# MASCULINITY AND GIG WORK: A CASE STUDY OF RIDESHARE WORKERS IN TORONTO

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines shifting masculinities and platform labour, following eleven semi-structured interviews conducted with male Toronto-based Uber and Lyft rideshare workers with dependents (children). Women have commonly done non-standard work, hence the proliferation of non-standard work being contextualized as the 'feminization of work' (Zahn, 2019). In contrast, rideshare work is a non-standard form of gig work done predominantly by men, rendering it a relevant form of platform work to examine with its complicated relationship to the historical context of gender and nonstandard work. This thesis argues for a need to organize the worker as a *whole*, examining how workers' unpaid social reproductive labour and balancing of rideshare work, and often another form of paid work, impacts the viability of classic organizing methods. I argue that these issues of convoluted boundaries between paid and unpaid work must be incorporated into the potential organizing demands of a rideshare workers' union and identify areas for further research on organizing rideshare workers accounting for shifting masculinities.

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AEIOU: Agitate, Educate, Inoculate, Organize, Unionize

CUPW: Canadian Union of Postal Workers

FPE: Feminist Political Economy

GTA: Greater Toronto Area

GWU: Gig Workers United

HPRC: Human Participants Review Committee

IDG: Independent Drivers' Guild

IWGB: Independent Workers Union of Great Britain

SER: Standard Employment Relationship

SRT: Social Reproduction Theory

SSA: Social Structure of Accumulation

TNC: Transnational Corporation

TWU: Transport Workers Union of Australia

UFCW: Commercial Workers International Union

UILTuCS: Sindicato Networkers

UPHD: United Private Hire Drivers

VFJ: Vendors for Justice

## CHAPTER 1: THE UBER PROBLEM WITH ORGANIZING

This thesis addresses the challenges of organizing non-standard work in the platform economy through a lens of understanding shifting masculinities of platform workers. Through an examination of male rideshare workers, the thesis seeks to understand how this form of work has an impact on aspects of family life and male identity and explores the potential openings for organizing in the sector. This introductory chapter outlines persistent challenges of platformization for workers, the main argument and the structure of the thesis.

### 1.1 Non-standard, Gig, and Platform Work: Persistent problems

From a post-capitalist "sharing economy" idealist alternative to a rampant market deregulation and capital-generating machine, the platform economy has configured and re-figured itself. Flexibility of work is often touted by proponents of the platform economy with promises of control over hours and the ability to "be your own boss" (Stapp, 2021). Unfortunately, this seldom reflects reality. Rideshare work in particular reveals obvious contradictions of the flexibility myth, as workers are in a chronic state of trying to accumulate the most remuneration from rides in the shortest amount of time. With a lack of regulatory protection, little to no benefits, and a constant battle between long hours and low pay, rideshare workers could benefit from unionization (Vandaele, 2018). However, they exist in the crossfire of an unfortunate predicament—one that's rooted in the broader historical political economy of gig work, and now platform-based gig work: It's a form of non-standard work, and trade unions have historically had difficulties organizing non-standard work (Huws, 2019).

This research examines rideshare work in the gig economy and shifting masculinities, acknowledging that non-standard work has historically been done by women (Zahn, 2019). Rideshare work, interestingly, is done predominantly by men and has a complicated relationship

to the historically feminized history of non-standard labour. While it's been proven to be difficult to find statistics on the gender demographics of rideshare workers in Canada specifically, an article in the Calgary Herald states that "in Toronto, […] it's been reported that about one in four Uber drivers are women" (Klingbeil, 2017). Further, a 2024 article states that only 23% of Lyft drivers are female (Khalid, 2024). Figure 1 displays the gender demographics of Uber drivers in the US as of 2020 (Bruder, 2020):

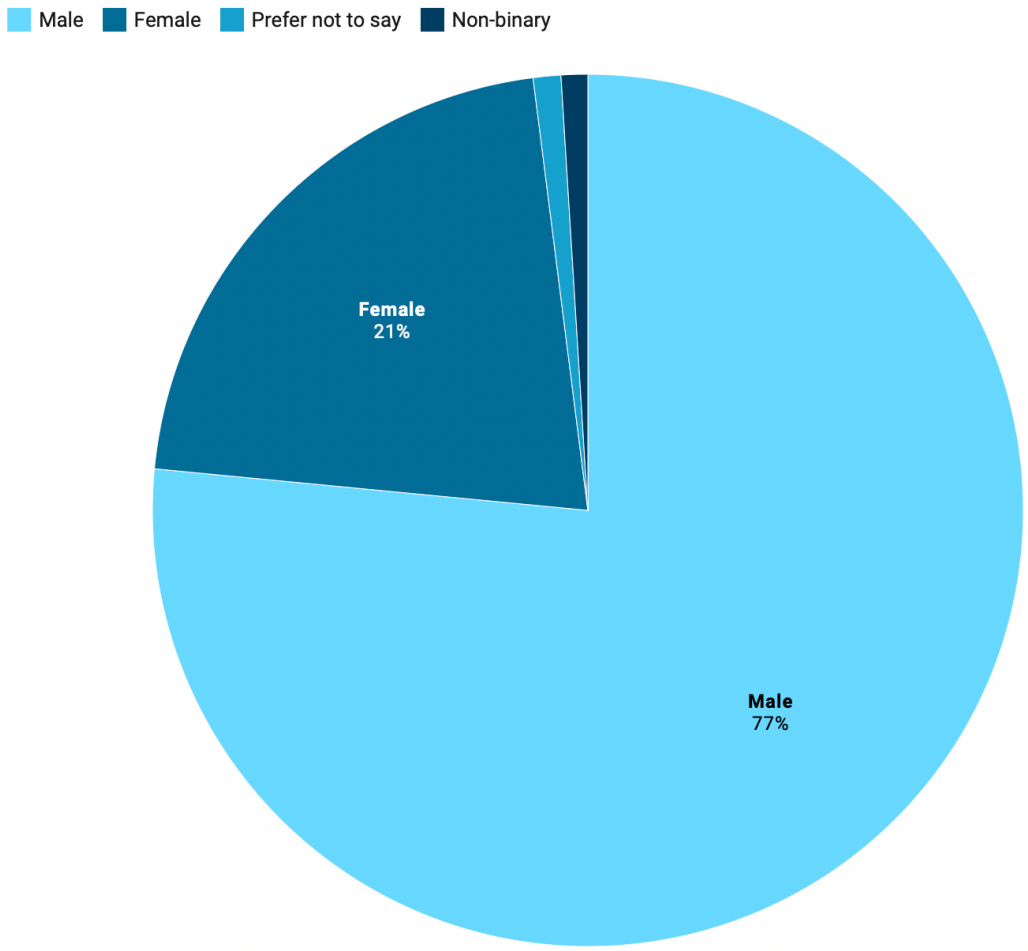


*Figure 1: Gender demographics of Uber drivers in the US (Source: Bruder 2020).*

The labour market has seen a gradual decline of the standard employment relationship (SER) and a proliferation of non-standard forms of employment (Vosko, 2006). The SER is

characterized by full-time continuous employment where the worker has one employer, works on the employer's premises under their supervision, and has access to benefits (Vosko, 2006, p. 460). The non-standard employment relationship can be characterized by impermanency, low wages, lack of benefits and is often precarious (Vosko, 2006).

For purposes of this thesis, it is imperative to acknowledge the trajectory of the SER and then the proliferation of non-standard work (Vosko, 2008). Vosko understands the normative model of employment as " [reflecting] the interplay between social customs and conventions of governance mechanisms that link work organization and labour supply" (Vosko, 2010, p. 3). Within industrialized capitalist countries post-World War II and during the rise of Fordism and the Keynesian welfare state, the SER was a model of employment offered to a certain population of workers (Vosko, 2010). The SER offered stability of hours as opposed to an unpredictable work schedule, along with a social wage model tied to Keynesian welfare state policy that assumed benefits and entitlements. The SER was also connected to a gender social contract reinforcing gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work, including the female-caregiver and male-breadwinner binary, and was catered to, as previously mentioned, a certain population of workers: predominantly white, male blue-collar workers (Vosko et. al. 2009). Further, for this reason, it is imperative to acknowledge the SER as an exception as opposed to a norm, considering "non-standard" precarious employment relations were more often *the* standard for racialized people and women. Bernhardt (2015) situates this phenomenon in the context of the Canadian Welfare State, stating that while Keynesian welfare policies were implemented to mitigate the experiences of those on the margins of the workforce, they did not fundamentally restructure racialized power structures (Bernhardt, 2015). Ali et. al. (2023, 17) acknowledge that

in the Canadian context, temporary employment is often "tied to gender, race, and immigration statuses of populations."

Non-standard forms of employment deviate from the normative model of employment in either one or multiple ways and can include temporary work, self-employment, contract work, etc. Further, while it is crucial not to conflate precarious work and non-standard work as synonymous, it rings true that many non-standard work arrangements can be characterized by precarity (Kalleberg, 2018). Gomez and Lamb (2019) argue that an impermanent part-time job renders the worker economically vulnerable compared to a full-time, permanent job, however, the authors remain agnostic to the precise degree of vulnerability, acknowledging its contextual nature. According to Vosko, precarious employment entails "forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health" (Vosko, 2006, p. 1). Often, including within the context of gig work, non-standard employment relationships include a third party who acts as an intermediary between the worker and the employer. Further, including most forms of gig work, non-standard work does not guarantee continued employment (Kalleberg, 2018).

Woodcock and Graham (2020) state that gig work is non-standard and can be characterized by typically short-term projects where workers are hired through digital marketplaces, and where technologies of automation and control are utilized (Duggan et al. 2022). This thesis introduction acknowledges the fact that while innovations and algorithmic technologies facilitate platform-based gig work, there are historical continuities of non-standard work permeating present forms of gig work that must be interrogated (Gray, 2022).

While Woodcock and Graham (2020) provide a useful definition for understanding platform-based gig work, their definition does not account for all work in the gig economy, as

gig work encompasses more than just digital work. Further, I argue that while platform work is a form of gig work, all gig work is not platform work, and thus a distinction must be made. Tucker (2020) states that while the gig economy is often equated to the platform economy in existing scholarship, these semantics can be fallacious. Tucker (2020) refers to Lewchuk's definition of the gig economy: "one where the dominant forms of employment are short-term contract work, freelancing and self-employment," (p. 403) and to Srnicek's definition of platforms as "digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects" (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43). This definition of platforms describes the function of Uber and Lyft, as they are intermediary platforms between the customer (someone requesting a ride on the app) and the service provider (the driver) (Srnicek, 2017).

Trade unions have historically organized workers in the SER and have had difficulties organizing workers in non-standard work (Zahn, 2019). Further, with a focus on advanced capitalist economies, I utilize the social structure of accumulation (SSA) theory of economic growth to contextualize the emergence of non-standard employment and gig work under neoliberal capitalism (Kotz, 2018). Srnicek (2017) identifies the correlation between difficulties organizing gig work and the decline of trade unionism and a weakened labour movement, highlighting the priority and agency given to capital and stripped from labour in a neoliberal capitalist context. In her book *Labour in Contemporary Capitalism,* Huws (2019) poses broader questions of "which workers trade unions can and should represent" (p. 72) in the context of declining trade union membership and of sectors that have been traditionally unionized.

Empirical scholarship on organizing platform-based gig work tends to be centred around organizing a spatially dispersed workforce and technological surveillance, including the management of algorithms and ratings. Gray (2022) asserts that the Foodsters' United campaign successfully organized utilizing traditional workplace organizing tactics. He maintains that while proponents of the gig economy, such as Foodora, like to tout its' unprecedentedness, the historical continuities of non-standard work that permeate the gig economy remain more than relevant (Gray, 2022). Aslam and Woodcock (2020) assert that classic organizing methods can effectively organize gig workers, however with adaptations to account for issues such as a spatially dispersed workforce, algorithmic control, and customers' ratings on apps. While both these assertions may ring true, what both analyses leave out—and what most of the scholarship on organizing gig work does not consider—*is how workers' personal/family lives may impact the viability of traditional organizing methods.* This thesis acknowledges the current path toward platform capitalism in Canada and other advanced capitalist economies (Schor, 2020) while also focusing on the possible futures of organizing platform work and the labour movement's role in this.

Gendered relationship dynamics and how they interact with labour market relations have historically impacted the organization of work. In the Fordist era, white male workers with a standard employment relationship (SER) were often organized into trade unions that were modelled to sustain the gender contract of work. Familial benefits were afforded, full-time, standard work hours were implemented, and the male breadwinner, female caregiver gender contract dominated. As asserted by Zahn (2019), "[…) the standard employment relationship was based upon an 'anachronistic notion of the division of labour in the household'" (6). Zahn questions how trade unions should effectively represent and organize workers in the gig

economy considering spatially dispersed workforces and neoliberal individualism, and in an era of decline of trade union membership. What is not asked, however, is whether organizing methods and the organization of unions need to be remodelled to account for shifting gendered relationship dynamics and their interaction with a highly precarious labour market (Zahn, 2019). The objective of this thesis is to *determine how shifting masculinities interact with male rideshare workers' both paid and unpaid work responsibilities, including the degree to which the flexible, non-standard employment relationship and precarious nature of rideshare work impacts their ability to manage that paid and unpaid work* (Kwan, 2021).

### 1.2 Research Questions

Non-standard work has been commonly done by women; hence the proliferation of non-standard work being contextualized as the 'feminization of work' (Zahn, 2019). In contrast, rideshare work is a non-standard form of gig work done predominantly by men (Statista et. al. 2020). This makes rideshare work a relevant form of gig work to examine, with its complex relationship to the gendered history of non-standard work. If hegemonic masculinities are shifting and reshaping, organizing tactics should re-shape to account for this. Thus, these primary research questions are posed:

1. Are male rideshare workers re-constructing hegemonic masculinity or are new forms of masculinity in workers emerging?
2. Do male rideshare workers engage in this work to balance paid work with unpaid social reproductive work? Or to supplement other income-generating activities and maintain the "male breadwinner" role?

These research questions are crucial for examining how masculinity operates in non-standard, historically feminized work (Zahn, 2019). Specifically, they are imperative for

examining male rideshare workers' conception of their masculinity, and how it operates as they balance rideshare work and/or other forms of paid work with unpaid household/childcare responsibilities. This thesis argues that *male rideshare workers are both re-constructing hegemonic masculinities by taking on multiple jobs to provide for their families* and *diverging from them through the taking on of social reproductive labour*. Moreover, this thesis also argues that *male rideshare workers' capacity to perform socially reproductive labour through unpaid household and childcare responsibilities is hampered by the "flexible" nature of rideshare work.* Further, these findings reveal the need for further research determining how labour-organizing methods and strategies can be better constructed to consider rideshare workers' capacities to perform socially reproductive labour while often working multiple jobs.

### 1.3 Chapter Outline

The next chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis, first providing overviews of relevant literature on neoliberal capitalism and the emergence of the gig economy. Further, the chapter provides overviews of feminist political economy and social reproduction theory, and hegemonic and South Asian masculinities. The chapter serves to bring together relevant literature that shapes the theoretical foundations of this thesis.

Chapter three outlines the research design and methods utilized in the collection and analysis of data in this project. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants over Zoom, from July until October of 2023. Participants were all rideshare workers who identified as men and had dependents. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to ensure anonymity.

Chapter four includes research findings, first exploring participants' sentiments around the flexibility of rideshare work, their experience with Uber/Lyft's algorithms and rating

systems, and grievances regarding unfair pay. It looks at how participants are compelled to perform emotional labour by the same algorithmic management. It then explores whether this so-called “flexibility” allows participants to balance unpaid household responsibilities with paid work. This chapter sets the context for chapter five, where these findings will be analyzed in conjunction with findings on convoluted home and work-life boundaries rideshare workers experience, along with whether they are maintaining, deviating (or both) from elements of the male breadwinner norm.

The concluding chapter examines findings regarding participants’ sentiments about solidarity with other drivers, and the potential for organizing. It discusses possible further research around organizing the worker as a whole, moving past demands revolving mostly around wages and taking into consideration gendered relationship dynamics, and workers’ personal lives more broadly. This chapter also looks at the potential and the limitations of organizing around masculinity—or rather, masculinities.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Understanding Platform Work from Neoliberalism to Social Reproductive Theory

This research situates the platform economy within neoliberal capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), understanding that the historical continuities of non-standard employment permeate platform-based gig work (Gray, 2022). This chapter acknowledges the gendered history of non-standard work, along with historical continuities *and* breaks from non-standard work relationships in platform work. This is done utilizing a feminist political economy (FPE) lens and a social reproduction theoretical (SRT) lens. This chapter seeks to situate shifting masculinities in platform work, specifically rideshare work, conceptualizing this form of employment as *historically feminized* (Zahn, 2019). To do this I turn to social reproduction theory (SRT) understood as both an abstract tool for understanding capitalism's reliance on social reproduction to produce labour power, and the more concrete understanding of the crisis of care in the neoliberal moment along with the muddled boundaries of work and home life (Ferguson, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2017).

The history of Canadian state relations with social reproduction is explored, acknowledging the forced shift from solely private, local regulation of social reproduction to more state-managed forms (Cameron, 2006). Moreover, this chapter provides an overview of the sub-discipline of labour geography and this thesis' relevance to it, including labour geography scholarship on precarity. Further, this research acknowledges the fluidity of masculinities, particularly in the context of migrant South Asian masculinities and the myriad of ways they may shift and adapt in a Western context (Kukreja, 2021). Lastly, this chapter acknowledges racial discrimination embedded in neoliberal capitalist labour markets.

### 2.1 Neoliberal Capitalism and Social Structure of Accumulation Theory

Social Structure of Accumulation (SSA) scholarship originates from late 1970s and 80s scholarship from David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich's (1982) questioning of why the labour movement was suffering, particularly concerning the erosion of several union members, unions' "cultural image," and "political strength." They created what Hornstein (2021) and other scholars refer to as a "middle range theory," a type of theory that often emerges within Marxist theory as an attempt to explain the trajectory of institutional structures that form within capitalism. It emerged both from and alongside French regulation theory as a more Anglo-American centred approach (see McDonough et al 2021). As stated by Kotz (2022), SSA theory intends to provide a level of analysis that is "intermediate" (or middle range) that bridges abstract Marxian theory of the development of capitalism, and concrete analyses of everyday life.

SSA is thus an "attempt to explain why institutional structures within capitalist society exist, change over time, and differ between countries and regions" (Hornstein 2021, 237). Kotz (1994) states that structures of accumulation, including that of neoliberal capitalism, are reflective of the contradictions of capitalism becoming stabilized, either through the capitalist class successfully minimizing labour movement mobilization and imposing "its program" (austerity measures, market deregulation, decreased social provisioning etc.), or the working class having enough power to force compromise, and thus the capitalist class must "share, to some degree, the fruits of the accumulation process" (e.g. more benefits, some regulatory market measures, increase of welfare) (Kotz, 1994, p. 55).

The validity of SSA theory has been contested over the decades, and in a recent scholarly debate between Hornstein (2021) and Kotz (2022), it is made apparent that a main critique by Hornstein is that SSA theory is unable to adequately explain capital-labour relations temporally

and spatially, despite its attempt to explain the temporal transformation of these relations. Hornstein (2021) states that the SSA theory does not explain the internal workings of class struggle and labour process functions. He states that it simply acknowledges the interconnectedness and admits to the need for a more concrete analysis.

While Hornstein's (2021) critiques of SSA theory may have merit, the theory remains useful for contextualizing neoliberal capitalism, the decline of trade unionism and the proliferation of non-standard employment for the purposes of this thesis (Kotz, 2022) (Gordon et. al. 1982). Thus, it will be employed with the acknowledgement of its theoretical shortcomings and its roots in literature debating variations of capitalism.

Canada, not unlike other industrialized advanced capitalist economies, has seen a proliferation of non-standard employment beginning in the 1980s, with the most dramatic increases occurring between the early 1980s and mid-1990s (Gomez and Lamb, 2019, p. 1010). The social structure of accumulation (SSA) theory of economic growth can be employed to contextualize the current SSA of neoliberal capitalism (Kotz, 2018). This theory recognizes that capitalism takes on different institutional forms that shift over decades. Each of these forms remains relatively stable, until they prohibit further capital accumulation and economic instability becomes heightened, and thus the SSA restructures. The current SSA is neoliberal capitalism (Kotz, 2018).

Further, Montalban, Frigant and Jullien (2019) discuss whether digital capitalism or the platform economy is a "new process of embeddedness," or a "next step for deregulation following the crisis of the financialized regime of accumulation (RA)" (p. 805). They define the platform economy as the exchange of both tangible and intangible resources between users and providers mediated by electronic platforms. Montalban, Frigant and Jullien (2019) argue that

while platform economic activities have proliferated in the service sector, they have not permeated the entire economy. Nonetheless, Srnicek (2017) argues that capitalism broadly has "turned to data as one way to maintain economic growth" (p. 6). Platform technologies and algorithms should be contextualized as profit-generating mechanisms in advanced capitalist countries (Srnicek, 2017).

The earlier concepts of the regime of accumulation (RA) and SSA theory both analyze the trajectory of capital accumulation and the restructuring of capitalism and identify different stages. Thus, it could be asserted that platform capitalism is a new SSA or a sub-SSA of neoliberal capitalism (Kotz, 1994). However, to acknowledge the historical continuities of non-standard work with platform-based gig work, the SSA of neoliberal capitalism will be employed (Kotz, 2018).

Moreover, neoliberal capitalism is a form of institutional capitalism that glorifies market relations and centres market relations as essential to human freedom (Kotz, 2018). This includes the so-called freedom to choose where and when you work, which correlates to the intentional classification of platform-based gig workers as "independent contractors" with the flexibility of work schedules and control over earnings (Woodcock and Graham, 2020). Under neoliberal capitalism, the role of the state as a regulator and provider of welfare and an economic safety net decreases alongside the decrease of market regulations. The neoliberal turn in the early 1980s marks the erosion of the SER, as the existence of the SER requires state employment regulation and provisioning for benefits (Kotz, 2018).

With neoliberalization came a significant decline in trade union membership in North American advanced capitalist countries. This decline has been attributed to the flexibilization of

labour, a shift from manufacturing to services and in some cases, the failure of unions to adapt to a racially diversifying workforce (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003). As outlined by Huws (2019), the expansion of global financialized capitalism marks a proliferation of transnational corporations (TNCs) as a novel vessel for further capital accumulation. Panitch (2004) outlines the nation-state as a mediator of the relationship between labour (trade unions) and capital during the Fordist era. The expansion of TNCs increased immigrant/migrant workforces, sometimes through offshoring, the proliferation of non-standard and informal labour, and overall, a decline of employment within typically unionized sectors. With hyper-deregulation in neoliberal capitalism, the nation-state no longer holds the same regulatory, mediatory role, thus rendering it difficult for trade unions to accommodate the expansion of TNCs (Panitch, 2004). Rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft are key examples of TNCs that have emerged in the era of global financialized capitalism and provide casual, non-standard employment.

### 2.2 Gig Economy, Platform Economy, or Both?

Platform technologies are facilitating the restructuring of work that relied on more traditional employment relationships into digitally outsourced tasks, and then further "precariatising" workers by identifying them as self-employed or independent contracts despite the platform acting as an employer and an intermediary (Rani and Gobel, 2022). Tucker (2020) argues that platform-mediated work rests in the intersection of the platform economy and precarious work. This thesis characterizes rideshare work as app-work, as participants drive for the platform apps Uber and Lyft. In their book *Platform Capitalism* (2017), Srnicek identifies Uber as a *lean* platform, characterized by its exceptionally low production cost. Uber owns none of its own vehicles, and its labour is hyper-outsourced. It allocates no money to worker training

costs and relies on surplus populations for labour. Uber takes massive cuts in wages, meaning there is a large reduction in labour costs (Srnicek, 2017).

### *2.2.1 Contested Definitions*

Srnicek (2017) notes that not only are definitions of the gig economy contested by scholars but so is the term itself. Alternative terms suggested by scholars include the sharing economy, platform capitalism, and the fourth industrial revolution. Woodcock and Graham (2020) define work in the gig economy as precarious, non-standard and can be characterized by typically short-term projects where workers are hired through digital marketplaces, and where technologies of automation and control are utilized (Duggan et al. 2022). Further, it is imperative to note that current scholarship on "gig" work often overlooks the origins of the term "gig," which was employed to reflect the gigs of musicians, whose livelihoods revolved around music gigs (Cloonan and Williamson, 2023).

For this thesis, the terms "platform capitalism" and "platform work" will be employed. Tucker (2020) reiterates the importance of not equating all forms of gig work with platform-based work. Short-term contract work and self-employment are forms of gig work that have pre-dated the existence, and still exist, within *and* outside of the platform economy (Tucker, 2020). While not all gig work is platform-based, all platform-based work is gig work as it is "short-term work and performed by workers classified as self-employed" (Tucker, 2020 p. 1890). He argues the need for platform-mediated work to be situated in either the platform or digital economy (Tucker, 2020).

Srnicek (2017) emphasizes the importance of contextualizing the digital economy within the broader mode of capitalist production, asserting that tech companies can be better understood

as economic actors this way. While "digital economy" and "platform economy" are not interchangeable, Srnicek's analysis of the digital economy is pertinent as the platform economy operates within it, as platform apps' business models rely on information technology and data. Srnicek's urge to distance understandings of the digital economy from a sectoral analysis and instead in the broader capitalist system is rooted in three primary understandings of its operation, the first being that it is the "most dynamic sector of the contemporary economy" (Srnicek, 2017 p. 5). He states that the dynamism of the digital economy renders it a space for continual innovation in a rather static economy. Secondly, Srnicek (2017) emphasizes the digital economy's systemic importance, comparing it to finance in a globalized financial economic context, as its demise would be economically devastating across the board. Finally, Srnicek (2017) makes the case that the digital economy is becoming the hegemonic model: "Cities are to become smart, businesses are to become flexible, and governments must be lean and intelligent" p. 5). It is imperative to note that this model dominates in advanced capitalist economies.

*2.2.2 Contextualizing the "Digital Economy"*

As capitalism is chronically seeking novel pathways for profit accumulation through surplus extraction, the digital economy presents a unique opportunity to do so. Tucker (2020) cites Srnicek (2017) to explain the triadic function of platforms: The platform operator mediates the payment between both the labour service seller and the labour service purchaser. In the case of Uber and Lyft, and all rideshare platforms, this looks like the rider paying the platform instead of the driver directly, and then the platform paying a fraction of what the consumer paid. Platforms like Uber and Lyft are excellent surplus-value extractors through their algorithmic

control of the flow of profit and control over both worker and consumer performance (Tucker, 2020).

Srnicek (2017) argues capitalism now relies on data as a method of sustaining capital accumulation. However, he seeks to contextualize the novelty of data collection and capitalism's newfound reliance on platform technologies in a broader economic history. Srnicek urges for novelties of the digital economy to not "obscure the persistence of long-term [economic] trends" (p. 8). Many scholars further Srnicek's argument and state that there is nothing particularly new about the platform economy. They argue that non-standard, typically precarious work has long been a feature of capitalist economies, and the only new defining characteristic is that algorithmic technologies are facilitating what has long existed. Platform companies like to tout their unprecedented nature and innovative offers, yet historical continuities of the platform economy are more imperative and are stronger than discontinuities (Huws, 2019) (Gray, 2022). While this rings true, as Srnicek stated, it is simultaneously correct that new innovative technologies and algorithms mediating labour must be examined. As noted by Rani and Gobel, these algorithms are significant as they "allocate, manage and evaluate workers, which has implications on the working conditions of the workers" (Rani and Gobel, 2022, p. 16). Duggan et. al. (2021) acknowledge the continuity of platform work with current and historical forms of contingent work, but they emphasize understanding platform work as a contemporary, distinct configuration of contingent work, as the technological surveillance of workers directly impacts their working conditions and employment relationships, as seen with rideshare work.

*2.2.3 The Future(s) of the Platform Economy*

There are ongoing debates on the possible trajectories of the platform economy, ranging from relatively hopeful for regulation, to an ongoing, rampant increase in deregulating digitized labour, resulting in total monopolization (Schor, 2020). Scholz (2017) and Srnicek (2017) both argue that this is the current trajectory, stating that a "monopolistic, rapacious 'platform capitalism' is on its way" (Schor, 2020, p. 31). In their book *After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win it Back,* Schor (2020) acknowledges that in the US, this path to platform capitalism has begun to be paved. They do, however, acknowledge that as most platforms, like Uber and Lyft, require operation in dense urban areas for profit accumulation, they are met with the contradiction of regulations passed by cities' municipal governments. A good example of a city with labour-friendly practices regulating platform labour in New York City. In 2021, the city passed six bills affording protection to platform workers, including bathroom access, minimum payments, tipping policies, payment standards, minimum payments, and delivery food bags with insulation (Cardin and Schild, 2021). The city also passed a law guaranteeing minimum wage for food delivery app-based drivers (Dewey–Stateline, 2023). Further, Schor (2020) notes the banning of Uber, Uber pulling out of the country or its minimal operation in several European countries due to national regulations including in Greece, Portugal, Denmark, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Uber pulled out of Greece in 2018 because of the country's law requiring Uber drivers to be employed by tourist agencies or car rental companies (Reuters, 2018). The European Union is also in the process of implementing a law that would correct the misclassification of drivers and force Uber to recognize them as full employees (Anderlini and Haeck, 2023). Scholz (2017) discusses a future of platform cooperativism but is careful to note this future's precarious reliance on organization and regulations, stating: "we may

end up sharing the scraps, not the economy. We may feel remorseful about not seeking out alternatives earlier on" (Scholz, 2017, p. 159). Scholz (2017) is also reluctant to paint platform co-ops as a foolproof, utopian alternative to platform capitalism. He notes that co-ops are still susceptible to capitalist market pressures, making some degree of self-exploitation inevitable.

While acknowledging the possible futures of the platform economy and the undeniable current trajectory of platform capitalism in advanced capitalist countries, this thesis seeks to focus on the possible futures of labour organizing, unions, and platform work, which was expanded on in the introductory Chapter 1: *The Uber Problem with Organizing* and will be the focus of the concluding Chapter 6: *Implications for Organizing.*

**2.3 Feminist Political Economy and Platformization**

This research is aligned with a feminist political economy (FPE) framework. FPE originated within Marxist feminist and socialist feminist scholarship (Luxton and Bezanson, 2006). These frameworks have historically been critical of the lack of gender analysis in traditional political economy, particularly within scholarly debates attempting to situate both paid and unpaid domestic work in the productive economy (Black, 2020). FPE framework acknowledges that sex and gendered divisions of labour did not emerge from a natural, biological order and that gendered divisions of labour are social constructions constantly in flux and reflected in historical configurations of the relationship between states, markets, and households (Meehan and Strauss, 2015). Employment patterns have not shifted radically to restructure the unevenness of paid and unpaid work between men and women. However, with the erosion of the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver gender social contract in the late 1970s and early 1980s in advanced capitalist countries and the rise of dual-earner households, it is argued that in many cases, men are now secondary caregivers as opposed to solely primary

breadwinners (Doucet, 2006). Thus, an FPE framework allows for a productive critical engagement with shifting employment patterns but also an avenue to situate SRT and shifting masculinities within this research.

### *2.3.1 Brief Overview of Standard Employment Relationship and Non-Standard Employment*

An FPE framework offers a gendered analysis of the shift from state-managed capitalism to neoliberal capitalism to situate the existence of rideshare work in the gig economy as non-standard, *historically feminized* labour (Zahn, 2019). The urban labour market in advanced capitalist countries has seen a gradual erosion of the standard employment relationship (SER) and proliferation of non-standard forms of employment since the onset of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The SER is characterized by full-time continuous employment where the worker has one employer, works on the employer's premises under their supervision, and has access to benefits (Vosko, 2006). The SER was connected to a gender contract reinforcing gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work, including the female-caregiver/male-breadwinner binary, and was catered to predominantly white, male blue-collar workers (Vosko et. al. 2009).

Non-standard work is typically precarious work, characterized by impermanence, employment risks, and low wages (Kalleberg, 2018). Non-standard work in cities has historically been feminized labour, and the proliferation of non-standard employment commonly done by women is also contextualized as "gendered precariousness" (Vosko, 2008). Zahn (2019) contextualizes the 'feminization of work,' highlighting the proliferation of women in sectors of the urban labour market that are typically low pay, temporary, and lacking regulation and formal representation. These forms of non-standard employment relationships would include temporary agency work, self-employment and contract work ranging from paid caregiving positions to

waitressing, and nursing etc, (Vosko, 2009). With minimal state regulation of non-standard work amidst the onset of neoliberalism and historical difficulties with trade unions organizing non-standard work, a lot of work done by women was rendered unprotected and unregulated (Vosko, 2009).

As previously stated, non-standard forms of employment deviate from the normative model of employment in either one or multiple ways and can include temporary work, self-employment, contract work etc. Further, while it is crucial not to conflate precarious work and non-standard work as synonymous, it rings true that many non-standard work arrangements can be characterized by precarity (Kalleberg, 2018). As stated by Gomez and Lamb (2019), an impermanent part-time job renders the worker economically vulnerable compared to a full-time, permanent job, however, the authors remain agnostic to the precise degree of vulnerability, acknowledging its contextual nature.

According to Vosko, precarious employment entails "forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health" (Vosko, 2006, p.1). Often, including within the context of gig work, non-standard employment relationships include a third party that acts as an intermediary between the worker and the employer. Further, including most forms of gig work, non-standard work does not guarantee continued employment (Kalleberg, 2018).

Non-standard work has been commonly done by women; hence the proliferation of non-standard work being contextualized as the "feminization of work" (Zahn, 2019), or "gendered precariousness" (Vosko, 2008). In contrast, rideshare work is a form of non-standard work done

predominantly by men (Statista et. al. 2020). This renders rideshare work an especially compelling form of labour to analyze from an FPE framework.

### *2.3.2 Feminist Political Economy's Contribution to Platform Labour Studies*

In their book *Feminism, Labour and Digital Media: The Digital Housewife,* Jarrett (2015) references the works of Marxist feminist scholars, including Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1975), Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) and Silvia Federici (2004) from which the crux of FPE was born of, to explain the contradiction of capitalism's reliance and simultaneous devaluation of domestic labour. Further, Jarrett (2015) seeks to examine the exploitation of affective and immaterial labour in the digital economy using this dialectical, contradictory relationship between social reproduction and capitalism as a framework. Jarrett's argument is that understanding how domestic labour is exploited under capitalism, but still imperative and pertinent to the social and economic function of the system, can aid us with understanding the dialectical relationship of exploitation and agency in digital, or platform capitalism.

Rodríguez-Modroño et al. (2023) note the "feminization" of the platform economy, referring to primarily the proliferation of work historically associated with women, including forms of service work. However, they note that despite this feminization of the platform economy, scholarship tends to focus on male-dominated platforms and lacks analysis of the gendered dimension of the work. In their article on platform capitalism and the care sector, the authors offer a theoretical and empirical (FPE) approach to move beyond scholarship that understands the platform economy in a strictly capitalistically productive and entrepreneurial sense, to examine its interconnectivity with processes of social reproduction (Rodríguez-Modroño et al. 2023). Further, while this thesis focuses on male-dominated rideshare platforms

or “masculine service niches” (Choi, 2018) like Uber and Lyft, it also seeks to implicate these platforms in the social reproduction process by looking at rideshare workers’ domestic responsibilities and balances of paid and unpaid work.

Uber, as a lean platform, is undeniably an effective surplus value extractor. FPE lens is useful for understanding surplus value extraction through working for the platform itself but through unpaid work in the home. (Rodríguez-Modroño et al. 2023) state: “As FPE argues, surplus values are not only obtained within the productive sphere, since it is also necessary to consider the reproductive activities performed by women workers in their homes for free, which shape exploitation by establishing a lower wage cost for the entire workforce” p. 630. Further, male rideshare worker participants in this thesis are producing surplus value in both the productive sphere through their paid work for these rideshare platforms, but also through their (and their partners’) unpaid domestic work.

## 2.4 From Feudalism, Capitalism to the Canadian State: Historical Dialectics of Production and Reproduction

### *2.4.1 Feminist recentring of primitive accumulation*

The process of primitive accumulation marks the transition from feudalism to capitalism. For Marx, primitive accumulation revealed the foundational conditions for the existence of a capitalist society, and his analysis of it in *Capital Volume 1* (Marx, 1990) is centred around the working-class waged male worker, and the formation of commodities and commodity production. In *Caliban and the Witch,* Silvia Federici seeks to re-center this analysis of primitive accumulation and examine how it shifted women’s socioeconomic location and their implication in the production of labour power, or social reproduction. Federici makes three distinctions in her

divergence from Marx's androcentric examination of primitive accumulation. These include the emergence of a gendered division of labour that subjugates both women's labour and sexual reproductive function to the reproduction of workers, a reconstruction of patriarchy that excludes women from waged work and renders them dependent on male counterparts, and the transformation of the female body into a "machine" for the reproduction of workers (Federici, 2004, p. 12).

### *2.4.2 Gendered relationship dynamics under the feudal system*

Federici notes that under the feudal system, the master-servant relationships were, of course, inherently oppressive. However, serfs being afforded a plot of land in exchange for their labour for the master meant that they had, to an extent, control over their sustenance and some autonomy over their living conditions. This also meant that women serfs were, of course with case-by-case exceptions, less dependent on men than they are under capitalism. Labour on servile farms was ordered based on sustenance, meaning that gendered divisions of labour were not as distinct. Federici states: "In the feudal village no social separation existed between the production of goods and the reproduction of the workforce; all work contributed to the family's sustenance" (Federici, 2004 p. 25). Federici acknowledges that the shift from feudalism to a capitalist economy meant the increased devaluation of social reproductive work, which she refers to as "women's work" with the separation of productive and reproductive work spheres.

### *2.4.3 Post-Feudalism: Capitalism and the Canadian State's Balance of Production and Reproduction*

In the wake of feudalism, the separation of productive and reproductive labour under capitalism is enforced and enhanced through the functions of the nation-state. Cameron (2006)

notes that in the Canadian context, the dialectical relationship between labour and capital accumulation is foundational to "political conflicts and compromises arising from the contradiction between social reproduction and production" p. 48. After the formation of the Canadian state in 1867, the state's relations to social reproduction were organized around the survival of French-speaking Catholic communities in Canada. The Canadian federal state was structured to preserve and protect the French-Canadian cultural minority and for the capitalist expansion of the Canadian economy facilitated by English-Canadian economic elites (Cameron, 2006).

Cameron's main argument is that the establishment of the 1867 constitution facilitated an arrangement between capital accumulation and social reproduction. This accommodation relied on the responsibility of social reproduction being delegated to primarily local and/or private institutions. However, as the state faced pressure to arbitrate the contradictory relationship between production and social reproduction, this original structure proved to be faulty. Different constitutional and extra-constitutional innovations along with varying judicial interpretations convoluted the original structure, and this resulted in "growing tensions between the French-speaking national minority and the English-speaking majority, reflected in conflicts between Quebec and the federal government, and ever-increasing resort to unaccountable intergovernmental arrangements to mediate conflicts around social reproduction" (Cameron, 2006 pgs. 48-49). These convolutions and tensions reflected the Canadian state's conceptualization of social reproduction as a "matter of the private sphere" (p. 50), wanting to delegate it only to churches, charities, and sometimes local governments. The architects of Canada's confederation did not anticipate the Canadian state having to federally balance the

dialectics of production and reproduction and ending up having to subsidize and allocate social provisioning to social reproduction.

*2.4.4 Dialectical Function of Capitalism and the Crisis of Care*

Musto (2021) delves into Marx's dialectical function of capitalism. He states that Marx notes that the exponential growth of productive forces under capitalism, distinct from that of feudalism and other previous forms of economic production, lays the foundation to overthrow the socioeconomic relations capitalism itself generated, thus acting as a prerequisite for the transition from socialism to communism. Marx and Engels also theorized that the breakdown of the nuclear family in capitalist production, marked by women and children's entry into waged labour through factory work in the 19th century, would begin the breakdown of women's oppression. They theorized that as capitalism eviscerated the working class, it simultaneously laid the groundwork for women's liberation (Musto, 2021).

This did not occur as theorized. Fraser (2016) situates two crises that emerged from women and children's entry into capitalistically productive labour in 19th-century liberal competitive capitalism: A crisis of social reproduction within the working class, and a crisis of moral panic revolving around the deconstruction of the family, and what Fraser refers to as the "de-sexing of proletarian women" (Fraser, 2016, p. 105). The crisis of social reproduction revolved around the working class's diminishing ability to reproduce their sustenance, and this crisis was so blatantly harrowing that Marx and Engels assumed its eradication of the working-class family to also be the eradicator of women's oppression. This first crisis of care under capitalism reflects its inherent contradictory relationship with social reproduction. Capitalism

relies on it to reproduce labour power yet devalues it by stripping working-class families of their ability to adequately sustain themselves (Fraser, 2016).

To remedy the crisis of social reproduction under liberal competitive capitalism, with state-managed capitalism of the 20th century emerged Keynesian-Fordist policies marked by state provisioning of social reproduction and the 'family wage.' The 'family wage' was attached to the standard employment relationship (SER), which Vosko (2006) identifies as an exception as opposed to a norm, as it was only afforded to those who fit the mould of the ideal working-class nuclear family. This would typically include a white-blue-collar husband, his wife, and his kids. As stated by Luxton and Bezanson (2006), a major shift towards neoliberal deregulation occurred in Canada in the 1990s. Social reproductive responsibilities were then delegated to municipalities, lower levels of government and individuals. This "accommodating" shift ended up exacerbating capitalism's contradictory devaluation and reliance on social reproductive labour. With the emergence of the "two-earner family" as more women were funnelled into predominantly non-standard work, another major crisis of care emerged with global financialized capitalism through austerity measures and lack of provisioning for social welfare (Fraser, 2016).

**2.5 Canadian Historical Context of Gender and Labour**

Further, another route for understanding the gendering of productive and reproductive spheres is through historical Canadian scholarship on gender and labour. Feminist historians such as Bradbury (1993) and Sangster (2010) have examined the gender organization of paid and unpaid work from 19th-century industrial capitalism, the post-war era to state-managed 20th-century capitalism.

In *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* Bradbury (1993) bluntly acknowledges that "Families with more than one wage-earner are not a new phenomenon" (p. 13). Bradbury declares the necessity to consider the paid and unpaid work roles of all family members in Montreal's 1861-91 transition to industrial capitalism, stating that historians have "ignored working women and children" (p. 15). According to Bradbury a difference in dual-earner households during industrial capitalism to today's era of neoliberal capitalism is that often, instead of the breadwinner's partner being the second earner, it was children who were secondary wage earners. This aligns with Fraser's (2016) identification of the 19th-century crisis of social reproduction with the continued entry of both women and children into waged work from the 19th century, diminishing the working-class family's ability to sustain itself.

Empirical historical accounts of families with paid and unpaid working women and children in industrializing Montreal are woven into Bradbury's text; for example, a fifty-year-old carpenter was the breadwinner of his dual-income family in 1871, with three daughters and two sons working paid jobs as seamstresses and apprentice painters. The only unpaid worker in his family was his wife. Bradbury incorporates these anecdotes into an "examination of daily survival," in an attempt to contribute to "a history of the 'totality of the working class'" and to a more well-rounded understanding of the 19th-century Canadian political economy (Bradbury, 1993).

Sangster's (2010) work acknowledges the filling of gaps in scholarship on gender and labour in Canada's political economy, stating that writing on women's paid work has contributed to a "revisionist view of the post-war years with studies of women's unionization, workplace cultures, and immigrant labour" (p. 9). Sangster states that they intend to further this "revisionist

strain of historiography" to strengthen the understanding of women's paid and unpaid work in the post-war era. Sangster fills important gaps in scholarship on the Fordist accord, acknowledging that while one of its main promises—the SER—was an exception as opposed to a norm that service workers did not reap many of the benefits of, there were women in unions who did prove to be beneficiaries of legalism through labour regulatory frameworks, apparent through their utilization of grievance systems (Sangster, 2010). Beyond legality, Sangster emphasizes the importance of unions as a "key 'social space' where workers addressed transformations in the workforce" (p. 11). One of Sangster's guiding questions is "What were the social and economic conditions in which women's labouring lives were embedded?" This historical exploration of unions as more than simply bureaucratic labour organizations representing workers aligns with my thesis' argument for unions to incorporate workers' lives outside of the sphere of production into how they function.

In a similar vein, Bradbury's deeper historical exploration of the familial gendered division of paid and unpaid work in industrializing Montreal disrupts what both she and Sangster consider to be a reductive narrative of work from the postwar era to an era of flexible, precarious employment amidst state deregulations. The narrative centers on the Fordist accord, the promise of the SER and its erosion as the catalyst for the rise of dual-earner households. While both Sangster (2010) and Bradbury (1993) acknowledge that this is not an entirely historically inaccurate account, and Sangster recognizes the usefulness of "Fordism" as a historical label, they fill in histories of gender and labour that this narrative does not account for. This includes the (often precarious) paid work of wives and children in 19th century Canada, long before the generally understood "rise" of dual-earner households in post-1970s flexibilization of work. Sangster critiques the narrative's lack of acknowledgment of women's involvement in trade

unions in the postwar Fordist period, along with its obscuration of women, immigrant, and racialized workers' experiences.

It is important to recognize the works of feminist historians in providing a more all-encompassing historical context of gender and labour than what broad accounts of historical political economy offer (Bradbury, 1993; Sangster, 2010). This scholarship served as a foundation of FPE and later SRT. But it is also important to acknowledge that there is a lack of account for shifting masculinities. Scholars such as R.W Connell (1991), Mike Donaldson (1993), Cecile Jackson (1999), and Linda McDowell (2002) have filled in gaps in the historical trajectory of work relationships and masculinities, some of which are referenced in the hegemonic masculinities section (2.10) of my thesis.

## 2.6 Overview of Social Reproduction Theory

Social reproduction theory operates within an FPE framework. Scholarship in FPE notes the contradiction of the separation of production and reproduction under capitalism and acknowledges their dialectical relationship. There exists a contradiction in advanced capitalist economies marked by the conflict between workers' quality of life, and the constant economic restructuring for capital accumulation and profits. Social reproduction remains the crux of this contradiction, for the healthy maintenance of a working population and the accumulation of capital both depend on it (Vosko and Clement, 2003).

### *2.6.1 Why Social Reproduction Feminism? Problematizing Separations of Capitalism and Patriarchy, and Productive labour and Unproductive labour*

Building on an FPE framework, social reproduction theory (SRT) grapples with how the capitalist system relies on social reproductive labour. Ferguson (2020) seeks to distinguish social

reproduction theory (SRT) from socialist feminist and critical equality feminist traditions, asserting that while both maintain that the only route for the liberation of those who perform unpaid social reproductive labour is the overturning of capitalism, SRT seeks to expand the dialectics of this assertion. Critical equality feminism holds what Ferguson describes as "theoretical dualism." (Ferguson, 2020, p. 4) It theorizes patriarchy and capitalism as two distinct powers with individual social relations and employs a reductionist perspective, maintaining that the feminist struggle can be relegated to an afterthought of class struggle, as only upon the demise of capitalism will women be liberated. Marx's failed theorization of the breakdown of patriarchy through women's entry into waged work is precisely why Marxist feminist literature rooted in critical equality feminism must be critiqued through social reproduction theory. Women's entry into waged work is not liberatory, and women's oppression cannot be relegated to an afterthought of the overthrowing of capitalism, or a natural by-product of the shift from capitalism to socialism to communism (Ferguson, 2020).

This line of theorizing implies a clear distinction between productive and unproductive labour, or the production of commodities and the reproduction of labour power. While SRT also maintains a distinction between material commodity production within capitalistic market relations and the reproduction of labour as just outside the sphere of capitalist production, it acknowledges that the two are inextricably linked and that capitalism requires the reproduction of labour power to function. Thus, the feminist struggle is directly implicated in the struggle against capitalism (Ferguson, 2020).

Katz, Mitchell, and Marston (2004) have also acknowledged the shift from socialist feminist binaries of structural forces of capitalism and patriarchy, asserting that those in critical

development studies have also worked to problematize and fuse this binate. Understanding patriarchy and capitalism and separate forces relegates unpaid labour, and the paid labour of racialized and the paid domestic labour of the working class, to outside the fundamental contradiction of capital (Strauss, 2020). Katz, Mitchell and Marston (2004) emphasize the neoliberal capitalist crumbling of definitive barriers between work and home life, in some cases rendering them indistinguishable from one another. Applying a feminist geographic lens to SRT, the authors assert a need to move beyond simply abstract theorizing around the disjunctions between productive and unproductive labour. They assert a need to employ an embodied understanding of how workers are constituted across time and space, including the messy and convoluted boundaries of spheres of production, the public, and reproduction, the private (Katz, Mitchell and Marston, 2004).

### *2.6.2 Social Reproduction and Labour Power as a Unique Commodity*

Marx does acknowledge that labour-power is the only commodity not produced directly through capitalist market relations. He does not, however, develop this theory to account for how the production of material commodities and the reproduction of labour power are deeply integrated into one process that reproduces capitalism itself (Bhattacharya, 2017). Bhattacharya (2017) outlines that for something to become a commodity, it must become recognized for more than just its use value. “Necromancy” is the process that commodifies something, turning its use value into an exchange value. Labour power, however, is a unique commodity, as it does not undergo the same process of necromancy that other commodities do. Bhattacharya seeks to explore the contradiction of the capitalist system that relies on a commodity that is not produced the same way as any other commodity. Labour power not undergoing the same process of

necromancy remains relevant as Bhattacharya (2017) states that SRT "reveals the essence-category of capitalism, its animating force, to be human labour and not commodities. In doing so, it exposes to critical scrutiny the superficiality of what we commonly understand to be 'economic' processes and restores to the economic process its messy, sensuous, gendered, raced, and unruly component: living human beings, capable of following orders as well as of flouting them" (p. 19). Not only is labour power the commodity that capitalism completely relies on to function, but it is the commodity that remains *alive.* Katz, Mitchell, and Marston (2004) engage with the embodied, animated liveliness of social reproduction and the reproduction of labour power. Katz refers to elements of social reproduction as the "messy, fleshy components of material life" (2004, p. 11).

*2.6.3 Social Reproduction: Abstract and Material*

Both an abstract theoretical understanding of social reproduction theory and a more embodied, material comprehension are relevant to this project. Neoliberal capitalism, or what Bhattacharya (2017) refers to as the "global financialized capitalism of the present era" (p. 25) has exacerbated the innate contradiction of capitalism's reliance on labour power and simultaneous devaluing of social reproductive work. Austerity measures marked by disinvestment in social provisions and welfare and the ongoing push of women into low-wage, non-standard work have depleted the ability of families to perform unpaid care work. As more men filter into non-standard work, including forms of gig work such as rideshare work, they become also implicated in this contradictory capitalist crisis of care and social reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017).

A more abstract theoretical understanding of SRT offered by Ferguson (2020) and Bhattacharya (2017) offers a framework for situating *why* this research is important for SRT scholarship. This understanding of SRT looks at how social reproductive, conceptualized *unproductive* labour commonly done by women, is now beginning to burden men while they still engage in capitalistically productive labour—in the case of my research, through Uber and Lyft. A spatialized understanding of SRT reveals the topographic, material messiness of the convoluted borders between home and work life that rideshare workers experience. It also allows for a more embodied acknowledgement of the myriad of ways neoliberal capitalism formulates the "neoliberal subject"; how do individual subjects, or my research participants as rideshare workers, not only "make and understand themselves as not only workers" (p. 3), but also parents, often migrants, and possibly lovers? (Katz, Mitchell, and Marston 2004).

**2.7 Labour Geography and Platformization**

Herod (1997) puts forward the sub-discipline of labour geography for examining how the social actions and interactions of workers are directly related to their chronic attempts to create "labour's spatial fix" p. 17. While Harvey (1982) theorizes "spatial fix" as the need for capital to facilitate and solidify its constant accumulation in specific geographical locations, Herod (1997) suggests that workers also desire a spatial fix of their labour, as they seek spatial fixes appropriate to their conditions as workers. Workers must construct landscapes that put first their social power and capacity for mobilization and undermine the power of capital accumulation. Tufts and Savage (2009) understand labour geography as consisting of "approaches which seek to understand the diverse processes which both limit and build labour's capacities to create more equitable economic systems" (p. 946). Thus, employing this definition,

studying the geography of labour is useful for understanding how workers are shaping these landscapes and appropriating their conditions under capitalism to maximize their social power (Herod, 1997; Tufts and Savage, 2009).

### *2.7.1 Labour Geography and Precarity*

Strauss (2018) examines labour geography's increasing focus on precarity, looking at the sub-discipline's contribution to "research on precarious forms of work, shifting identities and migration" (Coe, 2012 p. 272). Strauss (2018) cites Nancy Ettlinger's (2007) article as one of the first to offer a geographical perspective on precarious work and the politics of precarity. Ettlinger argues that the lens of precarity's analytical worth is embedded in its ability to contextualize the emergence of precarious work, and how it is engaged with by workers both spatially and temporally. Thus, Ettlinger (2007), and many labour geographers since, have taken to acknowledging that yes, the growth of precarious work can be attributed to the decline of the standard employment relationship post-Fordism and the proliferation of non-standard, "flexible" forms of work; however, precarity itself is embedded in both labour and life.

Strauss (2018) builds on the work of scholars that "examine precarity as a social relation of employment, rather than an employment relation" (p. 625). Further, this thesis acknowledges the proliferation of precarious employment in the context of neoliberal flexibilization (Peck, 2001), considering the emergence of platform capitalism within this context (Srnicek, 2017). However, this thesis moves past precarity as an employment relation to examine how rideshare workers' lives outside of their employment, such as unpaid household responsibilities and gendered relationship dynamics, contribute to the creation and sustainment of precarious lives (Meehan and Strauss, 2015). Further, this thesis considers Herod's (1997) concept of "labour's

spatial fix" in its implications, looking at how workers' ability to appropriate their condition is reliant on more than just their relation to wage labour, but also their relation to the unpaid responsibilities of social reproduction (Strauss, 2018).

### 2.8 Existing Scholarship on Gender and Platform-based Work

Further, there is some scholarship on platform-based work and social reproductive labour, which acknowledges that inadequate access to childcare and maternity leave impacts women's ability to participate in the labour market, resulting in women seeking employment that allows them the "flexibility" to balance familial responsibilities alongside their paid work (Kessler, 2018). Schor (2017) reveals an anecdote from Jennifer Guidry, a woman who works several gigs, including for platforms Uber, Lyft, and Sidecar, trying to make a living wage for her family. Working for all three platforms is still not enough (Schor, 2017).

While there has been minimal research on gig work and shifting gender norms, some relevant work includes Milkman et. al.'s (2021) work on women food delivery workers and normative femininity and Kylie Jarrett's (2022) Marxist-feminist analysis on digital labour. Similarly, Ursula Huws (2019) has published work on digital labour, social reproduction, and the commodification of domestic labour. Haley Kwan (2022) published work focused specifically on social reproduction, work-family flexibility and female platform rideshare drivers in China. Though there has been less work on gig work and shifting masculinities, there exists the important work of Dinh and Tienari (2022) on men, masculinity, and emotions in rideshare work.

### 2.9 Racial Discrimination Embedded in Neoliberal Capitalist Labour Markets

Luxton and Bezanson (2006) note the centrality of gender, race, and class in the neoliberal project (p. 5). With increased austerity measures, privatization, and lack of social provisioning, pre-existing structures of inequality surrounding citizenship, income, opportunities, and support were exacerbated. The decentralization of social reproduction that manufactured the neoliberal crisis of care, according to the authors, emerged from a disruption of the "dominant gender, class, and/or race/ethnicity order" (Luxton and Bezanson, 2006). Part of this is attributed to the breakdown of the male-breadwinner female-caregiver gender contract, a model that is inherently raced, and classed.

NELP Executive Director Rebecca Dixon first acknowledges that "today's app-based or 'gig' economy is frequently dressed up in talk about 'modern innovation' and the '21st century of work.' But, in reality, this type of precarious, contingent work is nothing new" (Nass, 2021). Dixon goes on to assert: "Workers of colour have always been heavily concentrated in these kinds of exploitative industries, which makes it that much more disturbing that companies like Uber and Lyft claim to be on the side of racial justice in their marketing" (Nass, 2021). Further, this can be attributed to systemic discrimination in the labour market embedded in non-standard work relationships permeating the gig economy. Dixon highlights the inseparability of the historical racialization of contingent, precarious, and non-standard work from the continuities of gig work.

Van Doorn (2017) explores the racialized vulnerabilities and exploitation of platform work. The racialized history of service and gig work is acknowledged, and Doorn (2017) seeks to lay out how this extends into the platform economy. Platforms, as Doorn (2017) puts it, seek to manufacture an image of opportunity for "upward social mobility" (p. 907), and in the process

attempt to veil not only general class subordination of workers under capitalism but the gendered and racialized directly implicated in this. The algorithms that control platform workers are far from race or gender-neutral, as proponents of platforms may tout, and this "colourblind makeover" (p. 907) in the name of entrepreneurialism ignores that gendered and racialized inequalities are coded and programmed into the infrastructure of platforms. Baril (2023) follows Van Doorn's argument, stating that "Systemic racism and exploitative conditions follow neoliberalisation," thus exacerbating the exploitation of racialized workers.

Moreover, Van Doorn (2017) makes the argument that "in the world of platform labour, inequality is a feature rather than a bug" p. 907. Platforms emerged within and from an already racialized late capitalism that relies on the continual gendered and racial oppression of the working class, particularly low-income workers, and the unemployed and unemployable—in Marxian language, the reserve army of labour (Huws, 2019).

All participants in this thesis are South Asian men, and many are migrants, which is reflective of a racialized platform workforce (Gebrial, 2021). Rideshare platforms like Uber and Lyft exist within a gendered, classed, *and* racialized nexus of labour market disparities, particularly within the context of neoliberal capitalism (Van Doorn, 2017).

**2.10 Hegemonic masculinities**

The concept of "hegemony" can be credited to Gramsci and his contribution to Marxist thought. Hegemony describes the capture and hold of power and both the formation and destruction of various social groups in that process. While hegemony originally aimed to conceptualize the domination of the ruling class (Gramsci, 2003), scholars have employed the concept of hegemony to contextualize other dominating ideologies (Donaldson, 1993).

Hegemonic masculinities refer to dominant forms of masculinities reproduced through words and deeds in a societal context. The male breadwinning norm is an example of hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson, 1993). Not only do hegemonic masculinities reproduce patriarchal domination over women, but they also disparage other forms of masculinities as subpar; this may include perpetuating the notion that men who take on caregiving responsibilities are somehow inadequate (Connell, 1987).

Further, in a study of masculinity in working-class men in London, England, McDowell (2003) notes the connection between successful employment and "acceptable versions of adult manhood" (p. 58), highlighting that waged work is a crucial element in the formation of a masculine identity. As waged work is embedded in constructions of hegemonic masculinity, it becomes implicated in individuals' understanding of their own masculine identity. McDowell poses the question: "What happens to men's sense of themselves as masculine when the sort of work associated with masculinity disappears, as it has in many urban localities?" (McDowell, 2003:58). This question not only implies the SER's centrality to hegemonic masculinity and the male breadwinning norm as a component of hegemonic masculinity but also reinforces the notion of men in non-standard forms of work posing challenges to traditional masculinities.

McDowell follows up by posing the question of whether the erosion of work arrangements associated with masculinity will result in men proliferating employment typically associated with women, or if "masculine dignity" will withhold them from doing so. McDowell contextualizes this as a "crisis of masculinity" (McDowell, 2003). McDowell seeks to understand the crisis of masculinity in conjunction with a transformation in cities within advanced capitalist countries towards an increasingly service-based economy. There is an increased reliance on more

than one income as work becomes further precaritized (McDowell, 2000). One of the aims of this project is to determine whether male rideshare workers are attempting to supplement inadequate incomes from elsewhere to maintain the male breadwinner hegemonic masculinity.

FPE literature and the literature on social reproduction and hegemonic masculinities have been in conversation with one another. While there has generally been a lack of conversation between these scholarships and work in the gig economy, there is an especially significant gap between gig work literature and the construction of masculinities and shifting gender norms.

**2.11 South Asian Masculinities**

This project was not intended to be one centred on South Asian masculinities in capitalist labour markets; however, all participants being South Asian renders a theoretical component on South Asian masculinities necessary. Masculinities are inherently raced, queered, and gendered (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014). They are also shaped by political economies and structures of patriarchal and racial capitalism, hence Mitchell, Katz, and Marston's (2004) embodied acknowledgement of the myriad of ways neoliberal capitalism formulates the "neoliberal subject." This includes how individual subjects, or research participants as rideshare workers, undergo experiences that shape their sense of self in relation to migration, citizenship, parenthood, interpersonal and romantic relationships, etc.

In their article titled *Migration Has Stripped Us of Our Manhood: Contradictions of Failed Masculinity Among South Asian Male Migrants in Greece,* Kukreja (2021) explores the correlation between transnational migration and reinscribing male breadwinner status for Indian and Pakistani men in Greece. They note that the participants perceive their masculinity as "failed" when they do not achieve cultural indicators of "successful manhood" enmeshed with

the political economy of their region, manufacturing a crisis of masculinity. Migration becomes an avenue to "reinstate symbolic hegemonic masculine status and prestige *(izzat)* with their families and communities" (Kukreja, 2021, p. 308). Kukreja notes the major adaptations migrant males must make upon entry into a new country; they are met with not only an alien language but work relations they may not be familiar with and preconceived racial and cultural identity assumptions.

Kukreja's work is particularly relevant to my thesis, as all my participants were South Asian men, and many were migrants in the process of obtaining Canadian citizenship. They can also be met with Eurocentric constructions of hegemonic masculinity and familial dynamics. With that being said, as masculinities in general are not static, neither are South Asian masculinities, and Kukreja (2021) acknowledges that their work is not reflective of all forms of South Asian masculinities shifting through cultures and historical sociopolitical contexts. Further, it is worth noting that all participants in this study were married, as Kukreja (2021) states that employment, marriage, and parenthood are imperative to achieving a "heterosexual masculine sorority," while those facing unemployment or are unmarried are often relegated to a "marginal masculine status" (p. 310).

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis draws on primary qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews with Toronto-based Uber and Lyft rideshare workers. There were 11 interviews conducted with participants who were all male rideshare drivers with dependents. While the intention was for interviews to last no longer than 90 minutes, most were around or under the 30-minute mark. All interviews were conducted over Zoom, and all interviews were recorded with both written and verbal consent from participants.

### 3.1 Recruitment

My original recruitment method proposed to the Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) was "recruitment-on-the-go". This would have entailed handing drivers a card with my information on it after our ride, and briefly stating that I'm a Masters' student researching rideshare workers. I stated I would inform drivers that their rating or tip would not be affected by whether they choose to participate or not. However, upon my first submission to the HPRC for review, my recruitment procedure was deemed "potentially problematic." The revisions for the recruitment process on the TD2 form (Part B, Question 3a) stated that recruiting the driver on the go seems "deceptive" and is "potentially coercive as the driver may feel pressured to say yes, for example, to receive a larger tip or rating" (Office of Research Ethics, 2023).

This response was frustrating because as previously stated, I had clarified on the original TD2 form that drivers would be informed that refusal to participate would not affect their tip or their rating. My supervisor and I decided to push back, stating in the submitted revisions that this recruitment method is most fitting for my research project and that any possible element of coercion and/or deception would be eliminated. A Zoom meeting with Research Ethics Review

Coordinators was scheduled, and the committee did not budge on their stance. Thus, I sent out one more set of revisions for my recruitment process that abandoned recruitment-on-the-go altogether. I outlined a new recruitment method through social media postings, which was suggested by the Ethics Coordinators. I included a sample poster, which is pictured below:


*Figure 2: Social Media Recruitment Poster*

I began the recruitment process immediately after receiving ethics approval in early August 2023 by reaching out to organizers with Gig Workers United and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers Participants. I received a timely response, but after a few weeks and sending a follow-up email, no participants were recruited through these organizations. Participants were recruited primarily through Facebook ads. I constructed an online poster using Canva, which included text describing the requirements for participants, and the expectations for participation in the research project. It outlined my affiliation with York University and the core of my research project, along with a statement explaining that participants will receive $25 honoraria as a token of appreciation for their time.

This poster was posted in a variety of Facebook groups for Uber and Lyft rideshare workers. Some of these groups stated that they were specifically for workers in the GTA, while others were for drivers and couriers across Canada. Facebook groups can be public or private, and around two to three of the groups I posted in required admin approval. I received approval and was granted entry to most groups I requested to join.

Upon joining, some group admins utilize a setting that allows them to review posts and decline or accept them. For this reason, many of my posts read “pending” for a few days before they were either accepted or declined. Around three of my post requests were declined by admins for violation of a group rule: No promotions or spam. This rule stated “No selling, self-promotion, promo codes, spam, scams and irrelevant posts or links allowed without permission. If you want to advertise, please contact a group admin.” The group that declined my posts had one of the largest reaches, with around 17,000 members across Canada. This proved not to be a

detrimental roadblock by virtue of the several other groups with reaches ranging from a couple hundred to 19,000 members that either allowed public posting or approved my post requests.

Further, another minor issue that arose with Facebook recruitment was my inability to explain, in in-depth, my recruitment requirements for participants. As this is an MA thesis on shifting masculinities and rideshare work, I was seeking to recruit only male participants. Before making posts in Facebook groups, I expected that some may point out the gendered exclusion of women rideshare workers in my recruitment poster. My expectations were correct, however, concerns were easily mitigated through a quick explanation, as pictured below:

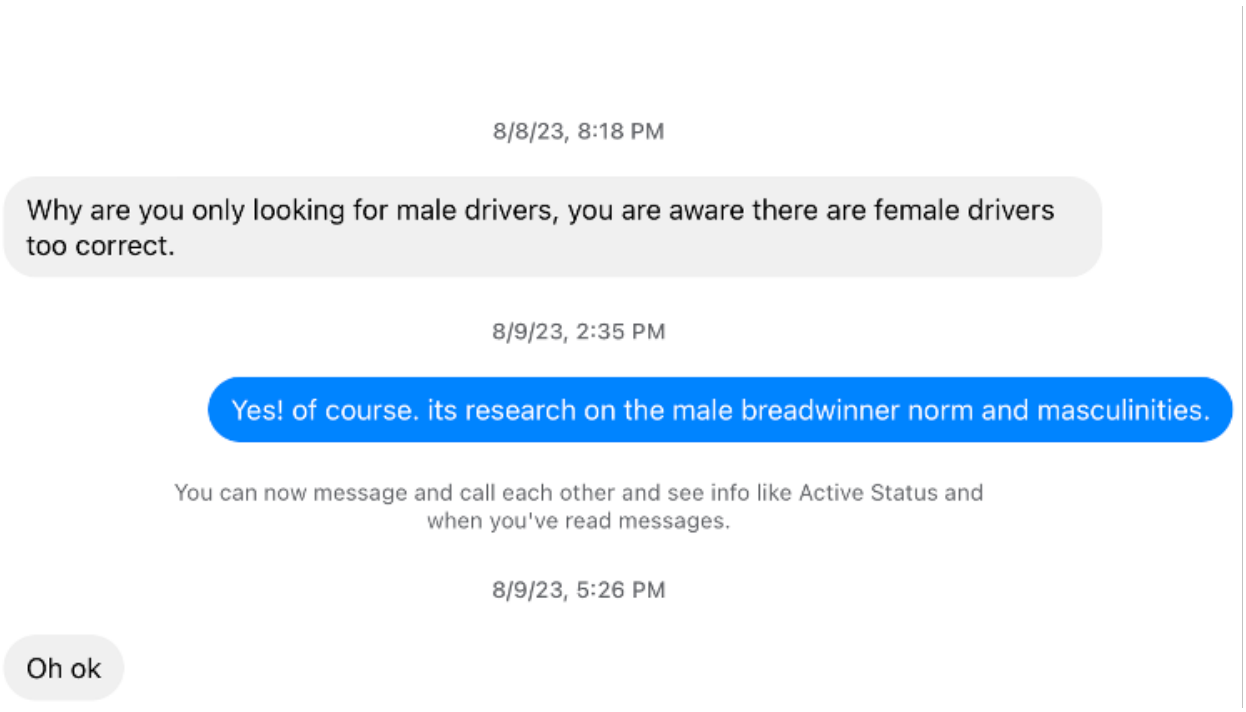


*Figure 3: Facebook message regarding recruitment requirements*

I explained why I was only recruiting male rideshare workers, and this was received well.

Admins tended to dislike members frequently posting similar posts, which proved to be a minor problem as frequent posting yielded more responses from members interested in participating. One group suspended my posting access for two weeks. Nevertheless, I was able to recruit nine participants through Facebook groups, and two through purposive sampling. All participants were assigned pseudonyms upon the initiation of data analysis. I assigned pseudonyms by conducting background research on the cultural origin of the participant's real name and the language(s) of its spelling and meaning and assigning them a pseudonym with a similar meaning from the same culture and language. In total, I recruited and secured eleven participants, listed in Figure 2 below:

| *Pseudonym* | *Uber, Lyft or both* | *Do they have another job (full- or part-time)?* | *Marital status* | *Number of Dependents* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eshan | Both | None | Married | 2 |
| Dilshan | Both | None | Married | 1 |
| Farhad | Uber | Full-time | Married | 1 |
| Arjun | Both | None | Married | 1 |
| Osman | Uber | None | Married | 2 |
| Sanjay | Uber | Full-time | Married | 3 |
| Umar | Uber | Full-time | Married | 1 |
| Nasir | Uber | None | Married | 3 |
| Hasan | Uber | Part-time | Married | 2 |
| Yusuf | Both | None | Married | 3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Imran | Both | Full-time | Married | 1 |

*Figure 4: Chart of Participants' Pseudonyms and Relevant Information*

### 3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom from the start of August until mid-October. The original proposed start date was the beginning of July, however the revisions required from HPRC delayed the process. Eleven interviews were conducted with male rideshare workers, all of whom had dependents.

Apart from questions regarding the age of the participant, the age of their dependents and how long they have been working for Uber and Lyft, most interview questions were open-ended. While interviews generally followed the outline of the protocol, in the nature of semi-structured interviews, there was some divergence. The protocol that was used as a guideline is shown below:

| **Preliminary information** |
|---|
| • Do you have any dependents?<br>o What age are they?<br>• Do you have a partner?<br>o What is their gender?<br>• How long have you been driving with Uber/Lyft? |
| **Regarding rideshare work** |
| • What made you decide to work as an Uber/Lyft driver?<br>• Is there a reason you chose rideshare as opposed to food delivery (or another form of gig work), or do you do both? |

- Are you balancing more than one job?
  - If so, is rideshare work to supplement inadequate pay from your external job?
- Would you rather have a standard employment relationship (SER) (full-time, benefits, etc.)?
  - If so, why?
- Do you believe Uber/Lyft pays you fairly?
  - If not, what are your grievances regarding inadequate pay?
- Have you chosen Uber/Lyft for the flexible hours available? (Ability to choose when and how often you work)
  - Do you believe "flexibility" in rideshare work is a myth that ends up forcing you to work long hours for low pay or has the "flexibility" element proven to be a truth beneficial to you?

**Regarding dependents/caregiving and rideshare work**

- If they have caregiving responsibilities…
  - Do you find the same satisfaction in working a paid job as you do caring for dependents?
    - If so, why?
    - If not, why?
- Does rideshare work allow you the flexibility to balance paid work with care work?

**Possible questions for organizing**

- Have you heard of Gig Workers United, or any organization fighting for the rights of gig workers, including rideshare workers?
  - If so: Have you been involved?
    - If so: was it successful or fulfilling? Is your involvement ongoing?
  - If not: Would you consider getting involved? What do you perceive as some barriers to getting involved? What would encourage you to get involved?

**Regarding dependents/caregiving**

- Do your dependents attend school? Do they attend preschool?
  - What are their school hours?
  - Who picks them up from school?
  - Do they attend after or before-school care?
  - Have you hired a paid caregiver (nanny, babysitter etc.)?
- What hours of the day are you the main caregiver of your dependents, if any?
- Do you and your partner divvy the time you each care for your dependents equally?
- Do you receive caregiving aid from any extended family?
- If they have a partner…
  - Does your partner have a paid job?

- Is it full-time or part-time?
- Did you and your partner collectively decide how to divvy up care responsibilities, or did your work schedules ultimately decide it for you?

*Figure 5: Interview Protocol*

### 3.3 Coding and Analysis

Before formal coding and analysis of interview transcriptions, my committee member guided me through a memoing session. A study by Kotob et al. (2016) concludes that mind mapping is a useful technique for the analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. This memoing through the construction of a mind map pictured below was constructed before any utilization of coding software. Only keywords, concepts, and themes that stuck out to me from my preliminary reads of transcripts are included in this mind map.

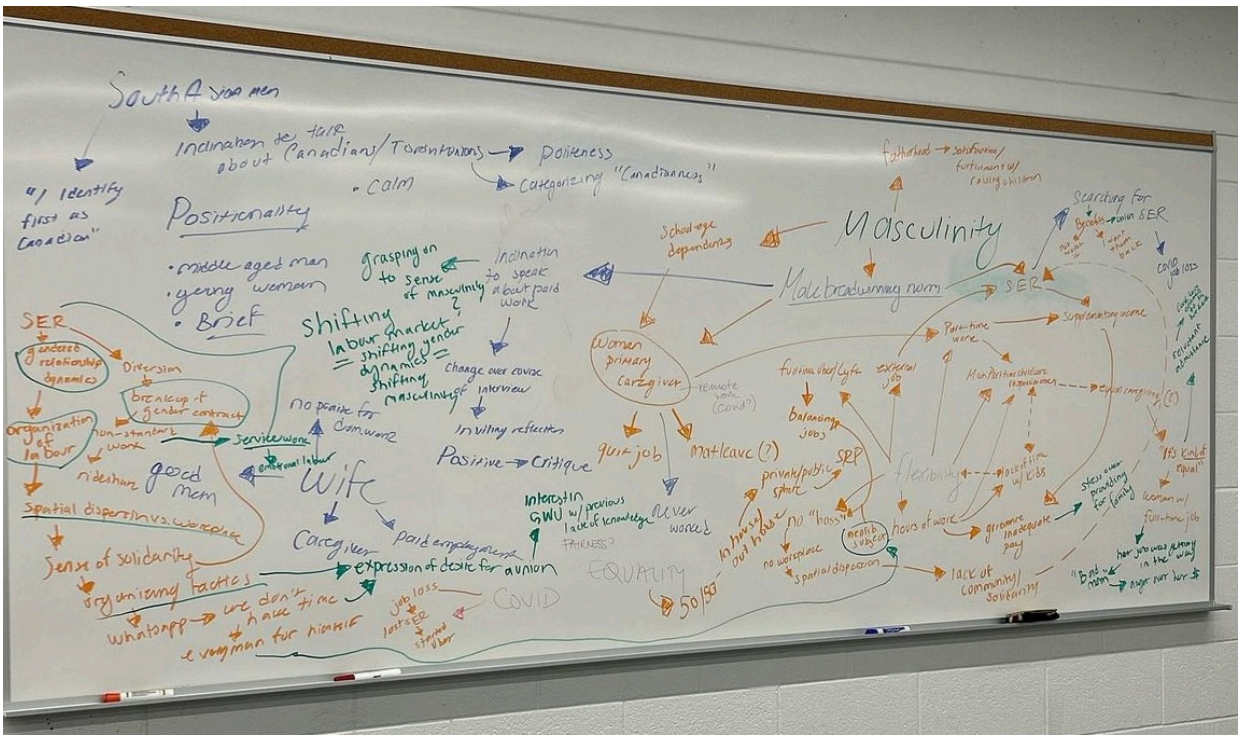


*Figure 6: Memoing Mind Map*

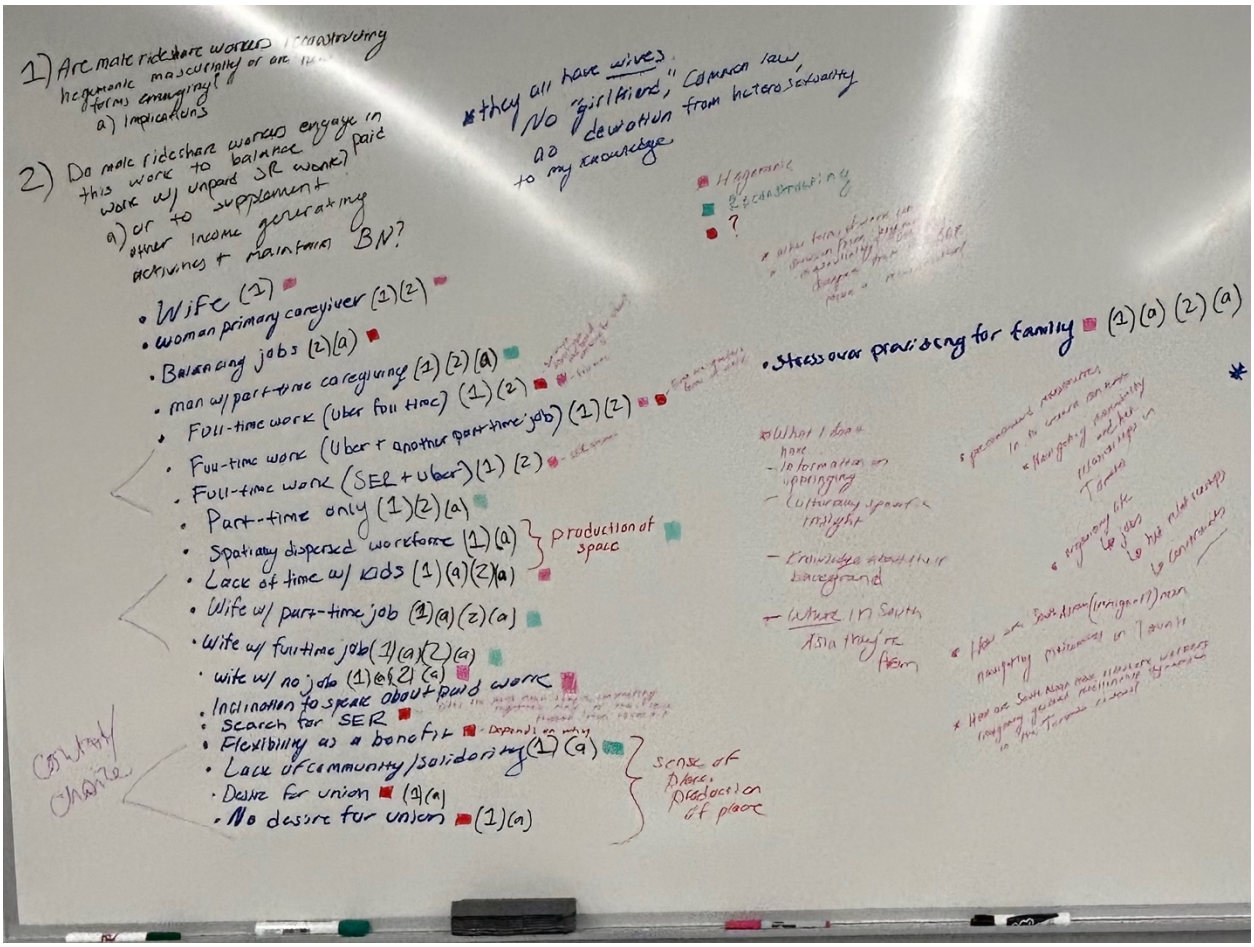


*Figure 7: Organization of Mind Map by Research Questions*

As pictured above, I conducted a second whiteboard exercise in the same open coding session. This was done by organizing key themes prevalent in the transcriptions and in my mind map by my research questions. I placed numbers (1) and (2) beside the themes depending on which question I thought they pertained to. I then decided to colour code themes by whether they are examples of hegemonic masculinity (pink), divergence or reconstruction of masculinities (mint), or red if I was unsure. Both the mind map and this organizational exercise were extremely useful for the eventual more formally organized coding of qualitative analysis software Dedoose.

I used both Happy Scribe and the Zoom transcription tool and was sure to watch and read interviews to check for accuracy. While neither Happy Scribe nor Zoom produced transcriptions that were 100% accurate, the corrections were very minor, and both services made editing the transcriptions easy. After finishing transcriptions, I used the qualitative analysis software Dedoose to create a list of colour-coded qualitative codes. These codes were created as I read over the transcriptions the first few times. The first few were descriptive codes, identifying participants' ages, whether they were married, how old their kids were, whether they drove for just Uber, Lyft, or both, etc. More analytical codes identifying broad themes from my original research questions were made after reading through transcripts while also making annotations, examples include "Breadwinning," "Balancing jobs," and "Part-time caregiving responsibilities." After continuing to read and annotate, I began adding sub-codes to the broader, more general codes. The number of subcodes began to feel overwhelming and increasingly disordered, which is when I took to annotating on Zotero and connecting quotations from participants' interviews to passages from literature that I knew would be useful for analysis and less writing. While less systematic, this form of analysis was what made writing the sections of the thesis that include findings feel tangible.

### 3.4 Limitations of the Research Design

Due to the nature of this research project, the findings of this study are not exhaustive, though they are in line with findings from studies in the small but expanding body of scholarship on shifting gender norms and the gig economy.

One limitation is the size of the data set. The participant sample size was limited due to time constraints of a Master's degree, and thesis length parameters. Another limitation includes

Zoom interviews. Interviews were conducted over Zoom as opposed to in person for several reasons, including the irregular nature of work, and the expected time constraints participants would be under. Two participants joined the Zoom call while parked in a parking lot or side of the road, taking a break from driving for Uber to do the interview. While this means that participants who may have not otherwise been able to participate were able to through Zoom facilitation, it also meant that interviews were shorter than intended. One reason for this is simply the previously mentioned time constraints that participants were under due to the nature of their work, but another could be that Zoom facilitation hinders the ability to connect through conversation compared to being in person. As stated by Prior and Lachover, "studies suggest that the online [interview] setting can make it harder to establish rapport and to form intimate relationships and that it can undermine the interviewer's ability to foster emotional connection and engage in deep listening to body cues" (2023, p. 2). This, along with the lack of shared senses, such as smell and touch, can disrupt rapport building. I found that this lack of ability to build rapport through Zoom shortened the interviews, as conversation can flow better when mutual understanding and trust are built.

Further, another limitation of this research is the power relations and positionality at play. McDowell (1997) writes about possible methodological challenges with interviewing men as a woman researcher. Some of these challenges discussed revolve around what some scholars will perceive as outdated constructs of masculinity and femininity, constructs that are invariably in flux. Nonetheless, McDowell makes a relevant reference to disrupting conventions of the "powerful male/submissive female: talking man/listening woman dichotomy" (McDowell, 1997, p. 392), a dichotomy that will be present during fieldwork. All my participants were very polite

and respectful, and I did not feel as though this dichotomy itself hindered data collection. However, as noted by Dery (2020), positionalities are formed by intersections of social axes to "produce specific challenges, power hierarchies, and ethical dilemmas for researchers conducting fieldwork in different contexts" p. 1768.

Kukreja (2021) stated that while conducting interviews for research on South Asian migrant males in Greece and barriers to achieving breadwinning stature, they found that their status as a "diasporic Punjabi woman" (p. 311) and their ability to speak the participants' languages fluently allowed Kukreja and the participants to easily build trust between one another. However, Kukreja also found that their female identity and education rendered them an "outsider" in some regards. Thus, my positionality extends beyond being a woman interviewing men; I was a young white woman interviewing some middle-aged, and some younger South Asians, mostly migrant men, all married and with children. For this reason, I did not have much in common with the participants, which perhaps hindered our ability to relate to each other and build rapport.

### 3.5 Feminist Geography Methodology and Positionality

This research was conducted with a feminist geography framework of methodology (Donovan and Moss, 2017). Feminist geographers have constructed space in the discipline of geography for a critical analysis of the relationships between masculinities, space, place, and temporality (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014). In their book *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies,* Linda McDowell emphasizes gender as both a "set of material social relations and symbolic meaning" (McDowell, 1999), and asserts that constructions of both femininity and masculinity remould across time and space.

Understanding gender as shifting alongside understandings of place, including the workplace, is crucial. Moreover, recognition of difference is particularly important within feminist projects surrounding masculinity, noting that masculinities are inherently queered, raced, and gendered. Berg and Longhurst (2003) assert the geographical specificity of masculinity, arguing that because of varying gendered contexts, relationships, and the constant restructuring of identities across time and space, singular masculinity should not be referenced, but rather multiple masculinities.

The lived experience of my participants rendered scholarship on South Asian masculinities integral to the theoretical section of this thesis. As asserted by Connell, hegemonic masculinities are layered and constructed by racialization, citizenship, and class (Connell, 1995; Kukreja, 2021). Thus, I incorporated scholarship on racial capitalism more broadly, and scholarship specifically on South Asian masculinities into my theoretical chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: FROM PAY TO ALGORITHMS AND FLEXIBILITY: DOES UBER *WORK?*

This chapter explores what participants have to say about remuneration, particularly in relation to rideshare platforms' payment for only *engaged time*—time that drivers are actively driving with riders. This chapter argues that participants' attempts to maximize engaged time for more pay results in less engaged time with their families, thus rendering paid work and home life a difficult balance. Further, it looks at participants' experiences with algorithms and ratings, including how platforms utilize them to compel the performance of emotional labour. This is expanded on to analyze emotional labour in conjunction with rideshare work as a "masculine service niche," maintaining that as rideshare work is a form of service work, the performance of emotional labour is required and enforced through platforms' algorithmic management, and that this process is a gendered one.

### 4.1 Rides and Remuneration: The Fight for Equilibrium

The flexibility of work is often touted as beneficial by proponents of the platform economy (Stapp, 2021). It is claimed to encompass control over amounts of work, scheduling, and workers' ability to decide their hours (Chihara, 2022). Rideshare work may reveal the shortcomings of this promise; workers are in a chronic state of trying to accumulate the most remuneration from rides in the shortest amount of time. A 2024 RideFair report focused on the City of Toronto and Ontario's regulations, or lack thereof, of rideshare workers' pay states that one of the reasons drivers make significantly below minimum wage is because platforms are only "required to pay workers for 'engaged time' (picking up and dropping off passengers), not all time worked, and with no obligation to ensure drivers spend enough time engaged" (p. 3). The report also states that in 2021, it was estimated by City of Toronto staff that rideshare

workers spend less than half their time—only 48%--in engaged time, meaning they are only getting paid 48% of the time they are on the road (RideFair, 2024). Imran, a participant interviewed for this thesis, recognizes that he is not getting paid for all the hours he works:

> *As far as the pay rate goes, I would push for the policy that mandates Uber to pay out, not less than minimum wage to the drivers. That's what's happening right now. After an hour of waiting, you may or may not get a $10 ride, and then you will have to wait again for an hour. So the idle time is not being paid out by Uber.*

A study conducted by the Transport Workers Union of Australia (TWU) on rideshare and food delivery workers states that around "41% of [gig] workers are forced to work over 40 hours a week, and 69% feel compelled to work during peak hours to earn a sufficient income" (TWU, 2023). When asked whether he would like to spend more time with his children, Hasan attributes his inability to do so with his work for Uber:

> *100 %, why not? If I plan to come back home around three o'clock and I find a ride, I always take that ride to finish work. If I'm downtown and it takes me to Scarborough, then from Scarborough, I have to get back home. It is not my choice.*

The need to work long hours because of the low pay that deters Hasan from spending more time with his family is compiled with the spatially dispersed nature of the work. Hasan may feel he must accept a ride that takes him further from home but pays better, thus increasing the amount of time and distance he must travel to get home.

Further, workers trying to maximize their "engaged time" could look like forgoing rides that workers perceive as "not worth it" for the travelling time and remuneration or attempting to

minimize the idle time between rides to the best of their ability (Koonse et. al. 2021). However, it may sometimes look like having no choice but to take what you can get, as Imran expresses:

> *It's either you must sit at a spot for an hour or 30 or 45 minutes at least, or you have to drive to an area where there is more demand. And by the time you reach there after 30 or 40 minutes of driving and spending the time and the gas as well, you have to sit again for another 15 to 20 minutes to find a ride.*

According to Imran, there is no visible solution, and you end up wasting idle time whether you are in an area with "high demand" or not. Further, for other participants, their qualms with inadequate pay from Uber and Lyft are accompanied by a consistent effort to maximize remuneration and minimize idle time between rides. This effort is not always successful. Umar expresses his struggle with being out on the road and not getting enough rides:

> *Yes, because at busy times, it can be really nice because you're getting back-to-back rides, you're earning more than the minimum wage and all that. No, because there are times, especially during weekdays, where you barely have any rides because the demand is so high […] and then there's like 50 people on the road. So, in that regard, I'm not even getting the bare minimum wage because I barely get, like, two rides per hour. And that's like, how much? $10. And the minimum wage is $16.*

Here, Umar acknowledges that sometimes, there are enough rides available to maximize pay for the time he's on the road. Other times, however, he's left with plenty of idle time and makes significantly under minimum wage. Arjun expresses that he often opts for days of the week when there is less traffic, as this minimizes idle time: "If you are stuck in traffic, you lose lots of pay." In Arjun's case, he selects long rides to minimize idle time. While this can be

effective, also finds himself in situations where he's so far from home that he cannot afford to get back:

> *[…] it will be like long hours for low pay because once you are in GTA, you don't know where you'll end up. So, you will be like most of the time I reside in Brampton, so I would end up either in Oakville or sometimes even I have drove to Pickering over that side and I couldn't get a ride back home, so I just slept in the car. Yeah, I couldn't come like almost 80, 90 [percent of gas in the tank] empty, so I just slept on the car overnight.*

This experience is not uncommon, and it has resulted in intentional nights spent in parking lots. A 2019 article in The Guardian highlights a group of drivers in the Bay Area that sleep in their cars in a parking lot on weekends. Tugas, a 42-year-hold Uber driver, drives over 90 miles to downtown San Francisco where he drives until he is too tired before heading over to sleep in the Safeway parking lot (Newcomer and Zaleski, 2017). Arifi, another one of the drivers spending his nights in the parking lot, stated that he must drive around 70-80 hours a week to survive (Paul, 2019). These drivers' actions reflect the false promise of flexibility: "Drive when you want, make what you need" states Uber's website, following up with the promise of a "flexible earning opportunity." It would be a far stretch to argue that drivers are *choosing* to spend their nights in parking lots, or that it's a "flexible earning opportunity." Even then, they are not making what they *need.* (Newcomer and Zaleski, 2017).

According to Hall and Krueger (2018), drivers averaged around nineteen dollars an hour before expenses; however, after costs, gross earnings ranged between $8.55 and $11.77 an hour. A report released in February 2024 reports even lower revenue per hour after expenses: between $6.37 and $10.60 an hour. It was reported that in Toronto, rideshare drivers "collectively lose as

much as $200 million as a result of earnings below the Province's minimum wage floor" (p. 3) This reflects the experience of the participants interviewed. Hasan, a part-time accountant who states he drives for Uber "full-time," expresses his discontent with his earnings from Uber after costs:

> *I drive no less than 11 hours per day. So, let's say I have $26,000 in my pocket […] I must pay for the depreciation of my car, maintenance of my car, I have to pay my monthly cell phone bill. […] Now, if I pay 100 bucks or let's say 90 bucks per month, my cell phone, $1,000 is my cell phone. That's $25,000. Out of $25,000, you can say I spent, let's say, $3,000 on my maintenance, oil change, tire change, anything, because I drive it commercially. No, it is $22,000. I did not add even a cup of coffee that cost me $2. I can add it for 25 days, $50, time 12, $600. I get my supper with me from my home, so I don't waste my time to find a restaurant to pay them 15 or $20 per meal. I deserve that, right? I drive it full-time. So, rest is $22,000 for 12 months. You can calculate how much money I make. It is even less than the basic wage.*

After providing an in-depth rundown of his costs and earnings, Hasan concludes that the money he makes driving for Uber ends up being less than a "basic" wage, pocketing $22,000 a year. Hasan, like a few other participants, relies on Uber for their primary income, and for some Uber is their only income. A survey conducted by Koonse et. al. (2021) found that "47% of respondents drive for a TNC [platforms such as Uber or Lyft] as their only job" p. 37 and that even for those with supplementary jobs, rideshare work is nonetheless their primary source of income: "66% depend on driving as their main source of income" p.37. The authors also note

that more than half of the survey respondents reported driving eight hours per day the week before they took the survey, which are full-time hours (Koonse et. al. 2021).

Yusuf, a forty-one-year-old full-time Uber driver, expresses significant grievances with inadequate pay and the instability of income: “it pays for your gas money for a little bit of here and there. But in terms of settling for Uber or Lyft income for a full-time income, because sometimes some months you make $3,000 and there are a few days that you don't make anything.” Here, Yusuf highlights what the “flexibility” myth does not: You may choose your hours, even full-time hours, but your pay will not reflect the pay of a secure, full-time employment relationship. Another Toronto rideshare driver, Muhammad Kamran, reports working around 16-17 hours per *day* to cover the cost of his car payments and provide for his family of five kids (RideFair, 2024). In January of 2024, a $328 million wage-theft settlement was paid out to Uber and Lyft drivers. Uber and Lyft driver Lamin Jadda stated that despite all of her and her fellow drivers' hard work, it was not being reflected in their wages. New York Attorney General Letitia James accused both rideshare companies of claiming wages as sales taxes and “black car fund fees,” thus withholding them from drivers. Lamin Jadda claimed to work around 60 hours a week, well over full-time, yet only received $500 per week in wages (Clark, 2024).

Several participants interviewed outright stated that Uber and Lyft were pocketing their wages, with the amount ranging from 35-50% of earnings from each ride. Sanjay states: “I think 40 or 35%. Something like that,” while Arjun claims: “Actually, most of the time it’s more than 50%.” Eshan agrees with Arjun: “More than 50%. Any driver you might have spoken to […] everybody would have said that they take more than 50% nowadays.” It’s proven to be difficult

to find an exact percentage. In 2020 it was reported that in New York State, Uber takes 25% of the fare and drivers keep 75%. Several other websites claim this number, including Gig Drivers of Canada, and Uber itself has claimed that its "take rate" is 25% (Horowitz, 2021). However, when scouring Reddit and Quora, the majority claim the 25-50% "take rate," (u/mariusroyale, 2023) with plenty claiming up to 70% (Raza, 2023). RideFair (2024) clears up some of these confusing numbers, stating that for image, platforms can, on paper, take only a 25% commission from drivers when the platform "deducts $2.50 from a ride for which a driver is paid $10. [...] If the platform charges the customer $15 for the same ride, the commission rises to 50% ($7.50/$15)!" (p. 16). With this lack of transparency regarding the increase of commission depending on what the customer is charged, there is no doubting the reason drivers report varying percentages of stolen wages. Imran claims that his pay has been gradually decreasing:

> *And it was okay before, too, just a couple of years ago, because the rates were way better and Uber was taking less and less cut. But these days, Uber is finding every opportunity to cut the driver's pay. So even if Uber and Lyft reinstate the rates they were paying out to the drivers before, it would help a lot as far as the drivers.*

Moreover, RideFair (2014) states that Toronto Uber drivers' wages have been decreasing: "Uber told the Globe and Mail that median earnings per engaged hour were $33.98 in December 2022 in Toronto, but by November 2023, reported median earnings per engaged hour were $33.35" (p. 7). This would represent a -1.9% decrease in a year. CTV News reported that Uber drivers' monthly gross earnings dropped 17.1% (Sriram, 2024).

*4.1.1 Below Minimum: Payment for "Engaged Time"*

Uber's sophisticated algorithms can fabricate "surge" pricing, which encourages drivers to keep driving after they have turned off the app or want to take a break as the app suddenly offers increased prices for rides. According to an article for *Drive* on the triggering of fake surge prices, drivers have tested this by gathering in an area and then logging off the app at the same time. A driver informed *Drive* that the app started sending notifications asking if they are sure they want to take a break, because "there's high demand in your area" (Dowling, 2023). Both drivers and riders can see surge prices, however, the pricing is incredibly unreliable for drivers. As surge prices are dependent on the riders' location and not the drivers', they may enter an area with surge pricing but receive requests from riders outside of that area with significantly lower fares. Of course, drivers are inclined to reject lower paying rides for higher paying ones, but Uber can penalize them for this. After an email was sent by a rider complaining that a driver cancelled their trip to wait for a surge fare instead, Uber told the driver they risk deactivation if they did so again (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016).

A few participants have expressed related discontent with surge pricing, including Imran:

> *And the surge these days, […] I feel like drivers are getting tricked [by Uber] by the surge areas as well […] and you can easily see that when you turn on the rider app, and then when you turn on the passenger app, you will see the difference between the two. So, it would show that there is a surge in an area, and when you book a ride, Uber will not pay you the surge rate, and they have a very easy way to get out of it, saying, "Hey, we had more drivers in that area, so that's why you are not paid out this rate." There have been reports recently that Uber is not paying. There have been some issues with*

*calculating the right payouts from Uber's end, and unless you report it to them and fight with them, they don't correct those issues.*

Imran's statement is reflective of Uber's faking of surge pricing in drivers' locations and faking of high demand with lower supply. Imran states that after accepting what he believes to be a ride with surge pricing and doesn't receive that amount, he's told by the app that there was no surge in the area the passenger requested from. Nasir, on the other hand, claims that the only time Uber's pay is fair is during surge pricing: "Sometimes when the prices surge, then that is the fair price. But when there is normal [pricing], that's not fair." However, Rosenblat and Stark (2016) state that surge pricing can begin to mimic gambling for drivers: "Some drivers are propelled into a similar emotional space as gambling or gaming by algorithmic pricing" p. 3766. Ravenelle (2019) acknowledges Uber's consistent use of algorithmic gamification techniques as psychological incentives. Uber wants drivers like Nasir to think surge pricing is fair so they will continue to chase it, as the platform intends to keep drivers "chasing the surge" (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). Srnicek (2017) also reports that Uber utilizes "phantom cabs" to manufacture the illusion of greater supply during these price surges, and even refers to Uber's data collection and algorithmic control as "governance over the rules of the game" (Srnicek, 2017, p. 47).

Moreover, Eshan mentions the importance of Uber Pro rankings, which can be considered another one of Uber's "gamification" techniques: "And that rating impacts us a lot, because if such ratings will take away our good rating, which will lead us to lose our Priority Driver badge, that will take away our privilege as well as some extra income what we might be getting. So, riders don't realize this." When Eshan says, "priority badge," he is referring to Uber Pro, which Uber claims is "a rewards program inspired by you and designed to help you reach

your goals—both on and off the road" (Uber Technologies, 2024). With Uber Pro, drivers are awarded on a scale of blue, gold, platinum, and diamond. Moving up on this scale not only unlocks more information when accepting rides and access to more rides but also access to discounts on fuel and car repairs. This is further evident of ratings directly impacting drivers' pay, as they earn points the more rides they accept, and their rating must be 4.85 or above with a cancellation rate of 3% or below (Uber, 2024).

Imran points out that you can achieve this with platinum while using Uber Pro, drivers have access to more information about longer rides:

> *It doesn't tell you where you're going. It's funny, they have different reward levels, so you must reach the platinum level to be able to see the duration of the ride and the pickup and drop off locations of the rides you're accepting. And to reach that level, it's practically impossible to reach that level unless you do Uber 40 hours a week continuously for two to three months, which at the end of the day, doesn't financially make any sense at all. So when I do it, I know if I'm in a long drive mood, I'll just turn on the filter and just stay put. I'll do lunch, dinner, whatever the time it is, if I get the ride. […] I would prefer a ride from Lyft any day over Uber, although Lyft pays less than Uber, but at least Lyft shows you the drop-off and the pickup locations upfront, which helps you in whether you want to accept that ride or so.*

While both Uber and Lyft employ similar algorithmic gamification tactics, Imran's comment reflects Ravenelle's (2019) statement that Uber is an "extreme case" of this, using incredibly manipulative algorithmic techniques on drivers.

Further, this section reveals that rideshare platforms like Uber and Lyft's algorithmic management is a tactic for "soft control" (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016) over drivers, urging them to continue working long hours chasing hollow incentives of higher pay utilizing "gamification techniques" (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 271). Moreover, algorithmic control over drivers complicates Uber's own claim that " Uber is a great way to be your own boss" (Uber, 2024). Surge pricing keeps drivers on the road, chasing the illusion of higher pay, often coercing them into continuing to work even after deciding to sign off for the day (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016). Moreover, this next section of the chapter will explore what participants have expressed regarding their experience with managing customer ratings while working for Uber and Lyft.

## 4.2 Your Own Boss, or Uber Bossed Around?

### *4.2.1 Ratings: Manufacturing Compliance, Fostering Discontent*

Srnicek (2017) claims that financialized capitalism is appropriating data collection as a new raw material, and platforms are spearheading this. Platforms assemble themselves as digital spaces for interaction, as they are intermediaries between customers and service providers. For this reason, they serve as excellent apparatuses for data extraction, and this is especially the case for lean platforms (Srnicek, 2017). As lean platforms, Uber and Lyft's most important assets are their data analytics and software. Uber collects data from all rides and all its drivers. Drivers are also producing their own data by working for Uber, and since Uber automatically owns this data, it immediately becomes commodified (Cullen, 2023). Chan and Humphreys (2018) examine the regulation of drivers' behaviours through data collection and rating systems. While the authors argue this often results in drivers' compliance, participants demonstrate awareness of this, as rating systems can impact their pay. This was the case for Eshan after an issue with a rider

getting angry with him and giving him a 1-star rating after he took the 407 without knowing the rider did not want him to. Eshan voiced his concerns to Uber:

> *I dropped her at her home very genuinely, and gently. Just after that, I called Uber and explained the situation, and I told them that her rating should not impact my ratings because it was not my fault. Uber never gave me training, saying: "First you need to ask the rider if they are okay to take 407 or not." So, they said, it will not impact. And it's still sitting on my profile as one star.*

Despite Eshan's expression of an honest mistake, and Uber's claim that the rating would not impact his profile, the one-star still sits there. Eshan also mentions the fact that Uber did not give him any "training," therefore there is no way he could have known to not take the 407. Further, what's pointed out here is true for many lean platforms, including Uber and why they are so profitable: Part of cutting down costs is not training workers (Srnicek, 2017). In the same vein, Uber provides workers' cars. Workers are using their own, which is another cost-cutting factor for Uber. This is a double benefit for Uber, for not only does it cut costs, but it allows them to market driving for Uber as a form of "being your own boss." However, this has negative implications for drivers, as Eshan verifies:

> *Right now, currently I'm driving a Tesla and people slam the door as if it's [a] garbage bin. And they slam it so badly that it hurts because it's not easy to own a car and maintain a car for pennies what they are paying us.*

Eshan is expressing how difficult it is to maintain his car with the inadequate wages he makes from Uber, and how customers slamming his door upsets him, as he is afraid of the car being damaged and having to pay for repairs. Further, this situation is directly intertwined with

how drivers are impacted by the ratings system: “And then if you tell the riders to be polite when closing the door, again, they give us bad rating because they don't like anyone telling them how to close the door.”

Uber’s promise of “being your own boss” quite obviously falls short, evidently through this contradictory situation Eshan, and many other drivers, are in: You want your car to be treated well to prevent having to pay for repairs, but you do not want to make comments to riders that will result in a drop in ratings, meaning you either get less rides, or eventually removed from the app. In their article *How Platform Workers Reckon with the Risks of Gig Labor,* Schor et. al. (2023) state that because Uber is a platform *mediator* and does not claim to be an employer, (they refer to drivers as driver-partners), workers are consistently exposed to unfair treatment from customers.

Platforms position themselves as “mere suppliers of information services, adopting a hands-off posture in relation to their workforce” (Schor et al. 2023) p. 17. Uber absolves itself from responsibility, distancing itself from any employer-employee relationship. Drivers are exposed to risks that may not exist in a more standard employment relationship, including the risk of your personal property (their car) being damaged. Schor et al. (2023) also claim that drivers assess risks inherent in platform work based on how secure of an income they have. For example, an Uber driver relying solely on their income from Uber may perceive risks to be greater than a driver who uses Uber for supplementary pay (Schor et al. 2023). This is reflective of Eshan’s case, as he is searching for a standard full-time job and doing Uber in the meantime.

Further, rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft's promise of "flexibility" and "being your own boss" can be connected to masculine identities related to entrepreneurship and breadwinning. Garlick (2023) identifies a gender-neoliberalism nexus that is tied to the lack of opportunity for working class, racialized men to be "breadwinners" and "providers" with secure employment within an era of neoliberal capitalism where control and freedom are promised to "neoliberal subjects." Choi (2018) states that there exists an "urban hegemonic masculine ideal that values entrepreneurship [and] wealth" (p. 496). Thus, platform companies like Uber and Lyft exacerbate this gender-neoliberalism nexus, as they promote hegemonic masculinities of entrepreneurship and control—hence "being your own boss" —but ultimately fail (intentionally) to deliver these (Choi, 2018; Garlick, 2023).

Nasir is in a position where Uber is his only job. As previously mentioned, he acknowledges that Uber does not pay drivers fairly, stating that only doing surges is the pay "fair." However, he also expresses that he prefers Uber to a standard employment relationship for the very reason Uber says he should. When asked if he feels a sense of entrepreneurship or if it feels like he is his own boss, he states: "Yeah, absolutely. That's why I'm in this field. […] Uber is free to make your choice. He never stops you from settling down your time, and he does not fix you [to a schedule]. You only work this time to this time. That's the liberty of work."

Nasir is technically an outlier, by the measure of Schor et al. (2023), as he is embracing risk and adopting an entrepreneurial attitude despite relying on Uber for his sole income. However, Nasir goes on to express frustrations with Uber's function:

> *the problem with Uber [is] you only communicate about anything if you are happy, if you're sad, if you have some grievances from your customer, or feedback, you are*

*communicating with the machine. Right. There is no human. So, it's become very frustrating when you try to tell them or try to explain your side is hard, how you communicate yourself. But Uber only like other industries, they always give preference to their customer, not the driver, as their team member.*

While Nasir expresses feeling a sense of control and "being his own boss," he is also expressing discontent with the same function of the app that creates that illusion of control—there's no human "boss," and thus it is incredibly difficult and frustrating when trying to voice concerns to Uber. Nasir also self-identifies as a breadwinner and identifies strong divisions of paid and unpaid work in the home between him and his wife. It can be inferred that his entrepreneurial attitude towards rideshare work is an attempt to maintain a sense of control and hegemonic manhood that is challenged within the "gender-neoliberalism nexus" that Garlick (2018) identifies.

*4.2.2 Algorithms, Ratings and Emotional Labour*

Further, Chan and Humphreys (2018) acknowledge platform companies' rating systems often result in drivers performing emotional labour in exchange for a good rating (p. 32). Van Doorn (2017) states that ratings act as another metric to control and surveil those providing services. In their book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling,* Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labour as "labor [that] requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). This can render workers feeling estranged or alienated from aspects of themselves "either the body or the margins of the soul—that is *used* to do the work" (p. 7). While Hochschild refers to the workers "employer" throughout their writing, indicating the existence of a human boss,

platform workers experience this emotional labour requirement and alienation through the control of algorithms and ratings. When asked about emotional challenges with rideshare work, Sanjay stated:

> *Yeah, there are times it gets annoying. There are times when you don't even want to be in the car yourself. Right? Yeah. There are bad ones, but they're good ones, too. Right. Sometimes you get to talk to people. Right. There are good aspects of it, too. You meet some interesting people.*

Here, Sanjay is expressing discontent with having to not only be in the car when he does not want to but also put on a front that he is enjoying himself, catering to riders' social and emotional needs. Newlands et al. (2019) acknowledge that on top performing emotional labour, drivers are often expected to provide riders with water or snacks.

Emotional labour performed by drivers is also inextricably linked to masculine identity and service work. As stated by Choi (2018), "masculine identities are built around men's access to masculine service niches and control over working conditions in these niches" (p. 493). "Masculine service niches" include, according to Choi (2018), forms of service work that are "[….] dominated by men and that require skills that are considered masculine—such as driving and security work" (p. 496). Thus, rideshare work being dominated by men (Brurder, 2020) and requiring the skill of driving renders it a "masculine service niche."

While Choi (2018) is discussing masculine identities and lack of control over working conditions in the context of increasing precarious nature of the work of male taxi drivers in South China, this rings true for male rideshare workers in advanced capitalist countries, specifically the participants in this thesis. As described by Choi (2018), one element of increased precarity

experienced by the male taxi drivers interviewed for their research is the "feminization" of their "masculine service niche" through the loss of control/power in service interactions with their customers. Rideshare workers interviewed for this thesis experience the same loss of control through the management and surveillance of their service providing through algorithms, ratings, and other gamification techniques employed by platforms Uber and Lyft. This forces them to perform a degree of emotional labour to satisfy their rider, which in turn keeps them in good standing on the platform (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016).

Further, Glöss et al. (2016) acknowledges an extra layer of "identity work" as a form of emotional labour that racialized rideshare workers may have to do. All participants in this research are South Asian, so this is particularly pertinent. Farhad mentions these difficulties while driving: "challenges like you get many kinds of customers, so you should have these high skills of customer service to customize yourself, adapt yourself according to the cultural background or even the psychology background of each one." Newlands et al. (2019) acknowledge how this can also be the experience of riders; they may struggle to navigate cultural and social norms entering the personal space of their driver—a service provider who is also a stranger.

Further, while emotional labour is typically associated with feminized service work, the performance of emotional labour by rideshare workers can also reflect the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity through the surveillance and policing of rideshare workers' emotions. Men are generally expected to have great control over their emotions, and this self-control allows for the reproduction of the hegemonic masculinity that men are rational, logical beings (Seidler, 2007). Emotional labour requires not only the performance of positive emotions but also the

regulation of emotions. Rideshare workers are expected by platforms to suppress the outward display of negative emotions including frustration, sadness, anxiousness, despair etc. (Dinh and Tienari, 2021). This is also visible through the lack of support for workers by Uber and Lyft. As previously stated in section *4.2.1 Ratings: Manufacturing Compliance, Fostering Discontent,* a participant, Nasir, states his frustration with the lack of human response from Uber when he wants to voice concerns. Drivers are expected to suppress any negative feelings towards riders or towards the app and continue to work.

### 4.3 Flexibility: Myth or Reality? Balancing Paid Work and Unpaid Household Work/Family Time

As discussed in the first two sections of this chapter, there's been substantial research on the emergence of gig work along with proponents that tout flexibility of hours as a benefit of platform work (Woodcock and Graham, 2020). Flexible work arrangements and control over hours of work may be an obvious pull factor, despite the hollow promise of flexibility and algorithmic soft control of workers (Kessler, 2018).

Haley Kwan (2022) acknowledges a gap in scholarship on platform work and social reproduction and looks at women rideshare workers' gendered experience with work-family life flexibility. She acknowledges that women platform workers often find themselves grappling with work-family conflict and that flexibility of scheduling is not the solution to this. This thesis acknowledges that women primarily face the brunt of this conflict. Yet, with aspects of the male-breadwinner, female-caregiver contract eroding, including the rise of two-earner households, men are taking on more unpaid childcare responsibilities (Vosko, 2009). Further, the data

analyzed in this chapter examines male rideshare workers' grappling with "flexible" work (Stapp, 2021) and the balancing of unpaid household responsibilities and family time.

*4.3.1 Work Hard, Play Less, Sleep Even Less*

Hasan is a father, Uber driver and part-time accountant. Hasan reveals the downsides of Uber's "flexibility" when trying to balance household responsibilities with rideshare work. According to Hasan, the downside of Uber's "flexibility" is that you never feel like you've worked enough—there's always more money to be made:

> *The reason is sometimes you are free, and you want to make more money due to flexibility. […] on Saturday, when everybody is home, I try to always leave my home around three o'clock because it is a weekend, so I can make more money. [The downside of flexibility is that] sometimes you want to drive more. It is never enough.*

Further, Dilshan, a 29-year-old with a four-month-old baby, acknowledges the "flexibility" of driving for Uber:

> *[…] earning is my priority right now […] I'm doing Uber Lyft just for the flexibility. And I think, yes, there is a time barrier as well. It depends on everybody else's situation, because if I was a single, then I have a lot of time for this. But right now, I'm staying with my family, so most of the time I spent with the family. So, I barely got time for anything else.*

Dilshan describes himself as working for Uber "full-time," and his partner works full-time from home. He states that earning is his priority, however, the rest of his time is spent with his family, and he does not have much time for "anything else." While Dilshan acknowledges the flexibility of driving for Uber allowing him to balance his work and family life, he still feels as

though he's in a time constraint. Two days of the week his wife must go into the office, and Dilshan stays home to look after their baby. Nevertheless, Dilshan's childcare responsibilities extend past those two days, as he works for Uber in the evenings on weekdays, usually from 6 pm to 3 am. He and his partner share daily childcare responsibilities. Thus, Dilshan's days are filled with both paid and unpaid work, and he's forgoing adequate sleep and downtime.

When asked whether the "flexibility" of rideshare work is beneficial for balancing paid work with household responsibilities, Yusuf states the work is "more than full-time":

> *I mean, it's more than full-time. If it's a nine-to-five job or any eight, nine hours of a job, you exactly know the amount of work you're going to do in the number of days. But this gig work, someday it's lengthy, 12, 13, 14 hours and other days it's nothing like today. So, the flexibility is there, but I don't know.*

Yusuf stated that his hours doing rideshare end up amounting to more than the hours of a standard full-time job, and he is hesitant with his acknowledgement of any flexibility that comes with the work. His experience solidifies "flexibility" as a myth, for working more than full-time hours to support yourself and your family is not indicative of choice, but necessity.

**4.4 Time, Service Work, and Masculinity**

Chapter 4 revealed the shortcomings of platform apps' promise of "flexibility" for workers. Platform apps like Uber and Lyft have workers in a constant push and pull, trying to acquire the most amount of pay for the least amount of driving. This is difficult to do when Uber and Lyft only compensate drivers for engaged time, which is less than half of the time they spend on the road (RideFair, 2024), and when drivers are chasing a false incentive of increased surge pricing (Dowling, 2023). Drivers end up working long hours and irregular shifts—according to

Ammad, sometimes up to 14 hours a day. Moreover, data collection through ratings and algorithmic control over drivers impact their autonomy, which is in direct contradiction with the promise of "flexibility" and the ability to "be your own boss." Thus, workers find themselves struggling to balance their paid work and unpaid household/childcare responsibilities. The next chapter will look at how this paid and unpaid work is delegated between participants and their partners amid this struggle, and whether participants are maintaining, or diverging—or simultaneously doing both—from the male breadwinner/female caregiver gender binary.

## CHAPTER 5: GENDERED PLATFORM LABOUR

This chapter analyzes data regarding the delegation of unpaid childcare responsibilities between participants and their partners. It looks at how though participants are often maintaining elements of the male-breadwinner, and female-caregiver gender roles, some divergences can be attributed to the convoluted borders of paid and unpaid work lives that participants are experiencing with rideshare work. It examines how this interacts with the reproduction, or dismantling of, hegemonic masculinities—specifically, the maintenance of the male breadwinner role. Katz, Mitchell, and Marston 2004 state that "Hegemony is secured—or may be frayed—in the overlapping of spaces where home and work, the public and the private, state and society converge" p. 433.

In their paper *Brothers and Broken Dreams: Men, masculinity and emotions in platform capitalism,* Dinh and Tienari (2021) note that platform work can challenge men's ability to reproduce hegemonic masculinities, and that proponents of platform companies' touting of flexibility and control over hours of work may manufacture new forms of desired, and/or enacted, masculinity. Gorman-Murray (2015) notes the connection between full-time, paid employment and Euro-American masculine ideals, and the responsibility of achieving a "gendered citizenship" in advanced capitalist countries. He states this is especially true for "men who are husbands and fathers—those who are breadwinning to 'keep' a family" (p. 72). All participants interviewed for this thesis are both husbands and fathers, and their desire to maintain a breadwinning role is present throughout the data collected from interviews; however, divergences—whether intentional are not—are also visible.

## 5.1 Divergences from Male-Breadwinner, Female-Caregiver Norms: Partners with Paid Work

As stated by Dinh and Tienari (2021): “Working for platform companies is likely to challenge opportunities that men (and women) have in enacting dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity. These companies' promises of autonomy and prosperity may also engender new forms of desired masculinity” (p. 612). As explored in Chapter 4, many participants find themselves working irregular, long hours for Uber and/or Lyft that these platform companies would tout as “flexible” (TWU, 2023) with unreliable pay to balance household responsibilities and childcare. This can engender masculinities that diverge from the traditional male-breadwinner norm (Dinh and Tienari, 2021). However, it’s important to note that the divergence from a full-time, standard employment relationship and a distinct female-caregiver, male-breadwinner divide does not negate any presence of hegemonic masculinities. This is a reason for acknowledging masculinitie(s) in the plural, as forms of hegemonic masculinities may exist even in the presence of divergences (Dinh and Tienari, 2021) (Connell, 1995). This is visible throughout most interviews with participants.

### *5.1.1 Balancing Household Responsibilities, Rideshare Work and Remote Paid Work*

For example, Rehan, a 30-year-old father of an infant, openly states that he is the breadwinner of his family and admits to his wife doing more childcare than him. Rehan drives for Uber and Lyft part-time and has a part-time remote job. However, when Rehan provides a breakdown of childcare responsibilities, it is revealed that he does more than he lets on:

> *She [wife] has a part-time job and she is working full-time remote, so that helps with respect to the childcare as well. My working hours are mostly flexible to my daytime job*

*hours. So that helps. You know, when she is working and when she is doing chores in home, I take care of the baby and then when I'm on the calls and meetings we kind of shift along my average hours. Per week doing Uber and Lyft have obviously reduced compared to when I didn't have a baby, because obviously I struggled to find some work-life balance with the baby as well in the home and doing the same number of hours. […] I had to cut down my Uber hours to take care of that.*

While Rehan self-identifies as a breadwinner and does financially provide more for his family than his partner does, he's also very implicated in childcare and household responsibilities. Even during his workdays, Rehan is squeezing in childcare, as he's switching back and forth between taking care of the baby and joining work calls. He also limited his hours of rideshare work to take on more childcare responsibilities. Further, even within these divergences, masculinities are still in pluralized, and in flux; within Rehan's childcare responsibilities exists delegations of social reproductive labour that are arguably reflective of hegemonic masculinities. When asked about the specifics of how childcare responsibilities are delegated, Rehan responded:

*[…] we tag team depending on what's needed. Usually, I try to get away from changing diapers. When it's stuff like putting the baby to sleep and giving some attention to the baby or if the baby needs to be fed, something like that, I'm more okay to do that. […] My wife does more of the cooking. I do help, but not as much as my wife does.*

Here, Rehan is voicing that he has the choice to opt out of the "messy, fleshy components of material life" (Katz, Mitchell, and Marston, 2004, p. 11) that he does not want to do. This is in line with the fact that while the female-caregiver, male-breadwinner roles are eroding in some

sense, especially in two-earner households (Bhattacharya, 2017) it is simultaneously true that women are still doing around 75% of the unpaid care and domestic work globally, and that they spend between two-to-ten more hours doing care work for children (Ferguson, 2020). Thus, it should be no surprise that Rehan is able to be more selective with which bits of the "messy, fleshy" work he chooses to do (Katz, Mitchell and Marston, 2004, p. 11).

*5.1.2 "Kind of Equal": Ebb and Flow of Caregiving Responsibilities*

Dilshan is a 29-year-old full-time Uber driver whose partner also works a hybrid job. She goes to the office twice a week and works from home the rest of the week. He is the primary caretaker of his four-month-old baby while his wife works: "my partner, she is working from home all the time and she works in a hybrid model. She has to go to the office just twice a week […] in those days I'm staying at home and I'm looking after the children." Doucet (2006) stated that while conducting a study on "stay-at-home" fathers, they found that the fathers that were interviewed were not necessarily always at home. They were often engaged in some form of paid work. This is the case for Dilshan, as though he is the primary caregiver during his wife's work hours, he also drives for Uber full-time hours, but in the evening. He states:

> *I am available all the time, and I mostly do Uber on evening. I started by 6:00 p.m. And ended up on 03:00 a.m. To the next morning. So, in the meantime, I was away from the family, and after that, I have the whole time to spend with the child and with my family.*

Further, Doucet (2006) writes that often, fathers' self-identification as a "stay-at-home" father meant they were the primary caregiver of their children while their wife is working, and that usually, these fathers were primarily "*sharing* care rather than providing primary or

secondary care" (p. 80). Dilshan states that he is the primary caregiver of his baby while his wife works her full-time job:

> *[…] this parenting thing is compromised by our work schedule because on weekends, my wife, she is busy all the time from 09:00 A.m. To 05:00 p.m. So, in that time, I'm taking care of my child. So, after that, she is available.*

While Dilshan does not identify as a stay-at-home father, his and his partners' situation continues to align with Doucet's (2006) research findings on how stay-at-home fathers identify. Of the fourteen couples they interviewed, it was found that being a stay-at-home father led to *shared* caregiving responsibilities. This is rooted in the fact that despite men taking on more caregiving responsibilities, women still do most of the unpaid domestic work (Ferguson, 2020), and this work is often invisible, or relegated to simply a "labour of love," as put by Meg Luxton (1980). Despite aligning with the "stay-at-home" father and "primary caregiver" self-identifying criteria of the fathers Doucet (2006) interviewed, Dilshan states that his and his partner's caregiving responsibilities are "equally balanced," and then switches to saying "kind of equal":

> *Yes, it is equally balanced because, […] she [goes] to office and I stay all the time and take care of [the baby] and on weekends, she stays at home, and she takes care of the child. So, it's kind of equal.*

Further, both Umar and Dilshan have stated that the delegation of childcare responsibilities between them and their partner are "kind of equal." For Umar, this means acknowledging that because he works full-time throughout the week *and* does Uber on the side, he has less time to spend with his baby:

*[…] it's kind of equal. But sometimes since I work full-time, so I have a little less time comparatively to spend. But yeah, when we both are not working, it's pretty much equal. If she looks in the kitchen, I look for the baby, or vice versa.*

Umar is technically the breadwinner of the family, as his wife went from full-time to part-time to take on more childcare and Umar works a full-time job on evenings throughout the week and does Uber as supplementary work. However, despite this, it is evident that Umar makes a distinct divergence from the male-breadwinner, female-caregiver role. Doucet (2006) notes that there's natural ebb and flow in partners' delegation of childcare responsibilities: "households, relationships, individuals, couples, and children are not static entities" (p. 80). Dilshan and Umar's reflection on delegation of childcare responsibilities between them and their partner is reflective of this; their statements do not outline exact scheduling, and their wording can be convoluted, just as their experiences navigating their work/family life balances are.

Sanjay works full-time as an evening caretaker for the school board on weeknights and drivers for Uber on weekdays, and his partner works full-time as a teacher. He and his partner have three sons. When the boys were babies, Sanjay's partner took full year maternity leave for each child. Now that his partner is back to work and his children are school-age, Sanjay says that he spends the most time with his children on the weekends. When asked whether he believes childcare responsibilities are equally delegated between him and his partner, he states: "No, my wife does more. I'll be honest." The childcare responsibilities Sanjay takes on are more often outside of the home: "Yeah, because basically Monday through Friday, I drop them off at school, unless they're sick or something like that. […] It's basically just that one hour before they get

dropped off." As Sanjay drives for Uber on weekdays, he can drop his children off at school and then immediately turn on Uber.

The borders between home and work from Sanjay become quite muddled here, and as such might be interpreted as a divergence from hegemonic masculinity. Schieman and Glavin (2008) state: "The gendered borders of work and family imply that it has been more *acceptable for men* to 'take work home,' while interference from family to work is more likely for employed women" p. 595. With the double-edged sword of "flexibility" working for Uber (Woodcock and Graham, 2020), Sanjay can, in a sense, "take his kids to work"—the only separation between work and dropping his kids off at school is turning on the Uber app or accepting a ride. Thus, it could be argued that this is a form of interference from "family to work," as opposed to "taking work home," rendering it a divergence from hegemonic masculinity (Schieman and Glavin, 2008).

*5.1.3 Breadwinner, Househusband or Somewhere In-between?*

Umar, a twenty-seven-year-old father of a three-year-old daughter, who is a rideshare worker and has an office job, attempts to clearly state when he must be physically in the office:

> *We both know the [work] schedules that we have and the responsibilities we have through our work. And based on that, like, certain days I'm super busy, and certain days when I have to be in the office, that's mostly Wednesday. […] Wednesday is the day I have to be in the office. That's why I asked you to schedule this today. […] Wednesday I have to be in the office and that is very clear. So she [his wife] tries to have her schedule clear on Wednesday so that when I am at work physically, she can look for the baby. So it's all sorted.*

While Umar says Wednesdays are the days he is in the office, he also states this is "mostly" the case, and that he's also "super busy" other days while he works from home. He also states that his partner must work her schedule around when he must be in the office, highlighting the need to alter work schedules for childcare. While Umar clearly desires to make a distinction between his paid work and family time, there's still convolution with separation between childcare and paid work when he's working from home. This becomes more complex with working for Uber thrown into the mix:

> *I finish work [full-time job] at five and then I got a whole, like half of the day with my family. I help my wife cook dinner and stuff like that. And weekends. I have planned it [working for Uber] in a way that I still enjoy the whole weekend. It's just that I just do [Uber] Friday, Saturday, and sometimes a little time on Sunday. I only do it when it's like 10:00 p.m. And then do it until early morning and that time anyway, my family is sleeping, and then I get a little less sleep on the weekends, but I'm still making money to pay the bills and all that. So, it's not like I'm compensated [or] I'm losing time for my family or so because I still have spent the entire day with them.*

Here, Umar states that he still enjoys the "whole weekend," however he still does Uber weekend nights and forgoes sleep to make money and still spend the days with his family. When I first asked Umar when he works for Uber, he stated: "I don't usually go on Uber through the week or so. And weekends, the whole day except for midnight." The second time he was asked, his response was different: "Yes, weekends and weekend nights."

Overall, it seems as though Umar desires to have a distinct schedule that outlines time for paid work, and time for family and household responsibilities. His intentions to establish clear

borders between work and home are present, however the precarious nature of working for Uber combined with his hybrid full-time job and his partner's job renders this a difficult task. While Umar does not identify as a "stay-at-home father", or "househusband," his experiences are nonetheless comparable to Peter's, a participant Gorman-Murray (2015) interviewed. Peter is a stay-at-home father who tried balancing flexible paid work with childcare. Gorman-Murray Peter as I did with Umar. Peter struggles to plan his time, as he is uncertain of his paid work schedule ahead of time, and his "free time," time that he wishes he had to himself, ends up being encompassed by parenting and responsibilities in the home (Gorman-Murray, 2015, p. 74). Both Umar and Peter find themselves juggling complex, dynamic schedules managing their work and home lives. Gorman-Murray (2015) states that this combined with lack of free time, and time to plan, can manufacture a sense of "placelessness" both at home and at work, and create feelings inadequacy in their performance of productive and reproductive labour.

Participants were asked the question of whether they find more satisfaction in paid work, or housework/childcare (socially reproductive labour). While Umar's answer was not clear-cut, his answer highlights a sense of accomplishment in being the breadwinner:

> *I find it more pleasing to earn for my family than I would earn for myself. So just three years ago, I was the only dependent of mine because I wouldn't care for anyone else. […] But now, since I look for my whole family and all that, it's just more relieving because I think when you give out to other people […], that makes you feel like you're doing really good.*

It can be inferred that this sense of "placelessness" with indistinct home and work life borders has resulted in participants' attempts to solidify the home/work binary and reaffirm their role as a paid worker. Yusuf states:

> *I'd rather be working for a paid job. […] it's okay [childcare], but I'm not an expert in it. […] My wife does better job in that I do take care of them, […] their wants and their needs, she understands them better. So, to be very honest, I'd rather be working.*

Here, Yusuf is reaffirming his role as a breadwinner, and clearly stating his belief that his wife is simply *better* at taking care of their children, and thus naturalizing male-breadwinner, female-caregiver gendered binary (Vosko, et. al. 2009). Referring to Katz, Mitchell, and Marston (2004), the hegemonic masculinity of breadwinning seems to be secured in this space between home and work. However, Yusuf states that his wife does Uber Eats part-time, and often sporadically while looking after the kids:

> *[…] my wife is very part-time here and there. Maybe she'd do once or twice an entire month or not even that. […] my wife is always with the kids, and I am the one usually out there. Okay. If I'm not working, that day, like today, if she would want to go grab something from outside, she would turn on her Uber Eats, grab something for someone on the way, make a little bit of money and come back. That's how she does it.*

This quote both reaffirms Yusuf's role as the main breadwinner, as he states he is "usually out there [doing Uber]" and highlights convoluted borders between work and home for Yusuf's partner. Her paid work becomes extremely intertwined with her unpaid work; if she's going to pick something up for the family or drop off/pick up her children, she may pick up an Uber Eats delivery on the way for extra money. Other scholars have found this is the case for

many women platform workers. For example, Milkman et al. (2020) states that food delivery and personal shopping has become a neoliberal form of "wages for housework," as it commodifies and monetizes unpaid social reproductive labour and provides a "neoliberal solution to work-family conflict" p. 358. Further, with relatively defined roles of paid and unpaid work between him and his wife, Yusuf expresses that having to work is the reason he cannot spend more time with his family:

> *So, yes, especially on events and weekends, any special occasion, Christmas, Thanksgiving, whatever. I'd rather be on the road because that's where the money is. But my family wants to be with them when I cannot. So they do understand. Initially, it was very hard for them to ingest it, but now they're okay with it, kind of. But I do get looks.*

Yusuf's wording is significant here, for he is stating he *cannot* be with his family because the "road [is] where the money is." This highlights Yusuf's perception of himself as a breadwinner, and fits with the assertion that while male platform workers are balancing household responsibilities with paid work, work/home boundaries tend to be more convoluted for women, as they are often trying to incorporate remunerated work into, or forgoing it, for unpaid household responsibilities as opposed to prioritizing paid work (Milkman, 2020).

## 5.2 Maintaining the Male-Breadwinner / Female-Caregiver Roles

### *5.2.1 Gendering Public and the Private*

While most participants diverged from the male-breadwinner, female-caregiver role to some degree, this is not the case for Nasir, a 55-year-old full-time Uber driver and father of three. When asked if his wife has ever worked, he stated: "No, she's a housewife. A housewife from day one." This theme continues as he continues to answer questions about delegation of

childcare responsibilities: “Out of home, everything done by me. And at home, she does everything.” By defining his work as “out of [the] home” and everything done by his wife as “at home,” Nasir is making a clear distinction between the public and the private. As stated by Winders and Smith (2018), binaries of work and home reify the separation of production and reproduction as separate, distinct spheres of daily life, and these spaces are gendered.

Gorman-Murray (2015) outlines how these borders can be instrumental in shaping hegemonic, “breadwinner” masculinities: “doing masculinity is primarily identified with performing full-time work activities outside the home. On the other hand, the solidification of boundaries is itself enrolled in doing masculinity—the practice of compartmentalizing home and work, crossing the public/private boundary, and ‘leaving home’ can be ‘central to masculine identification’” (p. 76). Nasir continued to reaffirm these gendered boundaries as the interview went on. When asked if there’s any division in caregiving responsibilities between him and his partner, Nasir stated:

> *Another thing is, I already told you that outside work or anything is done by me. I am responsible for those things. […] And at home, like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, this and that, to maintain the guest. At home, entertain them. That's all my wife.*

In this quote, Nasir is listing several of his partners’ in-home responsibilities, and they are encompassed in the work of social reproduction. Winders and Smith (2018) acknowledges that while the divides of the public/private and work/home often in scholarship on social reproduction reference a more discursive understanding of “a general set of ideas and practices,” (p. 873), they can also manifest in a tangible, material form, as Nasir does here by listing out the

very activities that accompany the "private" or "home" in his lived experience of the work/home, public/private binaries.

Although participants were not outright asked what their conception of "work" is and whether they view unpaid household responsibilities as "work," Nasir's response allows for some informed speculation. When asked whether he finds more satisfaction from childcare or paid work, he first states: "What do you mean by that? The paid work?" After clarification that this question was referring to his work for Uber, he states: "Paid work, of course […] everybody is doing for the paid work. Who is volunteer? There's no one volunteer here." It can be gathered that Nasir understands "work" as labour that you receive remuneration for. Doucet (2004) has found that fathers who are *home* often retain the mindset that unpaid care work is not *work,* even if they are engaging in it on a daily basis, and notes that one of the participants began his interview by saying that although he "'liked the domestic stuff, cooking and all that,' it was 'not working' that posed such difficulties for him 'as a man'" (p. 278). Thus, it would make sense that Nasir, a man who does not engage in much, if any at all, unpaid care work would remain static in his understanding of work and non-work.

*5.2.2 Breadwinning and South Asian Masculinities*

As Nasir continues to maintain the traditional male-breadwinner role, he consistently expresses love for and desire to spend time with his children. When asked whether driving for Uber full-time makes it difficult to find time to spend with his family, he states:

> *Yeah, on the weekends. Yes, because weekends with Uber is busy, so that is hard time. But as I tell you that, I scheduled my schedule myself, so I know what time I go home.*

*And when I miss my kids, I just quit the work and go home. […] on weekends […] I start [driving] after late noon.*

When asked what's the most fulfilling part of raising children, he states: "I enjoy when they are happy, they are joking to me, and they are playing each other and make fun for each other. I love that. […] Yeah. Just like seeing them happy with each other."

Further, Kukreja (2021) states that an abundance of scholarship on migratory masculinities references pressure to retain, or adapt to, the "breadwinner" heteropatriarchal masculinity. Indian and Pakistani men often acquire understanding of culturally embedded masculine norms from male family members, particularly those in a position of "authority," including older brothers, fathers, or uncles. Central to normative South Asian masculinity is dedication to taking on a "protector-provider" role, which can extend past one's own children and to elderly parents, siblings, and cousins (Kukreja, 2021). This normative masculinity operates in conjunction with the breadwinning norm, as a component of the "protector-provider" role includes financially providing. Towards the end of Nasir's interview, more casual conversation led to him stating how well his children get along: "They're well-connected siblings […] Yeah. It's very rare in Toronto, right?"

The conversation then led to how a Euro-American understanding of family can be rooted in individualism. Nasir acknowledged this, and began to elaborate on how he notices the difference between how South Asian families operate compared to white settler Canadian families:

*[…] our [South Asian families] focus is not to buy a house. Our focus is to raise the children. […] Make them a good person. That's or focus. Yeah. Because everybody here*

*[Canada], like husband and wife, only try to buy a house and pay the mortgage. That's why they ignore other things. […] That's the problem.*

It's evident that for Nasir, his conception of masculinity is rooted in providing for his family as the breadwinner, but also taking *care* of them. Nasir's comments are reflective of a broader climate of how globalized neoliberal capitalism has rendered the raising of children as an accumulation strategy, commodity, or waste, if neither of those (Katz, 2011). Nasir and his partners' focus is on raising his children to be good people, not raising them to be commodities or accumulation strategies. Further, desire to maintain the breadwinner role does not reflect a desire for capital or asset accumulation, like owning a property, but rather providing sustenance for safe and healthy living.

As masculinities are always in flux, and being constantly negotiated and reshaped (Connell, 1995) it is not founded to claim that Nasir and his family reflect all South Asian families with migrant fathers, or that white Canadian families are all void of fathers who view providing for their families as something de-commodified and rooted in deep familial commitment. This is simply not the case; rather, it is evident that Nasir statements regarding providing and raising children align with scholarship on South Asian masculinities in migratory contexts (Kukreja, 2021).

**5.3 Parental Leave: A Choice, or a Must?**

Arjun drives for Uber and Lyft full-time, and his partner is on maternity leave. When asked about how he and his partner delegate childcare responsibilities, he states: "because right now my wife is on maternity leave, she takes care [of the baby] for most of the time." Arjun's partner being on maternity leave may reveal the maintenance of the male-breadwinner female-

caregiver norm. Nonetheless, it's important to note that could have been a decision made based on lack of access to paternity leave, particularly in the context of precarious platform-work. Arjun's partner having access to maternity leave itself is reflective of an employment relationship with a level of security greater than Arjun's. Doucet (2021) states: "because of the rise of gig economies and precarious employment, more and more parents around the globe were not meeting the entitlements and eligibility criteria needed to receive employment-based parental leave benefits" (p. 227). Prior to driving for Uber, Arjun seemed to be in another precarious employment relationship, as it was full-time, but contractual and his employment was terminated as soon as the contract ended. Based on scholarship surrounding access to parental leave in precarious, particularly short-term work relationships, it is unlikely that Arjun would have had access to parental leave at his previous job (Doucet, 2021).

### 5.4 "Flexible" Work, "Flexible" Masculinity

What these participants' experiences reveal is that the non-standard employment relationship of working for Uber and Lyft and the false promise of flexibility renders the traditional male-breadwinner role a difficult one to perfect. However, it also hinders participants' ability to complete household labour and spend time with their families. Umar is forgoing sleep to work for Uber while balancing childcare and a remote job with his partner, and Yusuf is forgoing family time to work more than full-time hours for Uber. In both Umar and Yusuf's experiences, the precarious, "flexible" nature of rideshare work combined with balancing other jobs and/or household responsibilities creates instability (Woodcock and Graham, 2020).

Participants with partners who do paid work may have differing experiences from those whose partners do solely unpaid caregiving. For instance, division of caregiving responsibilities

between partners who do both forms of paid work becomes convoluted, and the irregular nature of rideshare work exacerbates this. This may be less apparent for participants with partners who do solely unpaid caregiving work, thus maintaining more elements of the male breadwinner/female caregiver dichotomy. However, in both cases, participants express divergences from hegemonic masculinities and incongruent work/home life borders.

As previously mentioned, Gorman-Murray (2015) notes that casual, flexible forms of paid work can make "home, as much as work, a site of uncertain schedules and commitments" (p. 74). This uncertainty can fracture heteromasculine identity, as having a full-time job and clear, compartmentalized boundaries between work and home is a "masculine ideal" in both Western societies (Gorman-Murray, 2015, p. 72) and manifests also in migrant South Asian masculinities (Kukreja 2021). Further, being a "breadwinner" in the context of South Asian hegemonic masculinities may differ from Eurocentric masculinities, which Nasir's self-conceptualization of being a provider is an example of (Kukreja, 2021).

Moreover, this fracturing of masculine identity across both Eurocentric and South Asian masculinities is relevant to my thesis' assertion that organizing rideshare workers in any form *must* take into account paid work and unpaid childcare and household responsibilities. Acknowledging also that there is not a singular South Asian masculinity (Kukreja, 2021), this crisis of masculinity is a transcultural issue that is embedded in precarious work under neoliberal capitalism (Dinh and Tienari, 2021) and the experiences of these rideshare workers illuminate it. Thus, while the way this crisis manifests in men varies with varying forms of masculinities, the need for paid work to interfere less with unpaid work and vice versa proves to be a common ground.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: MASCULINITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZING PLATFORM WORKERS

Rideshare work is a form of non-standard, platform-based work (Tucker, 2020). As stated in Chapter 2, Tucker (2020) places platform work at the intersection of precarious work and the platform economy (Srnicek, 2017). Trade unions have historically organized workers in standard employment relationships (Vosko, 2009) and have had difficulties organizing non-standard and precarious work (Zahn, 2019). Further, the classification of platform workers as 'self' or 'independent' contractors renders workers' capacity for collective representation exceptionally difficult, as this status is "generally considered incompatible with union membership" (Vandaele, 2018, p. 18). Nevertheless, this thesis operates with an understanding that despite characteristics distinguishing platform-based work from historical forms of non-standard work, such as platform technologies and unbounded worksites, classical organizing methods with adaptation to account for the spatial dispersion and algorithmic management of workers can be effective for organizing platform workers. Adaptations may include shortening the classic, full-length organizing conversations to account for rideshare and food couriers' pressure to work quickly, which was a tactic employed by Foodsters United organizers (Gray, 2022).

This final chapter begins with existing examples of platform workers organizing while accounting for the novelty of algorithmic management (Gray, 2022; Aslam and Woodcock, 2020). It then focusses on participants' sentiments regarding existing forms of solidarity, or for some, lack thereof, between Toronto-based rideshare workers. It also explores participants' perspectives regarding the idea of a union for rideshare workers and looks at their reasons for

being apprehensive. Lastly, this chapter pulls from data on participants' balancing of paid and unpaid work to argue a need for organizing around workers' convoluted work and home lives. I argue that work and home lives for participants are incredibly complex, and that being a rideshare worker does not uncomplicate anything; rather, the "flexible" nature of the work is further convoluting participants work/home life borders (Woodcock and Graham 2020); (Gorman-Murray, 2015). I suggest the need to account for unpaid social reproductive labour in organizing methods and the overall composition of a union for rideshare workers.

### 6.1 Successful Cases of Platform-based Workers Organizing

The case of Uber organizing in the UK is a relevant example of rideshare workers' success in unionizing. Organizer Yaseen Aslam co-writes with Jamie Woodcock to share their experiences as lead organizers of Uber workers in London, England. Aslam states that when he first decided to work for Uber, he was coerced by the "promise of making money and working flexibility [he] needed—or the supposed freedom to be [his] own boss" (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020). Aslam's statement highlights the condition of work in the platform economy and neoliberal capitalism. The notion of "being your own boss" is in line with the promotion of the neoliberal "individual pursuit of self-interest" (Kotz, 2018, p. 15).

Aslam's first discontent with working for Uber was the rating system. He felt that it was unfair to drivers who often had to cope with difficult customers, from simply rude ones to ones that put drivers' safety at risk (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020). Moreover, Aslam states: "We [Uber drivers] were now managed by an algorithm, and at the mercy of these star ratings we never realized when we joined" (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020, p. 3). Aslam also claims that the rating system was used by both Uber and customers to blackmail drivers.

Aslam's qualm with being managed by an algorithm accentuates novelty within platform-based gig work that must be accounted for in the organizing of rideshare workers. The novelty of app-based algorithmic control does not negate the continuities of old forms of non-standard work within gig work, such as impermanency, often precarity and low wages—all existing factors that Aslam, and participants in this thesis, point to in their experiences with Uber/Lyft—rather, it means traditional organizing methods need to be modified from time to time to account for workers' experiences with algorithmic technologies (Duggan et al. 2022).

Schmidt et. al. (2022) argues that a primary drive for organizing platform workers is to combat the fact that more control over the app is given to those requesting [MC1] the service than is given to the workers. As a result, workers can end up with poor ratings that do not accurately reflect their service providing, which can lead to a decrease in service requests and thus lower pay. While Schmidt et. al. (2022) is referring to online organizing where workers communicate on forums and group chats to try and avoid repeating each other's bad experiences, Aslam's experience with organizing with Uber in London is an example of this online organizing being transformed into tangible collective action (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020).

Social media group chats proved not to be effective organizing tools for Foodsters United organizers, though they did generate the initial expressions of discontent and desire for change (Gray, 2022). As the campaign grew, organizers switched to in-person and over the phone conversing. For Uber organizing in London, Aslam states that a WhatsApp group chat with around 50-60 workers was the birth of organizing. He refers to the chat as an early "invisible organization" (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020, p. 415). However, social media group chats ultimately led to in-person meetings, which is where organizing became more concrete.

One participant interviewed for this thesis, Hasan, expressed the desire for a union but pointed out the disadvantages of a spatially dispersed workforce: “But on Uber, you cannot go and strike. You never know who is driving the Uber, who is not. You don't know each other actually.” When Aslam, Woodcock and co-organizers founded United Private Hire Drivers (UPHD) with the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), organizing meetings were held in a way that made sense for spatially dispersed workers. British trade union meetings are traditionally held in pubs, and UPHD IWGB organizers recognized that gathering in pubs would not be possible for rideshare workers. UPHD IWGB organizers altered traditional meetings and held them at venues where food could be prepared for workers who could take breaks between rides and have organizing related chats. Traditional organizing conversations still occurred, but the setting and form of meetings were altered in a way that made sense for the nature of platform work managed by algorithmic technology and lacking a definitive workplace (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020).

Through a case study on Foodora couriers in Toronto and their organizing efforts through Foodsters United, Gray (2022) argues that classic organizing methods have proven to be useful for organizing platform workers. In 2018, Foodora workers decided to discuss unionizing in a Toronto park (Williams and Schofield, 2020). Meetings became regular, and organizers began to use the classic AEIOU organizing tactic: “Agitate, Educate, Inoculate, Organize, Unionize” (Gray, 2022, p. 49). 90% of couriers attending meetings had agreed to sign union cards, and this made labour history in Canada: It was “first union vote for gig workers […] a precedent-setting ruling by the Ontario Labour Relations Board that couriers are dependent contractors and have the right to unionize” (Williams and Schofield, 2020).

As campaign grew, Gray (2022) states that some workers grew skeptical as to whether classic organizing methods would work to organize a workplace that technically stretched across an entire major city (Gray, 2022). Foodsters decided that one-on-one conversations in person or over the phone would be the most effective way to mobilize, for it demands personal commitment that social media or text group chats cannot replicate.

Though a decentralized workplace without borders that encompasses the entire city was ultimately thought to be a disadvantage for organizing efforts, there proved to be one advantage of this: Workers were able to discuss organizing without direct surveillance from management (Gray, 2022). On the other hand, algorithmic management demanding quick work placed time constraints on organizing conversations. This was mediated by workers having quick chats with other workers to collect each other's contact information. These conversations often happened on the road and were as quick as ten seconds, but they were enough to establish workers' greatest concerns: "compensation, health and safety, and dignity" (Gray, 2022). The food couriers began organizing in May 2018, and a year later they conjoined with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) (Gray, 2022). In 2021, the Foodsters United campaign was relaunched as Gig Workers United (GWU) and expanded to represent app-based delivery and rideshare workers across the Greater Toronto Area (Gray, 2022). While the formation of GWU indicates a level of success from the campaign, it is imperative to note that Foodora did pull out of Canada in late April of 2020. Foodsters' United made a statement asserting that "The company [Foodora] would rather leave thousands of vulnerable workers without any income rather than to fix glaring issues with management and tech/infrastructure" (Foosters United. 2020).

The formation of the UPHD IWGB (Aslam and Woodcock, 2020) and Gig Workers United (Gray, 2022) are quintessential examples of successful organizing of platform workers using traditional organizing tactics with adaptations to account for algorithmic management and a spatially dispersed workforce, proving that organizing rideshare workers is indeed possible.

### *6.1.1 Social Media: The Initial Spark*

In both cases, the initial expressions of discontent that led to organizing began in social media group chats or online forums. Participants interviewed for this thesis were asked whether they are in, or aware, of any rideshare group chats and whether workers share their experiences in them. Umar stated:

> *I think it's on WhatsApp and it's on Facebook. It's a pretty huge group. It has like how many? 500,000 or 50,000. I'm not too sure, I may be wrong. So that's all the gig workers, like there's people from Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, skip the dishes and all that. So that's a whole group. And then they give out updates or any incidents that happen or good or bad things happening around while they're working.*

What Umar is speaking of here was discovered also during the participant recruitment process, as it was done primarily through Facebook groups for GTA-based rideshare workers. Participants did share their experiences; a driver would make a post, usually expressing discontent over treatment from a customer or the Uber or Lyft app itself, which would be followed by comments from drivers commonly agreeing or sharing advice. These group chats and forums are common for platform workers globally. Kwan (2022) discusses sharing of experiences and a built sense of community between Chinese rideshare workers on the platforms

WeChat and TikTok, and Dinh and Tienari (2021) call social media group chats a "community of coping" (p. 615) for rideshare workers in Vietnam.

Further, participants also express feelings of hostility and individualism from these group chats and forums. When asked whether he feels a sense of community with drivers on the Facebook or WhatsApp groups he's part of, Sanjay states:

> *Well, I'm a part of the Facebook group, but to tell you the truth, they're all out for themselves. Everyone. Right. There are certain days that I kid you not, when the Muslims are offer Ramadan, a lot of people find that blessing because they'll make more money that day. Right. Yeah. You know what? You're off. Perfect. I can go out and make more money. That's all I learned about at this point. Right.*

Here, Sanjay is highlighting a lack of solidarity and individualist sentiments between rideshare workers, stating that they are looking out for themselves and not each other. Though Umar notes the sharing of incidents between drivers in the Facebook and/or WhatsApp group chat he is a part of, he also shares that he feels disconnected from other drivers:

> *I am in contact with a few other Uber drivers who are from the same city. We barely talk. It's just that we just give updates to each other that, hey, this is a busy area. There's nothing going on here. Haven't got a ride for so long. So it's just that we haven't met personally or so it's just that we try to give updates through the app, so it's helpful for just a few of us*.

While social media/online group chats may be effective for generating initial sparks of discontent, as demonstrated in the cases of UPHD IWGB and GWU's organizing, they have their limits, and Sanjay and Umar's statements here highlight these limits. Umar states that he "barely

talks" to other drivers in the chat. Gray (2022) acknowledges the issue with this lack of engagement for organizing capabilities:

> Some thought social media would be the superior outreach tool, but they realized its limits as the campaign developed. A group chat with hundreds of couriers impedes organizing if only five to ten couriers participate consistently. If co-workers gave their Facebook account as contact information, they often remained disengaged, but a phone number usually meant meaningful commitment (p. 50).

Further, participants interviewed for this thesis shared some thoughts regarding where this lack of engagement in social media group chats may stem from, and Dilshan attributed it to the already incredibly busy lives of rideshare workers, especially ones with children:

> *[…] children, babysitting, and at the same time, earning is my priority right now, so I'm doing Uber Lyft just for the flexibility. And I think, yes, there is a time barrier as well. It depends on everybody else's situation, because if I was a single, then I have a lot of time for this. But right now, I'm staying with my family, so most of the time I spent with the family. So, I barely got time for anything else.*

If participants' ability to perform unpaid household and childcare responsibilities is hindered by the "flexibility" of rideshare work, then their ability to engage in substantial conversations with one another undoubtedly would also be.

## 6.2 Participants' Perspectives on Unionization

### *6.2.1 Hesitation and Apprehension: Surveillance and Removal*

Further, several participants still expressed a desire for a union, though not without naming reasons for hesitation and apprehension, including surveillance from Uber/Lyft, and fear

of disorganization and misrepresentation. When asked what he thinks about the idea of a rideshare union, Yusuf states:

> *Sure, why not? But as long as there's some kind of benefit for it. Because I did hear not long ago there was a front like that in Toronto, and what ended up happening was Uber threw all of those driver partners off the platform. They found out somehow who were participating in that union. Somehow they found out and they basically gave them a hard time. So even though that I feel like if there is some kind of benefit in joining a group like that, I would but I would still be scared that what would I mean, it's a good organization to make supplement free income. And when it comes to the core, that if you're dependent on Uber's income and you're working full-time with Uber, you would find out so many gray areas about Uber, just like the insurance area. And the way they know, because looking into the app or into the account, they know exactly, okay, this account is full-time, and this guy is working full-time with us. So, we can do or say whatever, calls in or says anything or claims anything. They would throw you off the platform.*

Here, Yusuf is expressing a desire for a union, but is quite apprehensive, for which the primary reason is a fear of being "thrown off the platform." This fear is not unfounded, for when the Foodsters' campaign union vote got over 88.8 percent support, the employer, Foodora, pulled out from Canadian markets altogether (Gray, 2022).

Another participant, Nasir, expressed concern regarding the potential for being a member of a union that does not adequately represent them: "Unionized, if you are very organized, then it's okay. If you are not organized and you don't know who is making deals on behalf of you and you don't know 100% what's going on inside." Concerns regarding control and the potential for

inadequate representation are also not unfounded. In January of 2022, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), the largest private-sector union in the country, and Uber signed an agreement. Drivers would not actually become members of the union. In fact, they would have "no say in electing their representation," and the agreement would push provincial governments to "provide new benefits and preserve worker choice on when, where, and if to work" (Di Trolio, 2022). This deal offers drivers no real protection; in reality, it further validates Uber's ability to tout "flexibility" as its pull factor.

*6.2.2 More Pay and Benefits*

Moreover, though Yusuf is apprehensive, he also expresses that he feels there would benefits to unionization. Other participants expressed the same sentiment, including Arjun and Eshan:

> *Tomorrow, if things improved and you had some free time and you just wanted to earn some extra, then I would do it and I would say join the union. Right now, we really require one. The pay has been decreasing. The cost of everything has been rising, and they are just taking advantage of it.* (Arjun)
>
> *I wish they had it [a union] because I think they don't have it […] And I personally feel they should have it now because Uber is not being fair right now. They are stealing from the drivers. And there has to be some association to help the drivers because I am working 12 hours a day, seven days a week, which is like two full-time jobs. And even after doing that, if I'm just making 1000 or $1,200 a week, which is nothing, yeah, I'm not even making $15 an hour, and I am working hard.* (Eshan)

Both Eshan and Arjun express the desire for a union because of decreasing pay, with Eshan claiming that he works the equivalent of two full-time jobs and still makes under $15 an hour. Dilshan also desires a union, stating the need for benefits: “Yes, I think this kind of work, if unionized, there will be more benefits for such kind of workers. So, I think yes, if Uber and Lyft get unionized, there will be more benefits for the drivers.”

New York City’s Independent Drivers’ Guild (IDG) is proof that organizing can result in more benefits for rideshare workers. While not a formal trade union, upon a deal in May 2016 between Uber and a local of the International Association of Machinists, members of the IDG were afforded legal services, life insurance at a discount, and access to professional courses. Through the formation of the IDG, labour now has a “foot in the door of the gig economy” (Racabi, 2021 p. 1160) In 2021, the city passed six bills affording protection to gig workers, including bathroom access, minimum payments, tipping policies, payment standards, minimum payments, and delivery food bags with insulation (Cardin, 2021). The city also passed a law guaranteeing minimum wage for food delivery app-based drivers (Dewey–Stateline, 2023).

Vandaele (2018) utilizes the case study of Deliveroo workers on strike in London in 2016, highlighting direct action in the form of publicizing discourse debunking false flexibility and entrepreneurial narratives. Vandaele (2018) states that this form of discursive power can be “translated into rule-making and institutional power,” (p. 16) resulting in state implementation of regulatory measures on the platform economy, including standards for wages, social protection, and benefits. In Europe, there’s a larger history of unions incorporating non-standard workers into their membership, paving the way for their current support of organizing gig and platform workers. A union in Italy, Sindicato Networkers (UILTuCS), has compiled a year-long survey

with the intention of understanding the experience of gig and platform workers, with the intention of ultimately improving their conditions (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2019).

### 6.3 Beyond Misclassification and Pay: Organizing the Worker as a Whole

This thesis reveals that male rideshare workers are taking on multiple jobs, unpaid household responsibilities, and often both at once. While some participants diverge from the male-breadwinner, female-caregiver norm more than others, what all participants have in common is complex work and home life boundaries, and lack of time to spend with their families. Participants interviewed for this thesis consistently express discontent with working long, irregular hours for low pay. This is in line with the bulk of scholarship on platform labour (Srnicek, 2017; Woodcock and Graham, 2020).

Moreover, this constant contention with long, irregular hours and inadequate remuneration results in participants struggling to balance caregiving and household responsibilities. This is particularly pertinent with the rise of two-earner households (Bhattacharya, 2017). As simply put by Dilshan: “My family time got hampered by doing Uber.” It’s widely known that unions result in better pay, more benefits, and better working conditions for workers (Yates, 2009), which in turn creates a better work/life balance for workers (Behrens, 2014).

Further, the theoretical framework of this thesis references the sub-discipline of labour geography, and its increasing focus on precarity (Strauss, 2018). While this thesis understands precarity in relation to precarious work manufactured through employment relations characterized by low pay, impermanence, and lack of benefits (Vosko, 2006), it simultaneously seeks to understand precarity as a broader condition that encompasses not only workers’

relationship to employment and wage labour, but also their social lives beyond the sphere of production. This includes unpaid household and caregiving responsibilities and gendered relationship dynamics, and how this complicates workers' borders between work and home. Thus, this research contributes to the sub-discipline of labour geography, particularly within scholarship on precarity as a *social relation of employment* (Strauss, 2018 p. 625).

In his study of a workplace organizing campaign by Toronto-based food couriers, Gray (2022) asserts that the campaign successfully organized workers utilizing traditional workplace organizing tactics. He argues that while proponents of the gig economy like to tout its newness, the historical continuities of non-standard work that permeate the gig economy remain more than relevant (Gray, 2022). Aslam and Woodcock (2020) note that classic organizing methods can effectively organize gig workers, albeit with adaptations to account for issues such as a spatially dispersed workforce, algorithmic control, and customers' ratings on apps.

While both analyses may ring true, what both leave out—and what most of the scholarship on organizing gig work does not consider—is how workers' personal/family lives and responsibilities for the unpaid work of social reproduction may impact the viability of classic labour organizing methods. This thesis argues that workers' capacity to perform socially reproductive labour through unpaid household and childcare responsibilities is hampered by the "flexible" nature of rideshare work. Moreover, further research is needed on *how* labour organizing methods and strategies can be better designed to cater to rideshare workers' ability to perform socially reproductive labour. Thus, I plan to conduct a PhD project that expands on the findings of this thesis and explores this question.

### 6.4 A "New Form of Unionism"—But Not New Enough

This section argues that while unions have made significant progress in organizing workers around demands that represent workforces beyond the traditional industrial union model's "collective identity"—characterized by being male, white, and paternalistic (Cockburn, 1991; Gerstel and Clawson, 2001)—to represent workers female and racialized workers "non-standard" forms of employment including the service sector, there is plenty more to be done. This includes developing a deeper understanding of the shifting masculinities of male non-standard workers (rideshare workers in this case) and how they can be considered in organizing tactics and collective bargaining demands. A deepened understanding of shifting masculinities must also acknowledge their occurrence in a racialized workforce. Further, this understanding must also consider how a spatially dispersed workforce and the myth of "flexibility" impacts workers' work-family life balance, or lack thereof, as the findings of my thesis make apparent.

My thesis emphasizes the importance of organizing the worker as a *whole*. This involves unions' need for collective bargaining for demands that go well beyond those of traditional industrial unionism, or "job control unionism," including wages and benefits. (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003) Demands should consider workers' implications in the social reproduction process, including unpaid household responsibilities. Further, while unions certainly fall behind on work-family demands including childcare, family leave, and accounting for non-standard work schedules (Gerstel and Clawson, 2001), there is scholarship on the progress unions have made since the formation of postwar industrial unions.

Fairbrother and Yates (2003) analyze the success of industrial trade unions in the organization and representation of workers outside manufacturing, particularly workers in the service sector, often including more female and racialized workers. Through analysis on debates

of union renewal in, but not limited to, the Canadian context, the authors seek to highlight a new "new form of unionism" (p. 222) emerging through the transformation as opposed to the erosion of industrial unions. Further, Gerstel and Clawson (2001) examine American unions' responses to work-family issues, arguing that union officials have advocated for work-family issues beyond the "conventional benefits," and they explore stark differences among unions' positions regarding childcare, family leave, non-standard work schedules etc.

Shifts in employment relations and unions' responses to them in the early 1980s led to distinct readjustments of collective bargaining relationships between industrial unions and employers. Fairbrother and Yates (2003) attribute this shift to a "new non-adversarial 'flexible' model of industrial unions" (p. 223). Moreover, with the proliferation of service sector work, industrial unions could no longer depend on a growing manufacturing industry for expanding union membership and membership renewal. Thus, new strategies and tactics had to be developed to restructure union organization, which meant expanding membership criteria to include service sector workers. This required a shift of industrial unions' white male collective identity which existed due to primarily three sets of relationships: "[…] the 'brute' physical nature of the work done by industrial union members, segmented labour market relations between white men, men of colour and women and the antagonistic relationship with management" (p. 228). The breadwinner norm and the family wage were also connected to this reproduction of maleness in industrial unionism (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003).

Four key areas of adaptation are outlined by Fairbrother and Yates (2003), including "1) organizing the unorganized, 2) bargaining, 3) restructuring of internal union organizations, and 4) changes to union identity" p. 229. There's plenty of variation between unions within these adaptations; some have made the adaptations while sticking generally to the industrial union

model, and some have eroded that model. Fairbrother and Yates (2003) make a point in emphasizing that industrial unions have been successful at organizing workers in the service sector, including a large women workforce and workers of colour. They back this claim up with data, stating that "Proportionally more of the total organizing drives undertaken by industrial unions were launched in female-dominated workplaces (defined as workplaces where 60 percent or more of the workers were women) than by non-industrial unions" (p. 230-231). Moreover, while it may be true that industrial unions have been successful, to an extent, with organizing the historically unorganized, amelioration is necessary. Gersten and Clawston (2001) look at how unions have responded to family issues and the implementation of, or lack thereof, work-family policies in bargaining negotiations.

The authors begin by acknowledging unions' positions on family-work issues as inherently gendered, referencing Glass and Fujimoto's (1995) claim that unions tend to be more successful in achieving family benefits in predominantly male workplaces, even though men typically take on less caregiving responsibilities (Ferguson, 2020). In the same section, the authors refer to several other small studies, including one stating that unionization meant employers were less likely to adopt maternity leave for workers, as employers would adopt bare minimum family policies to avoid unionization. Further, the authors emphasize the overall lack of literature on union response to work-family issues, and the small-scale and thus inconclusiveness of most literature that does exist (Gersten and Clawson, 2001).

Twenty-three interviews were conducted at the national and local level. The data collected allowed Gersten and Clawson to explore a wide range of union responses—characterized by inconsistency and variety—to family issues including alternative work schedules, childcare, family leaves, and benefits. They determined that ideas of "childcare"

policy ranged from on-site childcare to subsidies, subsidies being the most popular program, and that family leave had more support among all the unions interviewed than childcare provisions did (Gersten and Clawson, 2001). Moreover, while this research project does explore union responses to non-standard work schedules and childcare individually, these are not examined as interconnected issues. This could reflect not only a discrepancy in the framing of literature on unions and work-family issues but perhaps discrepancies within unions' structure and implementation of work-family policies. Literature on union renewal employs a gendered analysis that focuses on the representation of women in unions and the proliferation of women in service work, but there is a lack of analysis on union renewal and masculinities shifting alongside work relations.

Furthermore, the findings of my thesis suggest a need for not simply the organization and unionization of rideshare workers, but for a form of unionism that acknowledges the "flexible," non-standard nature of rideshare work and lack of time to perform unpaid caregiving responsibilities as interconnected issues. Any solution must also consider male workers' implication in unpaid caregiving, while simultaneously acknowledging that these men are not giving up paid work to perform unpaid work; in the case of my participants, they are balancing both, and often so are their wives. Moreover, the collective identity of unions has shifted to not center around maleness and whiteness to reflect diverse workforces, and this is certainly a positive shift. However, is there room for a new collective identity that can be leveraged to generate solidarity among male rideshare workers? If so, what would this look like? The following section speculates around this question.

### 6.5 Organizing Around Masculinity(ies)

In an article on the attempted organizing of New York City street vendors with Vendors for Justice's (VFJ), Roychowdhury (2014) argues that organizing around collective gender identity, including around masculinity for men, can "undermine hegemony and destabilize collective action" (p. 23). This challenges a plethora of scholarship that argues that hegemonic masculinity is an effective organizing tool that can utilize a collective identity to unite workers (Connell, 1995; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Roychowdhury (2014) acknowledges this, but states that organizing around "brotherhood" not only systematically excludes and silences women, but does the same to other marginalized men, particularly those occupying masculine identities that diverge from hegemony.

Further, this research has determined that participants in this thesis are both reconstructing and diverging from hegemonic masculinities by taking on childcare and household responsibilities, and often maintaining the breadwinner role. For some participants, they are doing both at once. Many participants feel the need to financially provide for their families, thus having a desire to reproduce the male breadwinner norm even if they are taking on household responsibilities alongside. Participants are also in non-standard, precarious work, and in a "masculine service niche" (Choi, 2018) where they must perform emotional labour. Thus, organizing around traditional hegemonic, working-class masculinity is not possible for these workers, as their precarious, flexible employment relationships in the gender-neoliberalism nexus (Garlick, 2023) render them unable to reproduce solely hegemonic masculinity. However, this does not render scholarship and concrete examples of organizing around hegemonic masculinity insignificant; rather, it begs the question of whether it is possible to organize around shifting, re-constructing masculinities that diverge from hegemonic ones. This question can be

formulated as: Can male rideshare riders be organized around the demand that they *should* have access to secure, full-time, employment with a living wage that allows them to provide for them family while also acknowledging that this work should allow them to be implicated in household/childcare responsibilities? This could look like forging connections through a collective understanding that these men are hardworking paid *and* unpaid workers who deserve better working standards *and* living standards in both the paid and unpaid realms of their lives, but that one cannot be achieved without the other.

For example, at the most basic level, money is needed to fulfill the responsibilities of reproducing a family, but what is also needed is time. Organizing around issues of hours of unpaid work in the vehicle and how platforms 'steal' family time could be centred in organizing conversations. These conversations have the potential to evolve into discussions around demands for childcare, or pay adequate enough to not force drivers to work sporadic schedules that impede their caregiving responsibilities Further, emotional labour is required in both service work, which rideshare work is a form of, and in social reproductive work, though one is a paid service provided to strangers and the latter unpaid affective work with families. Thus, organizing conversations could also center on the exhausting nature of rideshare platforms' requirement of emotional labour that does not get adequately compensated, and how this causes added difficulty in performing emotional labour that goes into unpaid childcare and household responsibilities.

While the parameters of this thesis do not allow for a direct answer to this question of organizing, it is one that will be explored in future research projects that expands this thesis' findings.

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