trends*. Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative

Jones, P. (2021). *Work without the worker: Labour in the age of platform capitalism*. Verso Books.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(1), 1–22.

Korczynski, M., & Evans, C. (2013). Customer abuse to service workers: An analysis of its social creation within the service economy. *Work, employment and society*, *27*(5), 768-784.

Larson, R. (2020). *Bit Tyrants: the Political Economy of Silicon Valley*. Haymarket Books.

Marx, K. (2004). *Capital: volume I* (Vol. 1). Penguin UK.

Milkman, R., Elliott-Negri, L., Griesbach, K., & Reich, A. (2021). Gender, class, and the gig economy: The case of platform-based food delivery. *Critical Sociology*, *47*(3), 357-372.

Moore, P. V., Upchurch, M., & Whittaker, X. (2018). *Humans and Machines at Work: Monitoring, Surveillance and Automation in Contemporary Capitalism*. Springer International Publishing.

Muntaner, C. (2018). Digital Platforms, Gig Economy, Precarious Employment, and the Invisible Hand of Social Class. *International Journal of Health Services*, *48*(4), 597–600.

Neff, G. (2012). *Venture Labor: Work and the Burden of Risk in Innovative Industries*. MIT Press

Osberg, L., Wein, F., & Grude, J. (1995). *Vanishing Jobs: Canada's changing workplaces.* Toronto, ON: James Lormier & Company Ltd.

Phillips, L., & Rozworski, M. (2019). *The people's republic of walmart: How the world's biggest corporations are laying the foundation for socialism*. Verso Books.

Ravenelle, A. J. (2019). *Hustle and gig: Struggling and surviving in the sharing economy*. Univ of California Press.

Rosenblat, A. (2019). *Uberland: How algorithms are rewriting the rules of work*. Univ of California Press.

Schor, J. B., & Attwood-Charles, W. (2017). The "sharing" economy: labor, inequality, and social connection on for-profit platforms. *Sociology Compass*, *11*(8),

Sennett, R. (1998). *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company.

Sewell, G., & Wilkinson, B. (1992). `Someone to Watch Over Me': Surveillance, Discipline and the Just-in-Time Labour Process. *Sociology*, *26*(2), 271–289.

Shestakofsky, B. (2017). Working Algorithms: Software Automation and the Future of Work. *Work and Occupations*, *44*(4), 376–423.

Slee, T. (2015). *What's Yours Is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy*. Toronto ON: OR Books.

Srnicek, N. (2016). *Platform Capitalism*. London: John Wiley & Sons

Standing, G. (2014). The Precariat. *Contexts*, *13*(4), 10-12.

Strangleman, T. (2007). The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work? The End of Work and its commentators. *The Sociological Review*, *55*(1), 81–103.

Terkel, S. (Ed.). (1974). *Working: People talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do*. The New Press.

Van Doorn, N. (2017). Platform labor: on the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the 'on-demand' economy. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(6), 898–914.

Vosko, L.F. (2010). *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment*. New York: Oxford University Press

Webb, J. (2004). Organizations, Self-Identities and the New Economy. *Sociology*, *38*(4), 719–738.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Call for participants for the Facebook group

Hi Everyone,

My name is Kris, I'm a Master's Student in Sociology from Dalhousie University. I'm writing my thesis on Gig economy workers. To do that, I'm looking to interview 20 Uber and/or Lyft Drivers in the Greater Toronto Area.

The interviews should take about an hour, and while Toronto is a big place, I will try my best to meet you at a location of your choosing. Participation would be entirely voluntary, and you would be able to end the interview at any time, as well as refuse any question you do not wish to answer. Questions will cover topics such as your work day, work/life balance, Uber as a company, and how you see yourself as a driver. All drivers that have driven for more than 6 months are eligible.

I'll be in Toronto from August X to X. If you're interested in sharing your experiences with me, I would encourage you to text me, at (902) 719-7649 and we can schedule a date, time and place that works best for you!

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kris

Appendix 2 – Oral script for recruitment by riding

I'm a Master's Student from Dalhousie University. I'm doing research on Uber drivers, and I'm looking to interview people about how Uber drivers see themselves.

The interviews should take about an hour, and I can meet you whenever and wherever is easiest for you. I assure you that your identity will be kept confidential, so no one besides me will know that you participated. The interview would be entirely voluntary, you could end it at any time, and refuse any questions you do not wish to answer. I'd also like to stress that I'm not an employee of Uber, and I'm not a journalist, the information that you give me will be used solely for academic purposes.

I'll give you my card, and feel free to take some time to think it over. That's my phone number there, you can text me if you have any other questions or want to schedule an interview. And don't worry, I promise that choosing not to participate won't affect how I rate you for this drive. I've already given you a five-star rating. Anyway, thanks for the consideration, and have a good day.

Appendix 3 - Interview guide

Thank you for meeting with me, before we start, I'd like just like to go over this consent form with you. [Reads consent form]. So can we begin?

1. Main Questions
- Possible probes and follow-ups

Background

1. Tell me about how you became an Uber driver.
- Can you tell me why you decided to start driving for Uber?
- When you tell people that you're an Uber driver, what do they think?

Work

2. Do you currently have any jobs other than driving?
- **YES:** What job is that? [look to other job]

i. How do you balance your other job with driving?

- **NO:** What was the last job you had before driving for Uber?

ii. Would you mind telling me, in a general way, why you left that job?

- Do you feel like driving for Uber is enough to make ends meet?

3. Describe for me a typical working day for Uber driving
- How many hours would you say you drive in a given week?
- What kind of vehicle do you drive?
- Did you own your current vehicle before you were a driver?
- You have a driver sticker on your car, correct? Have you ever been treated as a driver outside of the times when you're using the app?
- Are there any times or places that you avoid driving?
- Has there ever been a situation where you felt unsafe while driving?
- Tell me something about Uber driving that most people might not know about

4. As a driver, you're technically a contractor, not an employee, how do you feel about that?
- If you could change yourself from a contractor to an employee, would you?
- Do you see yourself as being a part of the company?

5. Does driving ever get in the way of other things in your life?
- Can you give me an example?

Platform & Surveillance

6. Tell me about the app itself, can you describe for me how it works?
- Does Uber always know your location?

7. What can you tell me about Uber's rating system?
- Are there any problems with this system?
- Have you ever been given a deactivation warning?
- What steps do you take, if any, to ensure a high rating?

8. Do you think Uber is honest with their drivers about how their platform works?
- Can you give me an example?
- How do you feel about that?

Ending questions

9. Do you see yourself driving for Uber for the foreseeable future?
- Are you aware of Uber's plans to implement autonomous cars in their fleet?

10. Can you tell me, overall, how you feel about contracting for Uber?
- Would you recommend it to someone you know?

11. Is there anything else that you think I should know about driving for Uber?

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Appendix 4 – Consent form

Project title: On-Demand: Worker's Career Narratives in the Gig Economy

Lead researcher: Kristopher George, MA Student in Sociology, Dalhousie University

Email: kr877884@dal.ca

Introduction

I invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Kristopher George, a master's student at Dalhousie University as part of my master's degree program. Choosing to take part in this research is entirely your choice. The information below tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do and about any benefit, risk, inconvenience or discomfort that you might experience.

You should discuss any questions or concerns you have about this study with me. Please ask as many questions as you like. If you have questions after the interview is complete, you can contact me by email through the address at the top of this form.

Purpose and Outline of the Research Study

Since the late 1980s, there has been a shift in the world of work. This shift entailed a move away from stable, lifelong, secure jobs towards a more flexible, short-term, insecure work. One sign of this shift is the so-called "gig economy", and Uber is often used as a prime example of it. There are differing perspectives on the impacts of this shift on individual workers. Some see higher risk for workers, and a threat to lasting interpersonal connections, social support, and belonging. Others see the flexible work as freeing workers to shape their working lives however they want. However, in this debate, there are mostly subject experts, scholars, politicians and CEOs, and the voices of Uber drivers are rarely heard. In this study, I am **conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with Uber drivers in the greater Toronto area,** to explore how Uber drivers understand and experience their work.

Who Can Take Part in the Research Study

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a contracted driver for Uber Technologies incorporated, and have been so for at least six months.

What You Will Be Asked to Do

In this study, you will be asked to participate in a single interview with me, lasting approximately 60 minutes. This interview will, with your approval, be audio recorded and will be conducted face-to-face at a location of your choosing.

Possible Benefits, Risks and Discomforts

There may not be any *direct* benefits to you if you choose to participate. You may benefit from any new insights about your work that you gain through your participation. However, these benefits will be entirely incidental.

Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. Findings from this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of jobs like yours. Millions of people are already working for digital platforms, and the success of this approach gives reason to believe it will become more common in the future. While this specific study might not be used to inform policy decisions, a better understanding these hyper-flexible jobs may benefit other workers in these occupations in the long term.

The risks associated with this interview are minimal, as the questions relate to common experiences of everyday life and employment. It is therefore unlikely that the subject matter of the interview will cause any emotional or psychological discomfort or stress. In the event this does happen, you are free to refuse to answer any questions that you find uncomfortable. There are no known guaranteed risks for participating in this research.

While there have been no known instances of driver-partners being punished for participating in academic research, Uber has been known to track and record the location and activity of users without their knowledge. The processes of recruitment, planning this meeting, and further correspondence will therefore take place outside of Uber's digital platform to maintain confidentiality. These measures will be taken to minimize any risk of your participation being subject to retaliation or punishment from Uber Technologies Incorporated.

Compensation / Reimbursement

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be compensated five Canadian dollars to help cover any applicable parking fees. If possible, a non-alcoholic beverage or light snack of the participant's choice will be provided free of charge as a courtesy at the start of the interview. The availability and variety of refreshments will vary based on the location of the interview, and thus cannot be guaranteed. If you choose to withdraw participation at any point of the interview, all compensation will still be provided in full.

How your information will be protected:

Your real name and any identifying information will be known only to me, the lead researcher. As soon as the interview is complete, all identifying information will be removed, and you will be given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. Any correspondence via email that occurs over the course of this study will not explicitly confirm your participation in this study in the subject line or body of the email.

For the sake of clarity during data analysis, a list of pseudonyms and their corresponding participants will be kept in an encrypted file, away from other data. Any handwritten notes from the interview will be kept in a notebook in my possession. The list of pseudonyms will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research. Recordings of interviews and all drafts of the thesis will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and backed up to a secure USB drive. All recordings will be deleted at the conclusion of the transcription process, and handwritten notes will be destroyed after analysis is complete. Thesis notes and drafts that have had identifying information removed will be kept for further research purposes.

The use of pseudonyms ensures that you cannot be identified in the thesis, even if you are quoted directly. Even with pseudonyms, you will not be quoted directly unless you consent by checking off the appropriate box on the consent form signature page.

As mentioned in the risks and benefits section above, Uber records data from their platform users, and steps have been taken to ensure that this does not constitute a breach in confidentiality. While our locations may be known, Uber does not know whether you agreed to participate, the time and location of our meeting, or the answers you give to the questions that I ask.

If You Decide to Stop Participating

You are free to end the interview and terminate your participation in this study at any time, and may indicate this verbally. If you do decide to stop participating at any point in the study, you can also decide whether you want any of the information that you have contributed up to that point to be removed or if you will allow me to use that information. You can also decide to withdraw your participation at any time up to January 1st , 2020 and have your data removed from analysis and destroyed. After that time, it will become impossible for us to remove it because it will already be analyzed and incorporated into the final thesis.

How to Obtain Results

I will not automatically provide you with a copy of the final thesis. If you wish to receive either a full copy of the finished thesis, or a summary report of the research, you can indicate this by checking the appropriate box on the signature page, circling which option you would prefer, and including your email address. This email address will not be used for any purpose other than the dissemination of the information.

Questions

As the lead researcher, I am happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have about your participation in this research study. Please contact me at the email address provided on the first page of this form at any time with questions, comments, or concerns about the research study.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email: ethics@dal.ca and reference REB file # 2019-0459.

Signature Page

Project Title: On-Demand: Worker's Career Narratives in the Gig Economy

Lead Researcher: Kristopher George, MA Student in Sociology, Dalhousie University

Email: kr877884@dal.ca

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have been asked to take part in one interview that will occur at a location acceptable to me. I understand direct quotes of things I say may be used without identifying me. I agree to take part in this study, with the understanding that my participation is voluntary, and I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until January 1st, 2020.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

[ ]Yes [ ]No

I agree that direct quotes from my interview may be used on the condition that my real name be removed, so as to avoid identifying me.

[ ]Yes [ ]No

I wish to receive a copy of the **completed thesis** or a **summary report** (circle one) via email.

Yes No **Email:** _____

_____ _____ _____

Name Signature Date