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Prosumer Capitalism: The Meanings and Motivations for Working in the Platform Economy

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology
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Abstract

People can earn income using digital platforms in many ways. Some earn income by sharing their homes on Airbnb. Others engage in ridesharing services using Uber, or become delivery couriers for DoorDash and Amazon Flex. Some even monetize their time spent online by completing paid surveys or transcribing audio/video clips. But is working in the growing platform economy just a side hustle to earn extra money? Or does it indicate a more permanent trajectory of work that is not standardized, salaried, and fulltime? Given that one-in-five Canadians work in the platform economy, it is necessary to uncover why people pursue platform work over conventional employment (and vice versa). Even more, because this sector is not entirely governed by current regulations, platform workers comprise a vulnerable group. Thus, unearthing the potential impacts, benefits, challenges, and consequences for working in the platform economy is important.

This dissertation investigated individuals' motivations for pursuing platform work and how participants rationalized their experiences of work within prosumer capitalism. This exploratory and interpretivist research is informed by the lived experiences of 71 participants performing 23 types of platform work to offer a more holistic view of this sector. The results were analyzed using social action theory and conspicuous prosumption.

The participants discussed a range of motivations, challenges, working patterns, and perspectives on platform work. This study argues that participants are rational social actors who make decisions to work shaped by conspicuous prosumption: the spectacle of excess spending and gratuitous working. Their decisions to pursue platform work are guided by their goals for consumption and meaningful production. More legal protections are needed to protect vulnerable platform workers who experience wage theft and dangerous working conditions. Moreover, participants work more hours than the average Canadian by taking on multiple jobs. Most take on added work as a personal choice but some are forced to do so out of financial necessity. Some reported a pessimistic outlook regarding the future of work in Canada. While participants enjoyed the autonomy, flexibility, and benefits of multiple jobholding in the context of the platform economy; they valued stable, fulltime, and salaried conventional employment.

Keywords

Sociology of work; Prosumer Capitalism; Platform Economy; Platform Work; Gig Work; Social Action Theory, Conspicuous Prosumption

Summary for Lay Audience

People can earn income using digital platforms in many ways. Some earn income by sharing their homes on Airbnb. Others engage in ridesharing services using Uber, or become delivery couriers for DoorDash and Amazon Flex. Some even monetize their time spent online by completing paid surveys or transcribing audio/video clips. But is working in the growing platform economy just a side hustle to earn extra money? Or does it indicate a more permanent trajectory of work that is not standardized, salaried, and fulltime? Given that one-in-five Canadians work in the platform economy, it is necessary to uncover why people pursue platform work over conventional employment (and vice versa). Even more, because this sector is not entirely governed by current regulations, platform workers comprise a vulnerable group. Thus, unearthing the potential impacts, benefits, challenges, and consequences for working in the platform economy is important.

This dissertation investigated individuals' motivations for pursuing platform work and how participants rationalized their experiences of work within prosumer capitalism. This research draws on the experiences of 71 participants performing 23 types of platform work to offer a holistic view of this sector. The results were analyzed using social action theory and conspicuous prosumption.

The participants discussed a range of motivations, challenges, working patterns, and perspectives on platform work. This study argues that participants are rational social actors who make decisions to work shaped by conspicuous prosumption: desires to work more, to spend more. Their decisions to pursue platform work are shaped by the need to be a good worker *and* good consumer. However, more legal protections are needed to protect vulnerable workers who experience wage theft and dangerous working conditions. Moreover, participants work more hours than the average Canadian by holding multiple jobs. Most take on added work as a personal choice but some are forced to do so out of financial necessity. Their satisfaction with platform work offers a pessimistic outlook regarding the future of work in Canada. While participants enjoyed the autonomy, flexibility, and benefits of multiple jobholding in the context of the platform economy; they valued stable, fulltime, and salaried conventional employment.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

> The fulltime job to which we've attached all of the rules about treating workers fairly is dissolving, and the community of workers who are treated as second class citizens, who are not protected by the same laws or entitled to the same benefits as other workers, is growing. That is a big, scary problem, and one worth studying (Kessler, 2018, p. 247).

Early internet users in the 1990s and early 2000s may remember a time when they were bombarded with internet safety messages warning them to never give out personal information like one's real name, age, or address online; to be wary of people you meet online; and never give out your credit card information on websites (United States Department of Justice, 2015). It was apparent then that this new multidisciplinary tool for creating, sharing, and communicating was revolutionary (Dentzel, 2013), but people were still apprehensive about its uses and impact. Since then, people's view of the internet and digital technologies has transformed. Today, we literally summon strangers we meet off the internet to our homes and we get into their personal vehicles and pay for these services completely online using our credit cards. We call this ridesharing, and it is part of the growing platform economy. This joke has proliferated online for many years (FNFollies, 2016). It demonstrates a clear change in cultural, economic, and social practices resulting from the presence and popularity of the internet and other information and communications technology (ICTs) such as mobile phones, tablets, and social media. While many of us participate in the platform economy mainly as consumers by ordering ridesharing services, booking hotels and airfares on websites, utilizing online food delivery companies, and engaging in eCommerce, there is a growing number of individuals who participate in the platform economy for work or income-earning purposes. These individuals and their experiences are the focus of this dissertation.

Digitalization is rapidly growing, and digital technologies, digital literacy, and digital data are all important commodities. From 2000 to 2016 the number of global internet users rose from 413 million to over 3 billion (Roser et al., 2015). This means that more than half of the world's population is currently online (Roser et al., 2015). In Canada, more than 90% of individuals use the internet (Statistics Canada, 2019c), and this proportion is growing as more seniors gain

access to digital technologies (Statistics Canada, 2019a). The widespread use of the internet and other ICTs demonstrates fundamental shifts in how individuals connect with one another and how they go about navigating their day-to-day lives (Pew Research Center, 2019b). The use of these technologies has also penetrated the work sphere (Drouin et al., 2015), and has greatly altered the ways in which people perform work, creating new jobs, and changing where people work and when they work. There have also been transformations to capitalism since digital technologies can be used to support new ways of accumulating capital (Srnicek, 2017). Some scholars have referred to this as platform capitalism (Langley & Leyshon, 2017; Pasquale, 2016; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Srnicek, 2017; Vallas, 2019). However, I utilize the term *prosumer capitalism* coined by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010). The term platform capitalism places the digital platform at the center of economic exchanges (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). However, the focus on platforms is misplaced as it is really the prosumption activities of individuals using these digital platforms that come to define the social, cultural, technical, and business practices of this new digital society. Thus, the term prosumer capitalism is most appropriate, and the paid prosumer activities of platform workers will be investigated here.

This research contributes significantly to enhancing understanding on how digital technologies intersect with modern capitalism and work. This research is largely exploratory since literature on prosumer capitalism is scarce. Literature pertaining to work in the platform economy is growing but is also limited. Current scholars have identified some differences in the conditions of platform work that warrant further sociological examination. For instance, platform work promotes task-oriented and piece-rate work rather than time-disciplined working hours (Wood et al., 2019a). It favours open employment relationships in which individuals can work for multiple organizations at the same time (Wood et al., 2019a). It also encourages flexibility by enabling individuals to dictate when and where they work (Bucher et al., 2019; Nakrosiene et al., 2019). As well, platform work relies heavily on artificial intelligence (AI) rather than automation (Staab, 2017).

This study expands on existing literature by exploring the ways in which individuals rationalize their decisions to engage in platform work by drawing on the theoretical perspectives of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption. The findings from this study can be used to inform

how governments regulate and manage platform work which is necessary as more people move online for work over traditional industries. The findings can also be used to improve the conditions and experiences of platform workers by legitimizing the platform economy as a source for work. Before moving further, I will contextualize my research by defining key terminology and concepts that are heavily utilized within this dissertation. Next, I outline the statement of the problem, and then provide an overview of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Contextualizing the Research

1.1.1 Defining Prosumption and Prosumer Capitalism

Production and consumption are often regarded as separate spheres of the capitalist economy (Ritzer, 2015; Toffler, 1980), and even separate human functions. However, they are never fully distinct processes. They are both subtypes of prosumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980). Alvin Toffler (1980) coined the terms prosumption and prosumer in his book *The Third Wave.* Prosumption refers to producing and designing for one's own consumption (Maruyama, 1981; Toffler, 1980). Because production and consumption are inter-related processes, it can be difficult to clearly separate one from the other (Ritzer, 2015, 2016a). This is similar to the chicken or the egg causality dilemma. Do we produce goods to consume them, or do we consume goods because we have produced them? The term prosumption eliminates this dilemma as it refers to activities that involve an indistinguishable mix of production and consumption (Ritzer, 2016a). The term prosumer refers to an individual who acts as both producer and consumer (Nagel, et al., 2018; Toffler, 1980).

Toffler (1980) contends that all humans are prosumers, but industrial capitalism and wage labour seemingly drove a symbolic wedge between production and consumption causing individuals to regard themselves as either producers (workers) or consumers. Examples to demonstrate the separation of the prosumer are discussed in chapter two, but I will briefly outline them here.
I expand on literature by Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) that regards modern capitalism (beginning with industrialism) as defined by either the processes of production or by the processes of consumption. Toffler (1980) argued that prior to the invention of wage labour or what he referred

to as “production-for-exchange” most people (and their families and communities) were self-sufficient, and they and their families consumed what they themselves produced. However, when the money-exchange economy replaced the bartering economy, self-sufficiency became a rarity. Instead, people became dependent upon purchasing the foods, goods, and services produced by others, and mostly everything is now produced for the sake of exchange rather than personal use (Toffler, 1980). Thus, wage labour fragmented prosumers into either producers or consumers depending on the specific period (Toffler, 1980). This was heightened by capitalism which concentrated the means of production into fewer hands driving more people to sell their labour.

It is argued that from the Industrial Revolution until the 1950s, the heart of the economy in the West was defined by production (Ritzer, 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). This is evident by the proliferation of manufacturing where factories symbolized “cathedrals of production” and people migrated at large numbers to urban cities in pursuit of wage labour. During this period of capitalism people came to identify themselves as workers (James, 2018), and frequently organized to improve workers’ rights and working conditions (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). Low wages and long working hours also meant that most workers could not afford to purchase the items they themselves produced (Luxemburg, 1913; Tolliday & Zeitlin, 1987). Thus, people came to view themselves and others by what they produced (their labour) rather than what they possessed (consumed).

Beginning in the 1950s, the focus on production in the West started to decline (Ritzer, 2014; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), as manufacturing firms moved overseas to low(er)-cost countries like China, Japan, and India (Rinehart, 2001). In tandem with this shift, the post-industrial service economy rapidly grew in Canada and the US, and more people pursued knowledge work and service work (Rinehart, 2001). Mass production reduced prices and rising wages led to the mass consumption of durable goods like automobiles and refrigerators (Ritzer, 2014). Consumer cultures also emerged to normalize consumption among all classes, and the growing services sector accommodated people’s desires to consume. Hence the heart of the economy and economic focus shifted towards consumption (Ritzer, 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). This is also evident from the rapid construction of shopping malls, amusement parks, and fast-food restaurants where the sole purpose of these sites is to facilitate consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson,

2010). These places signify “cathedrals of consumption” and greatly outpaced the building of factories or other sites of manufacturing (Ritzer, 2010). During this period of capitalism, individuals came to recognize themselves in their commodities (Marcuse, 1964), and they identified themselves and others by what they purchased and possessed.

Beginning in the 1980s, the symbolic wedge separating production and consumption began to disappear as the consumer was drawn back into the production process by means of technology (Maruyama, 1981; Toffler, 1980). Here, the productivity of the consumer is now harnessed within the production process to enhance efficiency (Toffler, 1980), and offer consumers customizability. In other words, through incorporating more technologies into the labour process, capitalists can turn the consumers into prosumers who are put to (unpaid) work by pumping their own gas, serving as their own bank teller when using ATM machines, or by bagging their own groceries at supermarkets (Ritzer, 2008; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). The invention of the internet and rise of digital platforms further ignite prosumption activities. Moreover, digital platforms are spreading across various industries to impact all aspects of life. Digital platforms or “cathedrals of prosumption” are increasingly gaining more prominence in modern society while the number of sites for manufacturing and/or consumption decline. For example, over the past decade eCommerce in Canada and the US has risen at a higher rate than traditional retail sales, and most Canadian retail firms have adopted internet-based systems to improve business (International Trade Administration, 2021). It is becoming increasingly evident that the heart of the modern digital society is prosumption and prosumer activities.

Prosumer capitalism does not get rid of the central tenets of capitalism. Wage labour, exploitation, domination, and control of profits are all still present within this type of capitalism. However, prosumer capitalism has different organizational forms, modes of exploitation, new types of jobs, and new markets (Srnicek, 2017). The purpose of this research is to examine these features of prosumer capitalism from the experiences of individuals, and to uncover how digital technologies and digital platforms transform people’s experiences of work. Platform work best demonstrates the conditions of prosumer capitalism in the same ways that factory and manufacturing work embodied the conditions of industrial producer capitalism, and knowledge

and service work exemplified the conditions of post-industrial consumer capitalism. Hence platform work is the focus of this study.

1.1.2 Defining the Platform Economy

Increasingly, more people are earning money through digital platforms. Currently, one-in-four Americans (Smith, 2016), and one-in-five Canadians (Angus Reid Institute, 2019), report utilizing the digital platform economy which includes the "gig economy" and "sharing economy" for income-earning purposes. Globally, the number of people using digital platforms for work and labour has also risen (International Labour Organization, 2021). In some economically poor countries like Venezuela, there is greater reliance on platform work to meet daily needs as hyperinflation and unemployment rates rise (Chen, 2019). With a growing workforce and global worth of over US$7.18 trillion dollars (Consultancy.org, 2018), the platform economy and gig work are no longer just buzzwords or catchphrases but are important elements of the modern domestic and international job markets.

There are many terms that are being used to refer to the digitization of the economy. Some of these terms denote more positive connotations and highlight the entrepreneurial benefits of digitalization. Such positive terms include sharing economy, collaborative economy, and the creative economy. Other terms offer more precarious connotations such as the gig economy or the on-demand labour market (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). The term digital platform economy was coined by Kenney and Zysman (2016, p. 3) as a "more neutral term that encompasses a growing number of digitally enabled activities in business, politics, and social interaction". The platform economy is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of technologies and activities, and even encompasses smaller digital economies including sharing, collaborative, gig, and creative (Schwellnus et al., 2019). According to the European Commission (2016) the digital platform economy is broadly defined as encompassing all business models and capital earning activities facilitated by collaborative websites, mobile apps, and social networking sites (often referred to as "platforms") that create an open marketplace for goods or services produced and/or provided by individuals.

1.1.3 What Are Digital Platforms?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a platform can be “a means or opportunity to communicate ideas or information to a group of people” and an operating system or technological application “that serves as a base from which a service is provided” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Thus, digital platforms are digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact (Srnicek, 2017). Srnicek (2017, p. 24) defines digital platforms as “intermediaries that bring together different [groups of] users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects” via the internet.

Digital platforms are accessible on a wide variety of devices such as tablets, smartphones, wearable technologies, and personal computers (Kenney et al., 2020). Platforms are also very diverse in their functions and structures (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). For instance, advertising platforms like Google extract information on its users and then analyzes that information to sell advertising space to other businesses. Similarly, cloud platforms like DropBox rent out computer resources over the internet to digitally dependent businesses. Product platforms like Spotify and Netflix transform traditional goods (e.g., music or television/movies) into a service that they can charge subscription fees to access (Srnicek, 2017). Social media platforms are distinct too and can be grouped based on core features and functions. To name a few, there are social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), bookmarking sites (StumbleUpon), microblogs (Twitter), media sharing (YouTube), collaborative authoring (Wikipedia), and geo-location based social media (Tinder) (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017).

To better understand how the platform economy facilitates work and labour, it may be more useful to think of digital platforms as their own ecosystem with unique interactions among the different users of that platform and the platform itself (Meijerink & Keegan, 2019). For instance, there are *one-sided* business-to-consumer platforms (sometimes regarded as the digital economy) such as Google and Netflix. The workforce of these platforms is often considered to be “internal,” meaning they are (mostly) employed directly by the platform company itself and the users of the digital platform are customers who purchase the goods or services offered by the platform company in a bilateral exchange (Weiss, 2020). The platform is the digital space where this exchange occurs.

Contrasting these one-sided platforms there are also *multi-sided platforms* that match individuals to earning opportunities on a per-service or "gig" basis (sometimes regarded as the gig economy) including Uber, Foodora, and Amazon Mechanical Turk, and *multi-sided peer-to-peer sharing platforms* such as Airbnb, RelayRides, Facebook, and eBay (sometimes regarded as the sharing economy) that connect users to one another (Schwellnus et al., 2019). Multi-sided platforms connect different types of users to one another in various ways. These multi-sided ecosystems have both an internal workforce and an external workforce. The internal workforce is made up of individuals directly employed by the platform company to create and maintain the operations of the digital platform (Kenney et al., 2020). The external workforce is comprised of individuals who use the digital ecosystem as an intermediary to find work opportunities or income-earning opportunities or to connect with other people. This external workforce is typically open access for anyone to join provided they meet specific criteria (Weiss, 2020). This dissertation examines the external workforce of digital platforms.

1.1.4 What is Platform Work?

Platform work encompasses three broad categories: work in service to platform companies, platform-mediated work, and platform-mediated content creation (Kenney et al., 2020). As mentioned, work in service to platform companies centers on creating and maintaining the operations of the platform and is fulfilled by an internal workforce. The focus of this research is on the latter two types of platform work.

Platform-mediated work is performed by individuals using the platform ecosystem for paid (or sometimes unpaid) work, labour, or other income-earning (or bartering) purposes. Platform work depends heavily upon the platform, and those doing the work are subject to the platform's rules and regulations (Kenney et al., 2020). One type of platform-mediated work includes online sellers of goods and services. These individuals use platforms like eBay, Kijiji, Craigslist, and Etsy as marketplaces to facilitate the sale of goods and services. Although the good or service may be delivered offline, the transaction is initiated on a digital platform and all the responsibilities for fulfillment, communications with buyers, and buyer satisfaction fall upon the individual seller, not the platform or platform company (Kenney et al., 2020). The platform is

merely the digital space that connects sellers with buyers. The other type of platform-mediated work is performed by individuals who use platforms as labour markets. Platforms like Uber, Foodora, Skipthedishes, Taskrabbit, and Fivver offer labour opportunities considered to be temporary one-off "gigs" that may be provided either in person or remotely. The platform connects individuals willing to provide the labour with individuals requiring labour opportunities (Kenney et al., 2020).

Platform work also includes platform-mediated content creation. Many people participate in content creation for both monetary and non-monetary purposes for platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Twitch, and TikTok. Individuals who engage in content creation for monetary purposes typically either sell their original content to the platform for a nominal fee or monetize their content through the platform (Kenney et al., 2020), and earn income based on advertisements served on their content or generate revenue through other unique ways such as product sponsorship and endorsements.

This dissertation is most interested in examining individuals' experiences performing paid platform-mediated work and platform-mediated content creation which will herein be referred to simply as platform work. Chapter three will explore current literature on the nature of work and employment within the platform economy.

1.1.5 Statement of the Problem

Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, literature examining work in the platform economy has grown substantially, but it is still largely incomplete. Literature on prosumer capitalism remains scarce and the few studies primarily focus on the unpaid prosumer activities of consumers in the services sector (Ritzer, 1996), or the unpaid prosumption of digital users with little examination of paid prosumption activities (Ritzer, 2015, 2016a; Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012).

The rising interest in the platform economy highlights the importance that digital platforms have in society for generating work opportunities or income-earning. The impact of the platform economy is a major source of contention within the literature. On one hand, optimists argue that ICTs have had a positive impact on workers by spreading atypical work practices, generating

new ways of working, and promoting non-standard work arrangements that may provide individuals with more autonomy to determine when to work, where to work, and how to go about their work (Drahokoupil & Jepsen, 2017). On the other hand, many digital pessimists fear that work in the platform economy is precarious and exploitative and disregards many historical gains won by labour movements forcing workers to toil for long hours, low wages, and in unsafe conditions (McKee et al., 2018; Mendes, 2020; van Doorn, 2017; Woodcock, 2021). Many of these concerns stem from platform companies operating in a grey area outside legal and regulatory frameworks exempting platform companies from employer responsibilities such as providing minimum wage, paid sick/vacation leave, parental leave, overtime pay, health insurance, pensions, compensation from work-related illness/injury, and even safe working conditions (McKee et al., 2018; Silberman & Harmon, 2018). There are also numerous legal battles in various countries as platform workers attempt to secure better working conditions (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Mojtehedzadeh, 2020). Pessimists further argue that platform work is accelerating the race to the bottom by deconstructing work activities into "microtasks" that are virtually distributed among large numbers of competing workers (Drahokoupil & Jepsen 2017; Lehdonvirta, 2018), who must undercut one another and work for the lowest compensation (Fabo et al., 2017).

Current literature has not been able to determine whether these informal digital ways of earning are a temporary feature of society indicative of "side hustles" used to supplement existing incomes, or if they reveal a more permanent trajectory of work that is characterized by zero-hour contracts and work flexibility (Graham et al., 2017; Healy et al., 2017; Kuhn et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2020). For most, choosing to work in the platform economy is not an easy decision considering the lack of regulations, precarity of the work, and (often) low pay (Silberman & Harmon, 2018), all of which place workers at greater risk for exploitation. Given the precarity of this sector, it is still unclear why Canadians pursue work in the platform economy over conventional employment in traditional industries. Through examining individual motivations and decision-making processes, it is possible to identify larger structural patterns that contribute to these decisions.

Moreover, while there is an abundance of literature that has examined the nature of manufacturing work and machine production within industrial producer capitalism, and literature exploring service work and knowledge production within post-industrial consumer capitalism, it is largely unclear what types of work and working patterns characterize prosumer capitalism whereby platform workers supply their own means of production and labour power. Today, digital technologies and the platform economy operate in a multinational context where labour, ideas and capital move freely across national borders, time, and space. This enhanced globalization impacts individuals' experiences of work and being a worker, and these differing experiences are worth investigating. Thus, the purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of prosumer capitalism by exploring the platform economy and the experiences of the individuals who work within this sector.

1.2 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured in monograph format to understand work in the platform economy. This dissertation is situated in the interpretivist paradigm and is exploratory given the general lack of literature in this area. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who currently work or have previously worked in the platform economy. These interviews provide thick data which is the "precious data from humans like stories, emotions, and interactions that cannot be quantified" but contains an "incredible depth of meaning" (Wang, 2016, 11:42). Qualitative thick data can help us better understand why individuals are motivated to enter the platform economy, how they attach meanings to their work and working conditions and inform our understandings for why they may continue to work in jobs they find unfulfilling or unsatisfactory.

This research addresses gaps in literature and compares numerous types of platform work to offer a more holistic understanding of the experiences of people performing platform work. I explore platform workers' motivations and decision-making processes for entering the platform economy. The difficulties and challenges they experience once working in the platform economy will also be addressed to inform understanding on why individuals may leave platform work to pursue conventional employment. The nature of their working patterns and their perceptions on

platform work and the future of work will also be explored. The thick data from this study are analyzed from the perspectives of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption.

This dissertation is organized in the following chapters: Chapter two explores the history of prosumption and its relation to capitalism. The third chapter provides a detailed review of current literature on the platform economy and outlines the theoretical perspectives informing the analysis. The interpretive qualitative methodology is described in chapter four. Chapter five outlines the descriptive results including descriptions of the participants and the various types of platform work examined in this study. Chapter six investigates participants' motivations for pursuing platform work. The findings discussed in chapter seven address challenges that motivate platform workers to leave the platform economy in pursuit of more conventional employment and highlights this sectors' disadvantages and exploitation. Chapter eight investigates how participants spend their time and rationalize their work-life balance. These findings are used to address whether there is an intensification of working hours. Chapter nine presents a discussion of platform workers' satisfaction with this sector and their perceptions on the future trajectory of work. The discussion, limitations, areas for future research, and concluding statements are presented in the final chapter.

Chapter 2

2 History of Prosumption

> We are accustomed, for example, to think of ourselves as producers or consumers. This wasn't always true (Toffler, 1980, p. 37).

2.1 Overview

This chapter examines prosumption and its relation to capitalism. This exploration of the history of prosumption expands on the work by Toffler (1980) and Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010). This section begins with the period of industrial capitalism since it was the Industrial Revolution and the proliferation of wage labour that seemingly drove a wedge between the processes of production and the processes of consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980). Society became increasingly obsessed with each process and treated them as separate human functions. This hyperattention placed on production and then later consumption is explored throughout this chapter. I end with a discussion on the return of prosumption first through unpaid prosumption in the services industries followed by unpaid prosumption using digital platforms. I extend the literature to discuss how digital platforms now facilitate paid prosumption or rather, work within the platform economy.

Marx (1887) identified three preconditions for industrial capitalism to emerge from previous economic systems. First, workers need to be separated from the means of production, only gaining access by selling their labour to others. Related to this is the increasing concentration of ownership into fewer hands which further forces workers to sell their labour power (Marx, 1887). This prevented people from being self-sufficient. Second, there could be no legal constraints on workers and their labour (Marx, 1887). For example, the conditions of serfdom and slavery prevented workers from selling their labour since they technically did not "own" their labour power. In addition, there did not exist a free market for people to sell their labour since peasants were symbolically tied to estates by customs and traditions and could not move freely from estate to estate or from owner (lord) to owner (lord) to improve their living conditions (Marx, 1887). They were essentially bound to their specific working arrangements

(Braverman, 1974.). With the end of feudalism, a free market for labour began to take shape and former peasants were "free" to sell their labour power for wages[1] (Marx, 1887). The final precondition is that there must be contracts to govern the conditions of the sale of labour power by the worker, and its purchase by the owner of the means of production (employer) (Braverman, 1974; Marx, 1887). Workers cannot sell their labour indefinitely since this would make them slaves (Marx, 1887). Thus, contracts between workers and employers are required to determine when and how labour is sold and bought (Marx, 1887). With capitalism, the role of the marketplace as a site for buying and selling commodities, including labour, becomes central to daily life (Toffler, 1980). The social practice of selling labour for wages or production-for-exchange served to symbolically separate production from consumption as workers no longer consumed what they themselves produced and everything they produce is done for the purpose of exchange (Toffler, 1980). The period of industrial capitalism was obsessed with production and enhancing productive outputs and producing efficiently. By contrast, the period of post-industrial capitalism was obsessed with consumption and consuming things faster. Today, the period of prosumer capitalism is obsessed with enhancing productivity to support mass consumption.

2.2 Producer Capitalism (Production as the Heart of the Industrial Society)

The emergence of industrial capitalism was an uneven process around the world (Heron, 2019a). In Canada, industrial capitalism is said to have gained prominence around 1870 (Rinehart, 2001). By comparison, in Britain and in other countries in Europe, industrial capitalism emerged much earlier (Braverman, 1974). Industrial capitalism places the heart of the economy on productive activities (Ritzer, 2014; Toffler, 1980). There is a clear "productive bias" characterizing much of society from the Industrial Revolution until the 1950s (Ritzer, 2015). Even the works of Karl Marx and Adam Smith highlight production through work and labour as giving commodities their value with little examination of the demands of consumers (Ritzer, 2010, 2014). In addition, while Max Weber recognized the growing importance of consumer goods in social life during

[1] Note: Their "freedom" was only in comparison to feudalism where they were legally tied to the landlords and to their estates, and where their mobility was restrained by customs and traditions.

the 19th century, his assessment of the spirit of capitalism focuses on the set values that promoted hard work and a productive work ethic (1958). Therefore, while consumption was present during this period of capitalism, the limitations of rudimentary local markets and low wages earned by workers (Heron, 2019b), restricted people from becoming pure consumers with consumer identities.

The emphasis on production can be seen in various areas of industrial society including: the growth of urban cities, cultural and structural changes to employment relationships, new working patterns and management systems, invention of mass production, and cultural campaigns promoting manufacturing. I discuss these examples in more detail below to emphasize that during industrial capitalism which can also be regarded as "producer capitalism", there is a clear obsession with enhancing production and individuals are primarily regarded as workers and as producers of goods and services.

2.2.1 Urbanization and Employment Relationships

The concentration of land ownership into the hands of fewer people contributed to instability, insecurity, dependency, and impoverishment among the pre-industrial population (Rinehart, 2001). Due to this precarity the concept of the family farm and the small rural village as self-contained economic units weakened, and more individuals were forced to seek (at first) seasonal wage employment off the family farm to supplement their living (Cohen, 1988; Rinehart, 2001). Thus, employment was not invented by industrial capitalism, however, paid labour greatly increased because of it. During industrial capitalism, more people sought out employment in urban cities (Adams, 2022). Many countries such as Great Britain witnessed a mass migration of individuals from rural farms to urban city centers in search of wage labour (Braverman, 1974). With more people living in proximity, the market expanded with other businesses and services further contributing to urban growth (Adams, 2022). Thus, urban cities became industrial epicenters as workers in factories replaced handcrafted producers manufacturing goods faster and cheaper than ever before (Rinehart, 2001).

In Canada, by the mid-nineteenth century the economy was still grounded in agriculture but there was growth in the manufacturing and services sectors (Cohen, 1988; Heron, 2019a). Many rural

towns were being increasingly connected by railways (Glazebrook, 1968), and canals as the country expanded its transportation system using the cheap labour of immigrant workers (Rinehart, 2001). Between 1881 to 1891, manufacturing in Canadian cities grew by 58 percent stimulated by the American Civil War which spurred the production of textiles, iron, steel, boots, and tobacco (Cohen, 1988). This growth in domestic manufacturing expanded opportunities for paid labour in urban cities (Glazebrook, 1968; Heron, 2019b). As a result, there was population growth in Canadian cities as individuals pursued production-for-exchange. Hence urbanization demonstrates one area where there was increased emphasis placed on labouring and productivity.

The employment dynamics of industrial capitalism was also depersonalized compared to pre-industrial societies (Wood, 1999), where people often employed individuals with whom they had personal connections (Rinehart, 2001). The driving goal of industrial capitalism was to maximize surplus profits by keeping costs low and boosting productive output (Marx, 1887). Depersonalized employment relationships made it possible for capitalist employers to regard the workers in the labour process as external "costs" (Braverman, 1974; Rinehart, 2001). Capitalists were able to boost workers' productive output by controlling and regulating the labour process (Braverman, 1974; Marx, 1887). Labour-saving machinery and other technological inventions further deskilled manufacturing (Marx, 1887), giving capitalists more control over the labour process (Braverman, 1974). This eroded workers' capacity to manage their own labour and workers became viewed as replaceable (Braverman, 1974; Marx, 1887; Rinehart, 2001).

Workers' feelings of precarity and replaceability were heightened by urbanization and immigration (Rinehart, 2001), which both increased the labour pool and created competition over jobs (Morton, 1998). As a result, the power-dynamic between employers and workers was uneven and workers had poor leverage for negotiating their wages (Glazebrook, 1968; Morton, 1998), modes of payment, and scheduling (Braverman, 1974; Rinehart, 2001). Even more, as companies grew, merged, and small businesses became bankrupt or were bought out, large capitalist enterprises emerged (Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979). For workers, the concentration of production meant that there were fewer employers overall to work for (Rinehart, 2001). This forced many workers to "accept" unfair terms and conditions. I will note that workers did not passively accept these conditions. They often organized in various ways to

challenge the power of employers such as forming trade/labour unions, participating in labour strikes, and organizing labour protests or engaging in various forms of sabotage while labouring such as insubordination and subversion (Braverman, 1974; Heron 2019a, 2019b). However, the key point here is that these measures were undertaken because most workers could not just leave an unfair employment relationship (Rinehart, 2001), since they lacked opportunities for alternative employment (especially within their city) when industry became more concentrated (Heron, 2019b).

The uneven employment dynamics resulted in unfair working conditions that mainly benefitted capitalists (Glazebrook, 1968). Because wages were insufficient and labour was irregular and insecure (Morton, 1998), workers could not afford to consume the very products they produced (Cohen, 1988). The low wages of male labourers also resulted in many women and children pursuing wage labour to contribute to the family's survival (Bradbury, 2000; Morton, 1998). However, the wages for women and children were so poor that the household's income was still insufficient to consume beyond subsistence (Bradbury, 2000; Cohen, 1988; Morton, 1998). In addition, the lack of social safety net including unemployment insurance further obligated workers to remain in these unfair employment relationships (Adams, 2022). Thus, the low wages of most industrial workers demonstrates that consumerism was not possible except for the wealthy and the small group of skilled workers who could afford to maintain their families through their wages (Cohen, 1988).

2.2.2 Productive Working Patterns and Clocks as Measures of Productivity and Efficiency

Changes to working patterns during industrialism also demonstrate the productive bias. Within pre-industrial societies working was highly irregular and often followed task-oriented working patterns. In fact, time was not measured by the cycle of the clock divided into fixed units of hours and minutes (Thompson, 1967). Instead, it was measured in loose and imprecise chunks that represented the time needed to perform or complete a task such as an interval called "cow milking time" (Toffler, 1980). Some measures of time based on task-orientation appear to be "natural" following nature's demands. This was most prominent with agricultural farming where work followed patterns of sunlight (dawn to dusk), seasons (planting and harvesting months),

and other rhythms such as tending to fires (Thompson, 1967). With task-oriented work, production is determined based on what is absolutely necessary with little surplus produced. Thus, the working day was highly irregular, determined according to the tasks required (Rinehart, 2001; Thompson, 1967). Task-orientation provides a more casual approach to work without clear separation between work and leisure.

In comparison, the moment individuals enter employment relationships there is a shift from task-orientated to timed labour (time-disciplined) (Thompson, 1967). Afterall Marx's third precondition for capitalism is that there must be contracts or conditions for the buying and selling of labour (1887). Workers demarcate between "employer's time and their own time" and a person's "time" becomes a currency that is bought and spent (Thompson, 1967, p. 61). In pre-industrial societies, most employers still measured working time based on the time needed to complete the tasks (Thompson, 1967). But as society industrialized there was a pressing need to synchronize labour performed by multiple workers (Rinehart, 2001), and synchronize the sequence of highly specialized machines to improve efficiency (Žmolek, 2013). In addition, employers also needed to standardize working hours across the seasons to maintain productive output (Toffler, 1980). As a result, industrial capitalists implemented clocks (Toffler, 1980), to measure time and dictate working hours (Thompson, 1967), and to shape employment contracts (Braverman, 1974; Rinehart, 2001). In addition, pay was dictated by units of time such as hour, day, week, or even year, and workers were expected to "clock in" to work (Žmolek, 2013). The clock is also said to be the key invention of industrial capitalism (Mumford, 1934; Thompson, 1967), since it is a more accurate measure of productivity, and efficiency can be measured in time and therefore improved upon (Mumford, 1934; Žmolek, 2013).

It is apparent that the transition to time-disciplined working patterns attempted to improve the productive inefficiencies of task-oriented working patterns. Afterall those operating on task-orientation dictated their own labour process and working hours, and production could be interrupted by religious holidays (Braverman, 1974), intermittent festivals/fairs (Thompson, 1967), and other periods where people did not work. For capitalists, even minor disruptions to production are costly especially when workers are paid the same amount for lower productive output. By dictating the working day using clocks to measure time, the industrial capitalists

gained more control over the labour process and reduced workers' ability to determine the pace of work (Rinehart, 2001). Thus, the transition to time-disciplined work demonstrates societal obsession with producing more and producing faster. Even laws with legal punishments were enforced to ensure wage workers abided by these new systems of working hours (Rinehart, 2001).

Another example of industrialism's productive bias was that for most workers, working hours were often long and arduous (Heron, 2019b). The typical mid-nineteenth century working week was about 70 hours (Veal, 2020). However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were intense campaigns to reduce working hours to improve the welfare of workers (Heron, 2019b). These movements were first aimed at reducing the work week for women and children (Rinehart, 2001; Tucker, 1998), and later extended to all workers (Heron, 2019b). Some scholars also attribute the reduction of working hours to employers recognizing that long working hours were not beneficial to production since overworked and fatigued workers were less productive overall (Chapman, 1909; Veal, 2020). Therefore, the reduction of working hours was also in part a capitalist strategy to enhance the productivity of workers rather than to solely benefit the workers and their wellbeing.

2.2.3 Techniques to enhance productivity and mass production

The implementation of techniques to coordinate, supervise, and discipline workers also contributed to maximizing productivity (Rinehart, 2001). Factories implemented hierarchies of authority and complex divisions of labour to better organize the labour process and to manage the large pool of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The need for management was premised on the idea that workers who enter wage labour (especially under unfair and exploitative conditions) will attempt to work as little as possible either as an instinct to take-it-easy (natural soldiering) or as a tactic to keep employers ignorant of how fast work can be done to promote the workers' best interests (systematic soldiering) (Braverman, 1974). To combat these soldiering techniques, management was established and given the responsibility to extract maximum productive output from workers by further controlling the labour process (Braverman, 1974). Management utilized techniques of persuasion such as economic incentives to boost output (Braverman, 1974), and

implemented strict rules with punitive consequences to prevent absenteeism, disobedience, and to minimize the amount of non-producing hours by wage workers (Rinehart, 2001).

Perhaps the most obvious indicator that production was the heart of industrial capitalism was the invention of mass production. Mass production is defined as producing large quantities of standardized goods by an automated mechanical process (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Capitalist employers regarded mass production as desirable since it enabled them to produce more, faster, and more cheaply due to the standardization of the production process (Rinehart, 2001). Mass production effectively replaced custom-made handcrafted production which was viewed by capitalists as an inefficient system (Toffler, 1980). In the 20th century, there were two prominent developments that greatly encouraged mass production: scientific management (Taylorism) and assembly-line production (Fordism) (Rinehart, 2001). These developments further demonstrate industrial society's obsession with maximizing production.

Scientific management, developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor, is the application of scientific techniques to the measurement, analysis, and control of workers to improve economic efficiency and labour productivity (Braverman, 1974; Heron, 2019a; Rinehart, 2001). This approach uses management to enhance workers' productive output by reorganizing the labour process and systematizing the pace of work (Heron, 2019a; Rinehart, 2001). Time-motion studies drawing on scientific management aided in improving productive capacities by separating work into several tasks assigned to multiple workers who are responsible for completing one task repetitively. This means that each individual task can be completed faster. Management controlled the pace of production by dictating the most efficient speed at which these tasks could be completed (Braverman, 1974). These practices improved the overall efficiency of production since several unskilled and semi-skilled workers could collectively complete the work of a skilled craftsman in shorter amounts of time and in a more standardized manner (Braverman, 1974; Rinehart, 2001). This was the beginning of mass production, which was further accelerated by the birth of Fordism, the assembly line system.

The assembly line system spearheaded by Henry Ford in 1913 further enhanced productivity to even greater capacities (Braverman, 1974). Fordism is a system of mass production that

combines technological innovations to accelerate the flow of production with a managerial reorganisation of work to improve efficiency (Watson, 2019). Thus, compared to Taylorism which improved productive output through wage incentives, Fordism used technology – the assembly line – to standardize the pace of work without the need for monetary incentives (Braverman, 1974; Watson, 2019). The productive successes of Fordism have been prominent throughout the 20th century (Rinehart, 2001). Some even credit Fordism with helping many countries rebuild their economies following the Great Depression and World War II (Becker & Weissenbacher, 2020). Therefore, during industrial capitalism, mass production was the dominant manufacturing strategy and demonstrates a heightened focus on maximizing productive output.

2.2.4 Productive propaganda

The final example of industrial capitalism's obsession with production as the dominant human function can be seen in social propaganda. Propaganda campaigns especially following social and economic crises show a clear productive bias. To demonstrate, consider the propaganda campaigns in Canada and the US throughout World War I and II which highlighted a war time emphasis on productivity (Rinehart, 2001). These poster campaigns often encouraged production through industrial labour, while curbing the consumption of scarce resources like water, electricity, petroleum, sugar, and flour to support the war effort overseas (Witkowski, 2003). Take for example the US war poster slogans "Save waste fats for explosives" and "Use It Up – Wear It Out – Make It Do – Our Labor and Our Goods Are Fighting" (Witkowski, 2003). These poster slogans encouraged people to conserve, recycle, produce at home for personal use, and ration rather than consume new goods. Propaganda efforts also encouraged people to take on factory jobs to support production needs for the military. These posters often targeted women encouraging them to take on jobs in war industries as riveters, welders, and electricians to replace the male labour force fighting in the war (Witkowski, 2003). In Canada, these campaigns organized by the federal government were highly effective at recruiting women into manufacturing jobs (see Figure 2.1). To better support the influx of women entering the industrial work force some provincial governments like Ontario and Quebec enacted special measures like tax benefits and established daycare centres to support these productive efforts (Pierson, 1986; Rinehart, 2001). These propaganda efforts highlight the societal bias towards

production and limitations to consumerism (other than encouraging the purchase of victory bonds) (Witkowski, 2003). Moreover, production was the heart of other aspects of social life such as the family where the paid productive contributions of men in the labour force were valued economically and symbolically higher than the unpaid domestic productivity of women (Ritzer, 2014).

Figure 2.1: "Ronnie the Bren Gun Girl" - This image was circulated widely in Canada media in 1941 to encourage the recruitment of women into factories jobs to help manage labour shortages throughout the country.[2]

The examples discussed above demonstrate that during much of industrial capitalism production and consumption were regarded as separate functions and there was greater focus placed on enhancing production during various segments of this capitalist period. Moreover, rudimentary markets and low wages stifled consumption. Owing to the vastly altered conditions of production and of life, Marx (1887) predicted that workers in this period would experience alienation - an

[2] Credit: Courtesy of National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque / Library and Archives Canada / PA-119766 https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=FonAndCol&IdNumber=3193621&q=the%20bren%20gun%20girl

estrangement from aspects that make people human; from themselves, from the products of their labour, from the process of production, and from their species-being. To soothe the feelings of alienation, workers turned to advocating for better wages and to spending their wages. For example, as C. Wright Mills (1951, p. 237) best describes “each day men sell little pieces of themselves in order to try and buy them back each night and weekend with the coin of fun” (as cited in Rinehart, 2001, p. 176). Thus, the shift towards consumerism began to take shape as industrialism moved towards post-industrialism.

2.3 Consumer Capitalism (Consumption as the Heart of the Post-Industrial Society)

The period of post-industrialism (also referred to as the service society and knowledge society) encompasses what many scholars, and this dissertation refer to as ‘consumer capitalism’ (Ritzer, 2015; Sillas, 2018; Webster, 2014), gaining prominence in the second half of the 20th century. The productive gains during industrial capitalism supported the growth of consumerism throughout post-industrialism. Thus, if mass production is the hallmark of producer capitalism, it is mass consumption that defines consumer capitalism. Consider this statement by Hilton (2003, p. 1):

> consumption, consumerism, consuming, price and material culture are all crucial to our understanding of twentieth-century history. They must be accorded the same historical significance as notions of production, work, the wage and perhaps all the ideologies associated with a productivist mentality. In the final analysis, they are perhaps more important: as one historian of 20th century American commercialism put it, ‘consumerism was the “ism” that won’. We are all consumers now.

Here, Hilton (2003) points out that the heart of the post-industrialism was consumption and the need to consume things faster (Ritzer, 2010). Scholars like Herbert Marcuse also supported the heightened focus on consumption proposing that individuals come to view themselves in their commodities, rather than their labour: “they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (1964, p. 60).

Production is of course still present within this period of capitalism. However, the heart of the economy shifted from one based on the production of goods to one centered on the provision of services (Rinehart, 2001). As the focus on production weakened, the emphasis on consumption

gained importance (Hilton, 2003). Countries like the US also experienced hyper-consumption – intense pressures to consume more goods and services (Ritzer, 2010). There are several examples in post-industrial society that best demonstrate this "consumer bias" including: the declining manufacturing sector and growing services sector, rising wages and emergence of consumer culture, worker-as-consumer identities, changes to production strategies and working patterns/relationships, and the rapid construction of cathedrals of consumption. I discuss these examples in more detail below to emphasize that during consumer capitalism there is a clear obsession with the processes of consumption.

2.3.1 Declines in the Manufacturing Sector and Growth in the Services Sector

Post-industrial societies experienced two related developments that indicate a move away from industrialism: a decline in industrial manufacturing and an increase in service and knowledge work (Bell, 1973). The G-7 countries Canada, US, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom experienced large increases in manufacturing output between 1950 and 1973 (Cobet & Wilson, 2002). After 1973, growth in U.S. productivity accelerated and later peaked in the 1990s, however manufacturing began to decline in Canada and in other G-7 countries (Cobet & Wilson, 2002).

Signs of deindustrialization could be seen as early as 1960 when corporations in Canada and the US experienced profit declines due to globalization and the development of the world market with manufacturing competitors emerging in other countries (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Rinehart, 2001; Srnicek, 2017). The presence of international competitors operating in the world market contributed to overproduction that put downward pressures on the prices of domestically manufactured goods (Srnicek, 2017). To restore profit margins, many domestic manufacturing firms implemented cost-cutting measures including downsizing, outsourcing, offshoring, and organizational restructuring (Rinehart, 2001). For instance, instead of hiring positions internally such as in-house janitors some manufacturing firms outsourced the cleaning of the factory to external companies that offer cleaning services. This transferred a position formerly in the manufacturing sector to the services sector. This contributed to growing service jobs at the cost of manufacturing jobs (Srnicek, 2017). In addition, many factories moved their entire

manufacturing operations to low(er)-cost countries (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982). Offshoring was also spurred by the creation of free trade zones that offered special privileges, tax concessions, and laws (or lack thereof) to encourage manufacturing companies to move their operations overseas (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Rinehart, 2001). This greatly reduced the proportion of manufacturing jobs available in many post-industrial societies in the West moving them to other parts of the world or replacing them with automation. Canada continues to experience shrinking employment in manufacturing with the sector's share of total employment declining from 16% in 2000 to 10% in 2009 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

As manufacturing declined, the proportion of services jobs greatly increased. Compared to manufacturing jobs where people work in relation to things or machines, work in the services requires people to work in relation to other people, typically in the provision of a service (Vogt, 2016). Services have come to dominate the economies of all post-industrial societies including Canada (Government of Canada, 2021). For example, in the US, employment in the services sector rose from 38% of the workforce in 1990 to 78% in 1999 (Fisk, 2001; Rosenberg, 2021). In Canada, most of the growth in the services sector took place between 1960 and 1980 (Government of Canada, 2021). By the early twenty-first century, services represented more than 75% of all employment. Today, nearly four out of every five jobs in Canada are in the services industries (Government of Canada, 2021).

The services sector is large and diverse and encompasses many industries (Government of Canada, 2021). Jobs in this sector vary widely from low-skilled jobs to highly skilled knowledge work. On the low-skilled end of the service work, many people work in fast-food restaurants, shopping malls, superstores, gambling casinos, cruise ships, and so on (Ritzer, 2010). These types of service work are often temporary, part-time, and non-unionized minimum-wage jobs commonly fulfilled by women, minorities, and uneducated youth (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). These jobs are less likely to be unionized or offer workers benefits and pensions (Shuey & O'Rand, 2004), and these positions tend to lack any internal career advancement opportunities (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). On the other end of service work are highly skilled managerial jobs and knowledge work. Knowledge is considered a key resource in post-industrialism (Eskola, 2017; Rinehart, 2001), and more people pursued and obtained higher education during this

period of capitalism compared to industrial capitalism. Knowledge work is viewed as the opposite of manual or physical work (Vogt, 2016), and broadly includes any occupation that produces knowledge (Eskola, 2017), such as professionals, scientists, technicians, teachers, healthcare workers, and social workers (Rinehart, 2001). Historically, knowledge workers possessed more autonomy (Rinehart, 2001), and had weaker attachments to specific employers since they possessed highly marketable skills (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). However, like most manual work where practices and processes can be predicted and routinized, knowledge work is also experiencing a degradation of labour due to the use of technology like artificial intelligence to deskill the work (Rinehart, 2001; Susskind & Susskind, 2015). Literature also suggests that compared to manufacturing jobs, work in the services is highly polarized with people either in jobs that offer high earnings and meaningful opportunities for upward mobility ("good jobs") or jobs that provide low wages, few opportunities for growth, poor to no benefits, and higher risks of being laid off or furloughed ("bad jobs") (Kalleberg, 2011).

This growth in the services sector can be attributed to rising demand for services by Canadian consumers (House of Commons, n.d.). Thus, the declines in domestic manufacturing paired with the growth in services sector demonstrate the waning attention placed on production and the increasing value placed on service jobs to support consumption. Moreover, rising wages, consumer cultures, and the declining costs of goods and services further contributed to enhancing consumption by creating demand.

2.3.2 Rising wages, consumer culture, and declining prices

Canadian labour movements during industrial capitalism were able to improve most workers' everyday lives in a myriad of ways including legalizing and protecting unions with the Trade Union Act of 1872, shortening the working week with the 'Nine Hour Movement', and implementing social safety nets like employment insurance in 1940 (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). In addition, there were long-term growths in wages between industrialism and post-industrialism (Rinehart, 2001). For example, in the US, hourly wages rose "on average by 1.43 percent per annum from 1900 to 1929, by 2.35 percent from 1948 to 1973, and by 0.46 percent after 1973 (Goldin, 2000 as cited in Rosenberg, 2021, p. 46). Canadian workers also experienced long-term improvements in hourly wages, and the implementation of safer working conditions

and parental leave/benefits (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). These labour movement successes helped to stabilize the economy and maintain workers' consumption patterns during turbulent times (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015).[3]

Scholars like Rosa Luxemburg (1913) suggested that one calamity facing industrial capitalism and the era of mass production was the crisis of underconsumption (Rosenberg, 2021), since workers could not afford the very products, they themselves produced (Luxemburg, 1913; Tolliday & Zeitlin, 1987). During earlier industrial capitalism, most people could only afford to engage in very modest forms of consumption except for the small "leisure class" who engaged in conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). Thus, consumption came second to production. Scholars like Aglietta (1977) argued that increasing the wages of workers would encourage them to spend those wages to sustain mass production. This contributed to the proliferation of Fordism's "five-dollar day" concept which advocated for paying workers more to boost demand (Rigart, 2001). Paying workers higher wages creates a 'virtuous circle' where high-wage workers sustain high levels of consumption and thereby cultivate more demand for goods and services (Figart, 2001). In other words, improving wages will create and endorse a "working class norm of consumption" (Aglietta, 1977, p. 158; Rosenberg, 2021, p. 23). It meant turning workers into consumers.

Norms of consumption developed into consumer culture that quickly gained economic power and extended consumerism along class lines. Consumer culture is defined as the "increasing prominence of consumption as social, cultural and economic activity" (Kravets et al., 2018, p. 2). Consumer culture represents the beliefs, values, and meanings that social groups create around commodities (Kravets et al., 2018), and emerges when consumers begin to make certain choices regarding their consumption of goods. They may choose to purchase goods not only because a product fulfills a specific material or psychological function but also because of the way the product fits into larger society's configuration of products and services (Toffler, 1980). In other

[3] Note: Real wage growth is a complex trend considering that not all workers experienced wage improvements during post-industrialism. Many workers experienced stasis and decline in real wages and there was income polarization among workers.

words, these consumer choices indicate one's lifestyle and identity (Kravets et al., 2018; Veblen, 1899). The extension of consumer culture to members of the working class further signifies the focus on consumption.

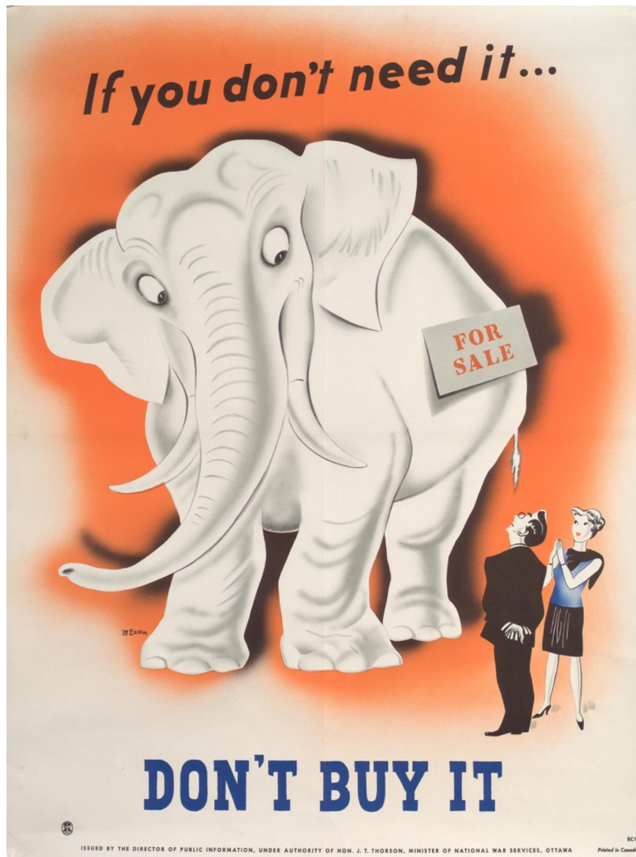

Figure 2.2: Example of a 1941 wartime savings propaganda poster aimed at curbing consumerism - This propaganda poster circulated in Canada during WWII and demonstrates the campaigns to control and shape working-class consumerism.[4]

It is important to note that earlier forms of consumer culture did exist especially among the wealthy and privileged classes. However, periods of social and economic conflict and turmoil such as World War I, The Great Depression, and World War II limited the consumption of working-class individuals who were discouraged from consumerism (or their consumer habits were shaped by these events) through campaigns promoting frugality and saving (see Figure 2.2) (Witkowski, 2003). Moreover, early forms of consumerism often came at odds with certain

[4] Credit: Courtesy of Toronto Public Library: https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/239099/if-you-dont-need-it--dont-buy-it?ctx=1e97fead2069b688cf77c33516d2d9ba961f9856&idx=10

religions that promoted material restraint (Roach et al., 2019). Thus, despite earlier forms of consumer culture shaping the purchasing habits of the wealthier classes, most people across classes prior to consumer capitalism did not regard themselves as consumers, and owners of production did not take consumer demands into consideration during the production process (de Vries, 2008).

Following the aftermath of World War II, countries like Canada experienced an economic boom (Rinehart, 2001). Not only did wages improve but the costs of goods declined from mass production and overproduction, and more diverse goods became available (de Vries, 2008). This contributed to the rise of mass consumption (Silla, 2018), and led to the re-emergence of a consumer culture in the West. The economic barriers and ideologies that had previously promoted rationing, saving, and frugal attitudes/behaviors gave way to a culture embracing consumerism and a "throwaway" mentality (Witkowski, 2003). In fact, ideologies transformed to praise consumers as patriotic citizens (Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], n.d.), and many people during the post-war era experienced strong desires to shop (Ritzer, 2010). The consumer desire was further developed by the mass production of durable household goods sold at more affordable prices (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), as global competitors undercut the formerly high fixed costs of domestic manufacturers (Srnicek, 2017). For example, Americans alone purchased 20 million refrigerators, 21.4 million cars, and 5.5 million stoves between 1945 and 1949 (PBS, n.d.). Similarly, Canadians also increased their domestic expenditures following the second war: "[we] drank one third more milk, ate two thirds more pork; rang up two thirds more movie admissions and bought 75% more houses in 1948 than in…1938" (Liverant, 1999, p. 72). Rising wages, ample savings (following wartime frugality) and pent-up demand supported consumption launching post-industrial societies into decades-long spending sprees (Witkowski, 2003).

Further developing this consumer culture was the advertising industry. The modern advertising industry can be traced back to the 1920s when owners realized that consumers, like workers, played an important role in capitalism (Ritzer, 2010). It is consumers who make purchasing decisions, and so advertisers can "help" people make those decisions by promoting their products for achieving happiness in society (Ritzer, 2010). Historically, businesses manufactured the things that consumers directly wanted. However, as global competition increased, businesses

shifted their marketing strategies to compel consumers to want or need the things that the business was producing and selling (Ritzer, 2010).

Manufacturers also realized that consumption was as much a social activity as well as an economic one (Roach et al., 2019). People can express their agency through consumption (Matt, 2013). As a result, manufacturers began to develop and produce "incentive goods" designed specifically to coax the wants of certain communities and individuals from various socioeconomic strata (de Vries, 2008). Marcuse (1964) referred to this as false needs. He argued that capitalists had effectively created false needs using advertisements to superimpose the belief onto individuals that they *need* these things to gain satisfaction. However, these needs can never be satiated as new goods are invented and create new needs (Marcuse, 1964). In addition, manufacturers were finding new ways to improve their ability to affect demand (Silla, 2018). There was a move away from the mass production of homogeneous goods towards manufacturing customized goods that respond to consumer desires (Rinehart, 2001; Srnicek, 2017). Through customization a world of goods was established in the minds of consumers (Silla, 2018). Advertisements became invaluable means for catching people's attention and informing them about products or services that could be purchased and consumed (Silla, 2018). Through advertising, manufacturers convince individuals to purchase their products by associating products with certain lifestyles and personalities (Bell, 1978; Rosenberg, 2021; Silla, 2018). Thus, in producer capitalism owners of business sought to control and exploit workers. However, in consumer capitalism, owners also sought to control and exploit consumers (Ritzer, 2010).

Compared to producer capitalism where capitalist exploit workers by controlling the labour process, capitalists control consumers by establishing a culture of emulation and envy (Matt, 2013). There is a long history of creating envy and emulation in society. Veblen (1899) described how the upper classes in ancient societies and earlier forms of capitalism engaged in ostentatious consumption to signify their rank and power in society. This norm spread from the top down to even the lowest ranks of society (Chessel & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018). Consumer culture and the rising number of goods at various prices urged people of all classes to pursue their consumer desires, and advertisements suggested that people could even gain personal

satisfaction from doing so (Matt, 2013; Rosenberg, 2021). Long gone were the war propaganda promoting frugality. In its place were numerous attention-grabbing advertisements that urged people to buy and spend (Rosenberg, 2021). Take for example, the economic downturn in the US following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. President George Bush did not urge citizens to go seek manufacturing work to support the economy. Instead, he urged Americans to respond to the crisis by shopping (Ritzer, 2010), and reigniting the consumerist spirit in America. This lies in stark contrast to the World War II propaganda during industrialism that urged citizens to save money and work in response to the war crisis. The creation and popularity of holidays that promote shopping around the globe also demonstrate the strength of consumerism within post-industrial societies such as Black Friday in the US (and elsewhere), Boxing Day in Canada and the United Kingdom, Singles Day in China, and Valentine's Day celebrated in many countries.

2.3.3 Workers-As-Consumers

Marx (1867) argued that the increasing mechanization of labour and intense exploitation of workers would eventually lead to historical transformation and the abolition of labour and classes. However, this has not occurred. Marcuse (1964) argued that the exploitative conditions of capitalism have sustained because consumerism and the desire to satisfy consumers' false needs is a form of social control that integrates the working class into the capitalist system. Thus, workers have increasingly come to view themselves through their commodities rather than through their labour (Marcuse, 1964), and this also demonstrates post-industrial obsession with consumption.

People's consumption habits can tell us a lot about their personal identity and can also be a means of communicating social messages (Roach et al., 2019). Through consumption, individuals and social groups can reproduce their social identities related to their political, cultural, and economic positions (Silla, 2018). Early post-industrialism saw a rise in affluent workers, a particular working-class identity that embraces middle-class values and social life (Goldthorpe, 1968). As wages and standards of living improved there was an overlap in income between those in white collar and working-class occupations. This meant that larger proportions of society possessed middle-range incomes (Goldthorpe et al., 1967). People in the working

class with these middle-range incomes began to view themselves with affluence. Even if they possessed low-status jobs, their high incomes enabled them to consume conspicuously and indirectly take pride in their occupations by surrounding themselves with desirable material things (Thompson, 1983). Thus, the differences in consumption patterns between white collar and working-class individuals narrowed as the affluent workers increasingly gained consumer power to support their consumption desires (Goldthorpe, 1968; Goldthorpe et al., 1967; Thompson, 1983).[5]

As workers engage in higher rates of consumption, they adopt consumer identities. The worker-as-employee identity prevalent during producer capitalism gave way to the worker-as-consumer identity during this form of capitalism. This view of workers-as-consumers is supported by changing labour movement strategies which stopped advocating for shorter workweeks and instead focused on securing better wages and working conditions (Roach et al., 2019). Larger proportions of workers preferred to work full-time, or even overtime, which highlights changing attitudes. People preferred to work more to earn more to be able to spend more. This is in stark contrast to producer capitalism where workers wanted to earn more but work less in order to enjoy more time for leisure (Roach et al., 2019). In addition, when workers view themselves as consumers, they begin to view work in a materialistic way to achieve their consumption. In other words, rather than gaining satisfaction from their work (which Marx referred to as species-being), workers begin to emphasize level of pay as a major reason for staying with a present employer and other aspects of the work activities such as level of repetition, monotony, autonomy, and independence as secondary considerations (Goldthorpe, 1968; Thompson, 1983).

A big problem with the worker-as-consumer identity is that many workers enter a "financial trap" where their spending patterns require them to continue working even in jobs that may be dangerous, physically labour-intensive, repetitive, or otherwise low status and alienating (Thompson, 1983). While wages have increased, consumer desires have also risen, and many workers' wages cannot sustain these consumption patterns. Schor (1991) refers to this as the

[5] Note: Throughout the 1970s to 1990s the narrowing of wages between white collar and working-class individuals declined. However, the rise of dual career-families counteracted wage polarization for some.

work-and-spend syndrome where the increased demands for consumer goods and overspending forces people to devote more hours to work to pay for these goods. Thus, increased wages have not reduced poverty rates since many workers are consuming beyond their means and incurring large debts (Ritzer, 2010). In addition, scholars have also pointed out that when workers regard themselves as consumers rather than workers, they fail to recognize their shared conditions, and this delegitimizes and weakens any attempts for collective action (Marcuse, 1964). Compared to industrialism where many workers attached their work to their identity, these types of workers in post-industrialism demonstrate an internalization of consumer culture and view their consumerist orientation as central to their identity.

2.3.4 Changings to Working Strategies, Patterns and Practices

The organization of production changed as well. Many manufacturers in the West shifted their manufacturing strategies towards lean production or "Toyotism" (Srnicek, 2017). The lean production model was first introduced by Toyota and is in stark contrast to Ford's mass production model (Rinehart, 2001). Lean production is a manufacturing model with a unique streamlined process (Srnicek, 2017), division of labour, work roles, labour management relations, and human resource policies (Rinehart, 2001). Mass production operated on maintaining large inventories. By contrast, lean production minimizes inventory by making only what is needed in the amount needed at that necessary time (Rinehart, 2001). The utilization of lean production as opposed to mass production during post-industrialism exemplifies the cultural shift away from producing as much as possible just-in-case to producing things just-as-needed (Rinehart, 2001). Thus, a move away from overproduction.

Post-industrialism brought about additional changes to working patterns and employment that highlight the increasing focus on consumption and consumerism. Industrial capitalism sought to synchronize daily life and labour by establishing working hours and non-working hours. As a result, many people worked full-time and on fixed work schedules (Rinehart, 2001). This standardization of working hours created synchronized schedules. People shared the same times of sleep and wake; times for work and play; mealtimes and so on (Toffler, 1980). However, rising consumption led to the creation of the 24-hour market. Many businesses now operate around the clock as a tactic to encourage more consumption. For example, many grocery stores

are open until late at night which enables them to attract consumers who might otherwise be unable to shop during the day such as night shift workers or truck drivers (Toffler, 1980). Casinos also operate 24/7 to eliminate consumers' sense of time passing thereby promoting more consumption (Ritzer, 2010). Around the clock operations require a larger pool of workers to work during all hours of the day and this led to the rise in the number of flexitime schedules, nonstandard work, part-time work, and night shifts during post-industrialism (Toffler, 1980). It is important to note that these types of working patterns and work arrangements were present during industrialism, but they grew significantly during consumer capitalism. For example, part-time jobs in Canada increased by 120% between 1975 and 1993 (Pold, 1994). Today, one in five employed Canadians works part-time less than thirty hours per week as their primary employment (Patterson, 2018). The growth of part-time jobs can be attributed in part to supporting around the clock operations as most non-standard employment is in the services sector[6] (Pold, 1994).

Another change in working practices that demonstrates the increased emphasis on improving consumption is the increased value placed on workers having soft skills. Compared to manufacturing work where workers generally only interact with management and fellow workers; workers in the services sector also interact with customers. Because workers in the services industries interact with customers, these encounters are very important (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996; Moss & Tilly, 1996). While management in manufacturing sectors can generally control the labour process through constant and direct supervision, management within services sector cannot rely solely on direct supervision to regulate the interactions between workers and customers. Therefore, they utilize cultural techniques of selection, development, and motivation to transform workers' characteristics and personalities to better control the labour process (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). As such, services industries place greater value on workers' soft skills – the subjective interpersonal skills related to personality, attitude and behaviour that are necessary for successful service interactions (Moss & Tilly, 1996), than hard skills like technical knowledge (reading and mathematics) and physical capabilities (strength and coordination) (Fan et al., 2017; Liu & Grusky, 2013).

[6] Note: Growth of part-time jobs is also attributed to women's movement into the labour force at large numbers.

Beyond soft skills, many service jobs also value workers' aesthetic labour (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009), and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). Every interactive service job has an aesthetic component - a set of normative expectations regarding appropriate appearance as well as an emotional component that dictates appropriate demeanor (Williams & Connell, 2010). Aesthetic labour refers to the labour required from workers to display the appropriate aesthetic (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Williams & Connell, 2010). Emotional labour refers to the labour required from workers to enact emotional states to manipulate clients or customers into a successful service encounter (Hochchild, 1983; Williams & Connell, 2010). It is not enough for the workers to merely possess and perform the aesthetic and emotional labour in the service industry. Post-industrial employers expect workers to embody these attributes. This deep programming can lead to the blurring of traditional distinctions between work and non-work as service employers demand workers to identify with the organization even outside of work (MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996).

The desire of companies to determine the soft skills, aesthetic labour, and emotional labour of workers to control service interactions and manipulate the consumption patterns of customers demonstrates the increasing importance placed on consumption during post-industrialism. Moreover, the rapid construction of cathedrals of consumption also contributed to the expansion of the services sector and the growth of part-time and non-standard work.

2.3.5 The Construction of Cathedrals of Consumption

The final example of societal focus on consumption is the proliferation of modern department stores, chain stores, shopping malls, amusement parks, athletic stadiums/arenas, casinos, cruise lines, movie theatres and so on. The purpose of these sites is purely to encourage consumerism. These places can be historically traced back to earlier societies around the world (Ritzer, 2010). However, during consumer capitalism these settings grew in importance and obtained a central role in society as cathedrals of consumption (Ritzer, 2010, 2016; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), especially as factories and manufacturing firms shut down or moved overseas (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982). Unlike historical versions of these structures (e.g., the shopping centers of ancient Greece), cathedrals of consumption are unique because they are "built on the model of

religious cathedrals that were constructed to be enchanted and to lead people to "consume" religion in a rationalized way" (Ritzer, 2016b, p. 38). In other words, cathedrals of consumption provide people with physical sites or opportunities that encourage and sometimes compel them to consume – they are developed with the intention to lure consumers to spend their money and their leisure time (Ritzer, 2010, 2015). Take for instance department stores that feature lavish display windows. These department stores promote the idea of shopping as a "spectacle," and lure shoppers to these stores by providing entertainment through elaborate interiors and seasonal displays (Roach et al., 2019).

Cathedrals of consumption have played a very important role in helping post-industrial societies reach higher levels of consumption (Ritzer, 2010). The post-industrial period experienced a rapid growth in the number of cathedrals of consumption. For example, Canada's first shopping mall, Park Royal Shopping Centre in West Vancouver opened in 1950 (HBC, n.d.). Six years later there were over sixty-four shopping centres in Canada (Therrien, 2011). In North America, the construction of shopping malls grew the most during the 1970s. For example, in the US, the number of shopping malls grew by 7.5 percent each year in the 1970s (Pacione, 2001). Beyond shopping malls, many new structures were also developed (such as Mega-malls and box stores) while traditional settings (sports arenas and museums) also experienced a complete restructuring to emulate a destination for lavish spending and consumption (Ritzer, 2010).

In addition to the construction of cathedrals of consumption, the invention of credit cards in the 1940s further supported consumerism (Roach et al., 2019). Cathedrals of consumption have been so successful at enchanting, that people often spend most, if not all, of their available resources on consumer goods and services. For example, from 1996 to 2007, Canadians and Americans spent almost all their disposable income leaving little for savings (Statistics Canada, 2007). When people run out of resources, they increasingly go into debt using credit cards and/or personal loans to fulfil their consumer needs and wants (Ritzer, 2010). Personal debt has grown steadily in both countries since the mid-1990s, slowing down in 2009 following the financial crisis (Statistics Canada, 2021a). Today, household non-mortgage debt has matched the rate of GDP indicating that Canadians are not increasingly in debt, but they are still not saving

(Statistics Canada, 2021a). In other words, Canadians are displaying a work-and-spend syndrome (Schor, 1991).

The examples discussed above demonstrate post-industrialism's increasing focus on consumption as the heart of society and economic exchange during post-industrialism. While people still engaged in productive processes, attention to these processes were largely overshadowed by processes of consumption. If the crisis of producer capitalism was one of underconsumption, the crises of consumer capitalism is one of overconsumption - people consuming beyond their means and incurring large personal debt.

Early signs of prosumer capitalism are identifiable near the end of the 20th century as capitalist firms realized they could get consumers to contribute to the labour process.

2.4 Prosumer Capitalism (Prosumption as the Heart of the Digital Society)

According to Toffler (1980) and Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) we are now living in a prosumer society. These scholars identified that technology enables capitalists to exploit workers *and* the unpaid labour of consumers (Maruyama, 1981; Toffler, 1980). In other words, technology makes it possible for consumers to participate in the production of the very goods and services they are purchasing, transforming them back into prosumers. As Ritzer (2015, p. 8) best explains “from the capitalist’s perspective, low pay is good, but no pay is even better”. Therefore, if producer capitalism was largely built on the labour of exploited workers and consumer capitalism grew from the exploitation of consumers; digital prosumer capitalism’s growth is attributable to both the unpaid and paid prosumption of workers *and* consumers who are actually prosumers.

The shift towards prosumption as the heart of the economy can be identified through several changes in society. This includes the return of prosumption activities within the services industries, the growth of the internet and digital society, the emergence of Internet-based capitalist firms, the stagnation of the service sector, and large growth of digital platforms as cathedrals of prosumption. I discuss these examples in more detail below to emphasize that in modern society there is an increasing focus placed on improving the processes of prosumption.

2.4.1 Return of prosumer goods and activities within the services sector

Beginning in the 1970s, the post-industrial society witnessed social changes that sowed the seeds for modern prosumer capitalism to emerge. Toffler (1980) identified the return of prosumption as beginning with the invention of the "do-it-yourself" (DIY) pregnancy kit sold at pharmacies in post-industrial Europe and later globally. By the 1980s, millions of women could perform on themselves a task previously carried out by doctors and laboratories. This ignited the trend of inventing other prosumer goods (Toffler, 1980). Beyond offering DIY goods, businesses found new ways to get consumers to participate in the labour process and consumers increasingly (through continued consumption of these goods/services) relented to being drawn into the production process for various reasons. By integrating the consumer into the production process, capitalist businesses externalized labour costs by not paying employees to perform this specific aspect of the labour. In other words, capitalists could increase their surplus value by harnessing the unpaid labour of customers.

Some capitalists rationalized prosumption as a way to reduce the purchasing costs for customers. For example, by pumping one's own gas, the customer pays a bit less but works a bit harder (Toffler, 1980). However, consumer demand also led the return of prosumption. As mentioned, during consumer capitalism, many capitalists recognized the importance of consumers and they sought to produce and sell products that would appeal to them. Thus, many of the prosumption activities emerged to help satisfy consumers. Zwick, Bonsu and Darmondy (2008) argued that many consumers support being drawn into the labour process if they can achieve some recognition, freedom, and/or agency for their unpaid labour. For example, rather than waiting in potentially long cashier lines at the grocery store, some customers may desire to save time and express agency by using a self-serve cashier kiosk. In other cases, consumers may relent to participating in the production process if they have social, economic, or material constraints (Rocha et al., 2020). For example, some people purchase ready-to-assemble furniture because it is generally more affordable than custom-made furniture or they opt to bake a cake using a DIY box-mix to save on time. Other consumers may engage in unpaid labour as a hobby or leisure alternative (Rocha et al., 2020): for instance, by participating in a bicycle wine tour wherein one produces their own transportation by bicycling to each winery or playing scratch-off lottery

tickets. The consumer may gain some sort of satisfaction or enjoyment from being brought into the labour process. In some cases, consumers need to participate in the labour processes because the capitalists have eliminated specific job roles or do not hire additional employees (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012). These capitalists employ reframing strategies to ideologically recruit customers into relenting their unpaid labour which also serves to mask their exploitation. For example, clearing one's table and throwing out one's own garbage after finishing a meal is a fair price to pay for cheap and fast service (see Figure 2.3). Or the suggestion that it is better to save money (to spend elsewhere) by assembling one's own furniture rather than purchasing pricier custom-made furniture.

The return of prosumption cut across many industries as modern consumers began to do the tasks once done for them by others as part of the production process (Toffler, 1980). In the latter part of the 20th century, Ritzer (1996) credited the rationalization of fast-food restaurants and other businesses within the services industries as accelerating the rate at which consumers turned into prosumers. He called this McDonaldization. Ritzer (1996) argued that service industries utilized techniques of rationalization typically found in bureaucracies to improve their standardization and efficiency for putting out cheap and fast meals that can be consumed by people at even faster rates.

McDonaldization draws on Taylorism and Fordism and utilizes new technologies to systematize and deskill the process involved in producing a service so that anyone could do the work (Ritzer, 1996). This meant that consumers could be brought into the production process since little-to-no training is necessary to perform the labour (Ritzer, 1996). This reduced operational costs for capitalists and appealed to consumers' obsession with consuming faster. The principles of McDonaldization have spread rapidly to other industries as more businesses have found additional ways to lure consumers into the production process.

When individuals are involved in producing and designing for their own consumption, they are effectively prosumers (Toffler, 1980). These early returns to prosumption highlight the shift towards a new type of capitalism, prosumer capitalism, where capitalist enterprises profit from the largely free labour of consumers (Ritzer, 2015). Beyond the services industries, the internet

and other digital technologies have given prosumption greater centrality in today's modern society (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Figure 2.3: Example of Ideological Reframing - This sign was placed by the entry to the cafeteria of an Ikea store located in Ontario, Canada. The contents of the sign demonstrate reframing strategies used to encourage consumers to engage in prosumption activities such as keeping prices low and ensuring better customer service.

2.4.2 The Internet and Digital Society

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) are one of the most transformative and fastest growing technologies in human history (Roser et al., 2015). Before the late 20th century, computers were mainly computational tools used within science, engineering and business and were not accessible to most people in society (Kraut et al., 1998). However, since the 1990s, there has been unprecedented adoption and use of ICTs following the invention of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 (Roser et al., 2015). For example, Pew Research Center (2021b) tracked Americans' internet usage over time and found that in 2000 only 52% of

Americans reported using the internet and only 1% indicated having broadband internet at home. Since then, these rates have increased to 93% of Americans now using the internet (Pew Research Center, 2021b), and over 75% of Americans accessing the internet from home or through their smartphones (Pew Research Center, 2021a). ICT adoption rates are also high in Canada. Ninety percent of all Canadian households have home internet and smartphones (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission [CRTC], 2019). The impact of ICTs is also not limited to advanced societies but has steadily affected most countries worldwide. There were less than 413 million global internet users in 2000. Today, more than half of the world's population is online. This is enormous growth over a twenty-year period. While usage rates are much lower in developing countries compared to more advanced countries, they are increasing yearly (Roser et al., 2015). The speed at which the world is changing as evident by the adoption of ICTs is incredibly fast and indicates that the world has entered a digital era.

In tandem with the higher adoption rates of ICTs, people are spending greater proportions of their day online. For example, the average hourly usage rate for OECD countries is approximately 4 hours per day (Roser et al., 2015). In Canada, one third of Canadians report being online on average 3 to 4 hours per day and 15% spend more than 8 hours online per day (Roser et al., 2015). As access to the digital sphere becomes easier due to newer technologies (e.g., smartphones, tablets, wearable technologies, home-assistant devices, smart-televisions and so on) more people are "almost constantly" online (Perrin & Atske, 2021).

Digitalization and the increased time people spend on the internet demonstrates that processes of prosumption are coming to dominate society. Today, much of what transpires on digital platforms is predicated on prosumption activities because most digital platforms rely on Web 2.0 styles of platform design and execution. Web 2.0 is a term first used in 2004 to describe the cyber shift where software developers began to develop platforms where content and applications could be continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (History Computer, 2022). This means that webpages are interactive and can be altered not only by the developers of these pages, but by the visitors as well. Think of the popular website Wikipedia, which encourages visitors to continuously add, edit, and revise content on the site in a collaborative fashion. Another important feature of Web 2.0 is that it connects visitors

not only to the owners of the site, but also to other visitors. Think of the comments sections on blogs or news websites which allow users to talk and respond to one another in an open format. Developers of Web 2.0 envisioned it as a set of tools that would help people connect, collaborate, socialize and coordinate (History Computer, 2022). Web 2.0 style webpages and digital platforms enable a social aspect to the internet that was not possible with "read-only" Web 1.0 designs of the 1990s (History Computer, 2022).

Participating on digital platforms is to engage in prosumption activities. This is because online platforms are built on Web 2.0, and therefore, demand prosumption (Ritzer, 2015). For example, when a user creates an email account, they are both consumers and producers. In the simplest case, they are a consumer of the email company. They are consuming the product offered by the company (email services) and their use of the product generates direct or indirect revenue or other benefits for the email company. The email user is also a producer as well. They produce emails to send to others (who consume those emails), and they also consume emails sent to them (another aspect of consumption). Similarly, on social media sites, whenever a person creates a user account, they create the account with the intention to access this site and consume the content displayed on this site. This could include personal posts produced by their "friends" or "subscribers" or other materials accessible only on the platform. In addition, through creating an account and publishing their own posts or contributing their own content to these sites, the user is producing materials for others to consume. Fisher (2015) describes this phenomenon as 'You Media' otherwise translated as "you, acting as media" or "you are our media" (Fisher, 2015, p. 51). Essentially 'you' become the content that is consumed by others (Fisher, 2015). Moreover, the user is a targeted consumer for the developer of that social media. Thus, the internet and Web 2.0 facilitates an implosion of production and consumption. Some may find that they contribute more on digital platforms by posting materials more frequently (e.g., social media influencers) while others may find that they mostly consume material on digital platforms and rarely contribute. Some digital platforms are free to access, others charge fees. However, the lines between digital activities as either purely production activities or purely consumption activities cannot be distinguished. For example, just by being on a digital platform, people leave digital footprints that can alter the site and these footprints can also be harvested and monetized by the platform company and/or sold back to users as new products or services (Warhurst et al., 2021).

This means that people consume and produce in interrelated and unanticipated ways when using digital platforms. As well, they are always engaging in unpaid prosumption activities. This makes digital platforms both the most prevalent location of prosumption and its most important facilitator (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010).

Today, digital platforms are emerging as powerful capitalist entities. The proliferation of internet-based firms demonstrates another way in which prosumption is at the heart economic exchanges.

2.4.3 Rise of internet-based capitalist firms

Digital platforms are now important sites for accumulating capital. In the 1990s the US experienced a tech boom known as the “Dot-com bubble” (Srnicek, 2017). This tech boom emerged from the commercialization of the internet. Its influence spread to other countries like Canada. American venture capitalists poured large amounts of money into internet-based companies latching onto this “new economy” even though these companies lacked revenue sources and real profits (Srnicek, 2017). This bubble period was instrumental for accelerating internet adoption and use within wider society with more people purchasing home computers. However, the bubble had burst by 2000 (Srnicek, 2017). Early internet-based companies were unprofitable at best and losing money at worst. The consequences of the burst were widespread. More than half of the internet-based companies that launched in the 1990s were sold or bankrupted in the early 2000s (McCullough, 2018). By 2002, 100 million individual investors had lost over US$5 trillion dollars in the stock market, and between 2001 and 2004 more than 200,000 jobs in Silicon Valley were lost (McCullough, 2018). However, this dot-com bubble and bust laid the groundwork and economic infrastructure for the modern platform economy (McCullough, 2018; Srnicek, 2017), and the advancement of prosumer capitalism.

The internet-based companies that survived the bust realized that they needed to establish actual revenue sources to be profitable. Many shifted their business models to monetize the ‘free’ prosumption activities of internet users (Srnicek, 2017). Consider the video-streaming platform YouTube. The bulk of videos displayed on YouTube come from the unpaid contributions of its users who upload videos onto this platform. YouTube monetizes the free video content created

and/or shared by its users by selling advertisement space on the platform to other businesses. These models have been successful, and many digital enterprises have accumulated power and capital over the following two decades (Srnicek, 2017), such as the platforms eBay, Uber, and Airbnb. In addition, part of the dot-com failure can be attributed to the lack of users online in 2000 (McCullough, 2018; Roser et al., 2015). Today, there are more than 4 billion global users online (McCullough, 2018), performing an unprecedent amount of prosumption activities that generate free data that digital firms can monetize.

Data is the raw material extracted from the activities of digital users (Srnicek, 2017). Digital data needs to be cleaned and organized into standardized formats to be usable but once it is extracted and refined it can be used in a variety of ways. In addition, the more data that a company obtains, the more useable (and desirable) it is (Srnicek, 2017). Digital capitalists can use the data extracted from users' prosumption activities to "optimize production processes, give insights into consumer preferences, control workers, provide the foundations for new products and services (e.g., Google Maps, self-driving cars, Siri), and sell to advertisers" as well as educate their algorithms, and to better coordinate and outsource workers (Srnicek, 2017, p. 23). The focus on digital data as a key resource is another example of modern society's shift towards prosumption. Thus, if capital is viewed as the key resource of industrial producer capitalism, and knowledge is the key resource of the post-industrial consumer capitalism, then it is data that is the key resource of prosumer capitalism. For digital platforms to remain competitive they need to intensify their extraction and control of data (Srnicek, 2017). As evident by the earlier dot-com bubble and bust, the successes of platform companies and their digital platforms rely on the prosumption activities of users to generate data for these platforms to extract, use, and sell.

In addition, within capitalism there is a tendency for capitalist firms to monopolize larger shares of industries and sectors (Staab, 2017). This monopolization is built into digital platforms as well. Because platforms rely on "network effects" – a situation where the more users who use a platform the more valuable that platform becomes for all users – these platforms are designed specifically to attract users (Srnicek, 2017). To obtain this monopoly, digital platforms try to seize upon early advantages before other similar platforms emerge (Srnicek, 2017). Consider again the platform YouTube. It was one of the earliest video-sharing platforms launching in 2005

and became one of the fastest growing sites on the internet (Dickey, 2013). Part of YouTube's successes is due to their early advantage being one of the few video sharing sites at the time. New video sharing platforms have emerged since such as Google Video, but these platforms have failed to overcome YouTube's monopoly on video-sharing services because there is more content on YouTube due to more people using YouTube, which leads to even more people choosing to use YouTube over other platforms. In other words, YouTube has obtained a monopoly over video-sharing in part due to its early advantage and its capacity to gather large amounts of data. Another capitalist tactic that digital platforms use to monopolize this sector is establishing the platform as an ecosystem of goods and services so that it can close off competition (Srnicek, 2017). For example, Google offers a wide range of products and services including email, calendars, search engines, geo-mapping, advertisement spacing, and so on. By offering a variety of products and services, Google retains its monopoly on users (and obtains new users) by reducing the need for users to turn to other digital platforms to fulfil their wants/needs. Despite the monopolization tendencies of digital platforms, successes within the digital space also generate even greater competition within that space. Every day more digital platforms are created, and they all seek to obtain a monopoly position. As such, there has been rapid growth in the number of digital platforms emerging as cathedrals of prosumption.

2.4.4 Cathedrals of Prosumption

A final example of society's increasing focus on processes of prosumption can be seen in the growth of digital platforms as cathedrals of prosumption (digital places that enchant people to engage in prosumption activities), and the levelling out of the services sector. Over the past twenty years there has been a steady decline in the number of cathedrals of consumption. For example, malls are closing, brick and mortar stores are going bankrupt, and many former cathedrals of consumption are digitalizing to become sources of prosumption. These changes have occurred in part because of the 2008-2009 Great Recession (Ritzer, 2010), and the replacement of physical sites of consumption with newer (less costly) settings for online prosumption of goods and services.

In the US, the growth of cathedrals of consumption and consumerism was fueled by the rising stock market and increasing credit flowing from banks linked to house prices and credit card

companies. This gave many consumers access to money that could be used to support their consumption patterns and behaviours (Ritzer, 2010). However, Ritzer (2010) argues that the former glory days of consumption are over. The Great Recession was experienced most heavily in the US, but its effects were also felt in Canada. Its beginnings can be traced to 2006 when US housing prices began to decline contributing to lower consumption rates (Srnicek, 2017). By 2008 there was a full-blown crisis where American investors lost trillions of dollars (Srnicek, 2017), and American consumers owed over $1 trillion dollars in personal credit card debt alone (Ritzer, 2010). Today, many societies have not fully recovered from this recession and mass consumption is limited as credit becomes harder to obtain and as more consumers reverse their long-term spending patterns to save more (Ritzer, 2010), or to pay off existing debt. These changes have led to the disappearance of many cathedrals of consumption (especially ones the promote reckless spending or lavish displays – e.g., malls, casinos, and arcades) (Ritzer, 2010). However, in the place of these declining cathedrals of consumption, more cathedrals of prosumption, digital platforms, are being built and launched.

The consumer capitalism crisis of overconsumption and rising personal debt can be regarded as contributing to the rise of the platform economy (Staab, 2017). The use of digital platforms to purchase goods and services has risen significantly and some of this growth is due to the lower prices of goods sold on digital platforms compared to in stores. Digital platforms that facilitate eCommerce have higher degrees of price flexibility since they can better monitor the pricing of their competitors including brick and mortar retailers and change their prices accordingly to remain competitive (Mitchell, 2019). Furthermore, many modern societies have fully embraced eCommerce especially following the COVID-19 pandemic when most businesses and consumers were forced to go digital due to widescale restrictions and lockdowns. Internet sales have risen at a higher rate than traditional retail and many retail firms have adopted digital technologies to improve their business-to-business and business-to-consumer relations (International Trade Administration, 2021). In 2021 there were over 27 million eCommerce users in Canada which represents approximately 72.5% of the total Canadian population and this is expected to continue growing (International Trade Administration, 2021). In other words, the rising number of Canadian online shoppers means that eCommerce will continue to carve out greater proportions

of total retail sales in the future (International Trade Administration, 2021), and possibly match or outnumber traditional retail sales.

2.5 Conclusion

Through the examination of the history of prosumption, it is apparent that prosumer capitalism has emerged, and consumption and consumerism are no longer the economic focus for accumulating capital. Over the past decade, prosumer capitalism has fundamentally changed how people and businesses interact, produce, distribute, and consume (Statistics Canada, 2019b). During industrial producer capitalism the major source of economic success was the exploitation of workers who produce large profits for capitalists in exchange for low pay. This was a *singly exploitative economic system* as capitalists focused on exploiting workers (Ritzer, 2015). During post-industrial consumer capitalism, the major source of economic success shifted to the exploitation of consumers who are manipulated through advertising to buy things they do not need and to pay more for these products/services than what it costs to produce. This further maximizes profits for capitalists. The singly exploitative system of producer capitalism evolved into a *doubly exploitative economic system* where capitalists profit from not only the exploitation of workers who produce for low wages but also from consumers who pay high prices for products and over buy (Ritzer, 2015). In prosumer capitalism, the major source of economic success is the exploitation of prosumers which maximizes profits for capitalists in unprecedented ways. Ritzer (2015) argues that the previously doubly exploitation system has now evolved again into a *synergistically double exploitation system.* In this system, capitalists continue to exploit traditional workers and consumers, and they also exploit prosumers. They exploit prosumers into performing work for no pay, and then they exploit prosumers again by selling back to them the products and services that the prosumers contributed to producing (often for free).

Current literature on prosumer capitalism (Ritzer, 2015; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980; Zwick et al., 2008), has primarily focused on prosumption activities where the prosumer does not receive any financial renumeration for their contributions to the labour process. The unpaid prosumption of consumers within the services industries and prosumers of digital platforms is informative but only contributes to understanding one aspect of prosumer capitalism. There is a growing number of people who are engaging in paid prosumption where they earn some form of renumeration for their prosumption activities. For example, some are

directly paid for their prosumption by the digital platform themselves – such as YouTube's renumeration program that enables some users to earn money for contributing content on YouTube (Google, 2017). However, paid prosumption also includes individuals who use platforms to find work or income-opportunities but are paid by other users of the platform. For example, consider the labour-exchange platform Upwork where people can buy and sell knowledge work. Individuals selling their knowledge work engage in prosumption on Upwork by setting up an account, outlining their services and wage payments, applying to job postings, connecting with other prosumers through direct messaging and so on. These users perform these prosumption activities for "free" as they do not expect Upwork to renumerate them for using the digital platform or contributing to content on the platform. Instead, these users perform these prosumption activities with the expectation or desire that their prosumption will "pay off" later and that they will earn money by securing jobs offered on Upwork by other users. In this case, the prosumer earns money from their prosumption activities indirectly through the payment provided by other prosumers. Upwork further benefits by charging both the client and prosumer a service fee for "connecting" them.

According to George Ritzer, prosumer capitalism is a more exploitative form of capitalism because "not only are prosumers (and that is all of us) being doubly and synergistically exploited, but they are to a large degree, if not totally, oblivious to that exploitation (2015, p. 427). Ritzer is primarily discussing the exploitation of unpaid prosumers, but paid prosumers are perhaps more exploited considering that they also provide their own means of production within the labour process of platform work. Therefore, the digital capitalist can profit off the workers' labour power and means of production, and their role as consumers of the digital platforms. However, it is currently unknown how digital paid prosumers regard their work.

This dissertation aims to address the gaps in literature by examining paid prosumption activities and the experiences of paid prosumers – the individuals pursuing work or income-earning opportunities in the platform economy and how they perceive and rationalize the exploitative conditions of this type of capitalism. The following chapter provides a brief literature review on work in the platform economy and the theoretical perspectives guiding this research.

Chapter 3

3 Literature Review

3.1 Overview

The first half of this chapter provides an overview of literature on the platform economy. Literature on the platform economy is still developing but within this review, I examine specific aspects of platform work to inform the various focal points of this study. First, I explore the separation of work and leisure since it is unclear whether individuals perceive platform work as work, a work alternative (e.g., side hustle), or a leisure activity. Next, I explore the platform disruptions to current notions of work and workers. I specifically examine the issues surrounding worker/employer classification, legal regulations, working patterns, and work quality. Subsequently, I examine the literature pertaining to motivations for pursuing platform work. I discuss how this current research will address the gaps in literature to enhance knowledge within this field.

The second half of this chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives: social action theory and conspicuous prosumption, that will largely inform the findings of this research. This chapter ends with a discussion of the research objectives and outlines the four research questions guiding this dissertation.

3.2 The Separation of Work and Leisure

Work has historically been and continues to remain a major human social pursuit especially since most people spend a third of their waking hours working (Rinehart, 2001). Scholars like Karl Marx regard work as what makes humans distinct from other living beings since only humans can consciously and freely transform nature, society, and themselves (Marx 1887). This means that work should give people a sense of fulfillment since they are enacting their life's purpose. However, rather than work being viewed as the meaning of life, work is increasingly becoming perceived as a way of making a living (Terkel, 1972). Today, most people experience work as something that must be done, either with joy or with pain (Muirhead, 2004). In other words,

work can still offer a great sense of accomplishment, status, and pride for some, but it can be meaningless for others (Rinehart, 2001; Terkel, 1972).

For individuals in the latter group, life is often separated into two experiences: labour and leisure. Labour is an alienated form of work where humans exchange their capacity to work (labour power) for a wage, give up control over the conditions of their labour process, and renounce ownership over the results of their labour production (Fuchs, 2014). Those who engage in labour regard it as a futile but necessary activity primarily aimed at meeting biological necessities to sustain human life (Arendt, 1958). In other words, labour for most people is earning an income to purchase these necessities of life and other things. Because labour sustains human life, it is an endless cycle, where a person's needs can never be met once and for all (Arendt, 1958). Instead, the products purchased by labour are consumed quickly, and more labour must be done to purchase more things to consume to maintain life. This creates a cyclical relationship between a person and their labour (Arendt, 1958).

To sustain labour, leisure is crucial since it is the time when humans re-create themselves (hence recreation and leisure are synonyms) and recharge their batteries to be able to continue with the cyclical endeavor of labour. When work becomes a way of living, people must distinguish their day into what Karl Marx refers to as the "realm of necessity" and "realm of freedom" (1887). The realm of necessity includes all the time essential to performing labour. This includes paid time where individuals sell their labour, and the non-paid time that is necessary for a worker to recover from the fatigue of labour (time needed for the "reproduction of labour power") (Marx, 1867; Veal, 2020). By contrast, the realm of freedom comprises all time that can be spent in idleness or in the performance of activities like pursuing education, social functions, and other freely chosen physical and mental endeavours (Marx, 1867: Veal, 2020). The realm of freedom is associated with leisure. Thus, just as industrialism separated the producer from the consumer, leisure was separated from labour. Hence, Marx claimed that when people become alienated from work through wage labour, they can only feel like themselves when they are engaging in leisure away from work (1887). As a result, leisure is now often constructed as the anti-thesis of repetitive, rationalized, and alienated labour, and it is also increasingly regarded as the antithesis of work in a broader sense as well.

Due to the separation of production and consumption, and labour and leisure, there have been many complex and evolving changes in how people occupy their time. Today, people often distinguish time into paid work (labour), unpaid work like childcare and volunteering, and leisure (Gershuny, 2000), seeking a balance among these activities (work-life balance) (Lewis, 2003). The composition of paid work, unpaid work, and leisure have changed throughout society and these variations indicate larger social changes (Gershuny, 2000). For example, Marx (1867) identified that one problem with industrial capitalism was that long working hours demanded by capitalists and the long recuperation time required to reproduce demanding and physical labour left workers with few to no hours left to pursue activities in the realm of freedom for leisure purposes. Thus, during industrial capitalism, labour movements often attempted to reduce working hours from 60+ hours to 40 hours (Veal, 2020). This shortening of the working week gave workers more time to spend outside of paid work. At the time, it was believed that this downward trend would continue throughout post-industrialism (Veal, 2020), since better technologies could be harnessed to improve productivity and further reduce working hours – freeing people up for even more leisure time (Rinehart, 2001).

However, rather than ushering us into the "leisure society" (Lewis, 2003), there is evidence that working hours in many post-industrial societies remained at 40 hours a week, and in some countries like the US, have somewhat increased (Hunnicutt, 1980, 1988; Schor, 1991; Veal, 2020). Thus, instead of working less, some people are working harder and longer, (Lewis, 2003), compared to older generations (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). This led some commentators to suggest that actual time spent working is not declining (Apel, 2019). Instead, time spent in paid labour or pursuing paid labour is increasingly dominating people's work-life balance (Lewis, 2003). These scholars suggested that the intensification of work may be due to consumerism which forces people to work more (Hunnicutt, 1980), weakening unions (Schor, 1991), and/or changes in social values where people equate self-worth with paid employment and longer working hours with commitment to, and affirmation of, one's professional identity (Lewis (2003).

By contrast, evidence from countries like Canada contradicts this literature revealing that working hours in employed positions appear to be declining below 40 hours per week (Statistics

Canada, 2015, 2022a). This suggests that Canadians may be spending greater proportions of their day engaging in leisure or unpaid work. However, these surveys and official data do not account for individuals in non-employment relationships including those who perform platform work or those who do not regard their platform activities as work. This is problematic considering that non-standard work including self-employment is on the rise in Canada (Krahn, 1995; Yssaad & Ferrao, 2019). Moreover, multiple jobholding or the practice of having two or more jobs simultaneously is also increasing in Canada (Fulford & Patterson, 2019). Multiple jobholding can be a combination of paid employees in full-time jobs, part-time jobs and/or self-employed persons in various combinations (Fulford & Patterson, 2019). There is evidence that multiple jobholding has grown because of the platform economy which offers greater variety in non-standard work (Fulford & Patterson, 2019). Thus, given the increases in multiple jobholding and non-standard platform work, it is unclear if Canadians are actually spending more time in leisure or if they are experiencing an intensification of work where they willingly sacrifice their leisure to pursue more labour (Stebbins, 2009), like paid prosumption, due to inabilities to secure full-time working hours (Rinehart, 2001).

This study will help to resolve this gap in the literature by examining the experiences of individuals who pursue platform activities in addition to hours spent in their other roles and responsibilities. This will shed light onto participants experiences of working and improve understanding of whether individuals perceive their platform activities as permanent work, a work alternative like a side hustle, or a leisure activity.

3.3 Platform Disruptions

According to Woodcock (2021) the work facilitated using digital platforms is not new. Instead, platforms provide new ways for connecting workers to paid opportunities (Graham & Woodcock, 2018). This results in the migration of many forms of work to online digital platforms (Graham & Woodcock, 2018). There have been many industry disruptions resulting from digital platforms since platforms can often accommodate offline activities as well. When digital platforms obtain a share of the market, it is likely a non-platform provider has lost it (Srnicek, 2017). For example, ridesharing platforms like Uber and Lyft offer transportation

services using their platforms to connect individuals that provide transportation to those requesting transportation. These platforms have gained shares of the transportation sector at the cost of traditional taxis and limousine companies losing business (Kenney et al., 2020). The disruption caused by platform companies emerging as alternative providers of goods and services is wide. There is also consensus that the platform economy has already impacted the structure of the retail sector with eCommerce eliminating the need for brick-and-mortar stores (Kovalainen et al., 2020). Even more, the presence of the platform economy has fundamentally altered societal notions of what it means to work or have a "job" (Davis, 2016; Kovalainen et al., 2020).

3.3.1 Ambiguity in worker classification

Platforms have disrupted what it means to be an employer and created ambiguity in what it means to be a worker. Marx (1887) regarded a wage worker as a person who is separated from owning the means of production and who's survival is entirely dependent on their ability to sell their labour for wages. However, platform workers are often different from traditional wage workers since they provide their own means of production as well as labour power. For example, a person who performs rideshare for platform companies like Uber and Lyft must provide their own (personal) vehicles to use for ridesharing and must take on the external costs of operation (e.g., pay for gas, insurance, vehicle maintenance, cleaning, and so on).

Research has found that most platform companies separate themselves from the designation of employer by positioning their operations as digital technologies or digital intermediaries that connect various groups (such as people offering labour and people seeking to purchase labour) rather than employers of services (Woodcock, 2021). The fact that platform workers provide their own means of production contributes to the (mis)perception that these individuals are independent contractors or micro-entrepreneurs rather than employees. In Canada, an independent contractor (or self-employed individual) is defined as "someone who is in business for themselves" and cannot be disciplined by the business who is contracting them other than having their contract terminated. As well, an independent contractor has opportunities to make profit and/or risk losing money from the work. They also have autonomy to determine how, when, and where work is performed and whether to subcontract some of the work (Government of Canada, n.d.). The contractor status exempts platform companies from having to offer benefits

like minimum wage, health insurance, and overtime pay (Gleim et al., 2019). However, the (mis)classification of these individuals as contractors versus employees (and vice versa) has legal implications and is at the center of various court cases spanning across Canada (Mojtehedzadeh, 2020), US, UK, and Europe (Hagiu & Wright, 2019). To further complicate matters, these court cases have often resulted in different outcomes in different jurisdictions (Hagiu & Wright, 2019). For example, in the US, there is no single test for determining whether workers are independent contractors or employees. This means that different States may rule differently depending on each State's individual laws (Kessler, 2018).

The ambiguity in the status of these workers is partly due to the nature of platform work and how platforms are organized. In particular, the business model for multi-sided platforms involves a minimum of three parties; the user/buyer of the product/service, the provider of the product/service, and the platform which acts as an intermediary that connects the other two parties (Gramano, 2019). If the role of the platform is only to connect buyers and providers then the latter are indeed independent contractors since they control when they work, how they work, for whom they work, and their payment, all of which are benchmarks for contract work (Hagiu & Wright, 2019). However, many have argued that most digital platforms do not merely act as intermediaries but are instead powerful entities that set and regulate the relationship between the buyer and provider (Gramano, 2019). For instance, rideshare drivers and delivery couriers using Uber and Deliveroo for platform work are unable to negotiate their pay or determine their driving routes, both of which are dictated by the platforms themselves. These drivers are also expected to bear the platform's logo and abide by the platforms "quality standards". Even more, these drivers are not compensated by the customer directly. Instead, all payments (including tip) are managed by the platform, and later distributed to the driver after a percentage has been deducted by the platform (Gramano, 2019). The control and authority that platform companies exhibit over providers does not satisfy the criteria for designating independent contractors and indicates some features of typical employment relationships. However, the grey area regarding classification makes it possible for platform companies to categorize workers as independent contractors despite exercising control over the labour process preventing these individuals from truly being autonomous and independent (Kessler, 2018).

Other literature has referred to individuals earning income online as micro-entrepreneurs that share greater similarities with small businesses than with employees (Duggan et al., 2017; Vandaele, 2018; Zervas et al., 2017). However, this designation is contested as well since digital activities are highly constrained by, and contingent upon, the platform's terms and policies which dictate how they may go about selling or sharing goods with removal of their "business" for failing to abide by these policies. For example, Airbnb hosts can be suspended from the platform for failing to meet basic requirements, overall ratings, response rates, number of accepted reservations, providing essential amenities, and having too many cancellations (Airbnb, 2019). Thus, these individuals do not purely embody the entrepreneurial status either.

Many scholars argue that these individuals earning income using digital platforms represent an altered working relationship where workers are separated from the employer via platforms (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Harris & Krueger, 2015; Krueger, 2018). For example, Kessler argues that new laws or regulations are needed to better classify platform workers since current laws and regulations are outdated and were "put into place long before anyone had imagined they'd find work with a smartphone" (2018, p. 98). Thus, advocates have promoted the use of a new classification "independent workers" – a term designed specifically for individuals who earn money online through their activities on platforms (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Harris & Krueger, 2015; Krueger, 2018). Independent worker was coined by Harris and Krueger (2015) as a new hybrid category to represent these new and emerging work relationships in the platform economy that do not easily fit into legal definitions of employee and independent contractor. An independent worker is someone who has the ability to choose when to work, whom to work for, and whether to work at all, whereas the platform firm retains significant control over the way independent workers perform their jobs.[7]

Literature has not reconciled whether people who earn money from their online activities are employees, micro-entrepreneurs, independent contractors, or demonstrate a new work identity (and relationship) altogether. The overall lack of consensus from academia, legal frameworks, and platform companies needs to be resolved. This research will address this gap in literature by

[7] See Harris and Kruger (2015) for full definition of independent contractor

examining how actual platform workers perceive their own work, identity, and relationships with the platforms they utilize. The findings may provide a different perspective that can aid in resolving the platform worker classification debate.

3.3.2 Issues in regulating the platform economy

Since platform companies position themselves as technologies rather than as employers, and the individuals operating within the platform economy are not legally classified as employees, there is a grey area within regulations governing work and employment (Duggan et al., 2022; Stewart, & Stanford, 2017). Most countries' existing regulations are currently defined by standard employment relationships. This effectively excludes individuals who are engaged in platform work arrangements (Forde et al., 2017). As a result, most modern societies have a general lack of labour protections for platform workers (Duggan et al., 2022; Frost, 2017; Stewart & Stanford, 2017). The lack of protections can result in limited opportunities for on-the-job training, upward advancement, and workers do not have access to social safety net programs like unemployment insurance and workers' compensation (Weil, 2017). Currently there is debate over how to effectively govern the platform economy and whether societies should revise existing legislation or establish new legislation to oversee platform workers (Duggan et al., 2022). Current discourse on regulations seeks to address the issues of labour exploitation, taxation, and worker classification (Duggan et al., 2022; Prassl, 2018; Schiek & Gideon, 2018). However, platform companies have resisted efforts to change or regulate the platform economy arguing that regulations will eradicate the flexibility that accompanies platform work (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Moreover, regulating the platform economy is even more complex because technology typically develops faster than labour regulations (Duggan et al., 2022). This means that new technologies may emerge to alter the nature of platform work rendering potential changes to regulations obsolete. This research will inform debates surrounding regulating platform work by examining platform workers' motivations for pursuing platform work and their opinions on regulating this industry.

3.3.3 Altered employment relationships and working patterns

Given that the platform economy is operating in a regulatory grey area, platform companies can strengthen their claims as non-employers by offering non-standard arrangements and zero-hour

contracts. This means that most platform workers do not have consistent working times nor standard working hours (Berg et al., 2014; Bosch, 2006). In the traditional services sector, zero-hour contracts (often referred to as on-call work) are offered to employees by employers who do not guarantee any work hours or income (Kalleberg, 2011). However, employees on these contracts can be called to work with short notice if, and when, required by their employer or face contract termination (Koumenta & Williams, 2018). Historically, zero-hour contracts have been criticized by trade unions as exploitative contracts that are contributing to underemployment, work precarity (Kalleberg, 2011), and threatening job quality (Koumenta & Williams, 2018). However, zero-hour contracts have been rebranded within the platform economy. Platform companies promote zero-hour contracts as beneficial for workers since the workers can choose their own working hours including how much to work, when to work, and they are not penalized with threat of termination for short or long periods of inactivity (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020). In other words, compared to the traditional services sector where employers do not guarantee they will offer any work or income by utilizing zero-hour contracts, workers in the platform economy do not guarantee they will accept any work or income offered to them on the digital platform.

Proponents of the platform economy have suggested that the autonomy provided to workers via zero-hour contracts provides them with "hyper-flexibility" that can empower workers by allowing them to pursue additional endeavours while working and earning income (Duggan et al., 2022). However, critics of platform work have argued that the use of zero-hour contracts by platform companies creates imprecise contracts for how much and exactly what work is entailed (c., 2019b). This treats labour as a commodity that can be "purchased and dispensed" on demand and without legal protections for workers (Wood et al., 2019b, p. 53). Thus, there are concerns that stable fulltime and benefitted work will be increasingly replaced by precarious and short-term roles (Kuhn, 2016). Literature has not resolved whether zero-hour contracts offered on digital platforms are as exploitative and precarious as they are in the services sector. Literature has also not reconciled why individuals willingly seek zero-hour contracts compared to conventional employment in traditional industries. Thus, this research will address this gap by exploring why some platform workers seek or need flexible work and whether they would sacrifice opportunities for job security and quality to retain work flexibility.

3.3.4 Work quality

The final disruption to work resulting from platforms is the issue of decent and quality work. Many scholars suggest that there is an absence of decent work in the platform economy (Duggan et al., 2022; MacDonald & Giazitzoglu, 2019). Because the platform economy is mostly unregulated, platform work by its very nature is often characterized by low job security, reduced commitment, and loyalty between parties (Wood et al., 2019a), few social protections, and lack of union representation or opportunities for collective action, (Duggan et al., 2022; Wood et al., 2018). There are also severe health-and-safety issues for some platform work and mental health problems from working in extended isolation (Duggan et al., 2022). Scholars also argue that there is lower pay in the platform economy compared to permanent employment in more traditional industries and this means that individuals must often work longer hours, more intensely, and perhaps hold multiple roles, or have additional income streams to survive (Duggan et al., 2022; Wood, 2016). This may result in longer overall hours and irregular, unpredictable work schedules (Wood, 2016).

Given the issue of quality of work within the platform economy, it is still unclear whether individuals freely choose to pursue platform work or if they lack reasonable alternatives for meaningful work due to larger structural and economic changes in society which force them to pursue platform work. This research will address this gap in literature by examining individuals' decisions for pursuing platform work, and how they perceive or rationalize the negative aspects of their labour.

3.4 Motivations for pursuing platform work

Current literature on the platform economy has begun to identify a variety of factors that may motivate individuals to pursue platform work. These motivations can be separated into push and pull factors. According to Keith, Harms, and Tay (2019, p. 289) "push factors are (often negative) external factors that influence one's actions… Pull factors are (often positive) internally driven choices that influence one's actions". Some scholars have identified money-oriented motivations, recognizing that some individuals may be motivated to work in the platform economy to create multiple income streams either through an entrepreneurial spirit (pull

factor) or because of economic necessity (push factor) (Dolber et al., 2021; Ravenelle, 2019a). Other scholars highlight more intrinsic motivations for pursuing platform work including desires for autonomy, enjoyment, flexibility, and control (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020), which are pull factors (Keith et al., 2019). Some platform workers may also be motivated to pursue platform work because of larger structural issues like unemployment resulting from debilitating health conditions (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020), which are push factors (Keith et al., 2019). Research by Dunn (2020) also highlights that individuals' perceptions of platform work vary as well. Some individuals may regard platform work as temporary and pursue it for a short time while they search for more permanent (typically non-platform) work. By contrast, others perceive platform work as a lifelong career and pursue it more permanently (Dunn, 2020).

Across the literature, scholars have emphasized the platform workers are not a homogenous group (Hoang et al., 2020; Keith et al., 2019; Kessler, 2018; Woodcock, 2021). Instead, people are motivated to pursue platform work for a variety of reasons and may experience different barriers-to-entry as well. Research by Hoang et al. (2020) identified occupational segregation within the platform economy suggesting that some individuals may self-select or sort into specific types of platform work depending on traditional understandings of who should perform certain types of work. In other words, some individuals pursue specific platform work based on societal expectations of the work as "men or women's work, white or non-white, and manual or non-manual" (Hoang et al., 2020, p. 15). Similarly, literature has also found more common motivations for specific types of platform work over others. For example, Peticca-Harris et al. (2020) and Hall and Krueger (2018) investigated rideshare drivers and found that pay, flexibility, autonomy, and low entry barriers commonly motivated these platform workers. By contrast, crowdworkers are often motivated by working remotely and working immediately (Kessler, 2018).

Scholars have begun to compare different types of platform work and the experiences of the individuals who pursue them (Kessler, 2018; Ravenelle, 2019a, 2019b; Woodcock, 2021). I expand on this literature by examining twenty-three different types of platform work and combinations of platform work. This provides a more holistic examination of the platform economy and the variety of individuals who utilize different platforms and prosumption activities

to earn income. Moreover, examining a broader range of platform work can help to identify whether there are any patterns in specific motivations due to specific conditions/features of the prosumption activities. This allows for identifying more nuanced differences in push and pull factors.

3.5 Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption will be used to inform my understanding of the participants' experiences working in the platform economy. These frameworks will also be useful in identifying patterns in the interviews that may highlight larger structural issues that shape the experiences of participants.

3.5.1 Social Action Theory

Social action theory understands social phenomena through the lens of the individual. This theory posits that individuals are rationalizing beings (Breen, 2012), capable of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting (Weber, 1963). This means that people's actions, behaviours, and conduct do not result from inevitable social forces that push or force people in one direction of action or another. Instead, people can have motives and justifications for their actions and behaviours, and these motives are guided by subjective and symbolic meanings (Parkin, 1982). In other words, human behaviour is informed by the social meanings people attach to their environment, their subjective perceptions of what is going on, and their personal assessment of goals and how they can achieve these goals (Allahar, 1986, 1995). This means that a person's perception of opportunities or constraints will influence which course of action or behaviour they adopt over other potential actions and behaviours (Parkin, 1982). Only when these meanings are uncovered can social behaviour truly be understood. Thus, meanings and perceptions of reality are important in explaining why people do the things they do and must be treated as social facts (Parkin, 1982).

The social world can be understood in terms of social actions (Weber, 1963). Action is human behaviour where the acting individual attaches subjective meaning to it (Parkin, 1982; Weber, 1963). An action is social when the acting individual considers the actions and reactions of

others and orients their action(s) accordingly (Weber, 1963). In this sense, social action is very different from nonrational habituation or biological impulse because it is always intelligible behaviour (Kippenberg, 2011). However, the intrusion of irrational elements such as emotions like anger, pride, or jealousy can impact action and behaviour so that it is not always purely rational (Parkin, 1982).

Social action theory purposes that we cannot comprehend *what* is going on unless we know *why* it is going on (Parkin, 1982). For instance, Weber suggests that we cannot understand what the woodcutter is doing until we uncover his reasons for holding the axe (Parkin, 1982). Similarly, we cannot understand how the platform economy may impact society until we find out the reasons for why people pursue platform work and what meanings they attach to their actions and activities. Uncovering the symbolic meanings motivating their prosumption activities will enable us to understand why these individuals continue working despite the precarious (and in some cases dangerous) nature of platform work.[8]

This framework distinguishes among four types of social action: traditional, affectual, value-rational, and instrumental. Traditional refers to action based on habit or because it was performed in the past (Weber, 1963). It is engaged in simply because it has always been done that way e.g., you wear the same sweater on Christmas every year. Affectual refers to action determined by emotions and feelings. Individuals engage in it without reflecting or thinking, e.g., while driving someone cuts you off on the road and you just give them the finger. Value-rational social action occurs through conscious belief in intrinsic, ethical, religious, legal, and aesthetic values, e.g., you get vaccinated because you value community efforts and believe that you are doing your part to ensure the safety of wider society. Finally, instrumental refers to action as a means of realizing your own premeditated and calculated aims or purposes, e.g., you choose to pursue a post-secondary education because you think it will better your chances of obtaining a “good” job in the future (Parkin, 1982). Only value-rational and instrumental social action are goal-oriented

[8] Note: Participants may not always be aware of their motivations, or their actions may be subconsciously motivated or habitual. It is also possible that some individuals may not be able to articulate why they do what they do. As well, rationalization may not always reflect actual motivations.

and considered rational actions (Weber, 1963). This study will draw on the rational social actions when analyzing the data generated through in-depth interviews.

Rational action is shaped by rationality which are means-end calculations for making decisions (Geva, 2015). There are four types of rationality or mental processes that guide rational social action: practical, formal, substantive, and theoretical (Kalberg, 1980). Practical rationality guides action motivated by an individual's purely pragmatic and egoistic interests (Kalberg, 1980; Weber, 1946). This type of rationality occurs when individuals accept their given situations and calculate the most practical, efficient, and effective means for achieving their goals. This rationality explains differences in individuals' social actions as resulting from differences in the means available to them at the time of action. By contrast, formal rationality motivates actions guided by societal laws, rules, and regulations (Kalberg, 1980; Weber, 1946). In other words, this type of rationality calculates the right and wrong ways to act based on society's rules and laws rather than the most efficient or practical ways to achieve a goal. Similarly, substantive rationality looks for the best course of action guided by all of one's collective values, honours, and ethical principles. In other words, choosing what is right or wrong based on your own moral codes and values rather than the most efficient manner to act (Kalberg, 1980). Finally, theoretical rationality occurs when individuals orient their actions based on abstract concepts that they use to view the world or to provide coherent meaning to everyday life (Weber, 1946). For example, individuals who are devoutly religious may view natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes as punishment for incurring the wrath of God(s). Their social action is indirectly impacted by these theoretical concepts, such as when a person abstains from acts they deem lustful, greedy, or gluttonous because they believe these actions to be sinful (Kalberg, 1980).

It is important to note that rational social action is also influenced by the past, present, and future and undergoes changes over time, evolving throughout human history. Thus, human behaviour including motivations for working can develop, improve, modify, and change (Weber, 1946). This is a strength of this framework as it can account for changes in individuals' decisions for working. Another strength of this framework is that it understands social phenomena not through the fragmented actions of individuals but through the identification of larger patterns of action.

Patterns of social action can inform us about sociocultural processes that characterize long-term historical developments or short-term societal movements (Kalberg, 1980).

3.5.2 Conspicuous Prosumption

Conspicuous Consumption – Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption proposes that individuals from the leisure class visibly display their wealth and status either by engaging in extensive leisure activity (purposeful waste of time and effort) or through excessive consumption of lavish goods and services (wasteful spending) (Veblen, 1899). This theory proports that people consume conspicuously for two main reasons: to be recognized by their peers and to achieve/display their higher social status in society (Veblen, 1899). In other words, conspicuous consumption is activity that is highly motivated by the desire to be recognized by others either through emulation or envy (Veblen, 1899). Crucial to this theory is the idea of wastefulness. These actions are wasteful in that their purpose is merely to promote material and social superiority and do not contribute to societal or individual development (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012).

Although mainly practiced by the leisure class composed of wealthy individuals of high social status, the principles of conspicuous consumption have trickled down to the lower classes who seek to emulate the leisure class. Individuals from higher social classes engage in invidious comparison – a type of conspicuous consumption to distinguish themselves from lower classes. By comparison, individuals from lower classes engage in pecuniary emulation – a form of conspicuous consumption where the individual seeks to be thought of as a member of a higher class or social status (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Veblen, 1899). For example, a wealthier individual may purchase an expensive and rare designer handbag to distinguish themselves from the lower classes and provoke the envy of other people: this person is engaging in invidious comparison. An individual from a lower class may purchase a knockoff or imitation version of that same designer bag or purchase a much less expensive designer bag to emulate being in a higher class. This is pecuniary emulation.

One issue highlighted by conspicuous consumption is that it is performed by individuals of all social statuses and classes. Unlike the leisure class who possess excess wealth and can spend

lavishly without financial repercussions, individuals from the lower classes often live paycheck-to-paycheck and their conspicuous consumption via pecuniary emulation comes at the cost of forgoing necessities in exchange for lavish goods and services, or they may increase the amount they work to earn more money to pay for these goods and services displaying the work-and-spend syndrome (Schor, 1991).

The conspicuous consumption of leisure was prominent during preindustrial societies and during producer capitalism due to the scarcity of lavish goods. This prevented lower class individuals from accessing these goods due to shortage and high prices (Veblen, 1899). Thus, maximizing leisure became an important goal for many industrial workers. However, as populations became more mobile; mass production enabled the manufacturing of more goods; and as competition and overproduction drove down the prices of durable goods, the display of wealth and status through consuming goods became possible for most. Eventually, consumerism became more important than engaging in leisure (Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1899). The conspicuous consumption of goods and services increased significantly in the period of consumer capitalism.

Conspicuous Production – Expanding on this theory, Polanyi (1960) introduced the idea of conspicuous production, referring to the construction of target-driven production that serves to create an illusion of productive success even though the goods produced do not meet the satisfaction or needs of the consumer (Overton & Banks, 2015). However, in recent years, the term conspicuous production has been used to indicate the worship of labour (Tarnoff, 2017). Or rather, it is not only how much you spend that conveys status and wealth, but how hard and how much you work. With the decline of standard full-time and lifelong employment and the rise in precarious work, individual productivity is becoming a marker of success and status as unwanted leisure is forced upon a growing number of people who can only obtain temporary and part-time jobs or who cannot find any work at all (Rinehart, 2001). Like conspicuous consumption, conspicuous production is not about working to meet one’s needs. Rather it is the public display of productivity and work that is used to symbolize class and power (Tarnoff, 2017). In other words, conspicuous production is aimed at achieving recognition for being a “good worker” or productive member of society through excess working. Conspicuous productivity can be used to explain the rising increase in overworked individuals or “workaholics” (Lewis, 2003). In

addition, conspicuous production is being used by people to justify their status positions, wealth, and material possessions compared to other individuals, suggesting that because these people work more hours or harder, they deserve to have more (Tarnoff, 2017). Thus, conspicuous production reinforces social and economic inequality through the guise of meritocracy.

Conspicuous Prosumption – The theories of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous production indicate social status through the spectacle of excess spending and working (Tarnoff, 2017). With the return of prosumption as the symbolic wedge between production and consumption has imploded (Ritzer, 2010), it is increasingly difficult to clearly distinguish between individual actions as indicators of pure consumption or pure production, especially activities within the digital sphere since all online activities are predicated on prosumption. No longer are individuals solely consumers or producers. They engage in an indistinguishable amount of both. In this dissertation I expand on the previous framework of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous production to include conspicuous prosumption – a gratuitous mix of work and consuming which both serve to simultaneously display status and wealth to others through the sacrifice of leisure. In addition, people may engage in intense prosumption to reduce the costs of goods and services they purchase in order to obtain the envy of others or to display a certain lifestyle. This perspective will be useful in understanding individual decisions to work in the platform economy and for uncovering how people rationalize their experiences of work and exploitation.

While individuals may be able to identify objective motivations for pursuing platform work, they may not be able to easily identify the meanings behind their actions that motivated them to act in one way over others. Therefore, social action theory will help us to better understand individuals' decision-making for pursuing platform work while conspicuous prosumption will enable us to understand how individual motivations and actions are shaped by capitalism's larger social structures, ideologies, and mass cultures. Together, both frameworks will provide strong basis for uncovering the symbolic meaning behind rational actions guiding decisions to work.

3.6 Research Objectives

This study builds on the literature discussed above by exploring digital platform work from the perspective and experiences of the individuals who perform this work and who earn income from their prosumer activities on digital platforms. This focus on platform work and the platform economy will enhance understanding of prosumer capitalism and how workers rationalize their experiences of modern capitalism's organizational forms, modes of exploitation, jobs, and markets. This study is guided by four exploratory research questions designed to help uncover the decision-making process behind individuals' choices to pursue platform work and how they rationalize their actions:

1) Which factors motivate participants to choose to work in the platform economy?
2) What challenges do participants experience in pursuit of their platform work and how do they rationalize their experiences?
3) Are participants working in excess and what meanings do they attach to their platform work?
4) How do participants perceive the future of work?

Both social action theory and conspicuous prosumption are well suited to provide explanatory power that can address these exploratory research questions. Moreover, a strength of both these frameworks is their capacity to identify larger patterns within the individual experiences of social phenomena.

Chapter 4

4 Methods

4.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the methods employed in this study. To address the gaps in literature and to expand on our understandings of modern work within prosumer capitalism, this study utilizes qualitative semi-structured interviews with different platform workers across different types of platform work. This qualitative method is appropriate for drawing out detailed information from individuals that captures the richness of their everyday working lives in the broader context of how the platform economy is currently organized and regulated. This method is also appropriate for capturing individual perceptions on the future trajectory of work. Examining multiple types of work in this sector also allows for the direct comparing of these activities to inform how experiences are shaped by the type of work. In addition, this approach draws on a multitude of unique perspectives which will aid in capturing how platform work may be similar to, and/or distinct from, participants' experiences within traditional employment.

4.2 Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of basic beliefs or "worldview" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004), that orients knowledge-building and how phenomena is studied and interpreted (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The choice of paradigm establishes the intent, motivation, and expectations for the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Choices for methodology, literature, and research design are also influenced by paradigmatic approach.

This research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm posits that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12), through a complex process involving history, language, and action (Schwandt, 1998). Because of this, human behaviour is purposive (Bruner, 1990; Schwandt, 1998), rather than merely reactive. In other words, humans are autonomous beings that "construe, construct, and interpret their own behaviours and that of their fellow agents" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 225). As such, the interpretivist paradigm's primary focus is to uncover meaning behind action to help us better understand (*verstehen)* social phenomena

(Schwandt, 1998). To do this, the interpretivist paradigm values examining complex lived experiences from the point of view of the individuals since meanings are “created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 225).

A goal of this research is to uncover the various meanings that individuals attach to their platform work. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, this research utilizes data collected from in-depth interviews. In-depth interviewing is a powerful qualitative data-gathering technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews that explore the respondents’ perspectives on certain ideas, events, or situations (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide richer and more detailed information by reconstructing the participants’ experiences and understandings of a topic (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Miller & Crabtree, 2004).

4.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19, a pandemic (Chappell, 2020). Following this announcement and the rising number of active cases, Canada and many other countries worldwide implemented measures to curb the spread of the virus. For instance, the federal government of Canada closed its borders to non-essential travel and implemented a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all arrivals to Canada (The Canadian Press, 2020). The province of Ontario where Western University is situated, declared its first COVID-19 related state of emergency on March 17, 2020. As a result, all public events were cancelled, public schools, buildings and spaces were closed, stay-at-home orders were implemented for all non-essential purposes, and social gatherings were restricted (The Canadian Press, 2020).

Participant recruitment and data collection for this project began shortly after the state of emergency in Ontario was announced. Due to these measures and the closure of public communal spaces, the initial strategies for participant recruitment and data collection were logistically altered to promote social distancing ensuring the safety of the participants and

interviewer.[9] Detailed description of the recruitment and data collection procedures are outline in the sections that follow, but here I will outline the changes to the procedure due to COVID-19. No physical copies of the recruitment posters were displayed in public buildings including universities, colleges, and cafes in London, Ontario, and Toronto, Ontario. Instead, only electronic copies of the recruitment posters were published on digital platforms. In addition, no interviews were conducted in-person. All interviews were conducted either through the video calling program Zoom or over the telephone. It is important to note that stay-at-home orders increased the overall number of people at home, working from home, and schooling from home. This placed unprecedented strain on household bandwidth capacities and on internet providers to accommodate the large volumes of internet traffic (McLeod & Jackson, 2020). So, while interviews over Zoom were preferred to include body language and facial expressions as informative data, participants located in Canada were given the option to choose between Zoom interview or telephone interview to better accommodate participants.

Because these interviews occurred during the "first wave" of the COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals also experienced new strains placed on their personal, professional, and social livelihoods. In some cases, individuals also experienced work displacement (unemployment or temporary job loss) due to the pandemic. This created a unique context that may have had a particularly large impact on the participants and their perceptions about their work and the platform economy. To capture these viewpoints, a question was added to the interview guide that asked participants to describe how COVID-19 had impacted their platform work or ability to work.

4.4 Data Collection and Procedures

4.4.1 Research Ethics

Ethics approval for this research was granted on March 11, 2020, by the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) at Western University (NMREB File #115338). Notices of approval and letter of information can be found in the Appendix (Appendix A and B, respectively).

[9] Any logistical changes to this study's procedures remained within the limits of the ethics approval.

4.4.2 Categories of Platform Work

The platform economy is not a homogenous sector (Hoang et al., 2020; Newlands et al., 2018; Schor, 2017), but a collection of diverse earning opportunities across different industries that may have distinct outcomes for those who perform the work. A driving force motivating this study is to explore the heterogeneity of the platform economy in a holistic manner. To do so, this study examines a wide variety of different types of platform work. Due to the large number of different activities within the platform economy, the work examined in this study was organized into two broad categories: in-person platform work and remote platform work (Mendes, 2020). Both categories involve work that is facilitated and organized by, or operates on, a digital platform (including emailing lists, websites, or smartphone apps).

More specifically, in-person platform work refers to activities that must be performed in-person (physically) at a specific location(s) or where there is direct contact between the worker and the final client (Mendes, 2020). This includes working for rideshare driving companies like Uber and Lyft, delivering goods for companies like Skipthedishes, DoorDash, and Amazon Flex, miscellaneous manual labour using platforms such as AskforTask and TaskRabbit or housecleaning using platforms like Aspen Clean.

By contrast, remote platform work refers to activities that can be performed primarily online, and do not require the individual to be physically present at any specific geographic location. This includes performing online microtasks and crowdwork for Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), and online administrative work or creative/knowledge work on sites like Fivver and Upwork.

According to literature, many platform workers provide more than one type of services and are often active on two or more platforms to reduce income risk by increasing variety in work (Mendes, 2020). Similarly, in this study there were some participants who reported performing multiple types of in-person platform work or remote platform work, respectively. However, there were also several participants who reported that they engaged in combinations of in-person and remote types of platform work. To better accommodate the unique experiences and perspectives of these individuals, a third broad category was created called “mixed platform work”.

It is important to note that many platform work activities contain both in-person and remote elements. For instance, while most crowdwork involves individuals performing remote online activities like filling out surveys, data entry, and transcribing audio/video recordings, other types of crowdwork may ask individuals to, for example, go out to a store and take photographs of bar codes on certain products and upload these photos online for payment. In this specific case, this remote platform work contains an in-person element. Similarly, in-person platform work can require online elements such as a painter spending one day a week reposting advertisement(s) on sites like Kijiji or Craigslist. The organizing of the platform work examined in this study into these categories was based on whether the work activities were mostly completed in-person or remotely.

4.4.3 Participant Recruitment

Recruitment for this study began in March 2020 and ended in October 2020. Examining a wide variety of individuals working in many different areas of the platform economy offers a more holistic view of this economy. As such, the inclusion criteria used to determine eligibility was designed to be broad enough to accommodate the diversity of this sector. The three practical criteria include a) currently or previously earned income from platform work; b) can speak English; c) age 18 years old or older at time of interview. The first criterion ensures that the participants have actual experience working in the platform economy. The inclusion of people who have previously worked in the platform economy was intended to capture key information on why they left this sector and whether they would return to it in the future. The second criterion ensures that there is no language barrier between participant and interviewer. The third criterion acknowledges that teenagers have very different experiences of work and the labour market compared to adults (Caroleo et al., 2018). As a result, individuals under age 18 were excluded from this study.

All participants were compensated for their contribution to the study. Most participants were compensated with an electronic gift-card valuing $5.00. However, the participants recruited specifically through Amazon Mechanical Turk were given the option to be compensated with either an electronic gift card or with a $5.00 bonus added to their Amazon Mechanical Turk account (in lieu of cash compensation due to COVID-19 restrictions) which I discuss in further

detail below. Three non-probability sampling strategies were used to recruit participants: convenience, snowball, and purposive sampling. For all three strategies of recruitment, interested participants were required to make initial contact with me through email. Through email, I confirmed with the individual their eligibility for inclusion in the study, provided a copy of the letter of information and informed consent, coordinated an interview time, and provided my phone number for the participant to call at the time of the scheduled phone interview or provided the Zoom link for the interview.

Convenience sampling was primarily used to identify any individuals performing any types of platform work for inclusion in this study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy where members of the target population (individuals who are currently or have previously worked in this industry) are selected based on the inclusionary criteria (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Digital copies of the recruitment poster (see Appendix C) were uploaded and posted to public digital platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Kijiji, and Craigslist. The digital posts on Facebook and Instagram were uploaded to my personal social media pages and first exposed to my personal contacts. These digital posts were then shared by seven of my personal contacts to their own social media pages, thereby, spreading the digital recruitment posters to a wider pool of potential participants.

The digital recruitment poster was also published on two e-marketplaces for classified advertisements: Kijiji and Craigslist. Both sites offer classified advertisements based on geographic location. To reach a broader range of potential participants, posts containing the recruitment poster were uploaded to the corresponding locations which I identified as places with large platform economy presence. On Kijiji, a Canadian site, these posts were uploaded to the location pages of London, Ontario; Kitchener, Ontario; Greater Toronto Area, Ontario; Ottawa, Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta; and Montreal, Quebec. Craigslist is both used in Canada and the United States and posts of the recruitment poster were uploaded to the location pages of London, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Kitchener, Ontario, Vancouver, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta; Montreal, Quebec; Ottawa, Ontario; New York, USA; San Francisco, USA, and Los Angeles, USA. Both Kijiji and Craigslist organize classified ads according to categories. On both sites, the recruitment posts were uploaded to the category

“Community – Volunteer” for each geographic location. All recruitment posts for each geographic location were re-uploaded every 30 days (when the ad automatically expires). All ads were removed by November 2020.

Snowball sampling was also utilized. Twenty individuals were recruited to participate in this study by the referral of participants who had already participated in the project. Referrals were made by the participant without any prompting from the interviewer. At the conclusion of the interview or shortly after the interview via email, some participants indicated to the interviewer that they knew of other individuals who were interested or would be interested in participating in the study. The interviewer allowed these participants to share the recruitment poster and the interviewer’s email address with the interested parties. In no situation was private contact information of prospective participants given to the researcher by the referring participants (as per the ethics approval). Prospective participants were informed by the referring participant to make first contact with the interviewer. As a result of snowball sampling, some of the participants interviewed for this study share similar demographic characteristics, workplaces, or personal histories. This may have a biasing effect. However, representativeness and generalizability are not the primary foci of this study and so the use of this nonprobability sampling technique is appropriate.

As a final strategy, purposive sampling was used to directly recruit specific types of platform workers. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers choose specific members of a population for inclusion in the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Drawing on prior knowledge of the more “common” types of platform work, I recruited directly on the platforms where much of the work takes place or where workers find clients. I also recruited directly in online forum groups meant to connect specific types of workers. This purposive sampling strategy helped to ensure that there were similar proportions of participants from different types of platform work.

To better recruit rideshare drivers and delivery couriers, I joined various community groups on Facebook for rideshare drivers and delivery couriers. These groups are generally created as spaces for workers or individuals interested in joining these platform companies to meet one

another and to talk about their experiences or offer/obtain information. These groups were private and required permission from admins to join. I was transparent with the admins about my intentions for joining the group and asked permission to post the recruitment poster in the group page. With permission from the admins, recruitment posters were uploaded to these community pages. I also joined Uber Drivers Forum an online forum dedicated to ridesharing drivers and uploaded a post containing the recruitment poster directly to this forum.

To better target remote workers, I similarly joined Facebook community groups for freelancers and online workers and posted the recruitment poster on these group pages after obtaining permission from the group's admins. In addition, I recruited directly on two popular freelance platforms: Fivver and Upwork. I made accounts on both platforms and created recruitment posts with the recruitment poster embedded within the post.

To target online crowdworkers, I turned to Amazon Mechanical Turk. I decided to recruit directly on this site because it is a widely used crowdsourcing website in Canada and the US. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is owned by Amazon.com Inc. MTurk is an online marketplace where individuals or businesses referred to as "Requesters" can hire a diverse, on-demand workforce of individuals known as "Turkers" or crowdworkers to perform various virtual tasks that requires human intelligence (Amazon Mechanical Turk, 2018). Requesters post jobs known as Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) which are individual tasks that a Turker can complete in order to collect a reward (payment). Requesters determine the rate of payment for each HIT and after Turkers complete the HIT, the Requesters have thirty days to approve or reject the work submitted by each individual Turker. When Requesters approve the work, the payment is immediately released to the Turkers' MTurk account which they can later transfer to a US bank account or convert into an Amazon.com gift card. After 30 days, all pending HITs are approved, and payment is released. Requesters can also reject work (e.g., if the HIT is done incorrectly or instructions were not followed) and the rejected Turker will not receive payment for the HIT. Requesters can also choose to pay a bonus or provide additional money to specific Turkers in addition to the stated base rate for completing the individual HIT. Bonuses are granted at the Requester's discretion and for a variety of reasons (Amazon Mechanical Turk, 2018).

Recruitment on this platform was as follows. I created an account on Amazon Mechanical Turk as a Requester. There is a separate process for creating an account as a Turker (worker). This specific platform does not have the capabilities to host surveys or hold interviews directly on the site. Instead, this platform relies on Requesters utilizing third-party survey software. As such, I created a questionnaire on Survey Monkey, an online survey website to serve as a "qualification" tool for eligibility in the study.[10] The survey asked three yes/no questions based on the inclusion criteria: 1) Are you currently or have you previously worked in the platform/gig economy? Examples of work in the platform economy include but are not limited to: Driving for ridesharing services (Uber or Lyft); Delivery work (Skipthedishes, DoorDash, UberEats); In-person manual labour (Handy, TaskRabbit); Crowdwork (Amazon Mechanical Turk); Virtual work (Fivver, Upwork, Freelancer; online tutoring). 2) Are you able to communicate/hold conversations in English? 3) Are you currently 18 years old or older? After completing the third question, a message of invitation asked all eligible individuals to participate in a follow-up interview to learn more about their experiences. This message encouraged individuals to contact me through email if they wanted to learn more about the study or participate in the study.

> *Thank you for completing the qualification questions. If you answered YES to **all three** prior questions, we invite you to participate in a follow-up in-person or video-chat interview about your experiences using digital platforms to earn income. This interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and you will be compensated $5.00 bonus to your account or $5.00 gift card for your participation.*
>
> *If you are interested in participating in the follow-up interview, or if you would like more information about this study, please contact us at lhoang3@uwo.ca. This study will not affect your employment/working status.*
>
> *To receive base pay for completing this survey, please type in the code 765 as the completion code in the Mturk task.*

Because the survey is hosted on a third-party site, a survey completion code is required by MTurk to verify that the individual has successfully completed the HIT.

[10] Note: Survey Monkey does not collect any personal information about the individuals completing the survey, nor does an individual need to create an account to complete the survey on this site.

On Amazon Mechanical Turk, I created a HIT that introduced the study and invited individuals to complete the survey available on Survey Monkey (the survey link was provided in the HIT). The rate of pay for completing the survey was listed at $0.01 dollars (approved by ethics). All Turkers who completed the questionnaire and provided the survey completion code received the base pay of $0.01 dollars. There were no cases where submitted work was rejected. Of 180 individuals who completed the survey and received base pay, nine individuals volunteered to participate in the follow up Zoom interview. All nine participants requested to be compensated with $5.00 added as a bonus to their MTurk account. In order to apply the bonus, the participants confirmed their unique MTurk worker ID number to the interviewer which ensured the bonus was applied to the correct account. [11]

4.4.4 Interviews

All interviews were carried out between March 2020 and October 2020. As mentioned, individuals located in Canada were given the opportunity to choose between a phone interview or an interview over Zoom. Individuals who indicated they resided outside of Canada were interviewed solely over Zoom. Forty-nine interviews occurred over phone, and twenty-two occurred over Zoom. Of the interviews conducted over Zoom, six interviews were video chat. Video interviews were discontinued after experiencing internet connection and technical issues that caused the video to freeze and/or the audio to cut out sporadically, disrupting the interview. As a result, the remaining sixteen Zoom interviews were conducted with audio only (both participant and interviewer keeping video off) to improve the internet connection and maintain the quality of the interview. The recording feature of Zoom automatically creates an audio and video recording, and audio-only recording. For the six interviews that included video, only the audio-only recordings were used in this study. The recording that contained both video and audio was immediately deleted from my personal computer and was not used in this study.

All participants were emailed the letter of information and informed consent prior to the interview. Participants were given the option to provide written informed consent and return the

[11] MTurk worker ID numbers do not provide any identifying or personal information about the Turker. ID numbers are automatically provided to the Requester whenever a Turker performs the HIT.

form (via email) to me prior to the interview or to provide verbal consent at the start of the interview. Six participants provided written consent and sixty-five provided verbal consent. With the consent of the participant, the interviews were recorded. Following the conclusion of the interview, all audio recordings were transferred to an encrypted and password protected hard drive and original copies of the recordings were then deleted from my personal computer or smartphone immediately afterwards. Sixty-seven participants agreed to be recorded. Four participants declined to be audio-recorded. For these interviews, extensive notes were taken on a personal computer.

The interviews were semi-structured following an interview guide (see Appendix D). The interview guide served as the foundation for all the interviews and covered several broad topics about working in the platform economy. Because the goal of this study is to examine a variety of different types of platform work, the semi-structured nature of the interviews was appropriate for forming the core of the interview while providing flexibility for the interviews to be tailored more towards the participants' specific type of work.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked sociodemographic questions to help provide context and to situate their experiences. This included questions about age, gender, highest level of completed education or current education status, marital status, number of children, location, and location of their work. Beyond these sociodemographic questions, the interview guide included basic questions about their work including daily work schedule and activities; their motivations for pursuing platform work; their satisfaction with the work including their likes and dislikes; questions that examined their overall experiences performing platform work including challenges; questions that looked at previous work experience and how participants compare platform work to traditional employment; general income, earnings, and payment-related questions; questions that explored participants' opinions and attitudes towards regulations and unionization; and finally questions that asked participants about their future outlook on work. A concluding question asked participants to discuss anything that was not asked in the interview, opening the interview up for further discussion based on the participants' specific type of work.

Throughout the data collection process, the interview process and interview guide remained relatively the same however there were two notable changes to the interview guide.[12] After the third interview, participants were asked about their experiences working during COVID-19. After interview four, three definitional questions were added to the interview guide. Participants were asked to define in their own words work, leisure, and productivity. The rationale for including these definitional questions was motivated after it became apparent in the earlier interviews that individual understandings of these terms varied from person to person. These variations could impact a person's motivation for pursuing platform work but also what kind of meanings they derive from their work. As such, these questions were included into the interview guide for the subsequent interviews. These interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 75 minutes with an average interview lasting approximately 35 minutes.

4.4.5 Confidentiality and Anonymity

As a cornerstone of ethical qualitative research, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities are protected, and pseudonyms are used in association with unidentifiable quotes. The need to protect the identities of the participants in this research project is especially important considering the nature of some of the issues and topics brought up in the interviews. For example, previous studies (Graham et al., 2017; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020) have acknowledged that most work in the platform economy requires few credentials and has low entry barriers to work. This means that it is entirely plausible that some of the participants examined in this study may be working illegally in their country of residence (lacking appropriate visas or work permits). In addition, many participants indicated that they do not report their income earned through platform work on their taxes and could face legal issues due to their online-earning activities. As well, some participants disclosed moral and legal dilemmas or conflicts with various platform companies and feared retaliation (such as having their digital accounts terminated) for speaking out about their experiences. To better protect participant identities, a list of pseudonyms was generated and assigned randomly to the participants. These pseudonyms were not listed on the consent forms and were stored separately.

[12] Additional questions added to interview guide are indicated in Appendix D

Quotations are used throughout the research findings and are important for highlighting and providing evidence of certain themes, patterns, and experiences. All participants were notified that unidentified quotations may be used. While this research study uses verbatim quotes as much as possible, some quotes may be altered to ensure anonymity is maintained. In addition, some quotations were amended to enhance readability, such as the removal of repeated words or conversational filler words such as “um”, “like”, and “you know”. Any amendments were crosschecked to ensure they maintain the integrity and overall intention of the statement by the participant. Where necessary, a footnote is included to further explain the redaction or rewording of the quotation.

4.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis process was inductive and iterative. I used QSR Nvivo 12 in the data analysis process. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim from the digital recording of the interview. Utilizing Nvivo’s organizational capabilities, the initial transcripts were individually crosschecked with the audio-recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. This process involved me listening to the audio-recording while reading the transcript. The transcription process familiarized me with the data and improved my engagement with the data.

The data for this study were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis strategy was utilized due to its strengths for identifying patterns of meaning and themes within data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). An inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) was taken during the coding process without the use of a pre-existing coding frame. Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006) the initial codes were generated on a semantic level, coding for descriptive meaning based on what the participants have explicitly said about their work experiences. This first-order coding strategy gave a voice to the participants by displaying their interpretations of their own experiences. This produced the descriptive themes outlining working hours, motivations for pursuing platform work, and likes and dislikes about their work. After all interviews had been cleaned and transcribed, the data were then recoded for latent themes underlying meaning in the data including attitudes, values, beliefs and ideas, assumptions, and ideologies (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This produced themes that included positive views on platform work, negative views, and meritocratic attitudes. Finally, I abstracted

these themes based on the theoretical frameworks of social action theory and conspicuous consumption. This produced themes that included a worship of labour, consumerism, work-and-spend syndrome, and rational action.

4.6 Conclusion

To summarize the methodological approach of this study: this research is situated in the interpretivist paradigm, is largely exploratory, and utilizes qualitative semi-structured interviews to gather data on the experiences of current and former platform workers. In total, 71 participants were included in this study and their experiences inform the findings of this study. The participants are either current platform workers or they previously worked in the platform economy. Moreover, these participants come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and perform a variety of different types of in-person or remote platform work, or a combination of these platform work. Their varying experiences provide a holistic understanding of work in the heterogeneous platform economy.

Chapter 5

5 Descriptive Findings: Participants and their Platform Work

5.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the study's descriptive findings and provides an overview of the different types of platform work examined in this study. In the sections that follow, I briefly discuss the sociodemographic composition of the participants. Then, I explore the different types of platform work performed by the participants to reveal some patterns pertaining to gender, age, and education level. Finally, I provide descriptions of each platform work examined in this study to provide the reader with a more general understanding of what each work entails. The descriptions of each platform work are organized according to in-person, remote, and mixed types of platform work. Furthermore, I expand on the broader categories of in-person and remote types of platform work to include additional subcategories based on specific features of the work. For example, in-person types of platform work can further be categorized into platform work that provides a service and platform work that requires physical manual labour. Remote types of platform work are also further grouped into work that is highly skilled compared to work that is low-skilled.

5.1 Description of Research Participants

Table 5.1 provides a detailed overview of the sociodemographic characteristics of all 71 participants. In total, forty-six participants (65%) indicated they identified as men, and twenty-five participants (35%) identified as women. The average age of all the participants is 32.5 years old. A large majority of the participants were under the age of 40 years old, with 52% between the ages of 20 to 29 years old, and 31% between the ages of 30 to 39 years old. Eleven percent of the sample indicated being between 40 and 49 years old, and 6% indicated they were over the age of 60 years old. Notably, this study did not include any individuals under the age of 20 years old or between the ages of 50 and 59 years old.

It is important to note that 64 participants (90%) reported that they were performing platform work at the time of the interviews. The remaining 7 participants (10%) indicated that they

previously engaged in platform work within the past five years but are no longer performing work in the platform economy. Three of the seven participants who previously engaged in platform work specifically reported that they will never return to doing that specific type of platform work in the future.[13]

Overall, the participants in this sample were highly educated. Many participants had completed post-secondary education with nearly 40% holding bachelor's degrees, 6% holding graduate-level degrees, and 11% indicated they had completed college. Only 6% of participants did not complete high school. The sample also included individuals who reported that they were currently in school for higher education. Of these students, 17% indicated they were obtaining a post-secondary education, and 1% indicated they were obtaining a master's level education.

In terms of marital status, the majority (83%) indicated they have never been married while 13% noted they were currently married or in a common-law relationship. Four percent reported being divorced, separated, or widowed. A large majority (85%) of the participants also noted they did not have any children. Of the fifteen percent of participants who reported having children, they had either one or two children.

Finally, this study was not limited to individuals currently living within Canada. While uncovering the Canadian perspective is important to this study, the decision to include participants from other countries was motivated to maintain the integrity of the study by minimizing potential dishonesty in participant responses. Because this study recruited participants on digital platforms and social media and held interviews over the phone and through Zoom, it would be difficult to limit recruitment to participants living in Canada only. In addition, many digital platforms such as MTurk, Fivver, and Upwork where some recruitment took place, are international platforms with a large pool of global users. Thus, restricting the study by geographic location could have led to potential dishonesty from some interested participants who may have shielded their place of residence to qualify for the study. In addition,

[13] Chapter 7 further explores their reasoning for leaving the platform economy.

even though some platforms like MTurk allow Requesters to select specific countries or regions to display the Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs), some individuals may use virtual private networks (VPNs) to mask their IP addresses in order to access HITs restricted to specific countries/regions. Because examining participants' responses may highlight larger structural issues that impacted their decisions to pursue platform work, it is imperative for participants to be clear about their current place of residence.

Fifteen participants noted they were currently residing in countries other than Canada. More specifically, 13 of the 71 participants (18%) reported currently living in the United States with eight of them specifically residing in New York. One participant (1%) indicated they currently live in Mumbai, India, and one participant (1%) reported residing in London, United Kingdom. These 15 international participants all reported performing remote types of platform work. In total, 56 participants (79%) indicated they currently reside within Canada. Of these participants, 43 indicated they were in the Greater Toronto Area or Southwestern Ontario; 5 participants resided in Ottawa, Ontario; 2 participants lived in Edmonton, Alberta; 5 participants resided in Vancouver, British Columbia, and 1 participant indicated living in Montreal, Quebec. All the participants who performed in-person types of platform work resided in Canada.

Table 5.1: Participant Characteristics (N=71)

Characteristic:	Number:	Percentage:
Gender		
Men	46	65%
Women	25	35%
Average Age	32.5	
Age range		
Under 20 years old	0	0%
20 – 29 years old	37	52%
30 – 39 years old	22	31%
40 – 49 years old	8	11%
50 – 59 years old	0	0%
60 years old and over	4	6%
Educational Attainment		
Graduate degree	4	6%
Bachelor's Degree	28	39%
College Diploma	8	11%
Some University or College	3	4%
High School Diploma	11	16%
Less Than High School	4	6%

Current Student (Graduate Level)	1	1%
Current Student (Post-Secondary Level)	12	17%
Marital Status		
Never married	59	83%
Common law - Married	9	13%
Divorced – Separated - Widowed	3	4%
Number of Children		
0	60	85%
1	6	8%
2	5	7%
# of Earners in Household		
1	55	77%
2	16	23%
Participant Location		
Canada	56	79%
USA	13	18%
India	1	1.5%
UK	1	1.5%
Current Work Status		
No longer doing platform work	7	10%
Currently doing platform work	64	90%
Total Participants	**71**	**100%**

5.2 Categorization of Participants by Platform Work

The findings displayed in Table 5.2 provide a detailed breakdown of the platform work categories included in this study and the specific types of work included within these categories. As mentioned, the types of in-person platform work are further grouped into two additional subcategories: in-person platform work that provides a service and in-person platform work that requires physical manual labour. These groupings better reflect certain nuanced differences in the various platform work that will be noted through the exploration of participants' experiences. The types of in-person platform work that offer a service include delivery courier, rideshare driving, cargo transportation, house cleaning, participating in research studies and user testing, event staffing, mystery shopping, modelling, pet care services, photography, and home-sharing hosts. The types of in-person platform work that requires physical manual labour include hardwood floor and carpet installation, drywall and painting, landscape and snow removal, handyman repair services, and house movers. In total, 37 of 71 participants (52%) performed *only* in-person types of platform work. It is important to note that several participants engaged in several different types of in-person platform work at any given time.

The types of remote platform work are also organized into two additional subcategories; remote platform work that require low-skills and knowledge to perform; and remote platform work that is highly skilled. Woodcock (2021) similarly identified notable differences between online microtaskers (low-skilled work) and online freelancers (highly skilled work). The types of low-skilled remote platform work include transcription services, crowdwork, and completing online surveys. The types of highly skilled remote platform work include online tutoring, social media marketing, remote consulting, online writing, graphic design and web development, voice acting, and online selling. In total, 23 of 71 participants (32%) performed *only* remote types of platform work. As well, several participants engaged in a few different types of remote platform work at any given time.

Finally, an additional 11 of 71 participants (16%) performed various *combinations* of in-person and remote types of platform work outlined above concurrently. They comprised the group 'mixed platform workers'. Table 5.2 also outlines the various combinations of platform work performed by these participants.

While there are a lot of different types of platform work examined in this study, the most common activities performed by participants is delivery courier (n=18), rideshare driving (n=13), online writing (n=11), online survey and crowdwork (n=12), online tutoring (n=10), and drywall and painting (n=5).

Table 5.2: Platform Work Categorization and Participant Distribution

Category of Platform Work	Type of Platform Work	Digital Platforms	Total # of participants engaging in this type of platform work
In - Person			**37**
Service Providing Platform Work	Delivery Courier	DoorDash Amazon Flex Skipthedishes UberEats Foodora	18
	Rideshare Driving	Uber Lyft	13
	Cargo Transportation	LoadBoards	1
	House Cleaning	Aspen Cleaners	1

	Research Studies + User Testing	Kjiji Craigslist	4
	Event Staffing	Kijiji Craigslist	2
	Mystery Shopping	MSRP Kijiji Craigslist	2
	Dog Walking + Pet Care	Rover Pawshake	3
	Photography + Art modelling	Kijiji Craigslist	2
	Airbnb Host	Airbnb	1
Manual Labour Platform Work	Floor installation	Kijiji Craigslist AskForTask	3
	Drywall + Painting	Kijiji Craigslist AskForTask	5
	Landscaping/snow removal	Kijiji Craigslist Askfortask	3
	Movers	Armando Movers	1
Remote			**23**
Highly skilled Platform Work	Online Tutoring/Remote Educator	VIPKid Cambly OneClass	10
	Social Media Marketing and Online Coaching	Facebook Kijiji Craigslist Fivver Upwork	2
	Freelance/Content/Copy Writing	Freelancer Upwork Fivver	11
	Office Administration	Fivver Upwork Freelancer	2
	Graphic Design / Web Development	Fivver Upwork	1
	Voice Over / Voice Acting	Facebook Facebook Marketplace	1
	Online selling	Kijiji Online auction sites	1

Low-skilled Platform Work	Online Surveys + Crowdwork	MTurk HoneyBee Prolific Swagbucks Lionsbridge Branded Surveys Valued Opinions YouGov GigHub Nielson Kijiji Craigslist	12
	Transcription	Rev Verbit	6
Mixed	**Remote + In-person**		**11**
Two types of platform work	Crowdwork/Online surveys + Mystery shopping		2
	Crowdwork/Online surveys + Rideshare driving		1
	Crowdwork/Online consulting + manual labour, delivery courier, rideshare driver, event staffing		1
	Online tutoring + Dog walking		1
	Online ESL tutoring + In-person tutoring		1
	Online coaching + Live-in Airbnb host		1
More than two types of platform work	Crowdwork/Online surveys + Delivery courier, dog walking, user-testing, babysitting, event staffing, misc. manual labour		1
	Crowdwork/Online surveys, online tutoring, transcribing + User-testing, dog boarding, delivery courier		1
	Online tutoring, online selling + In-person tutoring, landscaping		1
	Freelance writing + Delivery courier and event staffing		1

Research by Hoang et al. (2020) found evidence of horizontal occupational segregation within the platform economy arguing that individuals sort or self-select into certain types of platform work based on certain socioeconomic criteria including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational status. In this study, I found some patterns regarding the types of platform work performed by participants according to their age and gender. These findings are displayed in Table 5.3. Overall, nearly all the women in this study engaged in some form of remote platform work (Churchill & Craig, 2019). Most engaged in only highly skilled types of remote platform work (11 of 25), followed by mixed platform work (6 out of 25), low-skilled types of remote

work (5 of 25), and service-providing platform work (3 out of 25). No women reported performing manual labour types of in-person platform work. This is consistent with research that finds evidence of horizontal occupational segregation of men and women across the manual-nonmanual divide (Charles & Grusky, 2004). In addition, the women who performed in-person types of platform work opted to engage in service-providing types such as delivery courier, dog walking, user-testing, or event staffing. Only one participant who identified as a woman reported engaging in ridesharing. This is consistent with literature that finds that women are less represented in rideshare driving compared to the overall share of women in the workforce (Hall & Kreuger, 2018), and literature that found that males are 81% more likely be rideshare drivers than females (Hoang et al., 2020). By comparison, most men in this study engaged in in-person types of platform work. Almost half of the men performed service-providing platform work (22 of 46) like rideshare driving and delivery courier work, followed by manual labour (12 of 46), mixed platform work (5 of 46), highly skilled remote work (4 of 46), and low-skilled remote work (3 of 46). The men who performed low-skilled remote work primarily engaged in crowdwork and online surveys. No participants who identified as men reported engaging in transcription work or in-person mystery shopping.

Several patterns also emerged according to participants' age and the type of platform work they performed. Most participants who engaged in in-person types of platform work were between the ages of 20 and 39 years old. However, more individuals in their twenties engaged in service-providing platform work like rideshare driving and delivery courier work while more individuals in their thirties reported pursuing manual labour types of platform work. In terms of remote platform work, all participants who pursued only highly skilled platform work and three quarters of those who performed only low-skilled remote platform work were between the ages of 20 and 29 years old.

In terms of education-level, there does not appear to be any exceptional differences in the types of platform work performed by participants. More obviously, those who reported having a high school level education or below indicated pursuing in-person types of platform work. This is consistent with employment trends in general, where low-educated men are over-represented in blue collar and manual jobs (Adams, 2022). On the other hand, those who engaged in highly

skilled remote platform work had a post-secondary education or higher. Interestingly, more than half of the participants (16 of 25) who engaged in service-providing platform work and manual labour platform work (6 of 12) were highly educated with at least a post-secondary education. This is consistent with literature that finds platform workers to be highly educated but lacking work experiences (Woodcock, 2021), or limited in work opportunities (Graham et al., 2017).

Table 5.3: Types of Platform Work by Gender, Age, and Education Level (N=71)

Characteristics	**Type of Platform Work**					
	In-Person Types of Platform Work		**Remote Types of Platform Work**		**Mixed platform work**	
Gender	Service-Providing	Manual Labour	High-skilled	Low-Skilled		*Total*
Men	22	12	4	3	5	*46*
Women	3	0	11	5	6	*25*
Total	*25*	*12*	*15*	*8*	*11*	*71*
Age						
Under 20 years old	0	0	0	0	0	*0*
20 – 29 years old	12	1	15	6	3	*37*
30 – 39 years old	10	8	0	0	4	*22*
40 – 49 years old	1	3	0	2	2	*8*
50 – 59 years old	0	0	0	0	0	*0*
60 and older	2	0	0	0	2	*4*
Total	*25*	*12*	*15*	*8*	*11*	*71*
Education						
< Highschool	2	2	0	0	0	*4*
Highschool diploma	7	4	0	0	0	*11*
Some university or college	0	0	0	1	2	*3*
University or College Degree	10	6	10	4	6	*36*
Graduate Degree	1	0	2	0	1	*4*
Currently In-School	5	0	3	3	2	*13*
Total	*25*	*12*	*15*	*8*	*11*	*71*

5.3 Descriptions of platform work

This section explores the diversity of platform work. Below I describe various platform work performed by the individuals within in this study. I outlined each platform work based on the participants' explanations of the work and the application and entry requirements they identified and discussed. It is important to note that while this study examines a lot of different types of platform work, it is not an exhaustive list of all types of platform work within the platform economy and there are other types not included here.[14]

5.3.1 In-Person Types of Platform Work

5.3.1.1 Service-providing in-person platform work

Rideshare driving – Thirteen participants in this study engaged in rideshare driving. These participants reported using either the digital platform Uber or Lyft. One participant used both Uber and Lyft concurrently. Rideshare driving has become the face of the sharing economy – a branch of the platform economy that promotes profiting off personal assets via rental or offering labour services that utilize those assets (Schor, 2017). Uber and Lyft are two popular platforms that provide on-demand ridesharing services that connect clients (passengers) looking for private transportation with workers (drivers) offering this service via their personal vehicle (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020). According to participants in this study, Uber and Lyft are similar in their operations. However, the participants who utilize Uber suggested their decisions to use this platform were mainly because it is more popular within their city/region. Participants reported that both platforms offer flexible work schedules, zero-hour contracts, and workers can set their own working hours and are not penalized for periods of inactivity. They also reported low entry barriers for this platform work. Many participants who reported beginning this platform work prior to 2016 noted the application process (in Ontario) consisted of filling out an online application, submitting vehicle and insurance documents, providing driver's license, driving history, proof of work eligibility, and completing a criminal background screening. They also

[14] See Chapter 10: Limitations and Areas for Future Research for more information on some platform activities not examined in this study.

needed to watch several online training videos before they could begin working. By contrast, participants who joined these platforms in more recent years have suggested that new regulations require individuals to obtain certain certifications such as the Private Transportation Company (PTC) License to operate in some locations such as downtown Toronto (Uber, 2020). Also, all workers now must purchase specific liability insurance that covers rideshare work in addition to their regular personal vehicle insurance. Furthermore, new regulations mandate that personal vehicles utilized for ridesharing must be under 7 years old (Uber, 2020). This places more constraints on workers as they must purchase newer vehicles every several years to qualify to perform the work. A few participants indicated that to circumvent this barrier they lease vehicles with other rideshare drivers and timeshare use of the vehicle amongst themselves. Others explained that they rent vehicles from car rental companies to use specifically for ridesharing. Overall, participants noted that the length of time between applying for and beginning this work is short. Most indicated that they could begin working in less than one week after submitting all their documentation and watching the training videos, while one participant noted he waited two weeks.

In terms of this platform work, participants reported that when they are interested in working, they log onto the platform's smartphone app as a driver. Depending on their immediate location, they get notifications for ride requests from clients within a certain distance from their location. This notification provides workers with approximately fifteen seconds to "accept" the ride (Uber, 2020). By accepting, workers commit to performing the work and if they later choose to cancel the ride, their 'driver rating' score can be negatively affected. After accepting the ride, workers are provided with GPS navigation to their client's location. After picking up the client, they are given a GPS navigation to the destination's location. After dropping the client off at their destination and "completing" the ride, the worker can continue to view and fulfill requested rides nearby until they log off. Cora (age 27) provided an example of a typical day performing rideshare driving,

> yeah, so whenever I feel like I have some time, like usually my shifts are like around three hours, so it's not long at all. And I just turn on the app, go to my car and then login. It, because it's really flexible, I can work for an hour however much I want, so it's really easy for me to like, like any time I can just like jump into my car and say "I am going to do some work now" and get into the car and turn on the app and pick up or accept people's requests to pick up. So yeah, just do that and I do that for three hours, that three

> hours usually it ranges, on a good day, a more busy day where I can do it, it depends on how far the distance is, it can range from like three to even ten people in three hours, clients I mean. It's quite varied and then at the end, also if I'm too tired then okay that's enough or I have to do something else now I just turn off the app and just go my own way.

Payment for these rides occurs over the platform. Clients pay for services directly to the platform. The platform deducts various service fees and taxes from the payment and then transfers the remaining payment including tips to the worker. However, workers can also receive cash tips from clients. These platforms also utilize rating systems that allow clients and workers to "rate their experience" with one another. The participants reported that maintaining high ratings is very important as lower ratings will get workers' accounts suspended. If ratings fall below four out of five stars, the account is terminated, and the individual can no longer perform this work on that specific platform. In addition, some participants explained that they believe the platform's algorithms are specifically designed to offer more requests for rides to workers with the highest ratings. This means that those with lower ratings may have fewer opportunities to view and accept rides and their overall earnings will be much lower. Because workers are cognizant of the rating system, they find additional ways to enhance customer experiences. For example, Deepak (age 30) stated "the goal obviously was to try to maintain a good rating. You know a part of that was try to offer some good service to the customer in the car and I think like mints and some, you know, phone chargers available and water bottles". A certain level of emotional labour is also required from rideshare workers to maximize ratings. For example, Lucas (age 39) explained that this platform work involves chatting with clients, "I talk to so many people. Everybody to come and it's like I'm psychologist, everybody say "Oh, I am, my problem. My wife give me a hard time. My kids give me a hard time and sometimes the kids say I hate my father". Everybody tell me their problems. So, I just say "Oh, yeah. Okay. Okay." I don't know what to say. I just pretending". Lucas elaborated that he provides emotional labour "because then if you become nice with them, then they give a big tip too. So, if you become on their side then then they leave you money. If you're quiet, then nobody wants to. Or you get maybe poor poor stars. Maybe a bad star because they say [you're] not talkative or unfriendly. And they don't give you money or good stars".

Most participants reported that they mainly rely on the platform's algorithm to show them available rides that they can choose to accept. However, other participants reported additional tactics they utilize to maximize their earnings when working. Most participants who engaged in ridesharing noted that it is important to work during busy periods including rush hours where people are looking for rides to and from work, and on weekends and evenings where more clients may be seeking services. However, other participants reported they utilize additional strategies like queuing outside popular hotels or airports. For example, Lucas also explained that he primarily parks his vehicle near hotels in downtown Toronto like the Royal York Hotel where guests typically utilize ridesharing services. By staying within this area, he can view more ride offers since he is closer to the client's location. In addition, some participants bribe third party persons to secure higher paying rides. For example, Fez (age 39) explained that in addition to its platform booking system, Lyft also has a dispatcher line where clients can call in ahead of time to order rides (such as to the airport). This booking occurs off the platform, and the dispatchers can assign drivers to specific rides. Fez explained that to secure better paying rides that are typically longer distances, he bribes the dispatchers. He explained that compared to 2013 when he first started, rideshare driving is becoming more aggressive due to more people performing the work. He said "everybody wants the long rides like I have to give, sometimes I pay the dispatch lady. I had to give her $50 so she gives me extra calls to the airport…For Lyft. So I tell her sometimes I say 'I don't get too many airport rides', she say 'because yeah, you have to pay me'. I said 'I had to pay you?' She says 'yes, because if you want me to give you [the rides], I want money too'… Two of my friends already pay, they are, they asking for $75. Everybody wants the airport ride because easy money". One participant referred to these tactics for maximizing platform work as "gaming the system".

Delivery courier – 18 participants noted that they engage in delivery courier work. Most of these participants indicated they used food delivery platforms including Skipthedishes, UberEats, Foodora, and DoorDash. One participant is a courier using the platform Amazon Flex. The majority of these participants used vehicles to perform this work, however, several participants delivered using bicycles or motorbikes/scooters. These platforms offer on-demand delivery services connecting clients ordering food or goods with restaurants or business offering these goods, and workers pick up the goods from the restaurant/business and deliver them to the client.

The platforms charge services fees to all parties involved including the business/restaurants, clients, and delivery couriers.

The participants explained that the platforms Skipthedishes, DoorDash, Foodora, and Amazon Flex operate on flexitime shift schedules meaning that workers can choose their own availability for shifts each week. However, these platforms operate on set hours per shift. This means that workers commit to completing shifts that can last anywhere from 2 to 6 hours, and workers can also sign up for double shifts per day. By contrast, UberEats operates on flexible work hours so workers can work as much or as little per day without committing to working any set hours or shifts. Participants reported that these platforms have low entry barriers and do not require individuals to have any prior work experience. All these participants reported applying for the work online by filling out an application and submitting vehicle and insurance documents, drivers' licenses (for non-bicycle workers), providing proof of work eligibility, and completing a criminal background screening. A few participants reported that they had to complete a brief telephone interview. Workers also must complete online training videos. Most participants noted that the application process took less than a week while others reported it taking up to two weeks. However, most participants reported that the length of time to start working depending on how quickly the worker provided all their documentation and completed the training videos rather than an issue with the platform's hiring process.

In terms of this platform work, participants reported that it was very similar to ridesharing as workers log on to the platform when they want to work (for UberEats) or when they are scheduled to work a shift. Once logged on, the platform sends notifications to the workers of available delivery work based on their location and their expected earnings for fulfilling the delivery order. Workers can choose to accept the work or ignore it. They only have a few seconds to accept the work before the offer is no longer available to them. Once work is accepted the platform provides them with GPS directions to the location of the restaurant/business where they will pick up the orders. Once the workers pick up the order from the business, they will receive GPS directions to the location of the client. After finishing the delivery, the worker can continue to accept and fulfill more orders until they log off or finish their shift. Aaron (age 27) provided an example of a typical day of work using the platform UberEats,

> basically it was pretty open, um like you just kinda work whenever you want kinda thing. And then you turn on the app, and then you know it activates your GPS and then you find out, it will kind of tag you to the next delivery nearby, and then you just go pick up the food, you know, get back to your car, and then you put on start the trip and it tells you where to take the food, and you kinda do that. Rinse and repeat until however long you want until you turn off the app basically.

Payment for these orders occurs over the platform. Clients pay for the orders directly to the platform. The platform deducts from the payment its service fees, taxes, and the delivery fees and tip. The remaining payment is transferred to the restaurant or business which offered the goods. The platform transfers the delivery fee which is a combination of a base pay ranging from CAD$2.00 to $10.00 dollars depending on estimated time and distance travelled (DoorDash, 2020), and any tips to the delivery worker. These platforms also utilize rating systems where clients can rate their experience with the restaurant/business and delivery courier. These ratings are important and if a courier's rating is low, their accounts can be terminated. For example, DoorDash requires a customer rating minimum of 4.2 stars and 80% order completion rate (DoorDash, 2020). Several participants explained that they believe the platform's algorithm offers available orders to those with the highest ratings first. In other words, if you are working in the same location as another courier, and this other courier has a higher overall rating than your rating, the next available order will be shown to the other courier with the higher rating first. If the courier does not accept it, then it will be shown to you. Vick (age 23) elaborated on this,

> one thing that does matter is the rating a little bit, like somebody who has super low ratings let's say one star or something or bad comments about their work ah in that case you might have chances of getting orders less as compared to somebody who has 5-star rating or 4.5-star rating. But yeah, I haven't observed that it's just what I believe a little bit.

Several other participants supported this perception on ratings and order offers given the platform's emphasis on maintaining good customer service. While most of these participants explained that they view the rating system as mostly fair, some did acknowledge that it can be unfair. For instance, while most platforms offer separate ratings for restaurants/businesses and couriers, clients do not always separate their ratings, and a courier can be negatively rated because of issues with the order or its quality rather than the delivery service. This affects their

overall rating for an issue outside their control. Participants did acknowledge that they can dispute negative ratings but that this process can be tedious and instead they opt to fulfilling more orders to try to obtain higher ratings that will negate the lower ratings.

The participants reported that to maximize their earnings, they typically utilize strategies to work faster such as accepting new orders while still finishing previous orders and working during peak periods where the platform is offering extra pay. It is important to note that these participants who engage in food delivery also reported that they are responsible for purchasing hot/cold delivery bags to transport food from the restaurants to the business and these bags cost on average CAD$50.00. Most participants reported they had at least two bags.

One participant reported he uses the platform Amazon Flex, and two participants who are currently food couriers reported interest in pursuing work on this specific platform. Amazon Flex is a subsidiary of Amazon.com and this platform utilizes couriers to deliver packages purchased from Amazon.com to clients via their personal vehicles. The entry requirements for pursuing this work are similar to the process described above for the food delivery courier platforms. Once an individual's account is approved and online training is complete, they can begin working immediately. As a courier for Amazon Flex, individuals sign up for shifts. They can choose a shift ahead of time or the same day depending on shift availability. They can also work multiple shifts per day. This work requires workers to pick up packages from local warehouses or delivery stations. After loading their vehicles, the platform app provides them with GPS navigation for delivering each package in an efficient manner. Workers are expected to deliver all the packages assigned to their shift within their shift-period and can be penalized for any late deliveries. The participant reported that this work is very fast-paced, and he often feels stressed when working to meet the delivery deadlines while avoiding traffic. Workers are also subjected to a rating system that rates workers on a variety of points including delivering packages on time. Workers with low ratings can have their accounts terminated and ratings also impact how many shifts workers are able to accept. Milo (age 30) further explained that when he first started using this platform for work, he was limited in how many shifts he could accept but now that he has a higher rating, he is able to work more shifts and expects he will be able to work 20 or 30 hours per week with this platform in the future. Workers using this platform are paid per hour by the platform, and

payrates can range from CAD$22 to $27 dollars per hour depending on city location (Amazon Flex Canada, 2022). However, workers are not paid for any time after their shift, so if they do not complete their orders on schedule and must work later, they are not paid for this additional time. In addition, workers are responsible for their own vehicle expenses including gas, insurance, and vehicle maintenance.

Cargo Transportation - One participant engaged in cargo transportation using the digital platform DAT One Load Boards which utilizes a bidding system. This platform offers a marketplace in North America for on-demand cargo transportation by connecting independent truck drivers with one-off gigs transporting freights from location to location. Businesses post jobs for cargo transportation on this platform. In these posts, they outline the transportation pick up and destination, information about what is being transported (e.g., hazardous materials, fragile goods, etc.), maximum price per mile the company is willing to pay, and other important information regarding the work. Once the gig is posted onto the platform, truck drivers known as *carriers* bid their desired payment to do the work; these bids factor in their costs and expenses such as fuel and time. The requester selects from the offered bids a carrier to transport the freight. Because this platform utilizes a bidding system, some carriers will attempt to undercut one another by offering the lowest bid to secure the work. However, the lowest bid does not always indicate successful selection for the work. Requesters get to select from the bidding carriers and can choose a more expensive carrier if they are more reputable. Once a bid is accepted, the requester and carrier correspond over email to finalize transportation details. The carrier then performs the work in the agreed upon timeframe and is paid directly by the client. Payment does not occur through the platform, and carriers are solely responsible for obtaining payment from their clients. For example, Martin (age 65 – former cargo transportation) explained that he once was unpaid in the amount of CAD$5000 dollars because the client had gone bankrupt.

House Cleaning – One participant engaged in house cleaning for a company called Aspen Clean. This company operates in Toronto offering house and business cleaning services. Customers can use their website platform to schedule cleaning services. Workers have access to an app on their smartphone where they can input their schedule availability. Teams of two or three are then

selected by management to go to each cleaning gig which lasts approximately three hours. Individuals are not guaranteed that they will be selected for any cleaning gigs. Joe (age 28) states that he typically is available to work every Saturday and Sunday and he often gets selected to work on two to four gigs per weekend for an average of 10 hours per week. The company encourages customers to review and rate the service, and he believes that his quality of work and his work ethic contributes to him being selected more frequently. However, Joe also indicates that he believes management is "fair" in their selection of workers and tries to keep a balance with selecting available workers for gigs, meaning they may decline providing one worker with more work if they have already been selected several times previously. Joe also indicates that the platform company provides cleaners with paid training, transportation to the cleaning location, a gift-card to be used towards lunch, and cleaning supplies. Workers also use a cleaning protocol checklist to better standardize the cleaning service. However, this company also tracks the workers' productivity by measuring how quickly jobs are completed, customer feedback, and customer retention. This participant said the company considered its workers to be employees, which distinguishes it from the other platforms examined in this study, for which workers are classified as independent contractors/freelancers.

Research Studies/User Testing, Event Staffing, and Mystery Shopping – Four participants reported that they frequently participate in paid research studies, focus groups, medical studies, and/or provide user-testing of products and services. These participants commented that they use the platforms like Kijiji, Craigslist, and HoneyBee to find paid research/testing opportunities. The platforms are marketplaces where individuals can post classified ads based on location. Various groups of people will utilize these platforms to find participants for their research/medical studies or to try products and provide detailed reviews and feedback. Participants can contact research/user testing ads and if they qualify, they are provided with instructions on how to participate. These participants noted that they are paid directly by the person/group offering the studies and user-testing.

Three participants noted that they perform one-off event staffing gigs that they find using the platforms Kijiji and Craigslist. Event staffing includes various positions from performing coat check duties for events, security, announcing, bartending, and other positions. These participants

noted that one-off event staffing is very common during the summer season as there are typically more events being hosted. These participants reported that they typically reply to ads offering one-time event work and will provide their resumes or previous work experience to the hiring party. There are rarely interviews when pursuing this work, although some event work may require successfully passing a telephone interview. Participants reported that they are typically paid in cash at the end of each workday or at the end of the event.

Three participants reported that they engage in mystery shopping using platforms like Kijiji and Craigslist to find opportunities. These participants noted that most of their mystery shopping work is offered by Mystery Shopping Professionals Association (MSPA). MSPA connects businesses that may want information or data pertaining to their customer service with individuals who visit the business with the intention of collecting data about their experience. These participants reported that obtaining mystery shopping work is straightforward. Participants apply for certain ads on Kijiji and Craigslist looking for people to act as mystery shoppers. In their application, they provide basic demographic details about themselves, a resume, and a writing sample detailing for example a recent positive shopping experience and/or a negative shopping experience. Individuals who are accepted to perform this work are then added to an emailing list or Facebook community page where they can access available mystery shopping opportunities based on their location and they can individually apply to fulfill certain opportunities they are interested in. This work is assigned based on first come, first serve so those who apply first are usually selected to complete the selected mystery shopping. Workers are provided with instructions by the clients for each gig, and once they complete the assignment, they provide a written report about their experience. Workers are paid directly by the client requesting the mystery shopping, and payment is usually in cash or cheque. However, clients can refuse to pay workers if specific instructions are not followed or if they are "spotted" or identified as a mystery shopper by employees of the establishment. Josie (age 60) discussed her experience with mystery shopping:

> Okay, so MSPA is actually a legitimate organization. A lot of people don't know that. And it's an organization for legitimate mystery shopping. And that's how it started. Okay. And it's been around for more than 30 years. Well, when I started with MSPA and I was a member, I actually did some [user] testing with them. There were more than 500 companies that did mystery shopping at that time. And I was making anywhere between $1000 and $2000 a month just doing mystery shopping. And I got away from it for a

> while when I started working fulltime, and I, you know, I'd still get the emails from people interested. Because it's all based obviously, on your demographics, some of its phone calls, but most of its demographic work and you go out and physically do it.

Dog Walking and Pet Care Services – Three participants noted they engage in dog walking and offer other pet care services using the digital platforms Rover and Pawshake to find clients. These platforms are marketplaces for people to buy and sell pet care services. All three participants indicated offering dog walking services and one participant also noted that she provides daytime pet boarding. These platforms require workers to create accounts and fill out information including a short biography, previous pet-care experience, and references. They also must pass a background screening. Workers of these platforms set their own pay rates for each of their offered services. Clients can then select from the various workers in their area and can contact the worker to set up the work schedule. Clients can also rate/review various workers and these ratings are viewable on the site. The participants who engaged in this work explained that they were paid for work through the app. More specifically, clients using the platform pay for the services they receive to the platform, and the platform transfers payment after services are rendered to the worker. The platform deducts a certain percentage or "booking" service fee from the payment. Rover charges a 20% service fee (Rover, 2022), and Pawshake charges 19% (Pawshake, 2022).

Photography/Modelling Services – One participant reported that he offers photography services for private events and children's birthday parties. He described finding clients online by placing ads on platforms like Kijiji and Craigslist. He noted that he sets his prices for photography and is paid directly by the client, typically in cash at the end of the session. No payment occurs through the platforms he uses. However, he noted that while his work is flexible in the sense that he can accept or reject clients, his working hours are dictated by the client's availability. One participant also reported that he utilizes Kijiji and Craigslist to find modelling/acting opportunities. In these cases, this participant explained that these platforms often have advertisements looking for models to participate in art classes or small acting roles. This work is typically paid in cash at the end of the work.

Home Sharing Host – One participant indicated that she offers home-sharing using the platform Airbnb. This participant rents out a spare bedroom in her home on the platform. She also indicated being an *experience host* – an additional service where she provides “an experience” to clients such as touring them around the city or taking them to local events. The platform allows people to set their own rates for room rental, cleaning fees, and hosting an experience. Payment occurs over the platform with clients paying for services. The platform deducts various service fees and taxes from the payment and transfers the remaining payment to the host. There is a rating system for hosts and clients to rate one another, and these ratings are instrumental for hosts who will accept clients based on their ratings.

5.3.1.2 In-Person Platform Work That Involves Manual Labour

Home repairs and manual labour - Three participants indicated that they offered hardwood floors or carpet installation, five participants indicated that they offered interior painting and drywall repairs, and three participants reported providing home landscaping. Most of these participants indicated that they use the platforms Kijiji, Craigslist, AskForTask, and TaskRabbit to find clients.

When utilizing Kijiji and Craigslist, these participants reported that they typically post advertisements offering their labour and typically photos of previous work. This is in direct contrast to participants who engaged in service-providing platform work who typically noted that when utilizing Kijiji or Craigslist to find paid opportunities, they often respond to ads created by others. When creating ads on these platforms, the participants reported that they must repost their advertisement at least once a day so that the ad is displayed on the platform’s first few pages of results, otherwise their advertisement is less likely to be viewed by potential clients. Participants reported that they receive responses to their advertisements from individuals interested in purchasing their work. Participants will then set up a physical meeting with clients at the location of the requested work to determine the amount of work needed to complete the project and negotiate payment. If the client agrees to the pricing, they typically schedule a time to perform the work. Participants noted that this work is flexible in that they mostly choose their working hours; however, they are also constrained by the client’s availability as well.

These types of platform workers are paid directly by clients for rendered work and are usually paid in cash or electronic bank transfer (e-transfer). Participants who utilize Kijiji and Craigslist to find paid work opportunities noted that it has the fewest restrictions or entry barriers. They stated that anyone can create advertisements on these platforms and offer work or labour. However, these participants reported that clients tend to be more wary compared to clients they obtain through other avenues such as through local newspaper advertisements or by referrals. As a result, participants reported that they created a portfolio containing photos of past work to show potential clients their work quality and experience. These platforms also offer rating systems for users to rate one another. The participants noted that having good ratings is instrumental for enhancing their credibility for prospective clients. However, they also indicated that the rating could be unfair as clients can rate them negatively for not providing discounts for work rather than quality of work. For example, Ruiz (age 31 – hardwood floors) explained this situation "I have two one-star reviews [on Kijiji]. And that's because I wouldn't give them a lower price. But they wrote down that I did really shitty work. And then I have 46 five-star reviews. So, everybody who calls me, they always ask me about the one-star review. They said, 'can I ask you what do you do wrong with that that particular home?' So, it's always something that is a problem, all the time". These participants also reported that pricing is another factor that dictates their work.

Some of the participants reported also using the platforms AskForTask and TaskRabbit to find manual labour opportunities. AskForTask and TaskRabbit are on-demand platforms that offer home services and small repairs such as house cleaning, landscaping, painting, and furniture assembly. They connect people looking for help around the house with workers willing to perform these tasks. These platforms are organized by location and workers can see available opportunities within a specific geographic range according to their postal code. The platforms also operate on flexible schedules allowing workers to choose the work they want to fulfill and their own working hours. To utilize these platforms, participants reported that they had to make an account on the platform and provide documentation and pass a background screening. AskForTask has various categorizations for work and participants described that depending on which work they pursued, they had to provide additional proof of experience or skill. For example, one participant noted he had to provide his painting portfolio and previous experience

working for a painting company. AskForTask pays workers an hourly rate and charges clients for services purchased through their platform. By contrast, TaskRabbit allows workers to set their own pricing and charges a service fee to the client and worker. However, clients pay for services through the platform, and the platform deducts taxes and fees and transfers the remaining to the worker. Both platforms utilize a rating system that allows clients to rate the worker. Workers with low ratings are terminated from the platform.

Some participants also noted that they utilize emailing lists to find various painting work. More specifically, professional painting companies like ProPainters and Benjamin Moores provide interior/exterior residential painting and they have in-house employees who they send out to fulfil work. However, when these companies receive client projects that may be "too small" to send out their in-house employed painters, they subcontract the work out to independent painters. For example, Hamed (age 38) explained why this occurs: 'because they [painting companies] are not interested in doing it, the job too small. Because they don't want to waste their time. But they don't see the job until they get to the site. And they cannot say no on the phone because people never sure. Sometimes one room turns into whole house, so they never refuse on the phone. And then when they get 'oh, I only want to paint the kitchen' it's like a day job. So, they're not interested in day jobs". As such, these companies have an email list of independent painters and will send out an email blast providing information about the work to all members subscribed to the emailing list. The participants explained that some companies operate their emailing list on a first-come, first-serve basis which means that whoever responds to the email and demonstrates willingness to do the work first will receive the rights to it. By contrast, other companies operate on a bidding system in which interested painters bid their price to do the work and typically the cheapest bid will obtain the rights to the work. These participants noted that clients pay the company directly for the completed work, and these companies will deduct a service or contracting fee from the payment and then transfer the payment to the worker in cash or cheque. One participant even specified that most clients are unaware that the work is being fulfilled by a subcontractor and not actually representatives of the painting company they contacted.

House Moving – One participant indicated working as a house mover using the company Armando Movers' emailing list to find work. Armando Mover is located in Toronto, Canada.

This participant indicated he is subscribed to an emailing list and when there are available moving jobs, the company will send out an "email blast" indicating the length of time for the gig, payment, and how many people are needed. These emails are often sent on short notice typically in the morning and give individuals approximately an hour to respond. Individuals can apply for the gig by responding to the email. The managers of the company then select a number of workers for the gig from the pool of interested individuals. The participant believes there is over 100 people on the email list, but managers typically select the best workers and blacklist individuals who do not perform well or do not show up for jobs. This work is labour-intensive, and workers are expected to properly wrap/pack clients' belongings, load the moving truck and unload the truck at the destination. Workers are not paid per hour but rather paid per gig. This participant indicated that he typically earns $200 to $300 dollars per gig and that he is paid in cash at the end of each gig. He believes the piece-rate strategy prevents the company from having to pay workers for the transportation time (to and from) as destinations can be quite far. For example, the participant indicated he once took on a gig moving belongings from a home in the Toronto, Ontario to Whitehorse, Yukon. There is also a reviewing system that clients can use to review their experience and based on the review this can impact an individual's likelihood of getting chosen for future jobs. The entry to this work is low-barrier and the participant described a small period between applying to be added to the email list and being selected for his first job.

5.3.2 Remote Types of Platform Work

5.3.2.1 Highly skilled Remote Platform Work:

Online tutoring / Remote educator – Ten participants reported that they engage in online tutoring work. Some participants reported that they utilize e-learning platforms. Some taught English to international clients using platforms like VIPKid and Cambly. VIPKid offers one-on-one English tutoring to children primarily located in China and Cambly offers one-on-one English tutoring to children and adults around the world. Some participants reported offering homework help and school tutoring using platforms like Easyke or utilized marketplaces like Kijiji to find local clients. One participant offered remote childcare services and created child-friendly educational content which parents can purchase from the platform Patreon to help occupy their children for anywhere between thirty minutes to two hours.

The participants reported that the work requirements for pursuing VIPKid, Cambly, and Easyke are more extensive as these platforms require applicants to demonstrate English-proficiency or academic qualifications to teach certain lessons and pass background screening. For example, Riley (age 27) explained that the platform he uses, Easyke, provides academic tutoring to (primarily) Chinese-speaking high school and university students attending English speaking schools in Canada, USA, and UK. He explained that this platform requires workers to hold a graduate-level degree from an English-speaking university or possess a board-certified teaching degree,

> anyone could probably just tell them they have a graduate degree and, and ah get on the platform but ah I know on the STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] side of things it's a little bit different, and I think that's because you know maybe STEM has a bit more of a directly marketable skill set. So, you know, an engineer isn't gonna come and like necessarily, you know, someone with their P. Eng [professional engineer designation] isn't necessarily gonna come work for as a teacher, um I think on the STEM side of things there are a little bit more lenient with the credentials, where they'll hire like upper year students kind of thing".

He also explained that he had to successfully pass a subject quiz that tested his level of expertise, complete several online training videos, and when he first started working, he was placed on a probationary period where all his tutoring with clients (including answering online questions) was overseen by moderators. Similarly, participants who used the platform VIPKid also noted they had to demonstrate a teaching lesson during the application process. This type of platform work had the most entry barriers/requirements out of all the platform work examined in this study.

In terms of the work, these participants reported flexible working schedules as they could dictate when to work or which questions/students to take on as clients. However, these participants reported that once a teaching slot was booked, or they accepted a particular tutoring question, they had to fulfill the work. These platforms also operated on rating systems where clients rated their experience and low rating were cause for termination from the platform. However, clients reported that while the ratings were mostly fair, they could be unfair at times. For example, Riley (age 27) explained that the platform he uses encourages maintaining academic integrity and wants to work alongside universities as opposed to being a cheating service. However, some

clients have more illicit expectations for using these platforms and can rate workers poorly, “you get students who are like 'hey can you write this for me' and you gotta be like 'no, I can't write it for you, but here's an outline that you can work off of, use this outline'. And they'll be like 'whoa like what the, that’s not good enough' - one star kind of thing”.

In terms of payment, participants who utilize platforms VIPKid, Cambly and Easyke noted they are paid by the platform and their earnings are dictated by the platform. By contrast, participants who use platforms like Kijiji or Craigslist to find clients reported they are paid directly by the client, and they typically determine their own payrate.

Social Media Marketing / Consulting / Voice Acting - One participant reported that she performs social media marketing using various digital platforms like Kijiji, Upwork and Fivver to find clients. This work entails creating unique posts and scheduling when to upload these posts to client’s social media accounts to maximize their social media presence. One participant reported that she offers one-on-one remote nutrition and fitness consulting/coaching using Facebook and Facebook Marketplace to find clients. One participant reported that he offers voice acting and primarily uses Facebook Marketplace to find clients. These participants noted that the entry requirements for their work were low. Instead, they needed to build a portfolio of previous work to show potential clients. These participants reported that they were paid directly by their clients and set their own rate of pay or negotiate payment directly with clients. In addition, they have more creative control over their work and autonomy to determine how many clients or projects they take on at a time.

Freelance/ Content/Copy Writing/Office Administration /Graphic Design /Web Development – 14 participants reported engaging in online writing (freelance, content and copy writing), virtual office administration, and/or graphic design/web development using the platforms Upwork, Fivver, and/or Freelancer to find clients. These types of platform work are offered virtually. Workers obtain clients in two broad ways. Some workers may post advertisements on various platforms offering their services, providing writing samples, and outlining their typical rate of pay for each service. Prospective clients can send them a message directly on the platform and both parties can negotiate the work and pay. In addition, these platforms also allow clients to

post advertisements on the platform outlining the requested work, length of time for the project/gig, experience required, rate of pay, and all other necessary information. The workers respond to these advertisements displayed on the platform and they can "apply" to receive the rights to the work. The client may ask them to submit certain credentials, writing samples, resumes, or even sometimes complete a telephone interview. The client then selects from all workers who apply to the gig. These platforms typically require all work to be negotiated and accepted directly on the platform through its direct messaging systems. After work is accepted, the client and worker can move their discussions to other avenues like email. Payment also occurs directly through the platform. Clients provide payment to the platform and the platform deducts its servicing fees or operational fees from the payment before transferring the remaining payment to the worker's account. The participants described that most of their work is short-term that they can typically complete in several days to a few weeks, although several participants noted that some remote work can be long-term and last several months. These participants reported preferring long-term projects since it guaranteed them income for a longer period and is typically better paying than short-term projects or gigs.

Online Selling - One participant reported that he engages in online selling using platforms like Kijiji, Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, and several online auction sites to sell vintage and antique items he acquires. He reported creating advertisements on these sites depicting the item he is selling including sale price. Interested buyers contact him on the platform and they will negotiate price and set up a purchasing time and location. This participant noted that all the payment from all items he sells occurs off the platform and he is paid in cash or e-transfer.

5.3.2.2 Low-Skilled Remote Platform Work:

Transcription Services – Six participants engaged in transcription services using the digital platforms Rev or Verbit. These platforms offer a marketplace that connects clients requiring transcription services with individuals that provide captioning and/or transcription for audio and video recordings. The individuals using these platforms have access to a pool of audio clips organized by whether the client wants verbatim transcription or non-verbatim. The participants explained that these audio clips provide them with a short snippet of the audio and depending on the quality of the audio, the participants can choose to accept the job to transcribe/caption the

audio. These platforms operate on a first come, first serve strategy. They also operate on zero-hour contracts so that workers can choose to stop or start working at any moment without being penalized. These participants also explained that payment for each transcription is determined by clients but typically ranges from ten cents to one dollar per minute of audio/video recording. The participants reported that the entry requirements for these two platforms were very low. These platforms did not require any specific qualifications or credentials. Instead, applicants must pass a short transcription quiz where they transcribe an audio clip and the transcription is checked for accuracy, English-proficiency, writing style, and speed. Once an applicant passes the quiz, their account is activated, and they can access the pool of audio clips and begin selecting audio files to transcribe for income. These participants reported that they are paid by the platforms they use. Clients pay the platform a base price per minute of audio clip, the platform then deducts their service fees from the payment and transfers the remaining payment to the worker. The participants noted that their transcriptions are "graded" for accuracy, formatting, and timeliness and those with consistently low grades have their accounts terminated.

Crowdwork and Online Surveys – Crowdwork involves a large number of people contributing to a small amount of labour (Kessler, 2018). Twelve participants in this study indicated performing various types of crowdwork including filling out surveys and questionnaires, minor data entry, transcribing receipts, and providing feedback to AI systems. The majority of these participants use the platform MTurk, and several reported using sites like HoneyBee, Prolific, Swagbucks, Lionsbridge, Branded Surveys, Valued Opinions, You Gov, GigHub, Nielson, Kijiji, and Craigslist. Since 9 participants specifically used the platform MTurk, I will describe how participants perform crowdwork particularly through this platform. To become a worker on MTurk, individuals sign up on the site as a Turker (worker) and complete the online application form providing demographic information such as age, gender, and education level. They submit their application and wait for it to be approved and their Turker accounts to be activated before they can begin working. Account activations can occur as quick as one day to several months. Most participants reported that their accounts were approved and activated within one week. However, several participants reported that account activations were an unclear and arbitrary process. More specifically, these participants were unsure about how this platform goes through the process of selecting which applications to activate or reject. For example, Katie (age 46)

reported that when she had applied, her account was approved and activated within a day, but her daughter's application was rejected. Similarly, Amandeep (age 22) who lives in Mumbai, India reported that his initial application was rejected but six months later without reapplying he received an email that his account had been approved for activation. Some participants suggested that account activation is based on luck, although others reported that account activations are based on location, demographics characteristics of the applicant, and timing. MTurk has not revealed any information on their application selection process.

Once accounts are activated, these remote platform workers fill out a quick financial form where they submit their bank information (for U.S. Turkers only) for payment and preferred payment schedule, and then they can begin completing crowdwork tasks immediately. Non-US Turkers are informed that they can convert their earnings into a gift card to Amazon.com. Turkers have access to a list of available Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) they can choose to accept and perform within a given timeline. Once the HITs are completed and submitted by the Turker, Requesters must approve or reject the work. If approved, the Turker receives the base payment for completing the HIT. If rejected, the Turker does not receive any payment. However, Turkers can reach out to the Requester for information on why the work was rejected and, in some cases, Requesters can overturn their rejection and approve the work. Accepted and rejected work contributes to the Turker's overall HIT approval/rejection rate. Approval rates dictate the kinds of HITs workers can access or view since Requesters can also select to have their HITs shown exclusively to Turkers with specific approval rates (e.g., approval rates 99% or higher). High rejection rates can also cause accounts to be deactivated or terminated. Participants reported that location also impacts which HITs they can access. Several Canadian participants reported that they are more limited in which HITs they can access compared to American Turkers based on their own experiences and what they have read on online forums. Participants noted that Turkers living in the Global South such as India have the least access to HITs and especially higher paying HITs.

In terms of selecting HITs to perform, most participants reported that they manually look for HITs and typically select the HITs that are the highest paying, then followed by HITs that may be low paying but interest them. Some participants reported they have installed third party

software on their devices and/or browser extensions such as “Hit Catcher” which automatically accepts to perform any HITs that meets the Turker’s preferences, such as any HIT that offers payment over $1.00. These tools ensure the Turker can access the best HITs in a timely manner since they must compete with other Turkers to secure limited work. Participants reported that most of their time spent working is looking for HITs to perform while less time is devoted to completing the work. In terms of payment, Requesters dictate rate of pay for each HIT and payment occurs through the platform.

5.3.3 Mixed Platform Work

Eleven participants described engaging in a mixture of different types of in-person and remote platform work concurrently. Table 5.2 shows the various combination of platform work performed by each of these participants. The combination of remote and in-person platform work varied by each participant, however, there were some broader patterns and similarities in the types of platform work they engaged in. Six of the eleven participants only engaged in one type of remote work and one type of in-person work at a time. The remaining five participants engaged in multiple types of remote and in-person platform work. The most popular type of platform work performed by most of these participants was crowdwork or completing online surveys for cash or rewards.

Five participants in this study (7% of all participants) indicated that they have chronic medical conditions. Notably, four out of the five participants with chronic conditions reported that they engage in mixed types of platform work. This means that 4 of the 11 participants (36%) who engaged in mixed platform work also have chronic medical conditions. These participants indicated that the variety in work was needed due to the erratic nature of their conditions which makes it hard for them to take on, or commit to, full-time or standard employment. This is best demonstrated by Louise (age 44) who revealed that her weekly working hours vary considerably due to her chronic condition which impacts her differently each week: “I can safely say four [hours], some weeks it's as many as 20 [hours]. Some weeks, I think, maybe I should do more. Maybe I could do more. But I also know if I push myself too hard, then I'm in bed for days”. For these participants, they first pursue platform work that has the lowest entry barriers, requires the least commitment, and that can be performed primarily from home such as crowdwork, online

surveys, and transcription. Over time as they become familiar with working in the platform economy and they better understand the limitations of their conditions they begin to take on additional opportunities that may require more commitment such as fulfilling in-person gigs such as dog walking (or pet boarding), mystery shopping, user-testing, paid research, and delivery work. Some may even take on one-time jobs that require scheduling work ahead of time and working for an assigned number of hours such as event staffing or online tutoring. To summarize, the participants with chronic illnesses or disabilities first enter the platform economy by seeking remote platform work because of its low entry barriers and requirements. Eventually, these participants take on in-person platform work that may require more physical commitment and time but that is still flexible and can accommodate their medical conditions.

Beyond the participants with medical conditions, an additional five of the eleven participants who engage in mixed platform work indicated that they do not have any alternative work other than their platform work. The remaining two participants reported that they have no other work but are currently in post-secondary school. Because these participants do not have other paid employment, they rely on a mixture of different types of platform work because of the inconsistent nature of platform work where work opportunities may be limited from time to time. This is best explained by Aileen (age 40) who stated that "I think I signed up for a total of 12 to 15 sites not just one or two because then I get more opportunities. If there's not one on this site or if there's limited work, then I go to the others. So, it's kind of hard because there's only so much work. So then, I just find that the more I'm involved with, then they send me emails 'oh we have jobs in your area' right and so it's more opportunities".

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the descriptive statistics of the participants whose experiences informed the findings of this study, and to provide descriptions about the various types of platform work from the perspective of the workers. To summarize, the platform work examined in this study were broadly grouped into in-person types of platform work that require workers to be present at a physical location to fulfil the work, and remote types of platform work which can primarily be performed online. In-person types of platform work were further

organized into service-providing platform work that included rideshare driving, delivery courier, freight transportation, house cleaning, user testing/research studies, event staffing, mystery shopping, modelling and photography, dog walking and pet services, and home sharing; and manual labour platform work which included painting, hardwood floor installation, landscaping and household repairs, and house moving. Remote types of platform work were also organized into two additional groups that better reflect the level of skills and knowledge required to perform the work; highly skilled remote work including online tutoring, social media marketing, virtual consulting, voice acting, freelance/copy/content writing, and online selling; and low-skilled remote work including crowdwork, online surveys, and transcription. Some participants reported engaging in various mixes of in-person and remote types of platform work. These participants were encompassed in the category "mixed types of platform work" since their experiences may be unique compared to individuals who perform *only* in-person or remote types of platform work. This is not an exhaustive list of all types of platform work within this sector and it is possible that there are other types of work not examined here that may not fit neatly into the categories of in-person or remote platform work or those that blur the lines between remote and in-person work such as social media influencers.

The findings also show broad patterns in the types of platform work participants pursued according to socioeconomic characteristics including age, gender, and education level. More women in this study noted pursuing remote types of platform work, primarily highly skilled types of work. The women who engaged in in-person types of platform work primarily pursued service-providing platform work compared to manual labour types of platform work. By contrast, most men engaged in in-person types of platform work, and only a few men engaged in low-skilled remote work. Participants with chronic medical conditions reported engaging in mixed types of platform work to better diversify their opportunities.

It is important to note that most participants in this study who have full-time or part-time employment within traditional industries do not perform platform work that is like their current

conventional jobs.[15] This means that they are not using platforms as another route to land work, but rather, only do the work on a specific platform(s) and not outside that platform. For example, I did not have any participants who were employed as taxi drivers at the time of the interview, and who also performed ridesharing work. However, I did have a few participants who reported prior experience employed as a taxi driver, but they are not currently employed in that industry.

Chapters 6 to 10 explore the analytical findings which inform our understanding of work in the platform economy, and more broadly theorize how experiences are shaped by rational social action and conspicuous prosumption to shape work within prosumer capitalism.

[15] Chapter 8 further explores the experiences of participants who have additional employment (multiple jobholding) in other industries.

Chapter 6

6 Motivations for Working in the Platform Economy

6.1 Overview

This chapter explores participants' motivations for pursuing platform work and the findings address the first research question: Which factors motivate participants to choose to work in the platform economy? Previous literature has identified some motivations for pursuing specific types of platform work including rideshare driving (Hall & Kreuger, 2018; Kessler, 2018; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020), crowdwork (Kessler, 2018; Margaryan, 2019), and highly skilled remote work (Graham et al., 2017; Kessler, 2018; Margaryan, 2019). Because this study examines a broader range of platform work, the findings discussed here expand on previous literature by highlighting trends in motivational factors that influence decisions to pursue in-person, remote, or mixed types of platform work, respectively.

Going beyond the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I analyze participants' motivations through the lens of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption. The analysis reveals that participants made rational decisions that motivated their choices to pursue platform work. Drawing on literature by Wright (2002) who argues that material interests have a strong tendency to shape the actual behavior of people, the findings reveal rational actions shaped by conspicuous prosumption. This chapter argues that participants pursued paid prosumption activities to support their consumerism and desires for productivity which aids in helping them achieve or sustain cognitive consonance.

The participants in this study identified a variety of motivations. The findings do not demonstrate any drastic differences in motivations across those who perform remote, in-person, or mixed types of platform work. However, participants did highlight certain features that were more common to some types of platform work compared to others. The motivations discussed here can be aggregated into five key themes: need for income, non-standardized work, barriers in traditional employment, career aspirations, and extra time (boredom).

6.2 Income Needs and Income Wants

All seventy-one participants indicated being motivated in part to work in the platform economy because it provides them with income. The need for income varied by each participant with some reporting a greater need than others. However, they all largely pursued platform work because it is a paid activity. Some even specified that if these activities were not paid, they would not engage in them demonstrating a materialistic orientation towards platform work. Therefore, the need for income is a motivating factor that pulls or pushes many individuals into working in the platform economy.

Participants can be grouped into two categories based on their income needs: those who *want* added income, and those who financially *need* their platform work earnings to afford their living needs. Comprising the first group were 28 participants who indicated using platform work to top-up their earnings from their conventional jobs (Drahokoupil & Jepsen, 2017; Fabo et al., 2017), and an additional 15 participants who reported using platform work to top-up their financial support (e.g., OSAP) or disability benefits. These participants (60.6%) reported wanting additional income to build up savings, for general spending, or to use towards large purchases like vacations. These participants reported that they did not rely on their platform work earnings to meet their living needs. Instead, they pursued platform work to earn money faster (e.g., "quick way to earn a buck") compared to working in a conventional job.

The speed at which they could earn money was commonly highlighted by in-person platform workers, especially manual labour platform workers as a driving motivation. For example, Hamed (age 38 – house painting) explained that he first started platform work in 2015 to help pay for a CAD$2000.00 vacation. He had prior experience painting as a teenager and decided to pursue this platform work independently rather than working for a painting company that would pay him slightly more than minimum wage. After his vacation, he realized he could continue to do platform work in addition to his conventional full-time job and use the added income from platform work towards purchasing other things he wanted such as a new vehicle without dipping into his savings. Hamed explained that he views his consumerism facilitated by platform work in the following way: "I don't see it as I'm using my money. I see it as I'm using somebody else's money. So, I look at it that way". In other words, earnings from platform work can motivate

some individuals by providing them with additional means for satisfying their consumer desires without tapping into their savings or incurring personal debt.

These participants who pursued platform work to satisfy their consumerism often highlighted pay as the most important feature of their work. They also rationalized pay as motivating them to perform platform work despite disliking many aspects of the work. This sentiment is best described by Bill (age 42 – house painting) who explained that he finds painting very boring and was experiencing loneliness and depression from working more than 60 hours per week between his full-time job and platform work. Despite disliking platform work and not demonstrating a financial need for the added income, Bill explained why he continues to perform platform work: "it's the money. The money I can save up and then can retire earlier. Or you can get things faster, getting more accomplished faster [because] I have two incomes coming in now". Similarly, Rai (age 32 – floor installation) explained that platform work in addition to his conventional job is enabling him to pay off his mortgage faster: "so, I'm getting, getting it done quickly. I managed to pay almost $25-$30,000 a year. So, at this rate I'd be done in two and a half years, three years, I'll be done". These comments demonstrate that some individuals pursue platform work to have multiple streams of income which can help them to achieve their consumer/purchasing goals quicker. However, there is a cyclical relationship between an individual and their consumption since individuals can never fully satisfy their consumer desires as new goods emerge (Marcuse, 1964). For example, Hamed (age 38 – house painting) reported that he does not see himself quitting this platform work anytime soon. He stated "maybe when I'm gonna get older. But I got too many wants right now in order to, in order to pay for them. I have to do this, I guess". Participants like Hamed embody the worker-as-consumer orientation. They view themselves as consumers or they come to see themselves in the very things they purchase (Marcuse, 1964), and engage in platform work to support this consumerism.

Compared to in-person platform workers who emphasized the earning speed and earning potential of their platform work; remote platform workers using their activities to top-up their incomes regarded platform work as "easy money" or a passive way to earn income without investing too much time or effort. This is especially true given that most remote platform work are typically low paying, and most individuals cannot earn enough from this work alone to

support themselves. For example, Zeke (age 23) who provides voice acting for clients explained "for me it's money for nothing. That's ultimately it. I feel like it's that, like I'm basically getting paid to do something that's super easy for me, anyway. That's what draws me to it. Like it's not like I need the money, I definitely do not need the money. It's just a matter of why not have it". In addition, because these participants do not rely on their platform work earnings to meet their living needs, they typically treat the added earnings as disposable income that they can use frivolously without feeling guilty. For example, Jorge (age 29) best explained this motivation for pursuing crowdwork:

> I find it a pretty easy way to make some extra money. It's kind of paid for things that would otherwise come out of the money I make at my full-time job. Um, you know, I have a wedding next summer so I can kind of start paying off like the photographer and the DJ that sort of stuff with this money whereas otherwise I'd be paying it straight out of my bank account. So, I think things like that there's always going to be things to spend money on…I think in the general sense, I mean last year, 2019, I made like almost USD$2500.00 and like this year I've already made about that too. You know that's-that's not a small amount for you know especially sitting on your computer and doing a few video chats or whatever it might be. It's kind of an opportunity to put a real chunk a change in my bank account, so I do appreciate that…It-it feels like separate money sort of in the way and it just makes me feel better when I'm spending this money rather than the money at my full-time job to do certain things. And I don't know if that makes sense but it's just kind of the way I think for some reason.

Thus, some remote platform workers also demonstrated consumer orientations towards their platform work.

In comparison to the participants who reported pursuing platform work for extra spending money, 39.4% of participants indicated more financial dependency on their platform work earnings to afford their living expenses. More specifically, 14 participants reported having no other source of income other than platform work, and an additional 14 participants reported needing platform work to supplement their earnings from their conventional part-time jobs. While most of these participants utilized the added income to afford their living expenses, other participants reported pursing platform work to afford additional expenses like sending money to support family living in other countries. Thus, financial needs can push some individuals into platform work. This finding supports the literature (Dolber et al., 2021; Keith et al., 2019; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Ravenelle, 2019a).

Participants elaborated on why they opted to choose work in the platform economy over (additional) conventional jobs. Many participants indicated that one appeal for pursuing platform work over conventional jobs is that platform work is piece-rate work. This means that platform earnings are directly impacted by how much they work compared to earning a standard hourly wage. This can help people earn income faster than working in a conventional job with finite earnings (Kessler, 2018). For example, Riley (age 27 – remote educator) stated "I think that something that appealed to me was its very performance based…I can make more money as long as I'm sort of willing to work more and I guess I can make as much money as I'm like willing to work kind of thing. And I kind of really like that. It motivates me." Also, some types of platform work can be more profitable if it is paid in cash (and not taxed) which can contribute to individuals achieving their income goals or consumer goals faster.[16]

Participants who reported income-based motivations for pursuing platform work demonstrated means-end instrumental social action guided by practical or formal rationality. These participants rationalized platform work as helping them to achieve their income goals whether for added consumerism or to support their living needs. Moreover, participants who reported paying taxes on their platform work earnings displayed more formal rationality orienting their actions towards society's rules and laws. By contrast, the participants who explained that they avoid paying taxes on their platform work earnings (by being paid in cash or not reporting their added income) displayed more practical rationality for achieving their goals in the most efficient manner.

6.3 Non-standardized Work

The platform economy's non-standard working practices are also motivating factors (Graham et al., 2017; Hall & Kreuger, 2018; Kessler, 2018; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020). Participants enjoyed the flexibility, autonomy, and low entry barriers platform work offers. Many participants explained that they sought these aspects due to certain conditions in their life that impacted their ability to pursue alternative employment in traditional industries.

[16] Participants satisfaction with platform work earnings is explored in more detail in Chapter 9.

6.3.1 Flexibility

Fifty-four participants (76%) directly discussed the importance of having flexibility in their work and how flexibility contributed to them pursuing platform work over conventional employment. When participants discussed flexibility, they referenced the ability to choose their own working hours including when to work, how much to work, and pace of work. Flexibility to choose working hours was most important for participants who also reported being employed in a traditional industry, those who are currently in school, and those caring for young children or aging parents. For example, some participants explained that their working schedule for their fulltime or part-time job changes each week. Because they lack standard working hours in their primary work, they are unable to pursue a second conventional job since they would not be able to anticipate their work availability until the start of each week. For example, Milo (age 30) who performs delivery courier work and ridesharing explained that he is also employed fulltime in a traditional industry, but his work schedule changes based on when his employers need him: "sometimes it's morning, sometimes it's night shift or afternoon. So, every-every week is different". The unpredictability of his full-time work schedule makes it difficult for him to pursue a second conventional job. Thus, some individuals are motivated to pursue platform work because the flexibility offered by this sector better accommodates their changing schedule needs.

Flexibility was also important for participants with fixed working schedules in their conventional jobs. These participants reported pursuing platform work over additional employment in traditional industries because the zero-hour contracts offered by platforms allow them to work when they want to and without being penalized for irregular working. For example, Katie (age 46 – crowdwork) is a full-time teacher. She primarily does crowdwork around her teaching job. She reported doing more crowdwork during her summer break when school is closed than during other periods in the school year:

> well cause there's weeks at a time where I don't feel like doing anything. So, like I might just like over the Christmas break, for example, I don't wanna. Teaching is hard from September to Nov-to December is a long haul. So, Christmas break I just want to do nothing, so I usually don't work at all. And I don't have to tell them or anything, I just don't work and it's kind of a nice break. So, I like that it's like totally up to you, how much you work.

Similarly, participants who were in school expressed flexibility as motivating their decision to work in the platform economy. For example, Fatima (age 21) who does transcription work using the digital platform Rev explained that she pursued this platform work because the flexibility appealed to her even though she was not interested in the work itself,

> I was applying everywhere and anywhere and then saw this and it was, it seemed convenient because it said you can login at any time, you can sorta pick up whatever you see if you want to pick it up. So, it's very flexible hours. The line of work didn't really interest me but the way it was set up for the workers interested me because it was more convenient to my time.

For these participants, platform work provides them with the choice to pursue additional paid work when they want or need to. Thus, these participants prioritized their conventional jobs or schooling. They pursued platform work because it fits around their pre-existing needs rather than taking on (additional) conventional jobs that may be too demanding or inflexible to balance with their current roles and responsibilities. The importance participants placed on flexibility was so great that when asked if they would continue doing platform work if it were no longer flexible or if they could no longer choose their own working days/hours, many indicated they would quit platform work to pursue conventional jobs which they largely regarded as less precarious.

6.3.2 Autonomy

Related to flexibility is the theme of autonomy or ability to choose the types of projects/gigs to work on, tasks to complete, and which clients to work for. Participants often referred to this as 'being your own boss' and they associated this with the feeling of having independence and "not taking any crap" from clients or employers. Kessler (2018) identified that many workers are lured into platform work each year with the promise of having "freedom from the tyranny of the punch of the clock, the autocratic boss, the finite wages, and limited opportunities of the 9-to-5 job. [Platform work] meant that you were *free.* Not only free but an entrepreneur" (Kessler, 2018, p. 13). Similarly, many participants reported pursuing platform work because of this perceived aspect of the platform economy. In fact, forty-eight participants even used the word 'freedom' or 'freedom of choice' in their discussion of platform work such as Tommy (age 30 – rideshare driver) who commented "it is just the freedom and the flexibility to do what you want when you want. You don't have to take action from your boss, and your boss won't tell you

‘okay, come here, do this. Now do that’. It's sort of the freedom of making your own hours and you do what you want, when you want”. Thus, participants with primary jobs or schooling often reported not having autonomy within these conventional pursuits such as Logan (age 42 – painting) who explained: “like at work [conventional job][17] I cannot say anything. Everything is yes, yes, or yes. You know, you don't say I don't want to want to do it. It's a different atmosphere [than platform work]. If you say you don't want to do it, then they'll tell you to talk a walk”. Therefore, rather than take on a(nother) job within a traditional industry, they rationalized the pursuit of platform work as providing them with some autonomy to control their work and work pace.

However, the perception of autonomy is not guaranteed in the platform economy (Ravenelle, 2019b; Shapiro, 2018). It is primarily experienced by individuals who are not financially dependent on platform work. For instance, choosing the right project is very important since some projects can be more difficult than others or may take longer to complete. Successful transcription work, for example, requires choosing audio files of high caliber since audio quality can impact the length of time it takes to transcribe and the overall accuracy of the transcript. If an audio file takes too long to transcribe, it is not profitable. Even worse, these platform companies penalize workers for taking too long to transcribe a file or for inaccuracies in the transcript. For example, Fatima (age 21) explained

> there's always jobs available, it's just the quality of work. It's just the quality of the audio and we're sort of based on metrics so we sort of get graded in a way so they can keep up the customer satisfaction and whatnot. So, if your metrics fall below a certain line you can't do transcription anymore. So, everyone sort of wants the good audio, you know, a good quality audio where you can sort of hear everything or you can sort of transcribe everything properly, so they don't get fired or penalized.

Similarly, because in-person platform workers generally have higher work-related expenses, they need to be more careful in calculating whether work will be profitable. This calculation is especially necessary for those using platforms based on bidding systems since bidding wars among numerous platform workers can quickly lead to low pay. This is expressed by Greg (age 40 – manual tasks and landscaping) who explained that when choosing work “I just bid, but I

[17] Name of company omitted to maintain participant’s anonymity

keep watching because the price keeps changing and then they close it like after five minutes. So, like remember the [gig to roll a] driveway started at $200 and then it went $190. Now it is closed at $145. So, somebody took $145!" However, this perceived autonomy discussed by many participants stems from the fact that most of them do not rely on their platform work earnings, and some do not even "need" these jobs since they have other sources of income. For example, Fatima is currently in post-secondary school and receiving government financial support (OSAP). She primarily took on transcription work as a short-term summer job. Because she does not depend on her platform work earnings, she admitted that she can be choosier in which transcription tasks she selects to complete. Similarly, Greg is employed full-time at a technology company and mainly uses platform work to top-up his income. Therefore, platform workers who are more financially dependent on their platform work earnings to meet their living needs are more vulnerable and may have less perceived autonomy to reject available platform work (Ravenelle, 2019b).[18]

6.3.3 Low Entry Barriers

Participants were also motivated to pursue platform work because of the platform economy's low entry barriers which make it easier for people to engage in paid activities. Some types of platform work are available immediately unlike conventional jobs where the hiring process can take a few weeks or months or require lengthy work experience (Kessler, 2018).

Some participants explained that at different times of a year they may have more availability to work than at other times. For example, students commonly cited this response. They indicated having several breaks from school throughout the year, including a longer four-month summer break. Because their periods of work availability are short, they were particularly interested in work that did not have lengthy application processes or did not require previous experience. For example, Hailey (age 28) explained that she pursued platform work because it better accommodated her summer break and because there would be less competition for securing work compared to pursuing conventional jobs where she would need to compete against other students

[18] Chapter 7 further explores this notion of perceived freedom via platform work, and how workers' autonomy is highly constrained by the platforms.

similarly looking for temporary work. She explained "because I went to a polytechnic [school], I only had a three-month break. And so, I started-I finished school a month after all the university students and I felt I was like, not in a good position to find traditional work for only three months."

Choosing to pursue platform work because it offers flexibility, autonomy, and/or has low entry barriers demonstrates means-end rational calculations. These participants explained pursuing platform work over conventional employment because they required non-standard working arrangements for a variety of reasons including balancing additional paid work with their fulltime or part-time jobs, schooling, familial obligations, and intrinsic desires.

6.4 Barriers to working in traditional industries

Individuals were also motivated to pursue platform work due to barriers that prevented them from obtaining conventional jobs in traditional industries. These barriers include lack of work opportunities, declining full-time standard employment, restrictive employment policies, and medical reasons.

6.4.1 Lack of Work Opportunities

Several participants identified a lack of work opportunities in traditional industries as motivating them to pursue platform work over conventional employment. This is best explained by Davidson (age 36 - mixed platform work) who commented that many people pursue platform work as a last resort:

> traditional work, as much as they say it's for everyone, it's not. What I mean is that there's still a barrier. Like I know people, I know for myself, it took me a long time to find work. I know people were in my class and people that I've met along the way, that you know, they did everything possible. They sent out their resumes, they did covers, they did interview prep, they went to see a counsellor or the employment advisor person, they did everything. They did everything they could and they were unable for a long time to get a full-time job or full-time work. And you know some have families, some have mortgages, pay rent, and then you're doing all the social stuff or culture stuff, all the logistical stuff, political stuff, all the community stuff, so that's all like external stuff and then you're dealing with mental health, you know, other health, physical health and it's just a lot. So I've seen in people, you just get to the point where you just gotta you know, you just gotta take it, and accept that that is how it is. Now, I'm not saying that you

> should give up but essentially you're going to say 'I'm just gonna go and take that minimum wage job. I'm gonna just go take that you know $2 dollars an hour, $4 dollars'.

Here, Davison emphasized that those who are desperate for work will settle for low paying jobs or platform work because they desire work but lack real opportunities to obtain conventional employment.

According to several participants, the COVID-19 pandemic had also worsened employment opportunities, and a few indicated losing their jobs or were furloughed due to the pandemic. For example, Josie (age 60 – mixed platform work) lost her job as a community manager of an apartment complex during the pandemic. After losing her full-time job, she increased her working hours for remote platform work and in-person platform work to at least 40 hours per week. When asked why she chose to increase her platform work hours rather than pursue a conventional job that matched her previous work experiences, Josie explained that she believed her age would prevent her from obtaining work in an administrative setting. In addition, she also believed that her education level would weaken her chances of obtaining conventional work due to the increased saturation of job seekers resulting from COVID-19,

> because getting a job is incredibly difficult right now, and I'm competing with people for secretarial office administrator jobs that have master's degrees, because they can't find a job. But I think I would be better armed if I had a four-year degree. Yeah, at least a four-year PhD would have been preferable. But if I had a degree, I think that would have made a difference.

In other words, Josie was motivated to increase her platform work because she believed her age and lack of education would not be a disadvantage when pursuing platform work like mystery shopping and crowdwork.

Recent graduates of post-secondary school who performed highly skilled remote platform work also indicated being motivated to pursue work in the platform economy because of a lack of work opportunities. More specifically, these participants explained that they have had difficulty finding conventional employment within their field such as Dakota (age 27 – online writing) who has a bachelor's degree in actuarial science: "I've come to learn that it is a bit difficult to find some jobs. So, I've just decided to go on with my online [work] because I've come to love it. I

really love it." For Dakota, she was previously doing 25 hours of this remote platform work while she was in school, but since graduating and not being able to find employment in her field, she has increased her platform work to over forty hours a week. Individuals may also find that having a lack of experience in their field despite their educational attainment makes it more difficult to secure conventional employment. These types of participants commented that they turned to platform work as a means of obtaining work experience and skills that they can later transfer to their preferred occupations. For example, Pete (age 25) indicated that he began working as a remote and in-person tutor finding clients on sites like Kijiji and Craigslist as a means of filling out his resume. He explained that after he graduated with his bachelor's degree in education, he had trouble obtaining a teaching position because of his lack of experience. Pete clarified that he now works as a supply teacher on both a public and Catholic school board in Ontario, but he maintains his tutoring work on the side until he can obtain a full-time teaching position.

Issues with work visas can also prevent people from seeking traditional employment and motivate them to pursue platform work. This is best demonstrated by the experiences of Belinda (age 28) who is currently employed in Vancouver, Canada as a behavioural interventionalist on a part-time basis. She explained that she is unable to seek another conventional job in a traditional industry due to restrictions on her work visa that prevent her from holding two separate jobs at the same time. Belinda noted that she is actively seeking full-time employment in her field, but to supplement her income, she uses the digital platforms Fivver and Upwork to find remote office administration work. This platform work does not violate her work visa conditions due to the lack of regulations and the grey area pertaining to this type of remote work.

6.4.2 Decline in Fulltime Standard Employment

Many participants who currently work in traditional industries discussed that opportunities for full-time employment are declining. Many even noted that their full-time working hours in their conventional jobs have been reduced over the past several years or that they have been unable to secure full-time hours altogether. This theme was more commonly shared by in-person platform workers compared to remote workers. Thus, some individuals pursued platform work to supplement the reduced hours (and wages) from their conventional jobs. This is best

demonstrated by Tommy (age 30) who took on rideshare driving when his working hours in the collections department of Visa were reduced making it harder for him to pay off his pre-existing credit card debt. He explained,

> we used to do 44 hours and then 36 and then 34 now 32. So, they keep cutting back on my hours, full-time hours. And in order to service the debt and to pay off the mortgage and the credit card debt, well, some people have mortgages, my friend have mortgages. I don't have mortgages. I'm renting. But I have the credit card, the Visa credit card debt. I need to pay all these off, so I'm looking for money to do [earn] sideways.

Similarly, other participants indicated that they are unable to obtain full-time work hours as many employers are no longer offering full-time employment. Take for example Fez (age 39) who relies on rideshare driving to supplement his part-time job as a custodian. He explained "they [school board] only give three days [of custodial work] because they don't want to pay full-time work. Everybody only part-time and no more than 25 hours". This participant noted that he would quit rideshare driving if he could secure full-time custodial employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic also greatly reduced some participants' conventional working hours. These participants all did small amounts of platform work prior to the pandemic but increased their platform working hours following the reduction of their conventional full-time hours. For example, Ferguson (age 33) discussed that prior to COVID-19 he worked more than 70 hours per week as a customer service representative. However, during the pandemic his work hours were reduced to less than 14 hours per week. As a result, he turned to delivery driving and freelance writing to supplement his work hours and income. At the time of the interview, he was working 16 hours per week as a delivery courier and an additional 16 hours doing freelance writing. He also stated that he had begun pursuing event staffing work using platforms like Kijiji to find one-time in-person paid opportunities. However, he indicated that he preferred remote freelance writing but is limited in how many projects he could secure. Hence, he supplements the freelance writing with different in-person platform work. Participants like Ferguson explained that they were motivated to pursue platform work rather than seeking another job in another traditional industry because they expect to have their conventional work hours reinstated after the pandemic and would be able to leave platform work (or reduce their platform work) more easily.

6.4.3 Restrictive Employment Policies

Some participants identified that their traditional employment has restrictive policies that prevent them from pursuing other conventional work. However, these restrictions do not necessarily apply to platform work since the platform economy operates in a grey area. For example, Hamed (age 38 – painter) is employed fulltime at a technology company and when asked why he does not pursue other work in the field, he explained that there is a non-compete clause in his employment contract that prevents him from pursuing another job in the field of IT. He stated "there is something in my clause, they don't allow us to work at the competitor's place. And then if I leave [here][19] I have to wait two months before I can work in something computer related".

Furthermore, while some traditional jobs may not directly restrict people from pursuing part-time or secondary employment, other social factors related to their standard employment may discourage individuals from pursuing more conventional part-time work. For example, Katie (age 46 - crowdwork) a full-time teacher discussed not wanting to pursue a traditional part-time job in her community during school breaks because she could potentially come across her students and peers outside of teaching. She commented "I like [that] I don't have to be working somewhere where people see me and wonder why a full-time teacher has to have a part-time job. You know what I mean?" This acts as a barrier to pursuing conventional employment and serves to motivate participants into working in the platform economy, especially remote platform work which can be done more privately or hidden.

6.4.4 Medical Barriers

As mentioned earlier, five participants indicated that they suffer from chronic medical conditions that prevent them from obtaining standard employment in traditional industries. These participants all discussed previous experiences of being fired or let go from conventional jobs due to their illnesses. For example, Louise (age 44 – mixed platform work) explained how her

[19] Name of company omitted to maintain participant's anonymity.

illness prevented her from seeking conventional work due to her difficulties maintaining pre-scheduled working hours,

> I have like a severe chronic illness that was kind of like starting up near the end of my, like the last couple years of schooling um and I knew I couldn't go on to do a masters or anything, so I initially started, actually okay I guess technically my gig work would've started then because I started doing nanny work through like the websites and apps as well. So yeah, so that was my first like, the first work I did were nanny jobs and I did those for like at least a year or two and then it sort of became clear that um my illness was still too big of a barrier for those jobs in the sense of like having to-have to get up at a specific time and to be somewhere at a certain time and be there for X number of hours just like has not been possible for me for a long time. My schedule is very variable um if I don't sleep enough I don't function at all and it's very unpredictable and my very sick days kind of come very sudden and I just take too many sick days to hold down a conventional job.

For individuals with health conditions, being unemployed or out of work for a lengthy period makes it harder for them to pursue conventional work later because they perceive their conditions make them less desirable as employees. For example, Aileen (age 40 – mixed platform work) explained that because she suffers from severe anxiety and depression, she believes she would not be able to obtain conventional work since the hiring process requires an interview. She commented that she would not do well in an interview because she would have to explain the gaps in her employment history due to her medical conditions and inform the employer that she may need extended sick days to accommodate her illnesses. She explained,

> I feel like in some ways I have a low self-esteem and I have a hard time getting a job so like I went through a couple periods where it was just, I really did not feel like I could get a regular job. I do not have confidence and I was like 'ok this mystery shopping, I don't have to worry about that because I'm not going for any interviews'. Like there's no interviews. I basically signed up for the site, they asked me to write about my best and maybe my most recent good customer service experience and then maybe like most recent negative customer service experience so I'm just writing and then they, I guess evaluate that and confirm that 'hey yeah you can, you're able to write about the service' because they see a sample of my writing so they're not to take me by any interviews or anything like that…I do find that having like anxiety and having depression can make it difficult for me sometimes if I'm going through something in my life and that I can't, I can't always dedicate or commit the same way that I feel like maybe another person could…When I was working for Rogers [Communications] I was there for two and a half years, right. So, there was a number of moments where I couldn't be there and it was like for a couple of weeks and you know I just, I don't like that feeling of 'oh I can't be at work, I can't commit'. I'm not, even though it's not true, it's like the feeling of 'oh I'm not a good employee' you know?

A final barrier discussed by those with medical conditions is that they are receiving government support such as disability benefits which limit how much conventional work they can perform before they no longer qualify for benefits. Derrick (age 27 -crowdwork) explained this as a reason for why he does not think he will pursue work in traditional industries in the future. He reported "I'm currently on a subsidy right now, it's like a supplemental security income. So, I can't really work a regular job right now. I could see myself doing this [crowdwork] for the rest of my career". For these participants, they indicated that their medical conditions were the biggest motivator for working in the platform economy and their preference for mixed platform work is to diversify their work to better suit their medical conditions. In other words, they prefer in-person platform work when they feel healthy but rely on remote platform work when their illnesses worsen.

This section highlighted barriers to obtaining employment or full-time work within traditional industries. These participants demonstrated rational means-end calculations. They demonstrated desires to engage in paid work but recognized there are structural and social barriers which may prevent or limit them from securing conventional employment or full-time working hours. Thus, these participants rationalized platform work as efficient means for satisfying their needs and desires to participate in paid work.

6.5 Career Orientation

A small group of participants highlighted that they viewed platform work as a potential career opportunity. This type of motivation was most expressed by the highly skilled remote platform workers. Take for example Laurie (age 25) a social media coordinator who uses platforms like Kijiji, Fivver, and Upwork to find clients requiring social media marketing or help managing their presence on social media. Laurie explained how she got into this line of work "I had volunteered with them [non-profit charity][20] to be their social media coordinator and I was really good at it. So, that's when I decided to actually maybe start making this as a career". In another example, Julie (age 61) began working as a fitness/nutrition coach several years ago, but she has primarily been seeing clients online for the past three years after she moved provinces. She

[20] Name of charity omitted to maintain participant's anonymity.

discussed having a doctorate degree in psychology and working as a lecturer for many years before changing careers. When asked why she switched careers, Julie commented "I can use my creativity, I can be more independent, I can do this when I want, and I think this can be [a] future." Julie further explained that she hopes to retire soon, but she wants to pursue other platform work in retirement to keep busy. Participants who indicated career-oriented motivations typically invested more effort into their platform work and were not seeking alternative employment in traditional industries. Instead, they were more invested in growing their clientele and improving how they go about their platform work to better suit their needs.

In addition, many highly skilled remote platform workers who are actively seeking conventional employment in traditional industries reported that while they do not see their platform work as a full-time career, they see themselves continuing to do platform work "on the side" of a career or full-time job. This is best demonstrated by Lily (age 24 – online writer) who stated "I think it's a temporary job till I find a better paying job. But still, even if I get a better paying job, I think I'll still write because I'm so interested in it." By contrast, many low-skilled remote workers and in-person platform workers interviewed in this study were not motivated to make their platform work into a career or to continue performing the work long-term.

6.6 Extra time or boredom in leisure

Finally, some individuals were motivated to pursue platform work because they had extra time. These participants explained wanting to spend their spare time pursuing a "productive" activity. Many participants commonly associated feeling productive with earning income. As a result, some participants reported that because they had free time, this time should be used to generate money or earnings rather than wasting time on unpaid and "unproductive" activities like watching television, napping, or socializing. Many even implied that sacrificing leisure for paid work was important because they could engage in leisure when they were older or retired. For example, when asked to define leisure, seven participants directly referenced retirement.[21] This supports the notion that leisure has become the anti-thesis of work. This motivation for platform

[21] Chapter 9 further explores how participants defined concepts like work and leisure.

work was common across in-person, remote, and mixed platform workers. This theme also best demonstrates the growing valuation of paid work over unpaid activities.

Desires to transform extra time into paid activities was most common among low-skilled remote platform workers who justified the low pay from their work with the fact that they perform it passively when they have time. For example, some participants who performed crowdwork noted that even though they may be doing tasks worth one penny, it was one penny more than they would earn engaging in an unpaid activity like watching television. In-person service-providing platform workers also reported this as a motivation. However, these participants used platforms that allow them to choose when to start and stop work (e.g., UberEats) rather than shift-based platforms (e.g., DoorDash or Skipthedishes). In-person manual platform workers also reported an element of wanting to be more productive in their spare time. However, these participants also indicated that because their work was labour-intensive, they did not see themselves doing this work for more than ten years and rationalized sacrificing leisure while they are young and have more energy to do the work to build savings that they could use to retire earlier.

Participants also noted boredom in their spare time as motivating them to pursue platform work. For example, Shin (age 49 – rideshare driver) commented that he works 40 hours a week at his conventional job he where earns more than CAD$150,000 annually. He also performs 20 hours a week of rideshare driving using the platform Uber and earns approximately CAD$20,000 per year from this platform work. Shin explained that he does not do platform work because he needs extra money, in fact, he gives all his platform earnings to his two children (aged 15 and 18 years old). He described performing platform work mainly to alleviate his boredom and to feel productive by doing something that earns income. Shin clarified that his work hours at his full-time job were from 5:30am to 2pm. After his conventional job, he has a lot of free time since his wife works until the evening and his children are in school. Platform work provides him with an outlet to occupy his spare time in what he reported as a productive way. He explained "when I'm at home it's just TV. I'm not a TV person. Either that or I go to the gym. I like to work out. So, if I come home from [my conventional job][22], then I'll go to a gym for two or three hours, that's a

[22] Name of company omitted to maintain participant's anonymity.

social thing…And this [rideshare driving] it kills my time". Thus, the desire to alleviate boredom and use spare time productively by earning money is a motivation for pursing platform work. These responses demonstrate means-end rational decision that rationalize unpaid work and leisure time as less valuable than paid work.

6.7 Prosumer Motivations

According to social action theory, people are rational beings with the capacity to make economically relevant decisions that motivate their actions (Wright, 2002). Weber (1958) argues that rational society is one built on logic and efficiency rather than morality and tradition, and that all capitalist systems are rational. In capitalist societies "wealth and its pursuit weigh heavily on individuals and directs their lives" (Hurst, 2000, p. 27). Similarly, many participants in this study demonstrated motivations to improve their wealth (e.g., top-up their incomes and enhance their savings) through pursuing paid activities even at the sacrifice of leisure or other activities in the realm of freedom (Marx, 1887). They also displayed strong desires to improve their livelihoods by spending their income on consumer goods. Thus, their actions are guided by a mix of satisfying both their goals for productivity and consumption. The participants in this study perceived working in the platform economy as a choice and displayed instrumental or value-rational social action guided by either practical or formal types of rationality. Their responses demonstrated that they made calculated decisions to pursue platform work (often weighing them against conventional employment or leisure) to help them achieve personal and material success.

Drawing on literature discussed in chapter 2, consumer capitalism emphasized consumerism for displaying social and economic status. The desire to associate self-identity with one's commodities (Marcuse, 1964), created a work-and-spend syndrome where many workers overconsumed beyond their means (Schor, 1991). For some, this created a financial trap that reinforced their need to work (Thompson, 1983). However, those who lacked well-paying jobs that provided disposable income could still engage in pecuniary emulation through credit cards and other financial loans (Ritzer, 2010). Thus, credit cards enabled people to maintain the impression they possessed wealth and status, albeit it contributed to rising personal debt in both Canada and the US (Statistics Canada, 2007). However, the digital prosumer society has experienced a sharp decline in full-time employment as precarious work increases. In addition,

the 2008 recession affected people's disposable income and made it more difficult for people to obtain credit to support their conspicuous consumption. These contributed to creating cognitive dissonance in which individuals' consumption and production goals shaped by societal expectations about consumption and (meaningful) production (like possessing a lifelong, salaried, and full-time job) cannot be met through traditional avenues for paid work alone.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals' personal beliefs and values are disrupted (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). In this case, workers in prosumer capitalist societies are encouraged to obtain good jobs with large salaries *and* to spend their salaries to gain recognition for their consumerism. When individuals' expectations are inconsistent with their environmental conditions (e.g., limited by structural barriers or social obstacles), they experience great discomfort and will be driven to find ways to reduce the dissonance and to make their actions feel consistent to their beliefs, behaviors, and observations of reality (Cooper, 2017; Festinger, 1957). In other words, when people lack the ability to obtain "good" jobs because conventional sources of employment have become more precarious or their salaries cannot support enhanced consumerism, and/or they cannot engage in pecuniary emulation through borrowing money; they must either alter their beliefs and attitudes such as rejecting the pursuit of wealth and consumerism, or they must change their social action to achieve consonance (Cooper, 2017). Thus, individuals adjust their means-end calculations and rationalize other efficient ways within today's economy to achieve their goals. Therefore, I argue that in a capitalist prosumer society where individuals have fewer opportunities to meet their productive and consumer goals, they make rational decisions to engage in paid prosumption where they can earn some renumeration for being both a consumer of, and producer for, digital platforms. Drawing on the results discussed in this chapter, participants are primarily motivated to pursue platform work either to top-up their incomes; to alleviate boredom and feel productive; or out of financial need. These groups of participants demonstrate differing aspects of conspicuous prosumption.

First, those who are motivated to top-up their incomes strongly displayed conspicuous prosumption in which they pursued additional (and non-essential) paid work to support their enhanced consumerism. This group valued paid work for achieving their consumption goals and they often rationalized engaging in platform work for helping them purchase large-scale goods

like houses, cars, and vacations which are status-indicating goods. These participants do not need platform work, and they reported that they could “comfortably live without” their platform work earnings. However, they pursued platform work to obtain an additional stream of income which can improve their efficiency for meeting their consumer goals. Thus, excess consumption supported by extra working largely guided these participants’ motivations for pursuing platform work. Hamed (age 38 – painting) best describes this aspect of conspicuous prosumption: “If [platform work] goes away tomorrow then it doesn't bother me. So, this is just an extra, these [items he buys with his earnings] are just wasting money on. I absolutely don't need them”. Hamed demonstrates the cyclical nature of the work-and-spend syndrome and how false needs contribute to this action. People work to spend their earnings on things they do not need but are pressured to buy. To afford all these things they do not need, they continue to work more than what is necessary.[23]

Second, those who are motivated out of boredom displayed conspicuous prosumption to pursue additional (and non-essential) paid work as a worship of labour. These participants perceived paid work as a way of living. This group also did not rely on their platform work earnings to support their living. However, they placed more symbolic meaning on spending free time pursuing paid work to obtain a sense of fulfillment. The flexibility, autonomy, and low entry barriers offered by platform work supported these individuals’ conspicuous prosumption since the non-standardized nature of platform work (compared to conventional jobs) better accommodates their other roles and responsibilities allowing them to devote more time to pursuing paid work.

Finally, participants who pursued platform work out of financial necessity and are more dependent on their platform work earnings to afford their living expenses demonstrated a form of conspicuous prosumption that is consistent with pecuniary emulation (Veblen, 1899). While this group cannot afford to quit their platform work, this does not mean that they are not consumers or that they reject consumerism. Instead, this group of participants sought out additional (necessary) paid work to supplement their existing incomes to afford their living needs *and*

[23] Chapter 8 further explores how some participants’ working patterns negatively impact their overall wellbeing

support their consumerism. As Aglietta (1977) argues, when the wages of workers increase, they are also encouraged by society, mass media, and culture to spend those wages. Thus, this group of participants also reported spending some of their platform work earnings to buy clothing, electronics, and towards social outings. They would not be able to afford these things without the added income of platform work. Only a few of them noted utilizing any added income towards savings. Thus, this group of participants also displayed a work-and-spend syndrome where they enhanced their time pursuing paid work to support non-essential consumption and their living needs. Moreover, these participants attached symbolic meaning to paid work especially those excluded from conventional full-time employment. To satisfy the dissonance caused by not being viewed as "good" workers and/or being unable to obtain income through conventional avenues, these individuals turned to platform work to overcome these barriers and achieve consonance. Therefore, platform work enables some individuals to obtain recognition as workers despite being excluded from traditional full-time work.

Therefore, within prosumer capitalism, participants attach social meaning to both their consumption and production. Since people come to view themselves in their commodities and in their ability to work, prosumption guides their decisions to work in the platform economy.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored participants' motivations for pursuing work in the platform economy. The motivational push or pull factors include need for income, non-standardized work, barriers to traditional industries, career orientations, and free time/boredom. In discussing their motivations, participants demonstrated rational social action. They made calculated decisions guided by practical or formal rationality for pursuing platform work to achieve their goals over conventional employment. Each participant in this study had individualized experiences. However, they can be grouped into three broad categories. Those who were motivated to pursue paid prosumption because of financial needs; those who were motivated more out of consumerism; and those who were motivated more out of productivity. Participants in each of these groupings attached meaning to platform work and rationalized their perceived and/or actual advantages or constraints to inform their decisions to pursue work in the platform economy over obtaining a conventional job.

Participants' social action were shaped by desires to enhance their incomes and to spend their income on consumer goods/services. Individuals may experience cognitive dissonance because their current conditions do not align with their goals for conspicuous consumption and conspicuous production. In addition, when pecuniary emulation is limited by fewer opportunities to obtain credit, individuals rationalize social action that promotes engaging in more paid work such as paid prosumption to support their consumerism.

Chapter 7

7 Challenges to Platform Work: Motivations for Leaving the Platform Economy

7.1 Overview

This chapter addresses the second research question: What challenges do participants experience in pursuit of their work in the platform economy, and how do they rationalize their experiences? Literature has suggested that platform companies often struggle to retain workers (Woodcock, 2021), and that more than half of the people who work in this sector will quit within a year (Kessler, 2018). The findings discussed here outline factors that motivated former platform workers to leave the platform economy in favor of conventional employment. Participants who were working in the platform economy at the time of interview also discussed factors that would cause them to leave platform work. Motivations for leaving platform work have not yet been explored extensively within existing literature and will contribute to enhancing our understanding of work and the features of work people value within digital society.

Work in the platform economy is unstable due to changes in legislation, regulations, and diverging interests (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Mojtehedzadeh, 2020; Woodcock, 2021). Workers must weigh decisions to leave or remain in this sector on an ongoing basis and these decisions are guided by their subjective and symbolic understandings of disadvantage and exploitation. This chapter argues that because most participants regard working in the platform economy as a choice, some rationalize the low pay, precarity, and outright exploitation as limitations that can pull them out of the work, especially when they have alternatives.

However, despite participants identifying many negative aspects of the platform economy that could cause them to leave, most of the participants continue to pursue platform work. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption, I argue that people put up with the exploitation because (a) they are consumers (and need to support their consumption patterns), (b) they want to feel like they are making good use of their time (displaying a worship of productivity), and (c) they regard platform work as temporary. Thus,

these workers contribute to their own self-exploitation when engaging in paid prosumption using digital platforms.

In the sections that follow I explore the various motivations that caused or would cause participants to leave platform work. These motivations are aggregated into the following themes: financial barriers, regulatory barriers, lack of regulations and protections for workers, low pay and/or long work hours, and lack of time.

7.2 Financial Barriers

Many platform companies tout the impression that the platform economy has few barriers to entry. In the previous section, this study also found evidence of low entry barriers and relatively short times between applying and beginning to work. However, the perception that all platform work has few barriers to entry is flawed. There are indeed significant financial barriers to platform work that greatly impact who can perform the work (Hoang et al., 2020). As Woodcock (2021) notes, many platform companies distance themselves from the traditional classification of employers by labelling their platforms as technologies that merely bring together supply (independent contractors) and demand (paid opportunities) while charging a connecting (service) fee. Thus, platform workers are expected to act as entrepreneurs and micro-businesses and provide their own means of production to the labour process. As discussed in chapter 2, this means, for example, that rideshare drivers need to supply their own vehicles and pay for their own gas, insurance, vehicle maintenance, smartphone, and mobile data while working. Food couriers pay for similar expenses and are also expected to purchase their own hot/cold delivery bags and repay the cost for any lost items or packages. Even remote platform workers bear the cost of purchasing all the necessary equipment to perform the work including smartphone, computers/laptops, software programs, and some may need to build home offices. Platform workers who provide manual labour such as landscaping, or home repairs fund their own materials and supplies. As such, there *are* significant financial barriers to pursuing platform work. A person who does not possess sufficient economic capital or access to the means of production required to perform the work will be excluded from this sector despite the low requirements for prior work experience and references. In other words, a person who does not have a vehicle, smartphone, and mobile data would not be able to engage in rideshare driving or

delivery courier work. Similarly, a person who does not have access to a smartphone or home computer and high-speed internet would not be able to pursue remote types of platform work.

Moreover, since platform workers are responsible for providing the means of production within the labour process, they are also responsible for maintaining and reproducing the means of production. Thus, the financial costs and expenses for continuing to perform platform work may force some individuals out of the platform economy if they can no longer afford to maintain their equipment or purchase new materials. The responses from participants in this study highlight these financial challenges and some participants noted that they were motivated to leave the platform economy for this reason. Participants currently working in the platform economy also make ongoing rational decisions to continue their platform work by weighing their earnings and expenses. Some participants admitted that increases in their operational costs would contribute to them leaving such as Hamed (age 38 – painter) who explained “if it becomes too costly or too complicated then it's not worth my while”.

In examining the expenses related to performing platform work, one survey found that the costs of doing rideshare driving in certain cities in the US ranged from 22% to 31% of their earnings (O’Donovan & Singer-Vine, 2016 as cited in Kessler, 2018, p. 107). Participants in this study noted wider variability in expenses depending on the type of platform work. Remote platform workers more broadly reported fewer expenses than in-person platform workers. One participant who did remote platform work reported his costs for doing platform work were as low as 5% of his total earnings while another participant who did in-person platform work reported his expenses were as high as 50% of his earnings. Most participants on average reported expenses between 20% and 30% of their earnings which supports the literature.

7.3 Regulatory barriers restricting platform work and workers

Increasing city-enforced regulations for platform work can also motivate some workers to leave the platform economy. This sentiment was commonly shared by delivery couriers and rideshare drivers who indicated that their work is more regulated compared to other types of platform work such as low-skilled crowdwork and even in-person manual labour. This is best demonstrated by the experiences of Deepak (age 30). He explained that in 2016 he pursued rideshare driving

using the platform Uber. He indicated that at that time, there was a general lack of regulations governing the work since it was relatively new. However, he was forced to stop rideshare driving due to increasing regulations that restricted the work:

> so, at the time in 2016, when I first started doing it that's when it [Uber] was kind of like newer. So, that's when it first kind of came out, and um, you know there weren't really a lot of rules around it, it was kind of I guess illegal in the sense early on, because it was no regulations that allowed it. But people were doing it kind of unofficially, um I guess kind of like in the grey area or whatever. And so, for me like I had a not an old car, but an older car. I had a 2007 car, so in 2016 I guess it was nine years old, but it was in good condition and all that and gas was fairly cheap on it. Yeah, so actually I had to stop because later on I think it was in that year or anyways, I stopped because they officially regulated it in Toronto and um when they did that they made rules as to the year I think the car has to be like within five years old. So if it's like 2020 now, it has to be like a 2015 year car or newer. And so, my car was you know too old to be a Uber car anymore. So that actually why I stopped. I kind of did some looking into whether it would make sense for me to um like purchase a used car that was newer to do it but um it didn't really make sense financially.

For Deepak, this was both a regulatory barrier and a financial barrier. Platforms do not provide workers with access to the means of production or the equipment necessary to do (or maintain) the work, and platforms do not even guarantee enough earnings for workers to be able to financially take on these expenses. As a result, workers may be unable to continue working in the platform economy. In Deepak's case, he was financially unable to purchase a newer vehicle that would satisfy city regulations. This initially forced him out of this platform work.

Deepak elaborated that he pursued the work again in 2019 for two months but found that there were even more regulations that further limited where he could work by requiring additional licensing. This forced him to work in less busy areas. In addition, regulations also made the work less profitable since he was now required to pay taxes on his earnings:

> I actually got a newer car last year, it's a 2015 you know SUV that we bought, a used car. And the summer for my [full-time conventional] work was slow, really slow, and so I thought I would try to see if it would make some extra money or whatever. Like I still had my [Uber] account, and I registered my car, but then there were some rules around like getting some sort of, there was some sort of certification or something like that in Toronto that I didn't have, and they told me I would have to get it, and, and I didn't want to. So actually they [Uber] told me that I can operate outside of the city of Toronto. So, like I did it in Vaughan area. I live in North York now so Vaughan is not that far. But I found that the payment wasn't very high at all. It was very low compared to kind of like-

> like what I was used to in the past and um once you take into account now that they have to pay HST out of the amount we get. So back in the day you didn't have to pay any HST because it wasn't regulated. And now that it is like the earnings were very low and so I just looked at it over after doing it for a couple month casually and just that I don't think this makes sense to do and the risk of, ah, just the risk of doing it and um the potential damage or maintenance to my newer vehicle that I just bought it. It didn't make sense for me to do, so I stopped.

Here, Deepak explained that he weighed the costs of performing this platform work with his earnings and decided that the work was no longer profitable enough to continue. It was ultimately too low paying and not worth depreciating the value of his own personal vehicle. Thus, Deepak's decision to leave platform work demonstrates means-end instrumental social action.

Participants also noted that too many regulations could potentially cause digital platforms to cease their operations in a particular city or region adversely impacting platform workers who rely on those platforms. For example, one delivery platform, Foodora, ceased operations in Canada in 2020 releasing a statement that "Foodora has unfortunately not been able to reach a strong leadership position and has been unable to reach a level of profitability in Canada that's sustainable enough to continue operation" (Edwards, 2020, para. 2). Some commentators suspected that Foodora's decision to exit Canada was the result of a "landmark decision of the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) designating Foodora couriers "dependent contractors" rather than "independent contractors," which means they have the legal right to organize and form a union" (Edwards, 2020, para. 5). Rosalie (age 25) a former bicycle delivery courier who used the platforms Foodora and UberEats also believes that Foodora's decision to cease operations in Canada was due to changing regulations. While she did not leave this work specifically for this reason, she did acknowledge that this affected many couriers whom she knew personally.

Some participants also expressed that too many regulations would turn platform work into "regular work" and make it less desirable. For example, Ricardo (age 28 - delivery courier) commented that "more regulation means more problems. I might drop it if you put all this stuff in, like regulations. I don't, maybe I don't want to do it then, if it becomes like a normal job then". The participants who indicated that regulations would turn platform work into traditional

“normal” jobs were most worried that they would lose the flexibility and autonomy that the work provided pushing them out of this sector. However, only participants who already had conventional employment or schooling expressed this view. These participants regarded their platform work as a side hustle or paid hobby rather than permanent work. Thus, they demonstrated more resistance to platform work becoming regulated because they do not fully rely on their platform work to sustain their livelihoods. Moreover, these participants acknowledged the importance of having secure conventional employment within traditional industries and reported that they would not leave their conventional jobs to pursue *only* platform work.[24] To reiterate, many participants reported they would (or did) leave platform work if regulations affected the nature of the work and its pay/earning potential.

7.4 Lack of Regulations and Protections for Workers

7.4.1 Injured while working

In direct contrast to the experiences of Deepak and other individuals who indicated that regulations on platform work pushed them out of working in the platform economy or would contribute to them leaving; other participants noted that a lack of regulations and protections for workers motivated them to seek out conventional employment that *is* regulated and offers protections like job security. For example, Rosalie (age 25 – former delivery courier) had explained earlier that more regulations could force some platform companies to cease their operations in certain cities or regions. However, Rosalie also argued that there needs to be more protections for platform workers because their work can place them in dangerous situations and platform workers are often treated as an expendable workforce. Rosalie explained that she quit working as a bicycle delivery courier after she got into a minor accident with a vehicle:

> I think it’s really dangerous. I actually got into like an accident when I was biking. And there's not too much protections for these types of workers. So, you're pretty much risking your life to deliver food and for like pretty shitty pay. And there's not much of a community because you're on your own, you’re biking on your own…There's not much I guess appreciation for these types of workers…and most customers don't tip, and so it’s, it’s not really worth it, especially when you're biking, and you're really exposed to being injured.

[24] I explore this theme further in chapter 9.

Rosalie further explained that other than being told to seek medical care after the incident, she was not provided with any other assistance or compensation by the digital platform she was using. Instead, they sent out another courier to pick up the order from her so that it could be delivered to the customer. The platform's apparent lack of respect towards Rosalie as a worker and a human being motivated her to leave this work. Platform workers whose work requires the use of vehicles also explained that they are constantly worried about getting into car accidents (or receiving driving infractions) and this fear is heightened by the fact that these are their personal vehicles which they rely on beyond performing platform work. Others may lease these vehicles and accidents will prevent them from making car payments on time (Kessler, 2018).

In another example, Moses (age 34) explained that when doing house moving work, he is personally responsible for covering the costs of any damages to clients' belongings during the moving process. Yet, there are few protections offered to him if he is injured while working. Moses explained that he once injured himself and felt pressured by the platform's manager not to apply for workers' compensation even though regulations require the platform to have insurance coverage. He explained,

> they have worker's comp [sic] coverage. They have the coverage, but we're not allowed to use it. They don't want us to use it because then they said that they have to pay more for coverage if we keep using it. So, they tell us don't, and they tell us if we are hurt don't come back, don't take another shift again. So, I said "I think I fell and I bruise the back of my butt like it's covered all black, because I fell on a banister" ... He said "no problem, so today's Monday take off till, take off 10 days". I said "okay do I go on worker's comp?" He said "yes we have workers, but we don't use it here". So, "I get like pain pay or anything like that or worker's comp pay?" He says "no, we don't do that. Don't come back for 10 days". I said "oh". They say if I use it [their] premiums go up so that was the only odd thing I found. Because at McDonald's when we have a slip and fall and something happens right away, they call, like it's like a different team, they make a report. Everything's like the opposite.

While Moses continues to perform this platform work, he indicated that he is greatly concerned about getting injured again since injuries will prevent him from performing more platform work. Even worse, he fears being injured while doing platform work will prevent him from fulfilling his full-time employment at McDonalds which provides him with job security, pension, and benefits. Moses explained that despite the lack of protections, he will continue doing this

platform work for a few more years but he does not think he will be doing this work in his long-term future. He stated,

> no, I don't think so in 10 years, because then, this is a very labour-intensive job and they take advantage of me, like the Armando Moving people, the management people, it’s like very hard, it's pretty hard on your muscles and your body. And then they tell you like it's not a big, it's not a hard job. But it's like very hard on your body. And they take advantage of you. They tell you it's piecework. It's $150 [per gig] but I should be getting paid a bit more I think sometimes… They always make you do more than they want to pay you for. It's too hard to take care of it. Too hard to tolerate it. They always taking advantage of you all the time. And then the people, also the clients too like “can you do this? So, do you mind taking this down? Or do you mind doing that?” It's always like extra-extra work and then nobody wants to pay you for it.

Thus, platform workers are cognizant that injuries while working are possible. However, platform companies take advantage of workers by not paying them enough for their work or treating them poorly because there are limited regulations to protect them. This contributes to few recourses for workers when they are injured and demonstrates extreme exploitation within this sector. Some workers leave platform work for this reason, opting to pursue work in regulated industries whether there are more protections for workers.

7.4.2 Dangers of Platform Work

As mentioned, platform workers are seen as expendable. Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work) explained “what I don't like about it, you're expendable. I can't say you're not expendable, you're just-you're a number on a sheet, you're just an account on the app. You're really expendable because these companies, the apps, they don't see you as an employee”. Others shared this perception that platform workers are replaceable because most platform work operates in a grey area outside of current regulations. This precarity places them in greater danger for extreme exploitation and mistreatment. Davidson also reported that because many platform workers are money-driven, like himself, this creates a hazardous condition where workers may accept dangerous or unsafe work that would be more heavily regulated in traditional industries where workers are employed rather than contracted. He explained “there have been clients that have been unreasonable, where you know, they wanna do something that is very unsafe and dangerous. A few times that I regret now but obviously in those times I've done them and thank the heavens that I’m fine. But I, you know, they were dangerous-

dangerous. Some-some of them were illegal, some of them were dangerous, some of them were just unsafe work. So, you don't really know, it's like the wild, wild west out there". Even more, Davidson noted that many people working in the platform economy are undocumented individuals who do not have legal status to work in Canada and a lot of other "under the table stuff" occurring within this sector. Workers who do not have legal status or proper work visas, may be less inclined to report dangerous platform work.

In other cases, the fast-paced nature of some platform work combined with the rating system may cause workers to feel as though they must take risks to ensure their work is completed on time or potentially have their accounts terminated by the platform companies. For example, Bruno (age 38 – delivery courier) explained that he sometimes drives through on a red traffic light or makes illegal left turns to ensure his orders are completed on time. However, he does this apprehensively knowing the consequences: "no I'm scared I'll get a ticket. It's a CAD$225 ticket and three [demerit] points".

Remote platform workers can also be placed at risk. Some low-skilled remote workers indicated that while most crowdwork is low risk for physical injuries, some clients do not respect platform workers and will utilize tactics that can harm workers' mental health. For instance, Josie (age 60 – crowdwork) explained that she once completed a paid survey that caused her emotional distress. Even worse, she noted being compensated fifty cents for her contributions:

> I did have one instance where they kind of warned me that they were going to do something, but they didn't explain what it was. And they actually showed a video of a woman being told that her two children and her husband died in a car accident, and I was not prepared. And at the end it said,' "please write, you know, feelings there". And I gave them a scathing, I said "how dare you?" I said "you made me cry". And you know the survey was not supposed to be about that. They did it as sort of a, I don't know if you've seen these, they'll do a question and answer then they'll do something in the middle to throw you off or make you think about something else so that you can complete the survey with a completely different mindset or attitude and see if your answers change. And I said it was inappropriate, and not to at least warn me that it was going to be so emotional.

Josie further explained that while MTurk requires Requesters to provide disclaimers for potentially distressing content, there is no actual guarantee that all Requesters will add this disclaimer. This puts workers at risk of harm when they unknowingly accept these kinds of

work. Highly skilled remote workers can also be put in harmful situations especially when their work entails meeting strangers online. For example, Louise (age 44 – mixed platform work) explained that workers can be harassed on some sites such as Cambly which offers one-on-one English lessons with clients around the world. She commented,

> Cambly was sketchy. I've heard there's some you know, that other people gotten like sexually harassed quite a bit from people in other countries from that site which is sad. So, when I would get a call and um their camera didn't connect and they weren't saying anything I was definitely like okay "what's this going to be" um you know. Luckily it's not - it's not, it doesn't feel terribly unsafe, it's just you know unpleasant obviously.

Platform workers as a group are often targets for scams. Because platform workers are looking for paid opportunities, scammers often try to exploit this in various ways such as gathering the individual's banking information by offering fraudulent work. For example, Tara (age 44 – mixed platform work) described a recent experience of having her banking information stolen after accepting remote work she found on the platform Kijiji. She detailed the experience,

> I actually have been frauded from Kijiji the other week…The job was advertised as "we're looking for an assistant, you make your own schedule, we will, all you're going to do is look and price different products for children's events". And then they give us the price list and then you will help with the purchasing. And I was like "that's cool. I can do that. I used to do that when I was a daycare worker"…And it was only going to be three or four hours a week. So, I'm like "yeah, I can do this". And so, they gave me some direction like it was all through email which I mean it's pretty 2020 and they were like "okay, look up these fun toys and then give me a price list". So, I did that. So, they would say you know this Lego toy and here's where we want you to look [for prices] in places like Walmart, pretty common stores.

Tara went on to explain that after providing a document with the toy prices, the scammers emailed her a photo of a cheque to deposit electronically into her bank account. She was instructed that she should use the funds to purchase specific toys on the list and then supply the toys to the company as part of the job responsibilities. Tara indicated that she was suspicious of this request because in her previous work experiences, employers provided her with a company credit card to purchase items rather than a cheque. She indicated that she did not initially deposit the cheque and even tried to resign from the position. This caused the scammers to become more aggressive in their tactics to convince her to deposit the cheque. Eventually, they suggested she keep the cheque as "compensation" for her labour. After depositing the cheque, she felt

uncomfortable with the entire situation and called the police who indicated to her that she had most likely been frauded and would need to call her bank and credit union. After calling the bank she was informed that while no money was missing from her account, she would need to close her account since the scammers had her banking information and could potentially withdraw funds later. Tara commented that her bank also informed her that these types of scam tactics have increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic as more people search for remote work. She stated, "so that's kind of the risks of platform work…being scammed is not nice but I've never felt unsafe, like, I might go to the door of a place and have somebody like steal my organs."

In direct contrast to remote platform workers who indicated that they typically did not experience fears for their physical safety; some in-person platform workers reported more concerns since their work brings them in direct contact with strangers. For example, Cora (age 26) indicated that she sometimes worries about her safety when she does ridesharing. She explained "sometimes you also have to be wary of what type of people you um encounter as passengers. It's just still at this point where Uber drivers is still male dominant-dominating, and I'm female and I'm Asian ethnicity as well". Cora explained that she has installed interior and exterior cameras in her vehicle as a layer of protection and that she regularly checks-in with her partner throughout her working hours. Nelson (age 39 – rideshare driving) noted that he no longer works after 11pm because passengers are more likely to be intoxicated and are more prone to getting into arguments and damaging his vehicle. He noted altering his working hours after intoxicated passengers urinated inside his vehicle.

The worst situations were described by Ricardo (age 28 – delivery courier) who detailed several incidents where he has been robbed of his food orders and was threatened with guns and other weapons during work. Ricardo explained that he does delivery work in downtown Toronto because the tips are typically better than the North York region where he lives. However, the downtown area is more dangerous: "the crowd is more rough like I get more drug users and I get more people who want to rob me sort of…I had my food stolen a few times. So, they set it up…I go to an address and then somebody will pull a gun on me. And he said, 'you have my Gyro for Mr. Greek four orders?' And I'll say, 'are you Tom?' They say, 'give me it, hand it over and then

the pull out a gun or a knife'. So, it's all a setup. That happens quite, almost once or twice a week". To clarify, Ricardo believes that some individuals order food on the platform using fake accounts tied to fake addresses. When he goes to deliver the orders, the perpetrator will meet him out front of the residence or in the staircase or elevator since the platform app allows clients to track the position of the courier. These individuals will proceed to raid the delivery orders from him and then they will report that they never received their items to obtain a refund from the platform. In other situations, Ricardo believes that because he carries a logoed delivery bag, some individuals may choose to victimize him on the spot knowing that he most likely has food in his bag. Even worse, Ricardo explains that these platforms deduct 50% of the cost of the order from his earnings to compensate for "losing" the order. The platforms do not care if the customer was fake, and they instead place responsibility on the delivery courier to make up for the losses. Ricardo explained that after the winter season he will no longer work the downtown area and instead will work in the North York area where the tips are lower but there are fewer risks of being attacked and robbed. Ricardo clarified that he does not see a long-term future performing this platform work. He stated "I'm just getting tired of it. It's wearing me down. And that's just giving me a lot of stress. I'm starting to get to the point where I don't like to go do it anymore. So, I'm reaching that level. I'm like, I'm hating it now." Despite the challenges he experiences, Ricardo does not financially depend on his platform work earnings, and he acknowledged that he could leave the work at any time. He reported that he earns enough income from his full-time job at McDonalds to cover his living expenses. He saves most of his platform work earnings.

Being treated as expendable, not respected as human beings, victimized by scams or online harassment, and/or placed in physically dangerous situations without legal protections or support from the platform companies are all experiences shared by participants in this study and are factors that could pull them out of the work. It further demonstrates the exploitative conditions of this sector.

7.4.3 Lack of pay protection

Across the interviews, many participants communicated that they have been in situations where they did not receive payment for work, were underpaid, or have had their payment delayed. This type of situation was more commonly reported by participants who engaged in remote platform

work. For participants who perform crowdwork on MTurk, their work can be rejected (and payment denied) for numerous reasons including the task was not completed or because instructions were not properly followed. However, many participants noted that on occasion their work was arbitrarily rejected even though their tasks were completed correctly. Josie (age 60) believes that some work is rejected so that clients can avoid paying for completed work. Even more problematic, rejections end up affecting workers' approval ratings which negatively impacts their ability to access more tasks. She explained,

> I'm very meticulous, and I read everything anyway. And I found out that some people reject because they have to pay Amazon for every single HIT. And so, if they reject the person, they can arbitrarily just reject you even if you've done everything correct. And I've actually gone back to one of the people that did this to me, he rejected me. And I said "that's not true, that's a lie". And he actually reversed his decision and gave me the money. It was five cents. I thought "really? I know I answered all your questions". And so, when I pushed back he actually gave me the money. And I don't, I don't know if some of the people who do this understand that on our end, user, the person who's doing all of the HITs that the rejection actually, to rebound from getting a rejection I now have to do like 16 HITs in order to rebound. It's a lot of work. And so, it's very frustrating for me who's had so much experience in an office to be doing this kind of stuff. And, you know, I'm answering survey questions or whatever, and I'm giving an honest opinion, or an honest answer. And they reject me for five cents, and then I have to do 16 HITs in order to get back to like 98% [approval rating]. It's very frustrating.

Other participants described similar situations and feeling like they are on their own since digital platforms like MTurk typically side with the clients in work disputes with workers. Katie (age 46) explained "Amazon is pretty hands off and not very supportive of the worker".

In comparison, some highly skilled remote workers commented that not receiving payment for work is uncommon because the digital platforms they use such as Fivver and Upwork tend to side with workers in disputes and will assist workers in obtaining payment for work that is negotiated on their platforms. One participant highlighted "these are the pros. They have to make sure that you are paid. These platforms are very secure. They have to make sure that you are paid for each and every task you do. So, the issue of not being paid is very minimal" (Celeste, age 25 – remote office administration). In addition, most of these types of platforms deduct a service fee from the earnings of remote platform workers, so they have more incentive to assist platform workers in obtaining payment from clients.

However, being underpaid or having payment delayed is more common. In terms of being underpaid, some highly skilled remote workers reported that many clients are unclear in their project instructions and will try to convince workers to do more work than initially agreed upon. Some of these participants indicated that they often do the extra work despite being underpaid to avoid receiving bad reviews or low ratings which can negatively impact their ability to find additional clients "because when you get a low score the potential [clients] shy away from you" (Harriet, age 25 – online writing). In these cases, the participants noted that platforms do not get involved since participants did receive payment from clients and the issue is related to the work negotiated by the client and worker. Other participants also explained that payment is not automated on these platforms since projects have different deadlines. As a result, it is common that workers experience having their payment delayed by clients for unknown reasons. This can be problematic for participants who rely solely on their platform work for income.

Participants who engaged in in-person types of platform work also discussed experiences of being unpaid, underpaid, or receiving delayed payments. Most participants indicated that not being paid was uncommon although they were cognizant that it could happen. Delivery couriers and rideshare drivers rationalized that because they are directly paid by the platforms they use and because these platforms track their rides and orders with a computerized system, they are mostly paid for all their work. However, some of these platform workers admitted that they never check their earnings and cannot say for sure if they are being paid the correct amount based on their completed deliveries or rides. Participants that do crosscheck their earnings have noted on occasion being underpaid. However, they explained that whenever they brought this up to the platform, the payment was usually corrected if they could prove there was a mistake. In contrast to participants who perform service-providing platform work where payment is typically facilitated by the platforms they use, manual labour platform workers commented that they usually are paid directly by clients off the platform. These participants explained that because their work occurs in clients' homes compared to other types of in-person platform work and remote work where there is more client anonymity or separation, it is rare for clients to not pay them for completed work. This is best explained by Ramone (age 36) who does landscaping work using the platforms Kijiji and Craigslist to find clients. He said,

> I've never been ripped off or anything. I have money delayed but everybody's paid. Because I know where they live. So, they don't really fool around as people are worried that I might do something to their house because I come to your home so I know where you are. So, it's not like I'm seeing you on the street or I have your email address. I know where you live. It's a different kind of scare.

In other words, because in-person platform workers have more physical contact with their clients compared to remote platform workers, they are less likely to experience not being paid for their work.

However, in-person platform workers did clarify that being underpaid for work was also very common within their line of platform work. These participants noted that clients who use platforms to find workers are typically seeking the "best deal" or "cheapest worker" especially in comparison to traditional companies. Some participants expressed that because this frugal mentality motivates clients to use platforms to commission work, these clients also believe that they can bargain for cheaper prices which can lead to low pay for workers. For example, Bill (age 42 – painting) explained,

> that happens all the time because we agree on a price and then they give me half upfront and then say "well, you know, it's not really good over here in this corner, and over here I don't think you've done a good job. So, I owe you $500. I'll give you $400". Then you argue and then you either get nothing or you get whatever they give you. Sometimes that happens quite often. About half the case, 50% of the time. So, you don't know who's going to do that to you. And sometimes they'll give you more work and then we already agreed to paint the kitchen and then they'll say "well, can you paint the baseboards and the doorframe and the door?" So that happens a lot.

Delayed payment also occurs for in-person platform workers but not to the extent as described by the remote platform workers. Again, the manual platform workers indicated that they typically know where clients live, so clients usually pay them immediately after the job is completed. In-person platform workers who are delivery couriers and rideshare drivers noted that their payments are automated by the platforms they use, so they typically do not experience delays in their pay.

Many participants believe there are few protections for them during these situations. For example, Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work) commented that the lack of pay protections for workers stems from governments not clearly understanding the unique position of platform

workers as neither completely employees nor completely self-employed independent contractors. He explained,

> it's very frustrating because like I said, you're not, they don't treat you as employees. If you're an employee there's a lot of um remedies. You know, you can say "well I'm not going to work anymore", you can contact a legal entity or a government agency. But when you work for a platform there's no real rules. So, it's like the government, they don't see you as an employee, right. They don't, they don't really know how to classify you. The company doesn't see you as employees, so you're an internet contractor which to the government means that you're self-employed, that you have your own business and you're like invoicing them. But yet, you're not invoicing them and you don't invoice, so you know you're stuck, right.

Because of the precarious role of platform worker, Davidson states that there are few protections for workers like him and regulations to assist them with this issue. Davidson indicated that 22% of the time he does not get paid for work he does and after reaching out to the clients he will eventually give up because he feels that there is nothing else that he can do to receive payment. Moreover, he finds that it is not worth his time to try and receive payment from bad clients and would rather spend more time finding other paid work. Others have also noted high percentages of income loss, with one participant noting that 30% of the time he is unpaid for his platform work, and someone else indicating that 50% of the time he is underpaid.

Issues in payment are factors that can push individuals who rely on their earnings to leave the platform economy, especially when they experience loss of income on a regular and consistent basis. Moreover, the lack of protections offered to platform workers due to the uncertainty in their worker classification further disadvantages them by limiting their legal recourses.

7.5 Low pay and long work hours

Another theme that motivated some participants to leave their platform work in search of more conventional employment or that participants commented was a negative aspect about their platform work is the low pay and income insecurity. In fact, most participants did not think platform workers could live solely off their earnings. Those who reported sufficient earnings clarified that this required investing a lot of work hours and/or working odd hours for their work

to be profitable. This means that platform work may not be as flexible as people perceive since success requires investing long hours (Kessler, 2018; Wood et al., 2019a).

Participants who performed low-skilled remote platform work indicated that their pay from crowdwork and transcription work was very poor. Two participants even referred to it as "slave labour". Meghan (age 29) indicated that she stopped doing crowdwork because of its low pay and that some tasks take longer to complete than what Requesters describe. She explained "sometimes it's like, it gives them expected time. Or if it's longer, it's kind of like slave work, because you spend more time than you're actually getting, like, you feel like you're getting out of it. So, I guess that's what I hate. I guess it's considered underpaid". Mila (age 26) similarly referred to crowdwork as slave labour because most HITs offer only one penny as compensation. Mila explained that she first started doing crowdwork on MTurk to earn extra income while in school. She no longer does this work because of the low pay:

> actually it was in my first [school] term like in the beginning of 2020. Like I wanted to do something extra to gain, make money like extra income. But I tried around three months. I think it's not my thing because I feel like it's, I'm like cheap labour. I completed sociology in my bachelor's degree so I know the theories so I feel, I feel like I'm living everything that I already read. I think it's not fair they are exploiting people's labour because even if you work around one hour or something like that, the income that you gain is not enough and it's not fair… I feel like my time is more valuable than gaining one dollar or two dollars.

Mila reported that the most she earned in one month doing crowdwork was USD$45.00 and on average she would earn about USD$3.00 per hour of work. From her perspective, doing crowdwork was not worth her time as she could earn a minimum wage of CAD$16.00 an hour working in a traditional industry in British Columbia, Canada.

All the participants who engaged in crowdwork or transcription expressed that the income earned from these types of platform work was not sufficient to live on. Only three participants indicated that they engage in low-skilled remote platform work as their only work. However, two of these participants described being furloughed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and are both anticipating returning to their conventional jobs in the future. The third participant receives a monthly disability subsidy and is not dependent on his crowdwork earnings either.

By contrast, highly skilled remote workers noted that they can earn enough income to support themselves since they generally determine or negotiate their own rate of pay for commissioned projects. However, they expressed experiencing more income precarity. Their earnings are dependent on how many projects or assignments they can obtain, and this can change weekly and monthly. For example, Ferguson (age 33) explained that he also does delivery and event staffing work because he cannot guarantee he will find enough freelance writing work. He described this precarity as one of the biggest challenges with working in the platform economy. He explained that he disliked,

> just the uncertainty, you don't know when the next opportunity is going to come. Cause like, you can get three in one day, and then a whole week passes and you get nothing and you just have to sit at home. So, it's just like the uncertainty of like, when is the gig coming or, you know. Sometimes they don't pay you right away when you do a gig, you have to wait like maybe a week or two. And then they give you a e-transfer or something. So it's just like, you know, "are they gonna pay me? Are they gonna say I didn't do a good job and withdraw the payment?" So, like you kind of have those scepticisms as well.

As a result, these highly skilled platform workers try to build long-term client relationships to secure consistent work. However, this can take significant time to achieve which can force some individuals out of this platform work. Many highly skilled remote platform workers in this study also reported that they do not view their platform work as their career and already have alternative employment or are seeking employment in traditional industries.

Some in-person platform workers explained that they could live off their platform work earnings, but this requires investing long hours. For instance, Deepak (age 30 - former rideshare driver) commented,

> I don't think you can make a good living like even at the time people were making you know thirty, forty, maybe you know at most fifty k [thousand] a year doing it and they were working absolutely insane hours to be able to achieve that. So, um it was so dependent on things like surges, and you know price surges and stuff like that. And so that's stuff is really out their control sometimes because you can't really control when prices are going to surge and a few people would always try and work like big events or concerts or sports games stuff like that. But in reality you didn't control what the pay was going to be.

Earning enough income from rideshare driving and delivery courier requires workers to perform a lot of "small jobs" where they earn fewer dollars. For example, Paul (age 35 – rideshare driver) explained that he can earn upwards of CAD$500.00 a day or CAD$2000.00 a week as a rideshare driver but doing so requires him to "hustle". He elaborated that to earn that sum of money he has to provide a lot of rides because these rides tend to be short distances where he earns fewer dollars overall, typically under CAD$20.00 per ride. As a result, he performs 70 rides on average. Paul identified this as a big drawback of the work: "it's just the hours I gotta put in. Long hours and a lot of small, small rides. So, it's a lot of small money… So you just have to hustle it's a hustle job." Moreover, Paul reports that 20% to 25% of his earnings goes towards covering his work-related expenses.

Similarly, manual labour platform workers reported that earning enough income requires investing long hours since work is labour-intensive and even small jobs could take several days to complete. Overall, many participants reported that the platform's low pay or long hours required to earn sufficient income is a factor motivating (or would motivate) their decisions to leave the platform economy to pursue conventional employment with standard work hours and guaranteed wages.

7.6 Lack of need and/or time for platform work

Finally, participants reported that they stopped or would quit their platform work if they no longer had a "need" for the work or available time to perform the work. Participants who reported this type of motivation were all employed in conventional jobs, or they were in school. In other words, these individuals had some stability and security offered by conventional employment or education and did not depend on their platform work to maintain their lifestyles. Moreover, age and life stage impacted those who expressed this motivation. Participants who were young, single, and childless noted having less need for platform work as they had alternative work or schooling. By contrast, participants who were in long-term relationships or had children generally indicated having less time to continue pursuing platform work.

Being motivated to leave platform work because they lack time was commonly reported by those who pursued platform work out of boredom. This is best demonstrated by Aaron (age 27 –

former delivery courier) who explained that he pursued platform work after moving to Ottawa for a conventional full-time job. Because he relocated to a new city, he found himself with a lot of extra time after work since he did not know anyone in the city and did not have a social life outside of work. As a result, he turned to platform work to alleviate his boredom and to become familiar with his new city. However, Aaron explained that he eventually quit doing this platform work after his girlfriend moved to the city and he began building a social life by joining various intramural sports teams. He said,

> I didn't have that time, extra free time. That was when my girlfriend moved and then I started getting into meeting more people and kinda getting into extracurricular like you know joining teams, like sports teams and kind of getting into the social events. So then I thought okay I don't really have time to kinda do it anymore, and I didn't really, I think that if I really felt the need, the income for it, then I probably would have made the time, but I didn't.

Thus, Aaron left platform work because he lacked free time and he had no financial need for it either.

Leaving platform work because of a lack of time was also discussed by participants who reported intense working hours between their conventional job, platform work, and/or schooling. These participants who worked more than 50 hours per week indicated that they could maintain these work hours because they did not have added familial obligations or responsibilities. Most of them are single and childless and can pursue intensive working hours in ways that people at a different life course stages may not be able. However, these participants noted that eventually they would like to pursue romantic relationships or start a family and will stop their platform work and focus solely on their current full-time jobs or seek full-time employment in traditional industries. Harshil (age 34 – photographer) best demonstrates this sentiment: "I plan to stop around 2025. My parents told me I have to get, I have to get serious and find somebody, they want grandkids." When asked why he would stop photography completely instead of reducing his platform work hours, he further elaborated that because he already has a full-time job that offers job security and benefits, performing platform work would prevent him from maintaining important relationships. He clarified "I don't think somebody will tolerate that, if I did that [platform work] so often. Maybe what, she won't put up with it. Maybe in the beginning but if it continues on for like, years or months it becomes a pain for them to accept." Similarly, other

participants commented that they may stop their platform work in the future to have more time to care for their aging parents.

7.7 Exploitation in the Platform Economy

The experiences discussed by participants highlight the widespread exploitation occurring within this sector. Some critics have pointed out that workers are highly exploited within the platform economy because they are treated as commodities (Schor, 2017; Wood et al., 2019a). Participants similarly reported being viewed and treated as expendable. As discussed in chapter 2, because platform workers are paid prosumers, they operate in a complex synergistically doubly exploitation system (Ritzer, 2015). On one hand, they are exploited as workers of the platforms who provide the labour and the means of production that platforms profit from. On the other hand, they are also exploited as consumers of the platform. Remember, platform workers comprise a significant portion of the consumers using the platform's apparatuses. By choosing to use specific platforms over others, platform workers enhance the network effects and contribute to maintaining that platform's operations since the more users who use the platform, the stronger its market position will be (Srnicek, 2017). Platforms exploit workers' whose presence on the platform enhances its popularity. Afterall there are more workers to fulfill services which draws in more users. The platforms also exploit workers by collecting their data (Srnicek, 2017). For workers, platforms may collect data pertaining to the times they are logged on, how many tasks/gigs they accept or bid on, how fast they may complete a designated task/gig, their earnings, and so on (Srnicek, 2017). Some platforms may even sell advertising space on their platforms that target all users (Marr, 2016), or they may sell the big data they harness from the workers to external companies (Newstex Finance & Accounting Blogs, 2018). More often, these platform companies use the data obtained from their platform workers to train their algorithms or AI systems to improve the platform's operations (Srnicek, 2017). They can also exploit the data to further control how platform workers perform the work and the speed at which work should be done (Sun, 2019).

Because workers provide their own means of production within the negotiation of platform work, platform companies can further shift responsibilities onto the worker for maintaining and reproducing the means of production and their labour power. However, as some of the

participants noted, many types of platform work can be low paying or require significant hours to be profitable. This is especially true after accounting for the worker's operational expenses or loss of income from being unpaid or underpaid. The lower earnings make it difficult for workers to maintain the means of production or access equipment necessary to do the work according to city regulations and/or platform requirements. The presence of regulations is not the issue for platform workers. In fact, more regulations are needed to better protect society and platform workers. Rather, it is the unwillingness of the platforms to pay living wages (even minimum wages) or offer enough opportunities for platform workers to be able to afford reproducing the costs of labour. Thus, there is extreme exploitation occurring within this sector and platform workers as a group are very disadvantaged.

7.8 Rationalizing self-exploitation

Why do platform workers put up with this disadvantage and exploitation? Social action is shaped by larger structural conditions, but human beings are conscious agents who retain some control over their behaviours and actions (Wright, 2002). Marcuse (1964) proposed that workers in consumer capitalism are integrated into the system through false needs which keep them "blissfully" distracted, entertained, and sated. Burawoy (1979) expanded on this suggesting that through subtle coercion and co-optation, rather than resist exploitation, (piece rate) workers turn work into a game where they try to maximize their pay and "beat" the system (Burawoy, 1979). Both scholars view workers in capitalist systems as maintaining some degree of autonomy within their work/workplaces (Burawoy, 1979; Marcuse, 1964). The findings from this chapter and the previous chapter demonstrate that decisions to continue working in the platform economy are shaped by practical and formal rationality. Thus, the platform workers examined here do choose to work in the platform economy despite recognizing specific exploitative or disadvantageous conditions. Their social actions are guided by means-end calculations where many seek recognition or social status through being good consumers and good workers. Thus, participants contribute to their self-exploitation by engaging in conspicuous prosumption.

First, participants put up with exploitation because they are consumers with consumer identities shaped by advertisements and mass culture. They are encouraged and pressured to want and buy things they do not need but which serves to keep them complacent and integrated as workers into

the capitalist system (Marcuse, 1964). Platform work supports their consumption patterns. Thus, workers contribute to their self-exploitation because doing so will allow them to satisfy their false needs and purchase the newest consumer goods or help them to afford specific consumer goods.

The participants who pursued platform work to top-up their income best demonstrated this aspect of conspicuous prosumption. For example, Logan (age 42 – painting) reported that he finds painting "boring as hell" and is beginning to develop chronic health issues from consistently inhaling paint fumes while working. However, he explained putting up with the negative aspects of platform work including its fast pace and being underpaid because it allows him to purchase things he wants. He noted that for the first five years he performed platform work he spent nearly all his platform earnings on consumer goods since he earned enough income from his full-time job to support his living needs. In another example, Vick (age 23 – former delivery courier) rationalized his purchase of an e-bike by using it to perform platform work: "well I used to go downtown [Toronto]…once a while and whenever I went there I saw a lot of bicycle riders, e-bike riders um doing UberEATS, Foodora, Doordash and they're like all over. Anywhere you go in downtown, even on the buses in Toronto they're doing it. So yeah, that's where I came to know about UberEATS and I checked more about it, I wanted to buy a motorbike, so I was like 'yeah that's fun'". Vick and Logan demonstrate work-and-spend syndromes where they ignore the disadvantage and precarity of this sector by reframing platform work as supporting their consumer wants. Thus, platform workers who utilize platform work to support their excess consumerism demonstrate conspicuous prosumption in which they engage in more paid work to spend more. They may use consumerism as an ideological tool to mask their own exploitation by reframing it as self-serving.

In other cases, participants who pursued platform work out of financial necessity demonstrated pecuniary emulation of conspicuous prosumption. These individuals also experience pressures to consume, and they share similar consumer goals shaped by society and media. Those who cannot achieve these goals through traditional avenues (e.g., conventional jobs or good credit) may experience cognitive dissonance. Thus, they turn to platform work to support their consumerism and achieve consonance. Unlike participants who top-up their earnings and can wastefully

engage in prosumption or can leave paid prosumption at any time, these participants cannot afford to quit platform work. In other words, they must continue to engage in paid prosumption because they are often caught in a financial trap or debt trap where their spending patterns force them to continue performing precarious, low paying, and dangerous platform work (Thompson, 1983).

Fez (age 39) demonstrates this financial (debt) trap. Fez works parttime as a custodian and does rideshare driving using the platform Uber. He explained that despite working part-time hours, his salary from his custodial work is enough to support his living expenses. He saves his ridesharing earnings to use towards purchasing a house, “I want to buy a home…. And so, I'm saving money, enough money for the down payment.” When I asked Fez if he plans to quit platform work after he saves enough money, he explained “oh no, I continue on as long as I can. Because then I would have big mortgage”. Participants like Fez demonstrate pecuniary emulation. Large consumer goals lead them into financial traps where they must continue pursuing more time in paid work to support these added expenses. In Fez’s case, without platform work he would not be able to afford a house or maintain mortgage payments with only the salary from his conventional job. Thus, Fez cannot afford to quit ridesharing despite hating the work. Moreover, if platform work is restricted by new regulations or if platform companies leave certain regions/cities, financially dependent participants caught in debt traps will be put in more perilous situations. Fez explained “I always worry maybe the government say ‘okay, well, Uber's finished, we close it-close them’. They don't license them anymore.”

Although participants like Fez lack conventional full-time jobs, they possess similar consumer goals as individuals with better financial means, such as homeownership. While stable housing is a basic human right and a living need, homeownership is increasingly a consumer decision where individuals consider rising costs, types of homes, residential location, and so on (Taplin-Kaguru, 2021). Beyond stable housing, homeownership provides many socioeconomic benefits that encourage individuals to want homeownership over renting (McCabe, 2018). Owning a home is promoted in the “Canadian/American Dream” for achieving personal and financial success (McConnell & Marcelli, 2007; Tesfai, 2016). Not only is it an economic tool for accumulating wealth especially in retirement (Goodman & Mayer, 2018; Haan, 2007; McCabe,

2018), but it also indicates to others a higher standard of living (Constant et al., 2009; Kuuire et al., 2016). Moreover, there is also symbolic value in homeownership (McCabe, 2018), as it is a source for personal pride (McConnell & Marcelli, 2007), a sign of citizenship (Haan, 2007; McCabe, 2018), and indicates a level of status attainment (McCabe, 2018). Research has also found that the social importance of homeownership may transcend the financial benefits since those lose their homeownership status lose their social standing within the community as well (Taplin-Kaguru, 2021). Thus, buying a home is a consumer choice especially when compared to renting which offers less social capital (Englehardt et al., 2010).

Take for example Paul (age 35 – rideshare driving) who emphasized the symbolic social value of homeownership (Kuuire et al., 2016; McCabe, 2018). Between his conventional part-time job and ridesharing he works over 50 combined hours per week. He stated, "my parents get mad at me to get married to find somebody. I don't have the time. I'm just trying to save money to buy a house first. If I have the money, then I can have the house, and then I can find a wife." Here, Paul suggests that owning a house may enhance his desirability (as a potential spouse) and contribute to helping him find a prospective wife in the future. Similarly, Fez attached symbolic value to homeownership: "I don't have marriage, I don't have wife or anything, so I need to buy a home." Thus, participants like Paul and Fez reframe the monotony, disadvantage, bad clients, and isolation from working long hours as helping them to achieve this consumer goal which they believe will enhance their social status. However, with the costs of homes becoming increasingly unaffordable, the participants motivated by pecuniary emulation *must* spend more time pursuing paid work because they are trapped in financial debt by consuming goods they cannot reasonably afford without platform work.

Second, some participants put up with the disadvantage and exploitation because they are ultimately producers who want to feel as though they are making good use of their time by pursuing paid work over unpaid activities or leisure. This type of rationalization was very common among the participants who pursued platform work to alleviate boredom. For example, Aaron (age 27 – former delivery courier) explained "[platform work is] kind of a way to fill my time but also feel kind of productive, yeah not just stay at home." Within prosumer capitalism, many individuals recognize that participating in paid activities can help them achieve fulfillment

through a sense of productivity. Participants like Aaron demonstrated a fixation with pursuing paid work and often work more hours overall compared to participants who pursued platform work out of financial necessity. For example, Milo (age 30) who performs rideshare driving and delivery courier work in addition to a full-time job explained rationalizing working more than 50 hours per week as a way to alleviate his perceived boredom from engaging in leisure. He clarified “I can't watch so much TV, I don't like TV. And a lot of my friends are married or they're looking to build homes like saving money for buying a home or a car or something. I already have a car and I live in- I live in an apartment so I don't have that need for that. It's just that work is there and money's good. So, I just do it because of boredom.” Milo displayed a valuation of paid work over non-paid activities. Similarly, Katie (age 46; crowdwork) also noted pursuing paid activities because she already spends a lot of her time online:

> I have a full-time job, I’m a teacher, so I mostly crowdwork like weekends for example. I have adult children and I live in an apartment so I don't have like a yard or anything to look after and I’m [already] online all the time, so I mostly just pick up tasks like whenever there is something interesting to me.

Because Katie already engages in unpaid prosumption by being on social media, she prefers to convert some of her time spent online into paid prosumption by doing crowdwork. Thus, being renumerated for some of her time online allows Katie to feel like she is making good use of her time and energy. This supported her decisions to pursue additional work despite the “slave wages” offered by crowdwork.

Overall, these participants demonstrated conspicuous prosumption through the worship of labour. They rationalized their exploitation by reframing their activities as a useful expenditure of time and effort. They also regarded the pursuit of unpaid activities in a negative light. Thus, within prosumer capitalism, those who engage in paid activities within their realm of freedom can be regarded as good workers.

Finally, many participants put up with the disadvantage and exploitation because they regard platform work as a temporary experience while they pursue prosumption goals. Viewing platform work as temporary work was common among nearly all the participants except for the few aiming to carve out a career with platform work. Many participants even labeled these

activities as side hustle, side income, paid hobby, or student job which all indicate temporary work.[25]

Others regarded platform work as temporary because only a few people who work in this sector can secure enough work or working hours to compose a full-time job. They also reported that platform companies avoid trying to rely on a few workers to do full-time hours because these workers may be unreliable in the future. As a result, platforms attempt to establish network effects by having a larger pool of workers and offering these workers fewer hours overall. For example, Milo (age 30 – rideshare/delivery courier) commented,

> oh I have friends ask for more and more hours, but they don't get them because they have so many people that want to do it. So, you can't have it like a full-time job because they- they don't want to give you more than 15, 20 hours a week because they have so many people willing to do this job, and if you don't show up if they can't rely on you, maybe you're doing fine for a month but after a month you say maybe I don't want this anymore I want parttime.

Here, Milo explains that platform companies reinforce the perception that the work is temporary which better supports their classification of workers as independent contractors compared to employees (Kessler, 2018; Woodcock, 2021). Thus, digital platforms also encourage workers to pursue platform work on a temporary basis. Moreover, this contributes to workers' viewing platform work as not career worthy. This theme is particularly illuminating because it directly contrasts with the perception that platform work is flexible, and that people can choose to work as much as they want. In actuality, platform work is constrained and there are limitations on how much work is available. This finding supports research that suggests the flexibility and autonomy of this sector is a myth, because the work is neither truly flexible nor autonomous (Wood et al., 2019a).

The student participants also perceived platform work as temporary and labelled it as "a good student job". Platform companies also directly target students as ideal workers recognizing that students require the flexibility that platform work provides and are less interested in features like job security since students are typically seeking short-term employment. As a result, some

[25] Chapter 8 further explores the concept of side hustle.

platforms often have fewer entry barriers for students. For example, Riley (age 27 – remote educator) explained that he was recruited to become an online tutor while he was still completing his graduate degree. In addition, most students in this study displayed eagerness to find conventional full-time employment within their field upon graduation. Thus, they mainly regarded platform work as a work suitable for this stage of their life.

Because most participants, especially those with conventional employment or those currently in school view platform work as temporary work, they display more willingness to ignore the negative attributes of the sector in order to reap its other advantages like low entry barriers, earning potential, flexibility, and autonomy. In other words, they engage in self-exploitation by rationalizing the disadvantages as short-term and unlikely to impact them in the long term.

7.9 Conclusion

The findings show that participants regarded pursuing platform work as on-going choice where they engage in means-end instrumental social action shaped by practical and formal rationality. Platform work largely appeals to workers, but the low pay, precarity, and outright exploitation are acknowledged by participants as limitations that can pull them out of the work, especially when they have alternatives. However, conspicuous prosumption helps to encourage platform workers to remain in the industry despite the significant disadvantages and exploitation. Thus, participants engaged in self-exploitation. They exploit themselves as prosumers by rationalizing their platform work as satisfying their consumer desires or consumption patterns and allowing them to feel productive through engaging in paid activities. In addition, by framing their activities as temporary work, participants view platform work in a very materialistic way – as a means to an end.

For most, platform work satisfies their need to be a productive, and to display their economic power through the consumption of excess goods/services that will signal to others their personal success within prosumer capitalism. However, some engage in pecuniary emulation which forces them into financial traps and necessitates their need to engage in more paid prosumption. Very few participants identified an actual passion for their platform work that would support the perspective that their work is an end in itself (meaningful).

Chapter 8

8 Platform Working Hours and the Pursuit of Paid Work

8.1 Overview

The findings discussed in the previous chapters demonstrate that participants to varying degrees pursued platform work because of conspicuous prosumption – excess production and enhanced consumption. Certainly, some do more than others, and conspicuous prosumption is most apparent among the participants who reported not needing their platform work earnings and/or those pursuing it out of boredom. Participants' fixation with consumption and facilitating their consumerism is evident in chapters 6 and 7. The purpose of this chapter is to further explore participants' desire to pursue paid activities, and to elucidate why many participants devalue time spent in leisure. This chapter addresses the third research question: Are participants working in excess and what social meanings do they attach to their platform work? To investigate this, I first explore participants conceptualizations of the terms work and leisure to better understand whether they perceived their platform work to be work or if they viewed these activities as a form of leisure. This is necessary since digital platforms are boundaryless and platform work which can done at any time and everywhere can blur the lines between work and leisure (Lewis, 2003). Following this, I outline participants' self-reported working hours including hours before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides a snapshot for how participants spend their time to inform whether they are experiencing intense working hours. Then, I examine participants who have multiple jobs (work) and how this contributes to working long hours. I draw on social action theory and conspicuous prosumption to explain why the pursuit of paid work is dominating much of how participants spend their time.

8.1 Platform Work, Platform Side Hustles, and Platform Leisure

To provide important context for understanding how participants rationalize the spending of their time, I examined how participants define the concepts of work and leisure. Drawing on definitions discussed in chapter 3, work can broadly be regarded as "obligated time, whether paid

or unpaid" and leisure can be conceived as unobligated time that is freely chosen and intrinsically motivated (Lewis, 2003, p. 344).

The definitions of work provided by participants revealed four main components. The element of work most often mentioned by participants in this study is pay: work is a paid activity or one that generates income. For example, many participants reported that work is "something that you do to earn money" to sustain life. In other words, the participants in this study tend to conceptualize work as labour. Some participants did acknowledge that there are types of work that are unpaid including domestic chores, childcare, and school responsibilities. As such, the definition of work can be expanded to include a second component – effort exerted to achieve an outcome. This is best described by Ferguson (age 33 – mixed platform work) who stated, "work is the labor that you put in [for] accomplishing a goal or a task." In other words, work is an intended activity that achieves a purpose. The third component is that work should offer deeper meanings for the people who perform it. Some emphasized that work should provide value, enjoyment, or allow people to better themselves or their surroundings in meaningful ways like Julie (age 61 – remote consulting and Airbnb host) who explained "for me, work was always a way to realize my life goals using my talents, gifts from god, and to doing something what I feel as meaningful in life." However, some participants clarified that work could be meaningful through feeling productive: "I have a certain number of hours per day that I am either working or doing errands that I need to do um and not just like you know watching TV or doing things that aren't going to contribute toward something that is meaningful or productive" (Aileen, age 40 – mixed platform work). The final facet of work described by participants is that it is a required part of daily life. In other words, work must be done every day and is mandatory part of living and survival.

By contrast, participants' definition of leisure reveals four different components. The first aspect of leisure most reported is that it is the unstructured use of time without any expectation of a specific outcome. More specifically, leisure is commonly associated with "time off" from paid work, familial obligations, domestic chores, and other responsibilities: "[leisure is] when I have no obligations and I can just um do whatever I choose" (Katie, age 46 – crowdwork). The second facet is that leisure must provide some degree of rest, relaxation, de-stressing, and "recharging of one's batteries." Participants noted that these features are flexible and can be different for

everyone. An activity may be more restful or relaxing for one individual yet not leisurely for others. For example, one participant described leisure as being social and freely spending time with friends and family, while another participant described leisure as being alone with quiet time to self-reflect. The third feature is that leisure provides some level of enjoyment or entertainment. More specifically, participants noted that leisure is doing something you intrinsically enjoy or for the purpose of having fun: “time that you have for yourself for enjoyment or relaxation” (Cora, age 27 – rideshare driver). The last component of leisure is that it is unpaid. This aspect was commonly associated with time away from work: “everything that is not work like everything you're not getting paid to do” (Hailey, age 28 – online tutor).

Based on participants’ conceptualization of leisure, it is evident that most participants do not conceive spending their time pursuing paid prosumption as time spent in leisure. First, platform work is a structured use of time that has expected outcomes such as completing a survey in a specific time frame or earning income for services provided. Second, many participants reported that they sacrifice rest in order to pursue platform work and some even noted that their activities are fast paced and highly stressful because they need to meet deadlines. Third, while some participants noted they enjoy aspects of their platform activities, many reported that they found platform work boring, repetitive, and/or disliked the work entirely. Finally, all participants noted that they performed platform work because it is a paid activity and most would not be doing these activities if they were not renumerated.

Therefore, most participants identified their paid prosumption activities as work. On one hand, the small group who oriented their platform activities as permanent work or career worthy often conceptualized it as a job and set up specific working schedules. On the other hand, participants who performed platform work while having conventional jobs or schooling commonly identified their platform activities as a work alternative – side hustle or side income. These participants viewed side hustle as small and less committed forms of work that can be fulfilled on the side of traditional employment (Hanks, 2018; Scott et al., 2020). For example, Zeke (age 23 – voice acting) describes side hustle as “basically something that's not your main job. It's not your nine-to-five. It's your after hours. You do it so you can make a bit of money.” The few participants who spend the fewest hours pursuing platform work regarded their activities as a leisure

alternative rather than time spent in leisure. For example, Pete (age 25 – mixed platform work) referred to his platform work as a paid hobby and only invests 3.5 hours per week doing it. However, he does recognize that his activities could become work if he were to invest more time into doing it or if it required greater commitments from him. Moreover, only those who engaged in remote or mixed types of platform work conceived it as a leisure alternative. All participants who performed only in-person types of platform work regarded their activities as work or work alternative.

These findings show that participants perceive time spent engaging in paid prosumption as time spent working. Because digital platforms offer work that is boundaryless, the pursuit of paid work can increasingly encroach onto individuals' personal lives to occupy significant portions of their work-life balance. The next section outlines working hours.

8.2 Working Hours

Data show average working hours in Canada have slightly decreased from 2000 to 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The average usual working hours for full-time employment was 41.1 hours per week in 2000. This decreased to 40.4 hours in 2010 and decreased again to 39.9 hours in 2020. The average usual working hours for part-time employment in Canada also slightly declined from 18.6 hours in 2010 to 18.4 hours in 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). This means that on average, Canadians are working fewer actual hours than before (Statistics Canada, 2015). Yet, participants in this study typically worked long hours: 66% worked more than 40 hours per week between their conventional employment and their platform work. This suggests that individuals who are unable to secure traditional employment or full-time hours in their conventional jobs, enhance their time spent in paid work by taking on (additional) platform work. Some of these extra hours spent in paid prosumption may not be reported, and hence may not be recognized in formal statistics on working hours. Moreover, combined with conventional working hours, some participants (31%) in this study spend more than 60 hours per week in paid work, and a few individuals (7%) work more than 80 hours per week. This indicates that some individuals are experiencing an intensification of working hours rather than a decline. By contrast, those who spend less time in paid work (under 40 hours) are unable to pursue more paid

activities because their time is constrained by unpaid work including schooling and childcare or chronic medical conditions. Only a few participants reported choosing to work under 40 hours a week to expand their leisure time.

To demonstrate, Table 8.1a displays participants' average weekly (or former) hours spent in platform work, average weekly hours in their conventional job, and the total combined working hours among both conventional and platform work. Table 8.1b is available in the appendix (Appendix E) and offers a more detailed breakdown of each participant's age, self-reported gender, working patterns including working hours in platform work, conventional job, total working hours, and if the participant is enrolled in school or reports a medical condition that limits their working patterns.

Table 8.1a: Summary of Participants' Working Patterns

Average Weekly Work Hours	0 hours	1-9 hours	10-19 hours	20-29 hours	30-39 hours	40-49 hours	50-59 hours	60-69 hours	70-79 hours	80+ hours	Total
Platform Work Hours Only	0 *0%*	6 *8.5%*	13 *18.3%*	26 *36.6%*	15 *21.1%*	6 *8.5%*	0 *0%*	2 *2.8%*	1 *1.4%*	2 *2.8%*	71 *100%*
Conventional Job Work Hours Only	3 *6.7%*	1 *2.2%*	3 *6.7%*	10 *22.2%*	11 *24.5%*	15 *33.3%*	0 *0%*	1 *2.2%*	1 *2.2%*	0 *0%*	45 *100%*
Combined Work Hours (Platform + Conventional)	0 *0%*	1 *1.4%*	5 *7%*	10 *14.1%*	8 *11.3%*	15 *21.2%*	10 *14.1%*	14 *19.7%*	3 *4.2%*	5 *7%*	71 *100%*

According to Table 8.1a most participants (36.6%) report working approximately between 20 and 29 hours of platform work alone per week followed by 30 to 39 hours (21.1%), and 10 to 19 hours (18.3%). Eleven participants (15.5%) reported performing over 40 hours of platform work each week and six participants (8.5%) reported working fewer than 10 hours per week. Those working the fewest hours are currently attending post-secondary school or are employed in other jobs (see Table 3b). Based on these findings, most individuals pursue platform work on a part-time basis working less than 30 hours per work. It is important to note that not all the work hours

individuals invest into platform work is paid (Wood et al., 2019b). There is significant unpaid time spent on work-related activities such as training, job searching, and applying and waiting for work (Standing, 2016; Wood et al., 2019b). Participants acknowledged the pervasiveness of unpaid hours pursuing platform work. These unpaid hours are not always counted in participants' self-reported working hours as participants had difficult times calculating unpaid hours. Thus, the actual amount of time participants spend pursuing paid activities is far greater than reported here.

Many participants did not pursue only platform work. Forty-five participants (63%) in this study reported having conventional employment in traditional industries. Of these participants, twenty-eight are employed fulltime working 30 hours or more; fourteen are employed parttime working under 30 hours per week; and three participants indicated that they were previously employed fulltime but have been furloughed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and were working zero hours at their conventional jobs at the time of the interviews. Beyond paid work, thirteen participants reported being in school at the time of interviews.

When examining the combined hours that participants invest pursuing both types of paid work it becomes apparent that the pursuit of paid work is dominating many participants' work-life balance. Overall, 47 of 71 participants reported working more than 40 hours per week between their conventional jobs and/or platform work. Nearly half of these 47 participants invest more than 60 hours per week in paid work, and five participants work more than 80 hours per week. Considering that the average Canadian working hours for full-time employment in 2020 is 39.9 hours, participants in this study are investing more time engaging in paid work.

A closer examination of these findings reveals some broader patterns. In terms of gender, all five participants reporting more than 80 hours of work per week identified as men. Only three women reported working more than 50 hours per week. These differences may be attributed to the unequal gendered division of labour extending into the platform economy. Broadly, women continue to have more domestic and childcaring responsibilities limiting their available hours in comparison to men (Gerber, 2022). When looking at age distribution of those who indicated spending more than 40 hours pursuing paid work, the majority (31%) are between 30 and 39

years old, followed by 20 and 29 years old (26.7%). To note, of the 22 participants who indicated working more than 60 hours per week, half are in their thirties, seven are in their twenties, two are in their forties, and two are in their sixties. In addition, those with the longest working hours tend to be childless. The few participants who have children and reported working more than 50 hours per week clarified that their children are older, either teenaged or young adults, or do not live with them. Thus, intense working hours are more notable among younger participants who are single and childless. This further supports the finding that different life course stages support or constrain participants' abilities to engage in more paid work.

When examining participants who reported the fewest hours in paid work, working hours are constrained by their other roles and responsibilities or extenuating circumstances rather than time spent pursuing leisure. In fact, many of these participants clarified that they would like to pursue more paid work but are limited in their available time (see Table 8.1b in the Appendix). First, of the participants who reported working under 20 hours per week, five are currently in school taking on a full course load, and the remaining participant indicated having a medical condition that prevents her from working more. Second, of the ten participants with combined working hours of 20 to 29 hours per week, three reported being in school with full course loads, two noted having medical conditions and being unable to work more, and two reported being furloughed. The final two participants reported being unable to pursue more work due to childcare responsibilities. Only one participant indicated pursuing 25 hours of work per week out of personal choice. However, this participant noted that she is in a dual-income household and does not have a financial necessity to work more. Third, out of the 8 participants who reported combined working hours between 30 and 39 hours per week, two had additional childcare responsibilities, one was in school, and one participant was limited by a medical condition. The remaining four participants noted working these hours mostly by choice, but they also indicated wanting to increase their working hours by obtaining more clients for highly skilled remote platform work. In other words, there are some limitations to their working hours in terms of securing more work.

To summarize, these findings reveal that most of the participants in this study are spending significant time pursuing paid work than the average Canadian. Those with the fewest working

hours have their time constrained by unpaid work responsibilities like school or childcare. Those with the longest hours are generally young men who are single and/or childless. This supports the perspective that certain socio-demographic characteristics and life stages can support or hinder working hours.

8.2.1 COVID-19 Pandemic on Working Hours

Because the interviews for this study took place during the first several months of the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to briefly discuss impacts to participants' working hours during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic (see Table 8.1b in Appendix). The changes are important because they demonstrate the precarity and unpredictability of platform work and how the availability of paid opportunities are greatly impacted by external factors and regulations.

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, in-person platform workers reported experiencing a complete decline in their platform work opportunities and a decrease in their working hours. By comparison, remote platform workers reported an increase in their work opportunities and indicated working more hours overall. Specifically, participants who engaged in in-person types of platform work explained that at the beginning of the pandemic many of them stopped working because they were unsure about how to properly protect themselves from the virus. For example, several participants who engaged in rideshare driving indicated halting work because there was not much information about the virus or clear instructions on how to properly protect oneself while engaging in this type of platform work. Paul (age 35 – rideshare driver) explained,

> I took about a month off because I didn't know how to handle customers or what to do. I don't want to get sick. So they [Uber] didn't know what to tell us what to do and how to handle customers. So they were also in the learning and learning procedure phase. So, we don't know. Are we supposed to wipe the steering wheel? Am I supposed to wipe the seats and am I supposed to wipe like the door handle? What I supposed to do when somebody leaves? Like what are, what are the rules?

These participants also commented that they were very scared at the beginning of the pandemic because their platform work placed them at higher risk for contracting the virus. Similarly, participants who provided services in peoples' homes like house cleaning and in-person tutoring

or performed manual labour like painting and flooring similarly reported not working. Some suggested there were no work opportunities since prospective clients also did not want platform workers inside their homes. Others explained that work was available, but platform workers were not accepting the work: "everybody was totally scared or unsure. The job, money was there, the work was there but people weren't signing up too much because we don't know where they catch it. For me go into somebody's house, are we more likely or reliable to get it more in someone's house and as far as outside and how long are you allowed to stay inside with somebody? So, all these things we are started thinking about all the things" (Joe – age 28 – house cleaning)

By contrast, participants who engaged in remote platform work reported that they experienced an increase in paid opportunities available on the platforms they used, and they found themselves working more hours overall. For instance, Fatima (age 21– transcription) explained that there was a large demand for transcription services as more business and industries turned to hosting meetings online and required transcriptions or captioning of these recording meetings. The participants who offered web design and development also noted that there were more work opportunities as businesses shifted their operations online.

After several months the participants experienced a shift in work opportunities. In-person platform workers reported experiencing a boom in work opportunities and an increase in their working hours as there was more demand for their platform work. By contrast, remote platform workers reported a decline in work opportunities due to increased competition from people pursuing platform work after being displaced from traditional employment. Hailey (age 28 – online tutor) best explains this experience:

> so, at the beginning, which was actually very convenient. It was like, just like in January, work took off like crazy because all the kids [in China] were home from school. So, you could teach every single night, basically, in the evening at time that were really convenient for me. So, I worked a lot more at the beginning of COVID when it wasn't in North America yet, or it wasn't spreading in North America yet. But then, in March, it became much more difficult because all these teachers and all these people who had been working traditional jobs suddenly wanted to work online. And there was absolutely no restraints in hiring. Like it was, like some of the other platforms stopped taking applications and VIPKid was like, 'no, sign them all up, we can pay them less' and so my bookings went way down after March.

While these participants indicated that the competition from other people pursuing platform work limited the number of available work opportunities, none of them reported that their work opportunities declined lower than what they worked prior to the pandemic. As some of these participants explained, a lot of remote platform work goes to individuals who have the best (or numerous) client ratings, reviews, and acceptance rates. Having enough good reviews and high ratings on these platforms takes time to build. These participants noted that because they had begun their remote platform work and building their online profiles prior to the pandemic, they had more (and better) reviews and ratings than individuals who started remote platform work during the pandemic. This improved their chances for securing platform work opportunities compared to newer remote platform workers.

The in-person platform workers who performed manual labour explained that compared to the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, many of them experienced a boom in work opportunities by the summertime. They clarified that after a few months, there was more public awareness and information on how to protect oneself from the virus, and these participants reported returning to performing their platform work. For example, several participants including Fez (age 39 – rideshare driver) reported purchasing plastic partitions or "splash shields" to place in their vehicles to separate them from their passengers. They also reported that platforms like Uber provided workers with guidelines on how to properly sanitize vehicles between passengers and they enforced mask mandates while working. Participants who engaged in rideshare driving also reported a boost in clients since many people did not want to take mass public transit. In addition, participants who engaged in delivery courier work also reported working more since restrictions limited people from dining indoors at restaurants resulting in increased use of delivery platforms. Many participants who engaged in in-person manual labour also reported a boost in work opportunities as people where home more and wanted to renovate their homes or build home offices. For example, Bill (age 42 – house painting) explained "a lot of people are buying, everybody live or living at home now. Because of COVID, nobody's leaving, so people are spending money in their home now. So, everybody wants to paint their basement now, I think I have 19 basements scheduled and basement are, is take long, take about seven days". Many of these manual labour platform workers believed the boost in work opportunities was temporary and they suspected that opportunities would decline as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

8.2.2 Moonlighting and multiple jobholding contributes to long working hours

As discussed above, the majority of participants in this study spend more hours in paid work than the average Canadian. However, most participants work longer hours by engaging in multiple jobs rather than engaging only in platform work. According to Statistics Canada (2022b) 5.1% of employed workers in 2021 held multiple jobs. In stark contrast, 63% of participants in this study reported having alternative work within traditional industries and therefore engaged in multiple work. The prevalence of participants who engage in multiple work supports literature that digitalization, the platform economy, and gig work are contributing to the growing rates of multiple jobholding (Fulford & Patterson, 2019; Glavin, 2020; Piasna et al., 2021).

Some scholars suggest that multiple jobholding or moonlighting occurs from a variety of factors that push or pull individuals into a second job or pursuing additional streams of income including birth of a child, natural outgrowing of a primary job (Dempster-McClain & Moen, 1989), to obtain additional experience, and/or intrinsic enjoyment of the second job (Heineck, 2009). Overall, literature identifies financial concerns from insufficient wages in the primary job compounded by the need to meet regular household expenses as the main reason that individuals moonlight or hold multiple jobs (Dempster-McClain & Moen, 1989; Heineck, 2009; Panos et al., 2014; Piasna et al., 2021). Insufficient wages can be attributed to declines in job quality (Piasna et al., 2021), the expansion of bad jobs characterized by part-time and low-income (Statistics Canada, 2022b), and limited working hours in the primary job (Heineck, 2009).

The findings from this study support the literature. Of the 45 participants who reported having conventional employment, fourteen indicated that they are employed part-time. Eleven of these fourteen workers indicated using their platform work earnings to supplement their conventional job's salaries to afford their living expenses and additional consumer spending. Thus, these participants indicated more financial need since they do not earn enough and/or are unable to secure enough working hours in their conventional jobs. The remaining three reported viewing their platform work earnings as their primary source of income and regarded their conventional employment as secondary work. However, they keep their conventional jobs because it offers

security, pensions, and benefits which platform work lacks. For example, Bruno (age 38) explained why he maintains 20 hours a week at his part-time job despite earning enough income as a delivery courier:

> I'm just scared because if something goes wrong, because if something happens in UberEats or they don't, all sudden it doesn't work out and doesn't pan out for me or I don't like it or something goes wrong, then it's hard to get [back] into McDonald's. I mean, it's a shitty job. But my friend got me in there, and he, I applied for the job but they said "we don't take random people you have to know somebody". And I was told by the manager "if you do leave here, keep in mind that you get blacklisted". I said "so what does that mean?" He said "well, you can leave, we can't hold you. It's a free country it's not a prison but then come six months down the line or four months down the line you want to come back to work here. I'm sure you won't come back to this location". And I said "no, I'll go across the street and I'll go to a different one". He said "exactly we put your name in there and your SIN number and we tell them not to hire you. So, you'll never-you'll never work another McDonald's chain again". So that's what scares me.

Because some participants are experiencing involuntary part-time employment where they are unable to find full-time work or secure sufficient working hours, they pursue multiple work out of necessity. Engaging in multiple work enables them to achieve at least forty hours of work per week which they would not be able to do via their conventional part-time jobs.

Contrasting Statistics Canada (2022b) which reported that part-time workers are more likely to perform multiple jobs compared to full-time workers: 28 participants are employed full-time in conventional jobs. Thus, more participants in this study have full-time salaried employment yet utilize platform work. This finding is important. First, those with full-time employment work more than 30 hours per week in their conventional jobs. By pursuing platform work, these individuals spend even greater amounts of time pursuing paid work beyond the Canadian average. Second, these employed participants also reported they do not rely on their platform work earnings and could live without them. Instead, their platform work earnings top-up their existing incomes and they primarily treat it as disposable money (Drahokoupil & Jepsen, 2017; Fabo et al., 2017; Hoang et al., 2020). Thus, not all individuals pursue multiple work out of financial necessity. Some willingly pursue multiple work or jobs, and they choose to invest more time in paid work, out of personal choice.

8.3 Sacrificing Leisure Time and Rationalizing Excessive Working Hours

It is apparent that participants are spending more time pursuing paid work and many of them engage in multiple work which contributes to their long working hours. As mentioned, intense working hours can result from financial necessity or personal choice (Lewis, 2003). For many participants in this study who choose to spend more time pursuing paid work via platform work, this choice rationalizes the sacrifice of leisure time and one's personal and social life.

Participants who reported working more than 60 hours per week between platform work and/or their conventional jobs indicated that they have no additional time to spend in leisure. For example, Nikesh (age 36 – hardwood flooring) reported working more than 60 hours per week between platform work and his conventional job. He explained that he often lacks the time to take care of personal matters like retrieving dry-cleaning:

> Mostly work takes over everything…For example, I lost my dry-cleaning. I give dry cleaning and I forgot about it and it's been 30 days. So the gentleman that sent me a phone call saying "I reminded you three times to come pick up your dry-cleaning, now it's gone, we sold it". So, this happens to me on regular basis where I don't have time to get around to everything.

Other participants reported that the pursuit of paid work has affected personal relationships. For example, Bill (age 42 – painting) explained that he has ignored social relationships in favour of doing platform work for several years. As a result, he reported intense loneliness. Bill expressed interest in reigniting his social life but stated that he no longer receives social invitations, and even if he were to receive an invitation, he believes he would be too exhausted to attend. Even worse, Bill reported that he does not actually rely on any of his platform work earnings because he earns sufficient salary in his conventional full-time job:

> I have no friends. Nobody wants to tell me anything or even or tell me they're going out with, they're doing this, even before COVID. Nobody wanted to, I wasn't a part of anybody or anything. I wasn't included in anything. They used to ask me 'we're going here' I said 'no, I'm sorry. I can't'…Then everything stopped. Nobody wants to include me in anything. So, they write me off now. They have no like no interest now to get in touch... Even at work with my friends at work, they have things they do after work. And they have like different game night or something like that. I don't go anymore. After work, I want to go home and go to bed. I have no interest. Like I'm just tired, I just don't

> want to do it. I want to go home and go to bed. I don't want to be part of it. They get- they've given up on me also.

In another example, Bruno (age 38) who works between 60 to 70 hours a week as a delivery courier and an additional 20 hours per week at McDonalds, explained that he has no life outside of work: "well, I lost my girlfriend about five years ago. She got tired of me. And I lost my friends too same time, around the same time. They got tired of me." Bruno clarified that they lost interest in maintaining relationships with him because he was always busy working. Some participants even reported that their relationship with their children is mainly materialistic because they lack time for meaningful engagement. For example, Rai (age 32 – hardwood floors) described his relationship with his kids as: "it's just mostly work. I get them presents and things like that." Rai spends between 80 and 95 hours per week doing paid work.

In some extreme cases, participants' sacrifice of leisure is adversely affecting their physical and mental health because they lack the necessary time to recreate themselves and their labour (Marx, 1887). For example, several participants reported that managing long working hours requires forgoing quality sleep. For example, Rami (age 24) works as a delivery courier five days a week typically at night between the hours of 6pm to 12am. In addition, he works part-time three days a week, 8 hours per shift, at McDonalds. On top of working, Rami explained he is in post-secondary school and typically allocates the hours of 1am to 7am to fulfill his school responsibilities. Rami commented that on his busiest days, he allows himself to sleep for a few hours from 7am to 10am or until 11am per day. However, he reported that the exhaustion is taking its toll on his body: "I've lost a lot of weight. I'm becoming very dark. I have like, like, I have like raccoon eyes. And I become very dark. And I think I lost about 30 pounds". Other health problems participants reported include fatigue, memory loss, and "crashing" out. For example, Ruiz (age 31 – hardwood floors) works 30 hours of platform work and an additional 40 hours in his conventional job as a sales associate at Lowes. He described being so fatigued from the intense pursuit of paid work that he once slept entirely through a long weekend: "there was one problem one-time last month. I slept for three days in a row. So, it was a weekend was like a long weekend, Monday was a holiday, the Good Easter holiday. So, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I woke up Monday afternoon. I had no idea. I said I'll sleep all day let me unplug my phone,

unplug everything, and I woke up on Monday afternoon. It was three days. So that was shocking that has never happened before”.

A few participants reported they rely on medications like Adderall and Ritalin to help keep them energized to be able to endure long work hours. They may purchase these medications illicitly, such as Ricardo (age 28 – delivery courier) who explained “I’ve asked my doctor to give me something else. It’s like, some Adderall. But he said no. I bought it in the black market. Adderall is something that makes you, the study drug. But it keeps you up, keeps you like conscious. It only keeps you hyper. So, I used to get that from somebody but then now they used to charge like $4 and now they want $14 dollars a pill”.

Participants who engaged in remote platform work commonly highlighted the negative impact that platform work can have on mental health due to the individualistic nature of the work (Wood et al., 2019a). For some participants this has led to developing feelings of loneliness and isolation because they tend to work by themselves for long periods of time and do not have opportunities to develop relationships with others who also perform the work.

These participants with conventional full-time employment sacrifice leisure to spend excessive amounts of time pursuing additional paid work via platforms. They largely do so out of personal choice rather than necessity. Conspicuous prosumption offers insight onto why this is occurring. First, participants valued paid work for shaping their self-identity. Individuals are socialized to value work in a particular way (James, 2018). Devotion to work (work ethic) is oriented on the belief that hard work promises a reward (James, 2018). For example, Weber (1958) argued that the rational approach to work that formed the Protestant work ethic was belief that devotion to work increased certainty of salvation (Giddens, 1976; James, 2018). Brad Aeon suggests that the modern work ethic is one that supports excess working: “work 80 hours a week? You're a good person. Work 20 or less? You're a slacker” (2016, 3:11). This means that there is a tendency to now judge other people by the number of hours they work (Aeon, 2016), especially since unwanted leisure is forced upon individuals unable to find employment or secure full-time jobs (Rinehart, 2001). The reward for the modern work ethic is recognition for being a good worker, and opportunities for enhanced consumption.

As social actors, individuals engage in self-exploration and reflect upon themselves, their choices, their past, and their futures to shape and negotiate their self-identity (Giddens, 1991). Occupations and careers have traditionally been important for self-identity since they are avenues for people to develop, express, and create themselves (Grey, 1994). However, for many people, occupation is no longer closely linked to identity as standard fulltime and lifelong employment is replaced with precarious, short-term, and involuntary part-time work (James, 2018; Kessler, 2018). This causes weaker identification and attachments to one's work (James, 2018; Sennett, 1998, 2006). However, self-identity can be altered to accommodate changing circumstances (Giddens 1991; James, 2018). For example, when individuals experience life changes, like losing a job, they can reconfigure their self-identity to maintain a "sense of personal continuity through time" (Ezzy, 2001, p. 145), and maintain cognitive consonance. In other words, rather than being in a constant state of uncertainty and ambiguity (cognitive dissonance), people can reconceptualize an altered narrative to place their new self-identity (James, 2018). Thus, for individuals who do not have strong attachments to their specific occupations or working relationships, they can develop their self-identity around their capacity to work including their number of working hours. This means that working hours can serve to symbolize class and power (Tarnoff, 2017), especially in a society where full-time work is declining. In other words, being able to achieve sufficient working hours is increasingly a marker of success and status regardless of the content of the work.

For many participants in this study who financially depend on their platform work, having full-time hours is important for their sense of self. For example, Ramone (age 36 – landscaping) explained that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic he relied on platform work mainly to top-up his income and he treated the earnings as disposable. However, during the pandemic his working hours decreased from 49 hours to 24 hours per week, and he relied more on his manual labour platform work to supplement the loss in income. Despite relying more on his platform work earnings, he does not want other people to know he works in the platform economy. He fears they will make negative assumptions about his working ability irrespective of the issues caused by COVID-19. He explained "I feel kind of shy telling them I have to. They'll think I have to or maybe think I'm poor or something or maybe I don't have enough money. Because why am I

working [doing platform work], especially with my [conventional work][26] colleagues. I don't tell them because they think they make good money over there so what are you doing over here, what did you do wrong?" This sentiment about supplementing working hours highlights that many individuals attach social status to their ability to achieve full-time employment, good salaries, and/or enough working hours. For those unable to obtain these, platform work allows them to imitate success.

According to Veblen (1899) people engage in conspicuous consumption (and production) for two primary reasons: to obtain recognition from their peers, and to achieve/display a higher social status in society. Therefore, some participants engage in pecuniary emulation by utilizing platform work to construct the appearance that they have full-time working hours which can contribute to an illusion that they have "good" jobs and salaries (Kalleberg, 2011). Through the pecuniary emulation of production, they can obtain some recognition from their peers as having achieved a level of success or status. Moreover, with added income from intense working patterns, individuals can purchase status-indicating goods like houses and cars to strengthen their status claims. Thus, conspicuous prosumption in the form of pecuniary emulation supports their endeavours to display themselves as good workers and good consumers.

Second, participants may also excessively pursue paid work even at the cost of leisure because the productivity and earning income is addictive (Aeon, 2016). This is especially true for the participants who pursue it to top-up their incomes or out of boredom. For example, Kevin (age 38 - painting) used this as justification for spending more than 50 hours in paid work between his conventional job and platform activities. He reported "it's hard to put a stop to it because then you get, it's like a drug, you get used to all this money and this freedom then you just want more of it." As mentioned, as prosumers, participants want to feel like they are making good use of their time. Participants can obtain meaning from repetitive, monotonous, and exploitative work if it provides them with a sense of accomplishment – that they have spent their time wisely by being productive. When productivity results in monetary benefits like added income, individuals may obtain a sense of accomplishment even if the work itself is unfulfilling. Thus, when

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[26] Name of company omitted to maintain participant's anonymity.

individuals engage in paid prosumption and are financially rewarded for their efforts, they may rationalize these activities as a valuable expenditure of time, effort, and resources especially compared to unpaid activities performed in leisure or in idleness.

It is important to note that conspicuous consumption values wasteful leisure in addition to wasteful consumption of goods/services. However, the participants in this study demonstrated a disregard for leisure. Because they value (and some are obsessed with) productivity, excessive time spend in idleness is rationalized as unproductive especially within prosumer capitalism. Thus, participants willingly sacrifice leisure to enhance personal and material success through paid work demonstrating conspicuous prosumption. For many participants, this pursuit can be endless. Harshil (age 34 – photographer) best explains this sentiment:

> my parents are telling me that I have a couple years until I have to find somebody and then start getting married. And they said "your life and your days are going so fast and going by so fast. It's going quickly". So, they keep asking me "well, how much money is enough for you until you stop? What will be enough that you need until you stop? When will be enough?" I always say "well, I only need a couple thousand more". [Dad] said "you said that last year that you need a couple of thousand more. Now again, you're telling us the same thing, a couple of thousand more. So when will be enough?"

Finally, participants justify their status, wealth, and material possessions with the idea of meritocracy. They suggest that because they work hard and spend more time pursuing paid work, they deserve to have more (Tarnoff, 2017). This helps to justify their consumerism and their excess productivity. For example, Paul (age 35) explained that to earn decent wages doing rideshare driving requires *hustling*: "you just have to hustle, it's a hustle job. Like, the app goes off, okay. The ride is at the corner of Yonge and Bloor, then you can accept it. If you're like relaxing or you don't monitor the app or people's requests for rides, then you lose out". In other words, conspicuous prosumption reinforces social and economic inequality through the guise of meritocracy. Participants may ignore the structural barriers that can prevent people from finding paid work in the platform economy (Hoang et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019b), such as COVID-19 or lacking sufficient ratings/reviews to be selected for paid opportunities. Instead, participants rationalized their own successes or failures as driven by their own willingness and efforts to work. This rationalization is best demonstrated by Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work)

who explained “at the end of the day the consequences are on me, so any success are mine and losses or failures are mine. So, I’m just, I just have a different view about it.”

8.4 Conclusion

In prosumer capitalism where excessive working to support the spectacle of spending is idolized, paid work dominates much of how most participants spend their time. By contrast, time spent in leisure or in idleness is devalued. The findings discussed in this chapter revealed that most participants work over 40 hours per week between their conventional job and platform work. This means that most participants examined in this study work more hours per week than the average Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The increased hours spent in paid work is possible due to multiple jobholding. Most participants in this study are also employed in conventional jobs. Digital platforms offer opportunities for participants to pursue multiple streams of income. This explains why more participants engaged in multiple jobholding than the average Canadian rate (Statistics Canada, 2022b). However, while statistics suggests that multiple jobholding is more common amongst part-time workers unable to secure enough working hours or income so that they must pursue multiple jobs out of necessity, more participants in this study are employed fulltime and utilize their platform work earnings to top-up their incomes (Statistics Canada, 2022b). They pursue multiple jobholding out of personal choice.

The dominance of paid work can be explained using conspicuous prosumption. Work is important for shaping participants’ self-identity. Previously, value and success have often been measured by occupational role, career achievements, and earnings (Gray, 1994; James, 2018). Yet, in societies where there is a shift away from fulltime standard employment as more people enter jobs that are temporary, precarious, low-paying, and deskilled or are excluded from the job market entirely – the capacity to work including working hours can be alternative indicators of success. Thus, people engage in means-end instrumental social action guided by practical and formal rationality to enhance their social position by increasing their time spent in paid work to emulate status. Moreover, they rationalize leisure as unproductive uses of time.

As discussed in chapter 2, during producer capitalism, for men at least, society placed the most emphasis on a person's role as a worker to determine social placement, expected standard of living, leisure activities, and social life (Bauman 1998; James, 2018). By contrast, in consumer capitalism an individual's identity was largely tied to their purchasing power (James, 2018). In prosumer capitalism, participants' perception of themselves is tied not only to their commodities and possessions, but also to their capacity to work to long and hard. In other words, it is not enough to be purely a worker *or* a consumer, people must be hard workers *and* good consumers.

Therefore, participants who reported more financial needs for pursuing platform work engage in conspicuous prosumption through pecuniary emulation. Despite not having conventional full-time jobs, they use platform work to shape their sense of self and indicate to others that they are "good" workers who work at least forty hours a week between their conventional job and/or platform work. By contrast, participants who choose to spend more time in paid work between their conventional job and platform work engage in conspicuous prosumption. They work more than necessary and willingly sacrifice their leisure time (even at the cost of personal wellbeing) to pursue more paid work. They do so because they are addicted to feeling productive, and/or they devalue unpaid activities.

Chapter 9

9 The Future of Work – Perceptions on Platform Work and Its Impact

9.1 Overview

This chapter addresses the final research question: How do participants perceive the future of work? The previous chapters demonstrate that paid prosumption and digital platforms have impacted current understandings of work, workers, and working patterns. It is necessary to uncover whether these changes are a temporary feature of prosumer capitalism or a more permanent fixture. To answer this research question and elucidate the impact of platform work, I begin with an examination of work satisfaction. This will provide context for understanding how individuals' outlook on the future of work is shaped by their current experiences of platform work. Then I discuss participants' opinions on which prominent characteristics of the platform economy are likely to remain in the future.

These findings inform our understanding for whether the conditions and characteristics of platform work are likely to impact future workers across all sectors and industries. Drawing on social action and conspicuous prosumption to frame the experiences of participants, I offer recommendations for a better future of work.

9.2 Work Satisfaction

Considering the contention surrounding platform work, it is important to identify how participants perceived their work and what sorts of benefits their work provided. Understanding participants' satisfaction with platform work focused on three aspects of work satisfaction: satisfaction with: the work itself (activities, tasks, and responsibilities), the prestige of the work (social status), and the financial rewards associated with the work (payment).

9.2.1 Personal satisfaction with platform work

Personal satisfaction refers to whether the participant enjoyed their platform work, and whether they would continue to perform the work even if they did not receive payment. The findings revealed broad patterns in terms of type of platform work and personal satisfaction. Overall, participants who performed manual labour types of platform work were not satisfied by their platform activities claiming their work was too labour-intensive. Those who engaged in service-providing platform work also reported less personal satisfaction with their platform work due to its fast pace and monotony. The participants who reported being dissatisfied with their platform work's activities, tasks, and responsibilities often viewed it as a materialistic endeavor. For example, Nikesh (age 36 – hardwood floor) explained that the only satisfaction he obtains from his platform work is the financial compensation it offers. He said "it's just the money. I hate the work. It's really hard, hard on your knees, I have to wear knee pads, elbow pads. Everything, you're always on the floor all the time or on your knees all the time. So, it's a lot of work. A lot of hard work."

In direct contrast, the few participants who treated their platform work as a career characterized platform work as an opportunity for personal growth and displayed more personal satisfaction. This response was most common among the participants who performed mixed types of platform work. For example, Henry (age 62) joined the platform economy in 2012 after quitting his career as a chef. He explained that when he first started platform work, he used platforms like Kijiji and Craigslist to find modelling and acting gigs and in-person research studies. His primary motivation for pursuing platform work was to earn income. However, over the past several years his view of platform work has shifted. He clarified:

> if we had this conversation in 2012, I would have said money, I'm doing it strictly for money nothing else, just earned income. Whereas now, it's um an end in itself. I enjoy what I'm doing. And they always say if you do what you love the money will come but that is true. Like I said, last fall I made the most, I made money hand over fist and it just, and I had so much fun doing it too as opposed to slaving in the kitchen or whatever.

Henry further explained that rather than viewing his platform activities as a job he considers it to be a learning experience. Similarly, Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work) also highlighted obtaining personal satisfaction with platform work after saving enough income through working.

The stability of having savings has encouraged him to be choosier about which types of platform work he takes on, especially avoiding dangerous work:

> I want something that was fulfilling, that I loved, my purpose, you know all that kind of stuff. But after a while I just got to the point where it was kind of like, I got to the point where I was burnt out and I was just tired, so I wasn't getting, you know I wasn't doing what I wanted to do, I wasn't enjoying it, um, I was working just for you know, just to put food, or just to pay bills in essence. I had to realize that that's not what life's about. So, I'm just in the, in this middle stage right now. So, I'm picking and choosing what I like, um I'm doing certain things…I'm appreciative of any penny I make and in any way I make it. I'm very appreciative about that. I once went through a period where that wasn't a possibility so now that I have it, you know, I appreciate it.

Thus, the participants who balance their need for personal satisfaction from what they are doing with their need to earn income had more positive opinions on platform work. By comparison, the participants who displayed more materialistic orientations towards work expressed personal dissatisfaction and offered more negative perceptions about their platform activities. The participants who reported the most personal satisfaction were individuals who engaged in mixed types of platform work compared to those who only engage in one type of platform work. Thus, the variety of activities, responsibilities, and tasks offered by engaging in different types of platform work can help combat feeling monotony and drudgery from performing the same type of platform work repetitively. This may improve individuals' feelings of being personally satisfied by their work.

9.2.2 Social satisfaction and prestige

Throughout the interviews, I asked participants to identify whether they felt pride in their platform work; whether they believed their platform work gave them social status; or whether they felt comfortable telling other people they engaged in the work. The vast majority of participants explained that they regarded work in the platform economy as having low social status and low occupational prestige especially when compared to their alternative work within traditional industries. Some even expressed shame perceiving their platform work to be bad jobs (Kalleberg, 2011). This is best demonstrated by Moses (age 34 – house mover) who said "I don't tell people anything because it's like, it's like a useless job. It's just like working at Walmart. It's just something you don't tell people". There are several trends emerging from participants' negative perceptions of platform work.

First, highly skilled remote platform workers expressed more pride in their platform work compared to low-skilled remote workers and in-person platform workers. These highly skilled remote platform workers discussed platform work positively – as allowing them to utilize their skills and education. Yet, these participants also did not view their work to be prestigious enough to pursue for a career. For example, participants who performed online tutoring spoke encouragingly about their work especially feeling a sense of satisfaction from helping others. However, this was more common among participants who performed this work as a student job. By comparison, the participants who performed online tutoring as their primary source of income reported a lack of occupational pride. For example, Riley (age 27 – remote educator) detailed that while he is satisfied with his platform work earnings, he does not regard the work as a viable career option because of its low occupational prestige. He elaborated:

> I was actually literally just talking to a friend about this. I feel like I'm making kind of good money from it in terms of like the um, the financial benefit of it. I feel like it's close to like a career job. The money I'm making is kind of, I would consider career-type money. It's the type of money I would like to be making in my career but I'm not sure if it's really what I want to do as my career… And it's not even like I'm a board-certified teacher right, I'm just kind of like the tutor consultant and, and something that I kind of found is like I don't feel a lot of occupational prestige in what I'm doing. So yeah, it's hard to say because I'm making, I'm making good money and when I consider what my other friends are doing, I think you know, relative to what my friends, I'm making probably more money than most of them but at the same time I wish I was able to say something like 'hey I work in like global investments at RBC [bank in Canada]' rather than just like 'oh yeah I'm a tutor' kind of thing.

Riley continued to explain that he does notice a shift in platform work becoming more common. He hopes that one day working in the platform economy may be regarded as prestigious:

> I think especially with this, with what's going on now [COVID-19 pandemic], this kind of like shift to e-learning I feel like it's kind of, it's kind of this new novel industry on the one hand, and so there's a bit of gratification with being, you know, sort of like getting into it and forging a career in it…I was laughing with my parents the other day and I was kind of telling them the same thing, you know, I don't know if I want to call myself a tutor for the rest of my life. Like people ask me what my job is and I try to like sort of 'oh I'm like an educational consult, a remote educational consultant' like try to dress it up a little bit, and then like people will be like 'oh so you're like a tutor'. and I'm like 'no, but like yeah I guess' kind of thing.

Compared to Riley's response, Deepak (age 30 – former rideshare driver) believes that the opposite is occurring. Rather than platform work gaining more prestige, he believes it is being perceived more negatively because the novelty of the industry is disappearing. He clarified "I think at the time when I first started [in 2016] it was new, and it was kind of like exciting. No one really knew, you know, there was really no negative view of it. It was mostly positive. And now I don't know if that's the case." Here Deepak argues that the novelty of the platform economy has worn off and ridesharing is now juxtaposed against similar low status work in traditional industries like being a taxi driver or chauffeur. Riley's comment similarly shows that neither he nor others think tutor is a prestigious job.

Second, the participants who engaged in manual labour types of platform work displayed the most negative opinions about their platform work's prestige. Mostly, these participants demonstrated traditional opinions about occupational prestige where labour jobs (working with one's hands) are regarded as less desirable than knowledge work (working with one's head) (Rinehart, 2001). This finding is consistent with literature in which manual labourers tend to display more self-degradation (Rinehart, 2001). For example, Ramone (age 36) avoids telling people he does seasonal landscaping work. Because many of his clients are elderly, he reframes his platform activities by telling others "I just say I have, I have a side gig job working with old people is what I always say. I don't tell what". Here, Ramone separates his platform work from manual labour by masking or "dressing up" the true nature of his work. These efforts to reframe labour jobs to make it sound more prestigious, are not uncommon, especially among men doing lower-status jobs (Pierce, 1996; Williams, 1995).

Third, participants with conventional full-time jobs reported that platform work has lower social status compared to their conventional employment. Because these participants have alternate work, they can easily hide or mask their platform activities. For example, Joe (age 28) said "it's not something that you tell somebody. I don't even tell my parents that I do this. I just say that I work overtime at [conventional work][27]. That's where I have to go." When asked why he avoids telling people he works in the platform economy, Joe clarified that house cleaning is "easy work

[27] Name of company omitted to maintain participant's anonymity.

but it’s always dirty work” and he does not want others to know he performs “dirty work” since he has a more prestigious part-time job. Thus, participants with conventional employment can overcome the self-degradation of performing platform work by associating their self-image with their (more prestigious) conventional job. This is true even for participants who can only secure part-time working hours in their conventional jobs.

Therefore, drawing on the findings discussed in chapter 8, while multiple jobholding is common, many participants hide their platform work to give the illusion they only work in one job, or they mask the true nature of their platform work to appear more prestigious. This demonstrates pecuniary emulation of production and consumption.

It is important to note that a small group of participants expressed more positive perceptions towards platform work’s status and prestige. However, these individuals typically reported not viewing their platform work as any different from working in a traditional industry. For example, Amit (age 23 – delivery courier) commented “to be honest like you know, I work hard. I work, I'm not doing anything wrong so there's no harm in telling anyone what I do”. Participants like Amit focus on the importance of working to earn income, rather than the features of the work. They also orient the status of platform work in relation to its ability to generate income compared to not working or earning income at all. Ferguson (age 33 – mixed platform work) best demonstrates this. He explained that he frequently tells some of his coworkers in his conventional job to use platform work to supplement their loss of income and reduced working hours from the pandemic. He stated “I tell some people, I mean, like coworkers at the customer service job, they'll tell me about whatever financial problem they're having. And I made the suggestion to them they get into like the [platform] economy, because I guess it's a good way to supplement your income. So, you know, rather than them being in problem, let's do that”. Similarly, Neveah (age 26 – online writing) also communicated that she “[tells] people because you know, others may be suffering out there with nothing to do. They have computer, they have internet, they have knowledge from school. So instead of sitting there and being useless, it's better to just do it and you might succeed.” Here, Neveah points out the value of using the platform economy to find work opportunities for those who have the means of production. She

highlighted the fewer barriers to entry and that people can use their pre-existing knowledge, commodities, and durable assets to benefit themselves rather than being unemployed.

A few others reported viewing platform work as "better" overall than working in low-wage jobs in traditional industries. For example, Hailey (age 28 – online tutoring) explained that her remote platform work is more prestigious than other jobs available to students: "I think I would I prefer to tell people that I like taught English over the summer than like, I had gone to work at a grocery store or a restaurant". Moreover, all five participants who indicated having medical conditions reported feeling pride in their platform work. These participants felt pride in their ability to work and earn income despite their medical conditions which have kept them out of traditional employment. This is best described by Louise (age 44 – mixed platform work) "I've been kind of sick on and off at times. I've had a lot of pressure to work and find jobs um so it makes it easier in the sense that I can, I can say that I'm working and I'm earning money." Similarly, Derrick (age 27) revealed that he suffers from severe anxiety and addiction. He explained that crowdwork provides him with opportunity to contribute to society in meaningful ways especially when there are crowdwork tasks pertaining to gathering information on these topics. These comments demonstrate that for individuals who are unable to obtain work in traditional industries or work in low-wage and low status conventional jobs, they perceive platform work as having higher status and they will frame these activities in a more positive light.

9.2.3 Financial satisfaction and income security

Finally, I asked participants if they are satisfied with their platform work earnings. The responses were mixed since pay and earning potential varies from type of work, location of work, and platform(s) used. Previous research has found that platform work can be very lucrative for some individuals but less profitable for others (Hoang et al., 2020). Findings from this study support this. More specifically, most in-person platform workers commented that they are satisfied by the pay they receive for their work or the earning potential of their work. This was most prominently expressed by the manual labour platform workers who reported that their work had a high earning potential. For example, Ruiz (age 31 - hardwood floor) explained that it is lucrative to use platforms for manual labour: "labour jobs are very, very high-high profit. I think

there is like a formula, whatever you spend on the flooring probably times it by two and a half and that's our cost. That's what we're gonna charge you. So, if I spend $1,000 of material, I can charge you up with almost $3500 for it. There's almost, that's how we work it out."

Delivery couriers and rideshare drivers also noted that the incomes earned from their work could be very lucrative especially when clients tipped them or when they worked during "surge pricing" periods or busy "peak" hours. While these platform workers must pay for their own work expenses, a few participants with prior experience driving for taxis noted that these expenses are far cheaper than being employed by taxi companies. These participants explained that some taxi companies can charge upwards of CAD$500.00 dollars per day in operational (licensing) fees to taxi drivers. Thus, these individuals clarified that while expenses do eat up a significant portion of their earnings, the expenses are fewer than working for a traditional taxi company.

Those who performed mystery shopping, modelling, and user-testing also noted that they were satisfied with the pay of their platform work such as Josie (age 60 – mixed platform work) who commented that prior to the pandemic, she could earn upwards of USD$2000.00 per month from mystery shopping. As well, highly skilled remote platform workers like online tutors and content writers reported that they are mostly satisfied with their platform earnings because they set their own wages or negotiated them with clients.

Out of all the types of platform work examined here, participants who performed low-skilled remote work reported being the least satisfied with their pay and earning potential of their platform work since some tasks paid them as low as one penny. However, these participants explained that because they regarded their earnings are disposable income, they were satisfied with the fact that they were earning money.

While earnings varied depending on the type of platform work, all participants reported experiencing income insecurity with platform work. While some types of platform work can be lucrative, participants cannot guarantee they will secure enough platform work to do each week. As discussed, earnings depend on variety of factors like how much individuals work, the pay rate

offered/negotiated, the availability of paid opportunities, likelihood of being underpaid, and external factors like consumer demand. Thus, platform work earnings are unstable because work in this sector is unpredictable. For example, Kevin (age 38 – painter) explained why he would never give up his fulltime job at McDonalds to pursue platform work on its own: “I have other friends who do this like fulltime. That's their real job. And they said that sometimes they can make up to $70,000, sometimes they make $10,000 a year. I think with McDonald's even if I work at minimum hours, I get benefits”. Similarly, participants who engaged in rideshare driving and delivery courier work noted that there are no minimum (and guaranteed) earnings. For example, Logan (age 24 – delivery courier) best explains this: “there is no minimum wage set up, so basically it starts from zero dollars an hour and moves upward…There is no bottom limit on earnings or upper limit on earning.” This means that drivers and couriers can work for several hours and only earn a few dollars per day, or they might earn more than $30 dollars per hour on busier days. This is all dependent on consumer demand which is outside their control. In addition, remote platform workers reported that paid opportunities are quite limited, and it can be difficult to secure enough work each week which requires them to carefully budget. Even if participants obtain enough paid opportunities, they may not be able to secure full payment for their efforts.

Overall participants noted different levels of satisfaction with their platform work earnings with in-person types of work more profitable than remote types. However, they all expressed dissatisfaction with their income stability since their ability to secure enough work each week or month is precarious.

To summarize, in examining participants’ satisfaction with platform work it is apparent that different types of platform work provide participants with differing accounts of feeling personally, socially, and financially satisfied. Their positive and negative perceptions of platform work informed by their work satisfaction shape their outlook (and concerns) for the future of work. Overall, most participants reported a pessimistic view regarding the future of work perceiving the negative aspects of the sector as likely to remain and affect other sectors.

9.3 Perspectives on the Future Trajectory of Work

Participants reported various challenges and difficulties that individuals working in prosumer capitalism may experience as society becomes increasingly digitalized and work patterns become more intense, flexible, and unstandardized. Their perspectives on the future trajectory of work include the end of full-time employment, multiple jobholding becoming a necessity, the digitalization of traditional industries, and more piece-rate (shift) work along with declining work quality.

9.3.1 The end of full-time employment

Participants suggested that certain features of platform work including flexibility and autonomy at the cost of job security is likely to characterize most work in the future. More specifically, they argued that flexible working patterns and contract positions will increase because full-time work will decline as traditional employers move away from offering stable employment. Many participants reported seeing this occur within their own conventional jobs/industries. For example, Ricardo (age 28 – delivery courier) reported that McDonalds has slowly been shifting away from offering full-time employment over the past few years:

> we're going to be going to that sort of at McDonald's now. Instead of giving us full-time hours, they want to give us rotating shifts, so we all get 30 hours. So nobody will get paid, nobody will be paid full-time hours now... They're already doing it in the [United] States already. And they're gonna be bringing it in here soon. So instead of working, I can't work more than 30 hours. And I can't take shifts from somebody else. So I can't exceed 30 hours. So if you want to give your shift away to somebody, it has to be somebody who's working less than 30 hours. They're bringing all these policies in now so they don't have to pay overtime. I get almost CAD$21.00 working in McDonald's an hour, then if I get time and a half and then it costs them almost $33.00, $34.00 an hour. So, they can't afford it. They don't want to pay it.

Other industries that participants identified as moving away from standard employment include information technology, academia, transportation, collections agencies, and call centers.

Participants perceived that the move away from full-time employment in favor of piece rate work, contract work, and flexible work hours is a tactic to deny workers employment benefits and guaranteed wages (Gleim et al., 2019). For example, Shin (age 49 – rideshare driver)

explained “they've already started bringing something similar to [my conventional job][28] where I work. So normally I'm an employee over there. But then I'm noticing now the new hires coming for next, for 2021, are going to be only on contract being offered now. And giving them piece work, so they only work, they only give them work when they need it. And not to have an employee. So that way, they have no pension and because they don't have to do all the things like extra that they pay for me.” These participants also reported feeling very apprehensive about this move away from standard employment suggesting that it will cause more job precarity and income insecurity. A few participants reported being told by their conventional employers that new contract work arrangements will only be offered to new hires and that their full-time employment is secured. However, these participants remain uneasy suggesting it is only a matter of time before they too are shifted to contract and part-time work.

9.3.2 All workers will hold multiple jobs

Because participants perceive a decline in full-time positions in the future, they also explained that multiple jobholding will become more of a necessity rather than personal choice. For example, Ferguson (age 33 – mixed platform work) shared “you know more, I'd say more and more things are getting outsourced. Um the traditional job where you work 30 years at the same place, I think that's being phased out. I think it's been going that way for some time.”

As discussed in previous chapters, many participants view pursuing platform work as a choice, especially those who have alternative work or are currently in school. However, the notion of “choice” to have multiple streams of income to maximize earnings will be lost if people are forced to seek multiple work or jobs just to meet their living expenses. Participants indicated trepidation that in the future, people will have to do it out of necessity as it may become their only resort for securing enough working hours and/or income. This is best demonstrated by Kevin (age 38 – painting) who reported “either you work part-time, or you don't get a job. So, I think the platform economy job is something that's going to be staying here for the long term.” Thus, the future trajectory of work in prosumer capitalism may be on the path of precarity where individuals will need to work many small jobs.

[28] Name of company omitted to maintain participant’s anonymity.

9.3.3 Traditional industries will become platform industries

Participants also reported that the platform economy is likely to continue growing as additional forms of work activities, occupations, and industries digitalize. This does not mean that work in the platform economy will dominate over traditional ways of working (Fleming et al., 2019). Instead, its presence may become more prominent and perhaps on-par with traditional work. This sentiment was best expressed by Jorge (age 29 - crowdwork) who explained,

> I think we're headed there. I mean not completely but I can see it becoming a little more powerful than it is now. You know, certainly there's always going to be a need for that traditional standard jobs, but we have access to more information than ever before and we're constantly learning things and trying to explore the world and-and I'm seeing a lot of Universities paying for research and using MTurk and private researchers using it and I think we're all going to see that [platform economy] keep growing more as people kind of get more exposed to that.

Here, Jorge explains that using digital platforms to facilitate work will become more mainstream as more people find innovative ways to earn income outside of traditional employment.

Participants also credited the COVID-19 pandemic as pushing work practices towards more digital platform-based models. In particular, the pandemic forced many businesses and organizations to develop an online infrastructure; many needed to completely shift their operations to remote working or digitized other aspects of the work activities (Linhart, 2022); and many adopted flexible working hours to better accommodate people working from home (Vyas, 2022). Since these shifts have been implemented, there may be a cultural and organizational reluctance to return to traditional working practices (Vyas, 2022), especially if these shifts eliminate overhead costs without affecting the quality and functionality of the work. Some organizations and businesses may even continue to incorporate platform-based models in addition to traditional models to capture bigger shares of the market. For example, Riley (age 27; online tutoring/education) perceived this shift as imminent:

> I noticed while I was at university that online courses are really starting to proliferate, right. And I think that this kind of, for academics, this shift [COVID-19 pandemic] that we've been in lately, it similarly kind of reinforces online work learning. This is a platform we can, schools can, they can make it work while still remaining functional, they offer the students a lot more flexibility. We can use like software tools to our advantage where Zoom, for example, like having the virtual classroom, being able to

> screenshare and use the [digital] whiteboard sort of thing. So yeah, I think that like as software tools continue to develop and allow for this kind of work it's going to continue to proliferate.

9.3.4 A future full of piece-rate (shift) work and poor productive quality

Finally, participants reported that many traditional businesses and industries that currently operate on hourly wages will move towards piece-rate work in the future due to the successes of digital platforms like Uber and MTurk. For instance, Aaron (age 27; delivery courier) suggested that “if I opened up a pizza store, I think it would maybe make more sense to contract it to UberEats instead of having like in-house drivers that when we're not busy I still have to like keep them in the store and pay them kind of thing”. Rosalie (age 25; former delivery courier) expressed similar sentiments that platform work will likely remain a fixture in society because it reduces costs for capitalist businesses by paying workers as little as possible. She commented “it’s like profitable from the company's side of things, because they're not paying the workers enough, a fair wage, so unfortunately I do think it’s gonna be around for the future”. These comments demonstrate that participants perceive piece-rate work as mostly benefiting employers rather than workers.

In addition to piece-rate work, platforms are also implementing piece-rate shifts. Unlike traditional shift work where workers are paid an hourly rate for each hour of their shift regardless of their productive output (guaranteeing them a certain number of wages for working), platform shifts pay workers piece-rate. This means that workers do not have any guaranteed wages and can earn nothing within their shift despite committing their time and/or resources to the platforms. The lack of guaranteed earnings is also worsened by the fact that platform workers can be denied payment for completed work or denied opportunities to correct any issues to receive pay and must also pay the costs of any expenses while working. Jorge (age 29 - crowdwork) best expressed this sentiment stating that “even in my full-time job if my boss doesn’t like something I did and I have to redo it, I'm still getting paid regardless…In this platform, I've put in the work um so you know I've done what they've asked of me, if-if you know if something's wrong or they don't like something I'd rather them come to me and let me know that rather than straight up rejecting it.”

Many participants also noted that the quality of work output in the future may be inferior to work quality now. For example, Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work) provided an explanation for why this may occur noting the negative effect of working multiple small jobs:

> some [platform] companies will charge the client like $40 dollars an hour, so the client thinks that they're getting somebody to come with experience and the knowledge of $40 dollars an hour cause that's what they charge. But the [platform] company takes like 60 percent, so you know the actual person may only have maybe $18 dollars an hour or you know it's, it's not the person that the client thinks, right. Or the client thinks "okay I hire you for three hours so that's you know $120 dollars, I expect to get my money's worth" which is reasonable, right. But the client doesn't realize that you're only making $18 dollars an hour and an $18 dollar an hour worker is not gonna be as um, not as good, able to do it, or experienced as somebody making $40 dollars an hour, right. So, if he's making $40 dollars an hour he'll have his own tools, have his own truck, have a lot of experience, um, maybe a friend… they'll bring a lot more to a job, maybe they're only working 2 to 3 jobs that day than somebody that has to work um 8, 9, 10, 12 jobs that day…so they're tired, they don't come energized.

Josie (age 60 – mixed platform work) also suggested that the quality of work in the platform economy is inferior to similar work offered by traditional and regulated industries. Because many different individuals perform the same work, the quality of work output will vary depending on the individuals' levels of experience, knowledge, and skills:

> in a traditional job, I would be given all of these projects and just for example, okay, I would be given all of these projects or tasks... And now what we've got is they've taken all of those tasks and cut them up into little itty bitty bite sized pieces. And they're giving it to 100 people instead of one person and paying that one person a decent wage. And so now they get to split it all up and give everybody garbage wage to get the same amount of stuff done. But what they don't see is that they're not getting consistency. They're not getting the same response.

Josie further elaborated that this fragmenting of work is leading "to the dumbing down of America. And I'm just going to say America, I don't know how much-how much is done in other countries by MTurk… I don't think this in the long run benefits the United States. I really don't. Employers yes, this helps survey-takers and universities and colleges and students. You know, if they're learning something, that's great. But like you had [asked] in the very beginning…No, I don't think this benefits in the long run. I don't think this benefits anybody." Here Josie explains that when work is divided, mass-distributed, and offered by platform companies it leads to job

loss in traditional industries. Josie suspects that if this continues, the future of work will not be filled with skilled work or workers.

9.4 Recommendations for a Better Future of Work

The previous chapters have provided evidence that platform workers are rational beings with capacities to make decisions to govern their lives. However, their rational actions are shaped (and constrained) by larger social structures and economic conditions. Marcuse (1964) argued that in affluent societies workers are integrated into the capitalist system through the manipulation of false needs that offer the illusion of comfort and fulfillment. Thus, participants are integrated into prosumer capitalism by institutions, mass media, and consumer culture (Marcuse, 1964). Their understandings of work, working patterns, and their perception of opportunities available to them are largely moulded to the current capitalist system that symbolically values productivity *and* consumerism.

The results demonstrate that participants are cognizant of structural inequalities and deteriorating working conditions as highlighted by their concerns for the future trajectory of work and their dissatisfactions with platform work. They continue to make rational choices that factor in these structural issues as they navigate this world of work and consumption. For example, they recognize that if opportunities for fulltime and salaried employment decline as more companies adopt platform-based models, then they will need to alter their actions to pursue multiple piece-rate jobs. Consider this statement by Leon (age 34 – rideshare driver) who explained that people will accept precarious work if they lack any real alternatives: "if you want job then you have to do whatever you get. So if you don't take it, then you don't get a job then. So if they're offering this, like this kind of job, like piece-work, then you have to take it then." Therefore, in response to the breakdown of traditional structures governing the organization of work and working relationships, participants adjust their expectations of work, and they orient their rational social actions accordingly.

Rational social action shaped by conspicuous prosumption can help explain why participants work hard to attain personal and material success despite the uneven playing field that

marginalizes and exploits them. As well, participants' pessimistic future for work in Canada supports research by Fleming et al. (2019) that the ideology of the platform economy and what it implies (e.g., the rise of precarious work) creates expectations among workers that is troubling. By drawing on the lived experiences of the participants throughout this chapter and previous chapters, there are three interrelated recommendations that contribute to conceptualizing a better future of work that will support the needs of modern workers. These recommendations acknowledge workers as prosumers with motivations tied to satisfying their desires to be good consumers and good workers.

The first recommendation is to improve the availability of full-time employment with guaranteed good salaries that can support participants' consumption patterns. Participants placed importance on having fulltime and stable jobs. Hence, most participants explained that they would never leave their full-time jobs to pursue only platform work, nor would participants leave stable part-time jobs to pursue platform work fulltime. Thus, it is important to understand that many people work in the platform economy as a work alternative, a side hustle, to perform alongside conventional employment to help them achieve their consumer aims or desires to feel productive rather than a permanent work pursuit. Consider this statement from Davidson (age 36 – mixed platform work) "so it's like it's a business opportunity, that's what it is. So, you just do it for a little bit and then you kind of move on." Therefore, we should not move away from offering fulltime and lifelong employment in favor of only nonstandard and flexible work.

The next recommendation is that multiple jobholding is only beneficial if it is pursued out of personal choice rather than financial necessity. A society where people have multiple jobs or multiple streams of income can be beneficial but only when it offers people variety in their work and encourages innovation. For example, Tara (age 44 – mixed platform work) explained,

> I think I remember reading an article and it talked about how older generations were complaining about how young people we are jumping from job to job. So, I think the typical person will change their career, when I was going to university or well when I started university, it was 6 to 8 times in their lifetime. That's been shown to increase as time progresses and the argument of the article was why are people complaining? In the golden days if you were at a company, they would respect you…honour your contract, provide a pension and you would stay with that company. Now they cut back on the pensions. They are giving, wages have been stagnant or decreasing over time and so it's to young peoples' not only their benefit but also their necessity to be able to move around

> and be flexible in the market. And so, I think largely the side hustle is good for individuals because they become free and independent because they become more creative and active in their workforce.

Tara's comment reveals two important features. First, she noted the benefits of stable full-time employment includes workers receiving respect, security, and pensions in exchange for loyalty. These are attributes modern workers still value, but many cannot attain. Second, she explained that platform work will be a necessity for workers if they cannot secure long-term and full-time employment. In other words, she does not regard multiple jobholding as better than having stable full-time employment. Instead, she only perceives it as a benefit when people choose to have multiple jobs. She also demonstrated reframing the insecurity caused by declining full-time employment by focusing on features like being free, independent, creative, and active. Thus, multiple jobholding needs to remain a choice decision for individuals who want to engage in conspicuous prosumption. Having multiple small jobs will not be beneficial if people must rely on it to meet their regular household expenses. It will only lead to worsening in-work poverty. Instead, individuals prefer multiple jobholding when it enables them to support excess spending via increased time in paid work.

The final recommendation is to improve job security or income security. Piece-rate work does not provide people with security. Those who pursue piece-rate platform work do so with the safety net of guaranteed income offered by their conventional jobs. Participants value piece-rate work for aiding them in reaching purchasing goals faster. Previous chapters have shown that participants value job security which is why no participant reported that they would leave their conventional job to pursue platform work fulltime even if the platform work was more lucrative. Thus, while many individuals pursue platform work because they view it as easy money or a faster way to earn money based on their performance, they still desire the safety, stability, and consistency of conventional employment where earnings are not based on performance and are generally guaranteed.

9.5 Conclusion

The findings outlined in this chapter reveal that participants' satisfaction varies in terms of personal, social, and financial aspects of platform work. Overall, most participants agree that

most types of platform work are not personally engaging (repetitive and/or dull) and offers low prestige. Moreover, while some platform work can be lucrative, all platform work earnings are precarious and unstable. Due to these negative perceptions, participants have more pessimistic outlooks for the future of work including a lack of full-time jobs, proliferation of piece-rate shifts, forced multiple jobholding, and poorer quality work output. Given that participants have mostly negative or mixed satisfaction with their platform work, it is not surprising that they provided more doubtful opinions regarding the future of work especially in the context of conventional employment. Their concerns are focused on deteriorating working conditions and the "oppressive feeling of precariousness"[29] that platform work has spread over most occupations both within and outside the platform economy (Fleming et al., 2019, p. 504). Drawing on experiences of participants as paid prosumers who are motivated to pursue platform work because of conspicuous prosumption, a better future of work can be conceived. This better future provides recommendations aimed at improving working relationships since rational social action is determined within the limits of these social structures (Marcuse, 1964).

[29] Workers' anxiety regarding their employment situation worsened by the belief that economic insecurity caused by platform work will stretch across the entire labour market to affect all other occupations and jobs. See Fleming, Rhodes, & Yu (2019) for more information.

Chapter 10

10 Discussion and Conclusion

10.1 Overview

The overall aim of this monograph was to enhance understanding of work in the platform economy. As well, through examining platform work which is ultimately a form of paid prosumption since some digital users are renumerated for being both producers for, and consumers of, digital platforms – a clearer picture of work within prosumer capitalism can be seen. Thus, this study obtained a deeper understanding of prosumer capitalism. This topic was worth investigating since digital technologies operating in a globalized context affect individuals' experiences of work and being a worker in ways that may be different compared to traditional workers.

The societal impacts and disruptions caused by digital platforms have been contested within current literature. While some argue that platform work has largely improved society by spreading atypical working practices, new ways of working, and promoting non-standard work arrangements (Drahokoupil & Jepsen, 2017), others fear that platform work has accelerated the rise of precarious and exploitative work (McKee et al., 2018; Mendes, 2020; Woodcock, 2021). Moreover, because most regulatory frameworks were enacted before it was conceived that work could be ordered and organized through digital technologies like smartphones (Kessler, 2018), most platform work operates within a legal grey area (McKee et al., 2018; Silberman & Harmon, 2018). As such, platform workers are neither clearly employees nor distinctively independent contractors. Thus, another aim of this study was to elucidate the impact of platform work on the actual individuals performing it.

Because this sector is unstable and precarious, choosing to work in the platform economy is not an easy decision for most (Silberman & Harmon, 2018). Therefore, understanding why people pursue platform work over available conventional employment in Canada is important. A final aim of this study was to determine whether these informal digital ways of earning are a

temporary feature of society where people choose to supplement their income or if they reveal a more permanent trajectory of work where people *must* pursue nonstandard work (Graham et al., 2017; Healy et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2020).

To investigate these aims, this interpretivist exploratory research investigated four research questions: 1) Which factors motivate participants to choose to work in the platform economy? 2) What challenges do participants experience in pursuit of their platform work and how do they rationalize their experiences? 3) Are participants working in excess and what meanings do they attach to their platform work? 4) How do participants perceive the future of work? The data that informed the findings were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 71 current and former platform workers primarily living in Canada (with a few individuals living in US, UK and India). This chapter summarizes the major research findings to succinctly answer each research question and then highlights the study's theoretical contributions and policy implications. I also address the study's limitations and recommend areas for future research.

10.2 Main Research Findings

In addressing the first research question, the findings reveal that platform workers are a diverse group motivated to work in the platform economy by many interrelated push and pull factors. Participants were broadly motivated because platform work is a paid activity that provides them with income. However, participants varied greatly in their need for income, with some expressing more financial need than others. Some participants were also motivated to pursue platform work over conventional jobs because they required non-standard work that offers flexibility, autonomy, and/or low entry barriers. Others pursued platform work because of structural or social barriers that prevented them from obtaining traditional employment such as a lack of employment opportunities, restrictive employment policies or visa conditions, and/or medical conditions. Declining working hours and/or inabilities to secure full-time work are also barriers in traditional work that motivated people to enter the platform economy. Viewing platform work as a viable career path or feeling bored in one's spare time were also motivating factors. These objective motivations are consistent with literature on why people pursue platform work (Dobler et al., 2021; Hall and Krueger, 2018; Kessler, 2018; Peticca-Harris et al., 2020; Ravenelle, 2019a; Woodcock, 2021). Thus, people can be pulled into platform work for intrinsic

motivations and/or pushed into it because of larger structural issues (Keith et al., 2019). These results indicate that participants either pursued platform work out of financial necessity, personal choice to top-up their incomes, or to alleviate boredom in free time.

The findings that address the second research question revealed that platform work has many challenges. The lived experiences of participants suggested that platform workers make up a very exploited and disadvantaged group of workers. Platform workers also experience a variety of challenges that can impact their working. For some, these challenges can push them out of platform work, especially when they have viable opportunities for alternative work in traditional industries. Challenges include being unable to bear the financial costs of providing and maintaining the means of production to perform platform work; the presence of too many regulations that could make the work unsustainable or unprofitable; a lack of regulations that make platform workers susceptible to being injured, victimized, and/or placed in dangerous situations both online and offline; wage theft and/or difficulties with retrieving (full) payment for their work with few legal recourses to assist them due to their ambiguous worker classification; low pay and long hours needed to earn sufficient income; and lacking available time. Because capitalists position their digital platforms as technologies, they can further shift responsibilities and external costs onto workers (Woodcock, 2021), which contributes to worsening these challenges. These findings support literature that there is widespread exploitation occurring within this sector and that workers often toil for long hours, low wages, and in unsafe conditions (McKee et al., 2018; Mendes, 2020; Woodcock, 2021). Moreover, these findings support previous research in highlighting that the lack of regulations governing this sector make it difficult for platform workers to secure better working conditions (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Mojtehedzadeh, 2020).

The findings that address the third research question show that many paid prosumers have intensive working patterns because they attach social meanings that connect paid work with productive uses of time. For those with the longest working hours, there is also evidence of a worshiping of productivity to which many individuals sacrifice leisure and personal wellbeing to maintain such extended hours.

To provide context for understanding their working patterns, participants' definitions of work reveal a materialistic orientation that regards work with paid activity. By contrast, participants' definitions of leisure support literature that there is separation of work and leisure as antithetical activities (Marx, 1867), which need to be balanced (Gershuny, 2000; Lewis, 2003). Because most participants regarded their platform activities as a paid job or a work alternative like a side hustle, they are not blurring work and leisure (Lewis, 2003), but are sacrificing leisure to pursue paid activities. Thus, most of the participants in this study reported more than 40 hours of paid work per week which is greater than the average Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Those with the fewest working hours have their time constrained by schooling, domestic responsibilities, or medical conditions rather than spending more time in leisure.

There are also patterns among the participants working more than 60 hours of work per week. Generally, younger participants who are single and childless maintain such intense hours suggesting that different life course stages support or constrain participants' abilities to engage in more paid work. These findings support literature that most platform work is combined with conventional jobs (Churchill & Craig, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2022b), which contribute to long working hours. This provides evidence that digitalization, the platform economy, and gig work are all contributing to multiple jobholding (Fulford & Patterson, 2019; Glavin, 2020; Piasna et al., 2021). However, unlike research that finds multiple jobholding prevalent among part-time workers who need to supplement their incomes with platform work (Statistics Canada, 2022b), most workers in this study are employed fulltime in their primary jobs and many did not rely on their platform work earnings. This suggests that intense working hours via platform work is pursued out of personal choice rather than financial necessity.

Finally, the findings that address the last research question reveal participants were anxious about the future trajectory of work in Canada. Their opinions on the future of work were connected to their personal, social, and financial satisfaction with platform work and their experiences with conventional work. There were nuanced differences in satisfaction depending on the type(s) of platform work the participants engaged in. For example, participants who regarded platform work as a career, those who engaged in mixed types of platform work, and those who reported being excluded from conventional jobs due to medical barriers expressed

more positive opinions about the personal and social aspects of their work. These participants largely viewed the future of work favorably. By contrast, most participants reported that work in the platform economy is not engaging, lacks prestige, and earnings are limited and unstable. These negative views were commonly shared by participants who displayed materialistic orientations towards platform work and those who only engage in one type of platform work. These participants also expressed belief that only a few individual workers actually reap the benefits of autonomous and flexible work with lucrative earnings. Due to these perceptions, more participants offered pessimistic outlooks on the future of work where traditional industries will continue to move away from offering standard and full-time employment with guaranteed wages to piece-rate work which will force multiple jobholding to become a necessity.

10.3 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Throughout each of the thematic chapters (6 – 9) I have unpacked the subjective experiences of the participants in this study. The results outlined above note the objective motivations guiding participants' pursuit of platform work, the various challenges they experienced, their specific working patterns, and their perceptions on the future of work in Canada. Going beyond the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), by analyzing participants' experiences through the lens of social action theory and conspicuous prosumption, the rewards and rationalization for engaging in paid prosumption become apparent.

Drawing on these frameworks, participants are rational beings who make economically relevant decisions (Weber, 1958; Wright, 2002). While their actions are built on logic and means-end calculations (Weber, 1958), their actions are oriented to the larger capitalist social structures (Giddens, 1991), that pressure them to be good workers *and* good consumers. Thus, conspicuous prosumption in varying forms factor into participants' rational social action.

10.3.1 Prosumer Motivations

The findings of this monograph revealed that participants can be grouped into three broad categories based on their motivations for working in the platform economy: those who need to work in the platform economy because of financial necessity or exclusion from conventional jobs; those who pursue platform work to top-up of their income and support their excess

consumption; and those who pursue platform work to alleviate boredom in their free time. These findings demonstrate that participants engaged in means-end instrumental social action tailored by conspicuous prosumption to satisfy their goals for productivity and/or consumption.

Participants who were motivated to top-up their existing incomes to support their enhanced consumerism strongly demonstrated conspicuous prosumption in which they (unnecessarily) work more to spend more to satisfy their false needs. By contrast, participants who pursued platform work to alleviate boredom and occupy their free time best demonstrated conspicuous prosumption through the worship of paid labour – they engage in excess paid work because they devalue unpaid activities and leisure. Finally, participants who were motivated because of financial necessity and/or exclusion from conventional full-time employment demonstrated pecuniary emulation of conspicuous prosumption. They engage in additional (necessary) paid work to afford their living needs *and* support their consumerism and goals for productivity.

These motivations are illuminating because they demonstrate the symbolic meaning imbued in consumption and production. Participants have certain goals shaped by societal expectations about consumption and being a good worker. If individuals' goals cannot be attained through traditional paid work alone because of structural or social barriers, they will experience cognitive dissonance (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). In other words, if people do not earn enough money in their conventional job to support their desired levels of consumption, or if they do not perceive their conventional work as meaningful because it is not fulltime or perceive time spent in leisure as unproductive, then they will experience great discomfort. To reduce dissonance, participants adjust their social actions. Thus, if their consumption and production goals cannot be met through traditional means, individuals will rationalize other efficient ways available to them to reach their goals. Therefore, people make the rational decision to fulfil their (instrumental and value) rational goals through paid prosumption which has low barriers to entry and the perceived flexibility and autonomy to balance with other forms of employment, schooling, or other social roles/responsibilities.

10.3.2 Rationalizing self-exploitation

As discussed in chapter 2, prosumer capitalism is a synergistically doubly exploitation system that exploits traditional workers, traditional consumers, and prosumers. Beyond labour, it also exploits prosumers into providing (and maintaining) their own means of production within the labour process of platform work. Despite the exploitative conditions of platform work and the disadvantages that platform workers experience, many participants choose to remain working in the platform economy because they rationalized their decisions as personal choices shaped by conspicuous prosumption.

Participants may self-exploit themselves in varying degrees by reframing platform work as self-serving, providing them with opportunities to satisfy their consumption patterns. Those who use platform work to top-up their earnings demonstrated conspicuous prosumption where they increase their time in paid work to afford their increased consumption more efficiently. Those who are financially dependent on platform work demonstrate pecuniary emulation of conspicuous prosumption where they have similar consumer goals shaped by society and they engage in platform work to afford their living expenses and satisfy their false needs. However, unlike the former group who can engage in wasteful prosumption, the latter group become financially trapped due to their work-and-spend syndromes. They cannot afford to leave precarious and disadvantaged work.

In addition, participants who pursued platform work out of boredom put up with the disadvantage and exploitation because they are ultimately producers who want to feel as though they are making good use of their time by pursuing paid work over unpaid activities like leisure. They regarded paid prosumption as a useful expenditure of time and effort. This demonstrates conspicuous prosumption through the worship of labour at the cost of leisure.

Finally, most participants also rationalized their disadvantage by reframing their work in the platform economy as a temporary side hustle, paid hobby, or student job. This perception is promoted and reinforced by digital platforms that make it difficult for individuals to secure enough work or working hours to be successful with platform work alone. Because most participants did not believe they will be doing platform work for more than ten years, they were

more willing to ignore the negative attributes of the sector to reap its other advantages. In other words, they engaged in self-exploitation by viewing it as a short-term experience. Thus, participants demonstrated practical or formal rationality guiding their rational social action to pursue platform work.

10.3.3 Sacrificing leisure to pursue paid work and intense work hours

Those who pursue platform work in addition to conventional employment reported intense working hours sustainable through the sacrifice of leisure, personal life, social life, and/or wellbeing. Conspicuous prosumption illuminates why people pursue intense working hours. As social actors, individuals often negotiate their self-identity (Giddens, 1991), through their occupations and careers (Grey, 1994). However, for many people occupation is no longer closely linked to identity since standard fulltime and lifelong employment is increasingly being replaced by precarious, short-term, and involuntary part-time work (James, 2018; Kessler, 2018). For individuals who do not have strong attachments to a specific occupation, self-identity can be developed around one's capacity to work including the number of working hours they can secure.

Because participants hold structurally shaped conceptualizations of, and goals for, meaningful production, those unable to secure fulltime, salaried, and stable employment can imitate success by taking on platform work. Some can even construct the appearance that they have fulltime working hours despite engaging in multiple jobs. Thus, the participants who pursued platform work out of necessity to supplement their conventional part-time jobs can mimic success through pecuniary emulation of conspicuous prosumption. They do so by highlighting to others their participation in a primary job (e.g., their conventional job) and then disguising their time spent in platform work as part of their conventional job to imitate having a full-time job. Or some may dress up the true nature of their platform work to appear more prestigious. Moreover, the added income from paid prosumption enables them to consume conspicuously which helps strengthen their status claims. Therefore, despite not having conventional full-time jobs, these participants use platform work to shape their sense of self and indicate to others that they are "good" workers who work at least forty hours a week between their conventional job and/or platform work.

Participants who pursued intense working hours out of personal choice (to top-up income or to alleviate boredom) are more conspicuous about their prosumption since they associated paid work with a sense of accomplishment. Thus, despite engaging in precarious, repetitive, monotonous, and exploitative work, individuals associated platform work with feeling like they have put their time to good use. In other words, when individuals engage in paid prosumption and are financially rewarded for their efforts, they rationalized these activities as a valuable expenditure of time, effort, and resources especially when compared to unpaid activities performed in leisure or in idleness. Furthermore, through the guise of meritocracy, people who choose to sacrifice their leisure to pursue paid work believe that because they willingly work longer hours, they deserve to have more (Tarnoff, 2017). This helps to justify social inequality. Thus, participants' decisions to work in excess are rational social actions guided by practical or formal rationality to achieve their prosumption goals.

10.3.4 Anxious future of work

Platform workers are "quietly" integrated into prosumer capitalism by institutions, mass media, and consumer culture (Marcuse, 1964). This means that their understandings of work, working patterns, and their perception of opportunities available to them are largely moulded to the current capitalist system that symbolically values productivity *and* consumerism. In response to the breakdown of traditional structures governing the organization of work and working relationships, participants as rational social actors adjust their expectations of work, and their rational social actions accordingly. Therefore, they display practical or formal rationality to navigate their lives around real or perceived changes to working relationships or working conditions.

Woodcock (2021) argues that the content of work facilitated using digital platforms is not new. Platforms merely offer novel ways for connecting workers to these paid opportunities (Graham & Woodcock, 2018). The data in this study largely support this as individuals pursued platform work to augment their own situational experiences of work. Participants did not reject conventional organizations of work. Thus, the platform economy offers continuity in the organization of work. However, the data also revealed specific contradictions in the current organization of work within prosumer capitalism. Participants like platform work because it is

relatively easier to access and deregulated compared to traditional jobs, making it convenient for participants to meet their goals of consumption and production. But at the same time, participants struggle with the deregulated nature of platform work that supports precarity, wage theft, and dangerous work. Moreover, despite working in the platform economy because it is non-standard and flexible, participants continue to value stable, fulltime, and salaried employment. As such, participants have deep fears and anxiety that their own conventional jobs that they depend on (or are hoping to obtain) will become unstable and precarious if traditional companies adopt platform-based models. This supports Fleming et al.'s (2019) argument for the oppressive feeling of precariousness. Therefore, while participants enjoyed flexibility, autonomy, piece rate pay, and multiple jobholding in the context of platform work, they feared these features within the context of conventional employment. This further supports the findings that platform work is largely perceived by participants to be temporary work suitable for certain life stages as opposed to life-long permanent work.

Envisioning a better future for work acknowledges that deteriorating working conditions create insecurities that alter people's expectations for work. Thus, in considering platform workers as motivated by conspicuous prosumption, a better future of work does not move away from standard and full-time employment with guaranteed wages. It also supports working in the platform economy when it is freely pursued out of personal choice.

10.3.5 The impact of prosumer capitalism on rational social action

This dissertation has revealed how individuals experience platform work within the confines of prosumer capitalism. Within this form of capitalism, the ideology of buying happiness and obtaining symbolic meaning through commodities remains prominent (Marcuse, 1964). While individuals continue to experience intense societal pressures to work and to consume, both opportunities for meaningful production and consumption are increasingly difficult to obtain through a single job. Moreover, fewer people can access credit to support their conspicuous consumption or pecuniary emulation (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2021a). This creates a contradiction that generates cognitive dissonance for modern workers. They are socialized to desire full-time employment with decent salaries to shape their sense of self, and they continue to value consumer goals such as homeownership for displaying a level of social status (Englehardt

et al., 2010; McCabe, 2018). Yet, more and more people are unable to secure stable full-time jobs with large salaries (Kalleberg, 2011). As well, large consumer goals like homeownership in cities like Toronto are becoming unaffordable even for those who possess a single, stable "good" job (Kalleberg, 2011).

The dissonance caused by being unable to satisfy one's production and consumption goals through traditional avenues alone motivate individuals to alter their social actions and engage in platform work. Thus, through increasing time in paid work, regardless of the work being precarious, low paying or disadvantageous, people can fuel their relentless need to be good consumers and to feel like they are good workers. Thus, prosumption keeps modern workers integrated into the capitalist system and helps to resolve the crisis of consumer capitalism, rising personal debt, by encouraging people to work more to support their excess consumption.

Drawing on Burawoy's (1979) concept of manufacturing consent, workers in capitalist systems do not rebel against exploitative conditions because these systems also manufacture their participation. Thus, rather than workers being blissfully ignorant or "one-dimensional" (Marcuse, 1964), workers participate (to various degrees) in capitalism. This means that rather than spending their energies trying to topple the whole system, alienated workers "play the game" and seek small daily victories like feeling productive or viewing themselves in their commodities that will give them the illusion of freedom, purpose, and excitement (Burawoy, 1979). Thus, workers are co-opted (Burawoy, 1979), into embracing prosumer capitalism through conspicuous prosumption.

The experiences of the platform workers in this study can be understood through this perspective of rational co-optation guided by conspicuous prosumption. Burawoy (1979) argued that capitalists utilize strategies to manufacture consent including the piece-rate pay system, job mobility, and collective bargaining. The platform economy similarly uses the idea of piece-rate pay as a reward system for extracting higher levels of productivity from workers. Like Burawoy's examination of factory workers who reframed their productivity as "making it out" – platform workers regarded their increased productive output as "hustling". Through hustling, participants attempt to "win" in capitalist society by earning more through working more to be

able to spend more. Hence, satisfying their conspicuous prosumption or pecuniary emulation. Moreover, platform companies manufacture consent by selling the illusion of entrepreneurship where workers buy into the myth that they can "be their own boss" and can "control their own work schedules". The findings showed that autonomy and flexibility in the platform economy are quite constrained, but they appear more autonomous and flexible when people directly compare them against conventional employment. However, by entering the platform economy, participants embodying the spirit of entrepreneurship (or the spirit of capitalism) may perceive themselves to be "making it out" better in unequal systems by engaging in paid prosumption.

To reiterate, while participants make rational choices to engage in platform work, their decisions come from a narrow range of choices shaped by current capitalist organizations of work and working that fetishizes commodities and worships at the altar of productivity.

10.3.6 Policy implications

The findings from this study have implications for policy creation. The findings highlight a need to regulate the platform economy given the rampant exploitation within this sector. First, platform workers comprise an extremely disadvantaged and exploited group of workers. More protections are needed to support those who pursue work in the platform economy including policies that ensure workers receive payment for all their work. This will help to reduce some of the precarity and exploitation occurring within this sector. In addition, policies should seek to establish legal recourses for platform workers to pursue "bad clients" or platforms that withhold wages. Second, policies are needed to accurately classify platform workers which will provide legal status to these workers. This research supports the use of independent worker to classify workers (Hagiu & Wright, 2019; Harris & Krueger, 2015; Krueger, 2018). Finally, more regulations are needed to govern platforms to ensure the safety of workers and consumers. A few participants noted sharing single accounts with multiple workers. This has ramifications for the safety of consumers (Fleming et al., 2019), especially when hiring workers to perform skilled work. It also demonstrates that current systems to protect consumers such as running background checks on prospective workers is inefficient. For example, once the accounts are activated (upon successful background screening) there are few to no other systems in place to ensure the individual who performs the work is the individual hired for the work.

10.4 Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory research has contributed to our understanding of work in the platform economy and more broadly, the experiences of some workers within prosumer capitalism. There are several limitations of this study and ample opportunity for future research to address these concerns. First, an aim of this study was to explore a wide range of different types of platform work to offer a holistic view of this sector. While I was able to examine 23 diverse types of platform work, the findings were largely informed by the experiences of those who performed rideshare driving, delivery courier work, crowdwork, online tutoring, online writing, painting, and flooring. Only a few participants engaged in other types of platform work including modeling/acting, pet care services, cargo transportation, handyman/landscaping services, event staffing, house cleaning, homesharing, and online selling. In addition, this study did not include the experiences of social media content creators (influencers), online sex workers, or care workers. Future research should explore the nuanced experiences of these other types of platform workers, and how the nature of these work impact who performs the work, their motivations for pursuing these work, and any unique challenges they may experience.

Second, this study sought to enhance understanding of working within prosumer capitalism via paid prosumption. A limitation is that this study only examines work in platform economy to generate understanding for work in prosumer capitalism. Other sectors including manufacturing and service industries are also experiencing an increase in prosumption as consumers are increasingly brought into labour production (Ritzer, 1996, 2014, 2016). Examining these additional forms of paid prosumption will enhance knowledge on this topic.

The third limitation is that this research cannot assess the true size and scope of the platform economy. Crude estimates suggest that one-in-four Americans (Smith, 2016), and one-in-five Canadians (Angus Reid Institute, 2019), work in the digital platform economy. However, these estimates are not up to date given the expansion of the platform sector following the pandemic (Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020). Moreover, estimates like these tend to utilize employment data (Jeon & Ostrovsky, 2020) or data pertaining to platform accounts to assess the number of people who

engage in platform work. These approaches may not capture the hidden population of platform workers who perform the work with their spouses or friends using a single shared account (and splitting the earnings). Future research should seek to establish a more accurate size and scope of those pursuing platform work.

Future research could also explore the impact of rating and review systems since they heavily impact how work in the platform economy is allocated and there may be more inequality within this industry than what is currently known (Hoang et al., 2020). As well, those with the best ratings/reviews may end up being able to secure more work opportunities than they can possibly fulfill. These individuals may seek to contract the work out to other platform workers creating an even more complex web of work precarity and exploitation.

Finally, several participants who reported being new mothers or mothers with young children reported pursuing platform work to better accommodate their childrearing responsibilities. Future research could seek to explore whether working in the platform economy will positively or negatively impact their opportunities for securing conventional employment later on. More specifically, research should investigate whether working remotely at home via the platform economy will translate into a lack of experience working outside of the home when individuals transition to traditional employment (Kessler, 2018). In addition, future research should seek to explore more nuanced difference between the experiences of men and women in pursuit of platform work.

10.5 Concluding Remarks

I began this monograph with a quote from Kessler (2018, p. 247) that succinctly summarizes why this examination of platform workers was needed: “the fulltime job to which we've attached all of the rules about treating workers fairly is dissolving, and the community of workers who are treated as second class citizens, who are not protected by the same laws or entitled to the same benefits as other workers, is growing. That is a big, scary problem, and one worth studying”. This dissertation has shined a light on the positive and negative aspects of working the platform economy as paid prosumers. The results of this study have revealed many challenges facing modern workers

including rampant exploitation by digital platforms and a lack of legal protections. It has also provided bases for why individuals pursue platform work and how they obtain meaning from largely precarious and fragmented work. These discoveries are important and can be used to help govern the creation of policies to better regulate the platform economy and will help educate individuals who may be mulling over whether to pursue work in this sector or conventional employment.

Beyond understanding work in the platform economy, this dissertation has improved knowledge on paid prosumption within prosumer capitalism where digital prosumers are synergistically doubly exploited. Individuals engage in paid prosumption as rational social actions that they calculate will effectively or efficiently help them to achieve their goals of consumption and meaningful production. Due to limited literature, this research has been exploratory in order to address certain gaps. The results of this study have illuminated aspects of paid prosumption and the experiences of platform workers. I have highlighted the need for continued investigation on this emerging sector as it is likely to remain an important source for work.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Date: 11 March 2020

To: Dr. Tracey Adams

Project ID: 115338

Study Title: Working in the Platform Economy: The Meanings and Motivations

Short Title: Working in the Platform Economy

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: April 3 2020

Date Approval Issued: 11/Mar/2020

REB Approval Expiry Date: 11/Mar/2021

Dear Dr. Tracey Adams

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Digital poster - Working in the platform economy	Recruitment Materials	27/Feb/2020	2
Interview Guide - working in the platform economy	Interview Guide	13/Feb/2020	001
Poster - Working in Platform Economy Poster UWO	Recruitment Materials	27/Feb/2020	2
Ver 1 - Mturk Recruitment form	Recruitment Materials	10/Mar/2020	1
Ver 2. LOI and Written consent - Working in the platform economy	Written Consent/Assent	27/Feb/2020	2
Ver.2 LOI and verbal consent - Working in the platform economy	Verbal Consent/Assent	27/Feb/2020	2

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Page 1 of 1

Appendix B: Digital Recruitment Poster

Western SocialScience

Sociology

Version Date: Jan 22, 2020

SEEKING STUDY PARTICIPANTS!

RESEARCH ON GIG WORK AND THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

We are looking for <u>volunteers</u> to learn about their experiences performing gig work, or other work in the platform economy.

Participants must meet the following requirements:

- Currently working or previously worked in the platform economy in past (5) years.
- English-speaking
- 18 years or older

If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last 45 to 60 minutes.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a compensation of $5.00CAD or $5.00 gift card to Tim Horton's.

Examples of work in the platform economy include but are not limited to:

- Driving for rideshare (Uber or Lyft)
- Delivery (Skipthedishes, DoorDash, UberEats)
- In-person manual labour (Handy, TaskRabbit)
- Crowdwork (Amazon Mechanical Turk)
- Virtual administrative work, (Fivver, Upwork, Freelancer)

Appendix C: Letter of Information

Sociology

LETTER OF INFORMATION AND VERBAL CONSENT

Title of Study: "Working in the Platform Economy: The meanings and motivations"

Principle Investigator and Co-Investigator:

Dr. Tracey Adams:
Department of Sociology,
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario,
N6G 2V4

Ms. Lyn Hoang, Ph.D student
Department of Sociology,
University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario,
N6G 2V4

1. **Invitation to Participate:**

You are being invited to participate in this study, which seeks to examine participants' experiences working in the platform economy.

The platform economy is defined as encompassing all work or earning pursuits that is facilitated by websites, mobile apps, and social networking sites.

Examples of working in the platform economy include but are not limited to: Driving for ridesharing services (Uber or Lyft); Delivery work (Skipthedishes, DoorDash, UberEats); In-person manual labour or cleaning services (Handy, TaskRabbit, Rover); Crowdwork (Amazon Mechanical Turk); Virtual administrative work (e.g. virtual assistant, graphic design, translation services, accounting services, and so on) (Fivver, Upwork, Freelancer).

2. **Purpose of this Letter:**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

3. **Purpose of this Study:**

Currently not much is known about the platform economy, or how these work impact the people who perform them. The purpose of this study is to uncover why individuals use platforms to earn money. We are also interested in participants' motivations for choosing platform work over work in traditional industries, and the meanings they attach to their work.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are: 1) Currently working or previously worked in the platform economy in the past (5) years; 2) English-Speaking; 3) Above 18 years of age.

4. Exclusion Criteria:
Men and women with no experiences working in the platform economy are not eligible to participate in this study.

5. Study Procedures:
If you agree to participate you will be interviewed about your experiences working in the platform economy. The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will take notes on a laptop or tablet. I will be using pseudonyms in the transcripts of the interview, as well as in the research paper that will be generated from the data. Interviews will take place at a location convenient to you. In situations where in-person interviews many not be feasible due to geographic distance, interviews will be conducted either through video chat (Zoom), or telephone.

6. Possible Risks and Harms:
There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

7. Possible Benefits:
Information gathered from your participation in this study may provide a better understanding of working in the platform economy; however, you may not benefit directly from participating in this study.

9. Compensation:
You will be financially compensated for your participation with $5.00 gift card to Amazon.

10. Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. You do not waive any legal rights by participating in this research study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. Participation will not affect your employment.

11. Confidentiality:
All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. Interviews will be saved on a personal computer and backed up on a hard drive. Both the computer and hard drive are password protected, and the files will be encrypted. All data will be stored in accordance with Western's University policy (for a minimum of 7 years). Paper documents will be shredded after the 7-year period. Electronic files will be deleted after this time. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. While

Participant Initials________

we will do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so.

12. Contacts for Further Information:
If you require further information about this research you may contact Lyn Hoang via e-mail at [redacted] or the principal investigator in the Department of Sociology, Professor Tracey Adams at [redacted] or via e-mail at [redacted] If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

13. Publication:
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Lyn Hoang (co-investigator) or Professor Tracey Adams (principal investigator) through the contact information above.

14. Consent:
If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign the attached consent form and return it back directly to me before the interview

Thank you for your participation

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

 Participant Initials________

Western SocialScience

Sociology

Verbal Consent Form:

Title: Working in the Platform Economy: The meanings and motivations

Principle Investigator: Tracey L. Adams, Department of Sociology, Western University

Co-Investigator: Lyn Hoang, Department of Sociology, Western University

Participant's Name: _______________________________________

Do you confirm that you have read the Letter of Information [or the Letter of Information has been read to you] and have had all questions answered to your satisfaction?

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you agree to participate in this research?

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you agree to be audio-recorded?

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

[For Researcher Only]
I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the participant named above and believe that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): ______________________________

Signature:___________________________ Date:________________

Page **4** of **4** - **Version 2 – Feb 27, 2020** Participant Initials_______

Appendix D: Revised Interview Guide

1. **Background Information:** Invite interviewee to briefly tell me about him/herself
   - What is your gender?
   - How old are you?
   - What is your highest level of education?
   - City of residence
   - Where work is located?
     - Probe: For virtual workers: ask what region most of their work opportunities is coming from.
   - Marital Status:
   - Number of children:

2. **Basic questions about work:**
   - Can you define what work means to you?
   - Can you define what leisure time means to you?
   - Can you define what productivity means to you?
   - Can you tell me about your job(s)? What do you do?
     - Probe: What is a typical working day like for you? OR What does your job consist of doing?
   - How many hours a day/week do you work?
     - Probe: How long have you been doing this work for?
   - Is this your only job? What other jobs do you do?
   - Do you need specific education or qualifications to do your job?

Questions added after 4th interview

3. **Motivations**
   - How did you find out about this kind of work?
   - How did you get into this kind of work? What factors led to you doing this kind of work?
   - *For participants not currently doing this work anymore:* Why did you stop doing this work?
     - Probe: Do you think you would ever go back? Why or why not.
   - How long was the process from applying to starting to work? Did you experience any barriers to entering this kind of work?
   - How do you decide when you want to work, or the kinds of work or offers you take on?
     - Probe: Are there times or days you will not work (for what reasons?)
     - Probe: What jobs will you NOT take on?
   - How do you leisure/spare time. What do you do in your spare time, when you're not working?
   - Do you find yourself doing work on your off time?
   - Do you feel productive when you do gig work? Probe: if you didn't do gig work, do you

think you would feel productive?

4. **Meanings**
   - Are you satisfied or happy (e.g. socially or financially) are you from the work you do?
   - Can you tell me the things you like most about your work?
   - Can you tell me the things you dislike about your work? Or things you find difficult about your work?
   - Overall how do you feel about the work you do? Do you consider it something you want to do for the rest of your career, or do you think it's just a job or way to make money until something else comes along?
   - Do you feel you that through your work you have opportunities to use fully your education, knowledge or skills?

5. **In-depth Questions: Challenges, Advantages, Overall Experiences.**
   - Have you ever faced a situation where you did not feel safe working?
   - Do you think there is a learning curve to this kind of work?
   - How has doing this kind of work impacted or influenced your life?
     - Probe - Personal, financial, academic, social, other work?
   - Are there any specific things you do to find work offers, or to get work? What are they? How are they helpful?
     - How much time do you spend a week looking for job opportunities?
   - Do you know any other people that do this kind of work?
     - Probe: How did you meet other people doing this kind of work?
     - Probe: Do you experience and loneliness or isolation in this line of work?
   - Do you view other people who do this work as co-workers or competitors?
   - What kinds of people do you interact with in your line of work (e.g. customers, other workers, etc.)
     - Probe: In what situations do you usually interact with other people doing this kind of work?
   - Do you have any type of relationship with the platform itself?
     - Probe: If you experienced a problem while working, who would you contact or would you receive assistance from the platform?
     - Probe: Would you characterize this relationship as managerial?
   - Have you ever felt advantaged or disadvantaged at doing this work compared to other people doing the work? i.e. education, gender, race, age, class, location?
   - are you proud of the work you do? Do you think it gives you status?

6. **Compared to other types of work questions**
   - What job(s) did you do before you started this one? How many jobs have you had until now?
     - Probe: Why did you leave your previous position?

- Probe: How do you feel about your past work experiences?
- Compared to all your previous jobs, how do you view this gig work? is it better, worse, no difference?
  - Probe: Were there any advantages or disadvantages to doing this kind of work?

7. Income and Earnings Questions

- Are you the sole provider for your household?
- Are the earnings from platform work your primary source of income? Or do the earnings supplement your existing income from other work?
- Can you make a good living off your work? or is it only enough to meet your basic needs.
  - Probe: What do you use the earnings for? (i.e. savings, buying goods, investing?)
- Can you explain to me how you receive pay for your work?
  - Probe: Are you paid directly by the platform? Does the platform take a percentage of your earnings?
- Have you ever experienced a situation where you were not paid for the work you did? Or where you were paid less than what you expected?
  - Probe: How did you cope/deal with this kind of situation(s).

8. Regulation Questions

- Do you consider yourself an employee of the platform company or an independent contractor/consultant?
- Do you think there is a need to better regulate your work or the platform economy? Like should there be more protections for workers like minimum wage, benefits, pensions, sick leave, and etc.) OR do you think it is fine as it currently is?
  - Probe: What kind of changes would you like to see?
- Would you ever join a union if one appeared? Or do you think unionizing this work will reduce a lot of the appeal of the work, like the flexibility.

9. Future Outlook on Work

- Do you see yourself continuing to do this kind of work in the future (5 years or 10 years?)
- Do you have any concerns over your financial security in the future?
- How do you think this kind of work will impact the future of work in Canada or in your area?
- Do you think you will go back to working in more traditional industries? Or do you think you will be doing platform work in the future?

10. Concluding Questions

- How has the COVID situation impacted your working?

  Questions added after 3rd interview
- Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you think I should know, or that you want to tell me?

Appendix E: Table 8.1b: Detailed Breakdown of Participants' Working Patterns (N=71)

Participant (Age)	Types of Platform Work	Platforms	Avg. Weekly Hours of Platform Work	Avg. Weekly Hours of Conventional Job	Avg. Weekly Hours in Paid Work (platform + conventional)	Conventional Job/Title	School	Medical Condition	Children
Aaron (27)	Delivery courier	UberEats	20	40	60	Analys t	--	--	
Riley (27)	Online tutoring	Easyke	60 - 70	0	60 - 70	--	--	--	
Rosalie (25)	Delivery courier	UberEats/ Foodora	20 - 25	0	20 - 25	--	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Laurie (25)	Social Media Marketing	Freelancer, Upwork, Kijiji	25	0	25	--	--	--	
Davidson (36)	In-person manual labour /Crowdwork/Onl ine consulting	Taskrabbit, Fivver, Kijiji, Craigslist	Summer seasons – 70-90 Winter – 50-70	0	50 - 90	--	--	--	
Deepak (30)	Rideshare driver	Uber	15 - 30	40	55 - 70	Office Administratio n	--	--	
Rebecca (47)	Crowdwork	MTurk	* 4 – 5 ** 25	* 40 ** 0	*44-45 **25	Office Administratio n	--	--	1
Katie (46)	Crowdwork	MTurk / Lionsbridge	12 - 15	40	52 - 55	Teacher	--	--	2
Jorge (29)	Crowdwork	Mturk	* 20 ** 40	* 40 ** 0	*60 **40	Marketing	--	--	
Mila (26)	Crowdwork	Mturk	7	0	7	--	Graduat e School	--	
Henry (62)	In-person research studies/user testing, modelling, acting	Craigslist, Kijiji	70 - 90	0	70 - 90	--	--	--	
Martin (65)	CargoTransportat ion	Loadboards	100	0	100	--	--	--	
Jazmin (24)	Delivery courier	Skipthedishes	15	0	15	--	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Aileen (40)	Mystery Shopping/ Online surveys/ User testing	Honeybee/ Kijiji/ MSPA	10	20	30	Customer Service	--	Yes	

Beena (22)	Dog walking/ online tutoring / tasks	Taskrabbit, Rover, Kijiji	10	0	10	--	Post-Secondary	--
Louise (28)	Usertesting/petcare/ Delivery courier/online tutoring/Transcribing	Doordash/ UberEats/ Pawshake /Rover/ VIPKid/ REV/ Cambly	20 – 30	0	20 - 30	--	--	Yes
Lee (28)	Delivery courier	Skipthedishes	20 – 30	40	60 - 70	Restaurant Supervisor	--	--
Fatima (21)	Transcription/ Online tutoring	Rev/Kijiji	13 - 20	0	13 - 20	--	Post-Secondary	--
Rachel (27)	Childcare – child programming/childcare content/freelance writing	Fivver/Patreon	*10-20 **20 - 30	*35-40 **10-25	40 - 60	Personal Support Worker + Nurse Aid	--	--
Logan (24)	Delivery courier	Doordash	20	40	60	Professional Cleaner	--	--
Vick (23)	Delivery courier	UberEats	5 – 10	70 - 80	75 - 90	Bartender + office admin	--	
Amit (23)	Delivery courier	Doordash	35 – 40	0	35 - 40	--	Post-Secondary	--
Amandeep (22)	Crowdwork	Mturk + Swagbucks	* 7 - 10 ** 20 - 30	0	20 - 30	--	Post-Secondary	--
Derrick (27)	Crowdwork	Mturk + Swagbucks	20	0	20	--	--	Yes
Julie (61)	Airbnb + online consulting/coaching	Airbnb + social media	40	0	40	--	--	--
Cora (27)	Rideshare	Uber	* 10 ** 20 - 25	* 30 - 40 ** 0	*40-50 **20 - 25	Customer Service Analyst	--	--
Meghan (29)	Crowdwork + transcription	MTurk/Verba/Prolific	10	37.5	47.5		--	--
Zeke (23)	Voice Acting	Facebook Marketplace and FB groups	5	40	45	School Co-Op	Post-Secondary	--
Pete (25)	Tutoring/grass cutting landscaping/ online selling	Kijiji/FB marketplace/FB groups/ Online auction sites/	3.5	40	43.5	Supply Teacher + contract work with government	--	--

Tara (44)	VARIOUS	Taskrabbit, UberEats, Rover/Pawshake/ Cornershop/usertesting / online surveys/ childcare/event staff/skipthedishes	4 - 20	0	4 - 20	--	--	Yes	2
Shin (49)	Rideshare	Uber	20	40	60	IT	--	--	2
Mason (27)	Delivery courier	UberEats	32	0	32	--	--	--	
Fez (39)	Rideshare	Uber	48	25	73	Custodian	--	--	
Milo (30)	Rideshare / Delivery courier	Uber / Lyft / Amazon Flex	15 - 30	36.5	51 - 67	IT	--	--	
Ferguson (33)	Delivery courier / Freelance Writing / event staff	UberEats / kijiji and craigslist	* 2-5 ** 32	* 70 ** 12 - 14	*72 - 75 **44 - 46	Customer service representative	--	--	
Nelson (39)	Rideshare	Uber	18	40	58	Customer service representative	--	--	
Hailey (28)	Online tutoring / transcription	VIPKid / Rev transcriptions	10	40	50	Software developer	--	--	
Belinda (28)	Remote office assistant	Fivver / Upwork	10 – 20	20	30 - 40	Behavioural interventionali st	--	--	
Tommy (30)	Ridesharing	Uber	15	32	47	Collections agent	--	--	
Josie (60)	Crowdwork + mystery shopping	MTurk/branded surveys/valued opinions/yougov/gighu b/Nielson/MSPA	*1 - 5 ** 40	* 40 ** 0	*41-45 **40	Community Apartment Manager	--	--	
Karim (30)	Rideshare / Crowdwork	Uber / MTurk	40	0	40	--	--	Yes	
Leon (34)	Rideshare	Uber	20 - 21	28	48 - 49	Collections agent	--	--	
Harshil (34)	Photographer	Kijiji + referrals	10 - 30	38 - 40	48 - 70	Collections agent	--	--	
Bill (42)	Painting	Kijiji + newspaper ads	20	40	60	Collections agent	--	--	
Lucas (39)	Rideshare	Uber	32	30	62	Customer service	Post-seconda ry	--	
Paul (35)	Rideshare	Uber	30	24	54	Customer service	--	--	

Greg (40)	Various manual labour + landscaping	AskForTask	15 - 20	38	53 - 58	Data entry	--	--	
Moses (34)	Moving	Armando Movers	10 - 20	40	60	McDonalds	--	--	
Manjit (34)	Delivery courier	UberEats	18	30	48	McDonalds	--	--	
Ricardo (28)	Delivery courier	UberEats	30	36	66	McDonalds	--	--	
Nevaeh (26)	Online writing	Upwork	20 – 30	0	20 - 30	--	--	--	1
Rami (24)	Delivery courier	UberEats	30	24	54	McDonalds	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Bruno (38)	Delivery courier	UberEats	60 - 70	20	80-90	McDonalds	--	--	
Kevin (38)	Painting/drywalli ng	Kijiji/Craigslist	20	30 - 36	50-56	McDonalds	--	--	
Theo (29)	Painting	Kijiji / Newspaper ads (Toronto Star)	20 - 36	16	36-52	McDonalds	--	--	
Logan (42)	Painting / wallpapering	Kijiji / Craigslist / Newspaper ad	* 10 ** 30	24	*34 **54	IT	--	--	
Hamed (38)	Painting / wallpapering	Professional painters emailing list	20	44 - 47	64-67	IT	--	--	
Lily (24)	Online writing	Upwork / Freelancer	30	0	30	--	--	--	1
Joe (28)	House Cleaning	Aspen Cleaning	5 - 10	38.5	43.5-48.5	IT	--	--	
Ramone (36)	Landscaping and house services	Kijiji + referrals	* 20 - 25 ** 20 - 25	* 49 ** 24	*69 - 74 **44-49	IT	--	--	
Travis (25)	Online writing	Upwork	30	0	30	--	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Sal (33)	Online tutoring + ESL Teaching	Kijiji	4	8	12	Sales associate	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Celeste (35)	Transcription + Virtual office assistant	Fivver/Upwork	20	0	20	--	Post-Seconda ry	--	
Delilah (25)	Online Writing	Upwork	20 - 30	0	20 - 30	--	--	--	2
Dakota (27)	Online Writing	Upwork	40	0	40	--	--	--	
Andy (25)	Online Writing	Upwork	30	0	30	--	--	--	
Nikesh (36)	Hardwood flooring	Kijiji/craigslist/ Newspaper ads	30	32	62	Cable Electronics	--	--	1

Rai (32)	Hardwood flooring	Kijiji/craigslist/ Newspaper ads / AskForTask	20 - 25	60 - 70	80 - 95	Professional painter	--	--	2
Hope (28)	Online Writing + web development	Upwork	25 - 30	40+	65 - 70	Store owner	--	--	
Ruiz (31)	Hardwood flooring	Kijiji/craigslist/ Newspaper ads / AskForTask	30	40	70	Sales Associate	--	--	
Harriet (25)	Online Writing	Upwork	25	12	37	Farmers Market	--	--	1

* Hours reported pre-COVID-19 pandemic
** Hours reported during COVID-19 pandemic

Curriculum Vitae

Lyn Hoang

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EDUCATION:

PhD candidate, Sociology, Western University — Present

- Dissertation Title: Prosumer Capitalism: Working in the platform economy
- Supervisor: T. Adams; Co-supervisor: A. Allahar; Committee Member: W. Lehmann
- Area of concentration; Work, digital technologies, social inequality

Masters in Sociology, Western University — 2017

- M.A. Research Paper: "Influence is the new power:" An analysis of social media use as work.
- Supervisor: T. Adams

Bachelors Honors Specialization in Criminology, Western University — 2014

- Dean's Honor List

SCHOLARSHIPS AND ACADEMIC HONOURS:

- Selected as one of 26 recipients of Western University's Inspiring Minds Showcase — 2021
- Network for Economic and Social Trends Doctoral Fellowship valued at $20,000 — 2020 - 2021
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship valued at $13,016 — 2019 – 2020
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship valued at $15,386 — 2018 – 2019
- Canadian Sociology Association – Outstanding Graduate Student Award — 2018
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship valued at $13,224 — 2017 – 2018
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship valued at $4,600 — 2016 – 2017
- Western Scholarship of Excellence valued at $2,000 — 2010
- Aiming for the Top Tuition Scholarship valued at $2,500 — 2010
- Rexdale Microskills Student Scholarship valued at $1,000 — 2010

AREAS OF EXPERTISE | RESEARCH INTERESTS:

- Completed Comprehensive Exams:
  - Work, Occupations and Professions
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- Areas of Research and Interests:
  - Digital Sociology: Social Media, Online Inequalities, Issues in Technology Access, Adoption and Use, and Cyber Security, Surveillance, and Privacy
  - Work and Professions: Platform economy, Labour market inequalities, history of work
  - Social Inequality across the Life course – The intersection of inequality across gender, race, and class.
  - Research Methods - Qualitative Research Methods, Virtual Qualitative Research Methods, Mixed Methods.

PUBLICATIONS:

Peer Reviewed Journal Publications:

Hoang, Lyn, Blank, Grant, & Quan-Haase, Anabel. (2020). "The Winners and The Losers of the Platform Economy: Who Participates?" *Information, Communication & Society,* Special Issue.

Papers Under Review or Revision:

Lyn Hoang, Tracey Adams. "Working as Influencer: Prosumption and Social Media" *Under review.*

Papers in Progress:

Lyn Hoang, Tracey Adams. "Life Built on Likes" – The Emotional Labour of YouTube Content Creators." *Qualitative content analysis in progress*

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE:

Post-Doctoral Fellow, University of Manitoba — Dec 2022 – Nov 2023

Research Assistant, Dr. A. Quan-Haase, Western University — May 2019 – Aug 2019

Research Assistant, Dr. T. Adams, Western University — May 2017 – Sept 2017

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Course Instructor:

- Soc 4466 – 'Professions, Professionals and their work', Western University — Winter 2023
- Soc 3301 – 'Internet and Society', Western University — Winter 2023
- Soc 2261 – 'Contemporary Social Problems', Western University — Fall 2022
- Soc 2140 – 'Social Problems', Western University — Summer 2021

Guest Lectures, Western University

- "Content Analysis" in 3307: Qualitative Research Methods (T. Adams). — Winter, 2022
- "Content Analysis" ; "Online Research Methods" ; "Arts-Based Research" in 3307: Qualitative Research Methods (K. Mendes), — Fall, 2021
- "Content Analysis" in 3307: Qualitative Research Methods (J. Elgie) — Winter, 2020

Teaching/Marking Assistantship, Western University,

- Soc 3307: Qualitative Methods; T. Adams — Winter 2022
- Soc 3307: Qualitative Methods, Kaitlyn Mendes — Fall 2021
- Soc 3307: Qualitative Methods, J. Elgie — Winter 2020
- Soc 3341: Social construction of gender, T Hooks — Fall 2019
- Soc 1021; Introduction to sociology, S. Ricard — Summer 2019; Summer 2020
- Soc 3307: Qualitative Methods, W. Lehmann — Winter 2019
- Soc 2166: The organization and experience of work, T. Adams — Fall 2018
- Soc 1027: Life isn't always fair, J. Reynolds — Fall 2017
- Soc 1027: Life isn't always fair, W. Lehmann — Winter 2017; Winter 2018
- Soc 2106: Technology and Society, A. Quan-Haase — Fall 2016

Teaching/Marking Assistantship, Brescia University College

- Soc 2260: Sociology of law, J. Reynolds — Winter 2021
- Soc 2267: Youth in conflict with the law, J. Reynolds — Fall 2019; Winter 2021
- Soc 2253: Administration of criminal justice, J. Reynolds — Fall 2020

Teaching Assistantship, Kings University College

- Soc 2267: Youth in conflict with the law, J. Reynolds Winter 2021
- Soc 2256: Sociology of corrections, J. Reynolds Fall 2019
- Soc 2206: Research Methods, J. Reynolds Winter 2018; Fall 2021

COURSE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:

- UWO Virtual Qualitative Research Methods – 3 Online Modules (Dec 2020 – Feb 2021)
- UWO Virtual Qualitative Research Methods - 5 Online Modules (June 2020 – Oct 2021)

CONFERENCES AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:

- "Life Built on Likes: The Emotional Labour of YouTube Content Creators." Lyn Hoang (presenter) & Tracey Adams at the Canadian Sociological Association. Work, Professions, and Occupations. [Conference cancelled due to COVID-19].
- "The Winners and Losers of the Platform Economy: Who participates and why?" Lyn Hoang (presenter), Grant Blank, & Anabel Quan-Haase at the American Sociological Association. Roundtable Session: Section on Organizations, Occupations and Work. New York, New York. August 11, 2019.
- "Influence is the New Power: An analysis of social media use as work" Lyn Hoang (presenter) at the American Sociological Association. Jobs, Occupations, and Professions cluser. New York, New York. August 11, 2019
- "The Winners and Losers of the Platform Economy: Who participates and why?" Lyn Hoang (presenter), Grant Blank, & Anabel Quan-Haase at the Canadian Sociological Association. Work, Professions and Occupations Cluster. Vancouver, British Columbia. June 04, 2019
- "Influence is the New Power: An analysis of social media use as work" Lyn Hoang (presenter) at the Canadian Sociological Association. Internet, Technology, and Society Cluster. Vancouver, British Columbia. June 04, 2019

EXTERNAL ACADEMIC SERVICE:

- Occasional Reviewer – Journal of Social Thought, Graduate Journal.
- Occasional Reviewer – Information, Communication & Society Journal.
- Occasional Reviewer – Technological Forecasting & Social Change
- Occasional Reviewer – Canadian Review of Sociology
- Session Organizer (with Anabel Quan-Haase & Grant Blank), "Communications, Information, Technologies, and Media Sociology (CITAMS) Refereed Roundtables" at American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, August 2020. [Cancelled due to COVID-19]

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- Own-Your-Future Design Studio hosted by Teaching Support Centre, Western University. Jul 2022
- Teaching Assistant Training Program, hosted by Teaching Support Centre, Western University. Sept 2016
- Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Training for Research Involving Humans course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: Core). April 07, 2017.