

Motivated by Money? Class, Gender, Race, and Workers' Accounts of Platform-Based Gig Work Participation



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This article examines how workers describe their motivations for participation in the platform-based gig economy, particularly as rideshare and delivery drivers. I investigate how these accounts vary by socioeconomic class, gender, and race. Based on interviews conducted as part of the American Voices Project, I find that workers' accounts differ based on income and gender. Higher earners tend to downplay financial needs and describe platform work as a path to explore their larger community, whereas lower earners focus on financial needs and benefits. Additionally, among lower earners, explanations differed by gender. Interestingly, I did not find any differences based on race. I conclude by investigating why workers from different social groups might offer varying accounts.

Keywords: gig work, platforms, inequality, motivations, race, class, gender

Since its emergence in the wake of the Great Recession, the gig economy has increasingly served an important role within the larger economic structure (Vallas and Schor 2020). Proponents of the gig economy touted its flexibility and autonomy, allowing workers to become their own boss while earning money on their

schedule. A 2021 Pew Research Center survey shows that nearly one in six Americans have earned money using an online gig platform.¹ Women and people of color were more likely than men and White workers, respectively, to have earned money as platform workers, and lower-income adults were more likely than

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1. The Pew study asks respondents whether they have earned money by "driving for a ride-hailing app; shopping for or delivering groceries or household items; performing household tasks like cleaning someone's home or assembling furniture, or running errands like picking up dry cleaning; making deliveries from a restaurant or store for a delivery app; using a personal vehicle to deliver packages to others via a mobile app or website such as Amazon Flex; or doing something else along these lines." (Anderson et al. 2021, 3)

middle- and upper-income adults to participate in the gig economy (Anderson et al. 2021). Notably, more than half of those who have earned money from a gig platform claim that this work is essential or necessary for meeting their basic financial needs (Anderson et al. 2021).

Despite initial claims that the gig economy would empower everyday workers, socioeconomic class (class), gender, and race inequalities have been imprinted on this new form of economic organization (Ravenelle 2019; Schor 2014, 2017). Women and people of color are not only more likely to work in the gig economy than men and White workers, but also more likely to report feeling unsafe, experience rude clients, and be subjected to unwanted sexual advances when completing gig work (Anderson et al., 2021). Platform workers with lower incomes report more dissatisfaction with their work experiences, confront more precarity, and may be experiencing a “crowding out” effect as more middle-income workers perform gig jobs to supplement their income (Schor 2017; Schor et al. 2020). These issues indicate that the gig economy is not as inclusive and empowering as initially thought. Given the inequality some workers may experience while performing gig work, I ask how platform workers explain their motivations for participating in the gig economy. Although money and flexibility are viewed as the primary motivators for platform work participation (Bajwa et al. 2018; Cameron 2020; Schor and Vallas 2021), I aim to interrogate how these explanations may differ by class, gender, and race. Additionally, I examine potential reasons why such accounts may vary by social group.

To examine how workers describe their reasons for participating in the platform-based gig economy, I draw upon interviews from a nationally representative sample of communities across the United States. The American Voices Project (AVP) is the first nationally representative open qualitative data set in the United States. Thus the AVP dataset is a novel tool to engage in policy research and understand social and economic behavior, including workers’ explanations of job selection and workforce participation. Additionally, although I cannot generalize to all gig workers, by using a nationally representative sample, I can build on re-

search that has investigated platform workers using local and city-based samples. In this study, I focus on the largest and most prominent sector of platform workers, namely delivery and rideshare drivers who use apps such as Uber, Lyft, Doordash, Instacart, and Postmates (Anderson et al. 2021; Schor et al. 2020; Schor 2021). Understanding why many people seek out app-based driver jobs can shed light on the precarious state of the U.S. economy, given that these jobs require minimal qualifications to enter and are often associated with a negative reputation and stigma (Ravenelle 2019).

I find that social background, namely, class and gender, shape workers’ accounts of platform work participation. Specifically, respondents with household incomes of more than \$48,000 a year were more likely to frame their motivations for platform work participation in ways that suggested platform work was exciting and something to do to explore the larger community rather than solely focusing on financial needs. Those with household incomes of \$48,000 or less were more likely to discuss the financial benefits of platform work. Additionally, among those with household incomes of \$48,000 or less, women were more likely to highlight the benefits of platform work. In contrast, the men were more likely to discuss platform work as a temporary endeavor. However, workers’ accounts did not differ by race. I evaluate potential reasons why racial differences did not emerge in the discussion.

BACKGROUND

In the following section, I provide a brief background of the gig economy, noting the benefits platform jobs promise, before highlighting some of their shortcomings. I then describe how platform jobs are similar to entry-level service work, as this comparison is important in understanding motivations for participating in the gig economy.

Inequality and the Gig Economy

The modern gig economy emerged after the Great Recession. Companies such as Uber (founded 2009) and Airbnb (founded 2008) emerged as a way that workers, especially recent college graduates, could counter widespread underemployment and find ways to

make money outside the traditional economy (Ravenelle 2019; Schor 2017; Vallas and Schor 2020). More than a decade later, the gig economy continues to thrive as people continue to seek out opportunities within this relatively new sector of the labor market.

Companies such as Uber, Lyft, and Instacart have promoted themselves as options that provide workers flexibility and autonomy alongside the opportunity to make considerable supplemental income. For example, Doordash's website informs potential workers that they are in control: "Your time. Your goals. You're the boss." Proponents of the platform-based gig economy argue that the available jobs can help reduce labor-market inequalities (Sundararajan 2016). Platform work has a low barrier to entry, is easily accessible, and reduces occupational segregation by education, increasing the chances that people from different classes will do the same type of work. Additionally, platform work allows people with low-income jobs to earn additional income.

However, critics note the lack of control that platform workers have as independent contractors (which denies them safety and health protections and a minimum wage), companies' failure to combat discrimination, exploitative techniques to increase worker usage, impersonality and high surveillance derived from algorithms, and reduced compensation (Cameron 2019; Glavin, Bierman, and Schieman 2021; Ravenelle 2019; Schor et al. 2020; Tan et al. 2021; Vallas and Schor 2020; van Doorn 2017). The platform-based gig economy also recreates existing labor-market inequalities. For example, Juliet Schor (2021) writes at length about the racial and ethnic discrimination that platform users and workers experience. A study of Uber drivers finds that women earn 7 percent less than men (Cook et al. 2021).

In another study, noting ongoing race, gender, and class inequalities, Niels van Doorn (2017) argues that platform work should be viewed similarly to the temporary staffing industry. Van Doorn asserts that platform companies take advantage of their workers by maintaining a high level of control over them and designating them as contractors rather than as employees, which would require employee benefits and insurance, and downplays the extent

of control that platform companies hold over their workers. Consequently, the gig economy exacerbates the vulnerability of contingent workers in the low-income service industry. The viewpoint van Doorn presents is valuable because it highlights the resemblance between platform-based gig work and entry-level service work.

Despite the criticisms surrounding gig platforms, many workers are attracted to the opportunity to make money and the promise of a flexible schedule (Bajwa et al. 2018; Cameron 2020; Schor and Vallas 2021). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some Americans turned to platform work to respond to a loss of earnings (Fee, Kaiser, and Wardrip 2024, this issue). Indeed, many view the relatively low barrier for entry into platform jobs as an advantage when considering ways to make supplemental income or cover expenses during periods of unemployment. Researchers have noted that workers' participation motives can be understood as a combination of necessity and opportunity—or push and pull factors. Push factors include unemployment and underemployment; pull factors include flexibility, the opportunity to earn money, interest in interacting with customers, and entrepreneurship (Bajwa et al. 2018). However, beyond push and pull factors, class, gender, and race also need to be considered when examining workers' accounts for platform work participation.

Platform-Based Gig Work and Entry-Level Service Work

When exploring how people discuss platform work participation, it is crucial to consider their previous experiences with entry-level service jobs and how their social class has shaped their perceptions. Although transformed by technology, many platform jobs resemble entry-level service jobs, such as client transportation, food delivery, repair work, and babysitting (Rosenblat 2018; Schor 2020; van Doorn 2017). By examining how both men and women have approached entry-level service jobs in the traditional economy, we can gain insight into potential motivators for engaging in platform work.

Gender has long been a factor in service work. Working-class men have associated work

with power, control, and a way to provide for their families (Choi 2018; MacLeod 1987; Nixon 2006, 2009; Willis 1981). Thus men often avoid precarious service work that does not guarantee stable earnings to support their families. (Choi 2018; Nixon 2006). Further, working-class men tend to view interactive service work—which emphasizes emotional labor (managing one’s feelings and expressions as a job requirement) and deference to the client or customer—as feminine (Choi 2018; Henson and Rogers 2001; Hochschild 1983). Instead of interactive service work, working-class men tend to dominate jobs offering hands-on work and control over their working conditions, such as automotive body repair, transportation, and construction (Nixon 2009).

When men do find themselves working in jobs they view as feminine, they may work to distance themselves from femininity by emphasizing the technical aspects of the work or create backstories to explain why they accepted the position. They may also highlight the importance of having a job while downplaying gender differences associated with the work or resist calls to perform deference and emotional labor (Cross and Bagilhole 2002; Henson and Rogers 2001; Seeley 2018; Wingfield 2010b). Such strategies allow men to maintain a masculine ideal while at work. Because platform workers are often expected to prioritize the needs of their customers, some men may create backstories to justify their engagement with platform work and use other tactics to distance themselves from customer service aspects of the job. Moreover, some men may find the financial uncertainty associated with platform work unappealing.

In contrast to the image of them as middle-class homemakers, working-class women have a long history of working to help meet household financial needs. Unlike working-class men who sought control over their labor, working-class women often worked under the direct supervision of others (Rollins 1985; Glenn 1992). Historically, this work frequently occurred in the homes of middle- and upper-class women and in offices, shops, small businesses, and factories (Glenn 1992; Rollins 1985; Romero 2002). In addition to being more likely to be closely supervised at work, women are more

likely than men to work in positions requiring people skills and customer interaction (Hall 1993; Nixon 2009).

Moreover, for many women, work has been carried out in relation to their caretaking responsibilities (Fielding-Singh et al. 2024, this issue; Milkman et al. 2021). As a result, many women weigh their household needs when determining work arrangements (Damasko 2011). One study found that mothers’ socioeconomic and employment statuses influenced how they navigated household and work demands during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fielding-Singh et al. 2024). With the possibility of having more control over their work schedule and tasks, women may find the prospect of platform jobs appealing.

Race has played a significant role in shaping entry-level service work in the United States. Native Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos have historically been marked as exploitable sources of labor (Espiritu 2008). These groups have historically faced discrimination that has limited their employment opportunities to service positions, often serving White Americans. For example, Black men have worked service jobs such as sleeping car porters, coachmen, servers, and cooks (Trotter 2019; Tye 2004). Michael Park (2013) points out that Asian American men were locked into feminized service jobs such as cooks, servers, and laundry workers. Women of color have had to work service jobs to contribute financially to households as men of color have faced difficulties in the labor market. In fact, married women of color have been more likely to work than married White women (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Historically, women of color worked as domestics for White families, including Black women in the South, Asian women in California and Hawaii, and Mexican women in the Southwest (Glenn 1992).

Today, workers of color report lower job quality in the service sector than their White counterparts. The reported gaps are primarily the result of unstable and unpredictable work schedules that contribute to economic insecurity (Storer, Schneider, and Harknett 2020). Given the history of discrimination in the labor market and the financial hardships associated with unpredictable work schedules, one would

expect the gig economy, which promotes entrepreneurship and flexible work schedules, to offer workers of color a potential pathway to circumvent discrimination and financial uncertainty.

It is impossible to understand the gig economy separately from the traditional labor market (Schor 2017; Schor et al. 2020). Despite claims of flexibility and autonomy, I argue that platform work mirrors entry-level service work. As a result, men and women view platform jobs similarly to how they have viewed traditional entry-level service work. However, platform work offers some differences from the traditional market that make it seem attractive to higher-income workers, appealing to women, and worth considering for men in the short term. In the discussion, I hypothesize why race should also be considered for understanding platform work participation and why I do not observe racial differences in the current study. Because class and gender matter for service work participation, they also influence how workers talk about involvement in the platform-based gig economy.

METHODS

The data for this project come from interviews conducted as part of the American Voices Project. The AVP is a large-scale public-use data set containing 2,700 interviews (at the time of data analysis, only 1,613 interviews were available for study). The data set is based on a nationally representative sample of communities across the United States with members of households age eighteen and older. The AVP sampling took place in three stages—at the census tract level, the census block group level (to understand neighborhood-level experiences), and the address-based level, where addresses likely to be low income were oversampled. Interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2021 and lasted about two hours.²

During initial data analysis, I worked with a research team to locate the analytic sample. We used the NVivo query function to discover our sample, resulting in 953 cases out of 1,613 respondents. These 953 cases included examples whereby respondents mentioned terms such as

gig, freelance, app, and delivery, or explicitly mentioned platforms like Postmates and Grubhub. We then coded the 953 cases to identify rideshare and delivery workers, removing cases that did not expressly mention working for the service (such as “Yesterday, I ordered lunch from Uber Eats”). Eliminating these cases narrowed our sample to forty-eight.

As shown in table 1, the sample includes twenty-seven women, fourteen White respondents, and thirty-eight individuals with a reported annual household income of \$48,000 a year or less (see table 1; due to privacy concerns, cell counts smaller than eleven are not published). The AVP dataset categorized annual household income into the following seven groups: less than \$12,000; \$12,001–24,000; \$24,001–36,000; \$36,001–48,000; \$48,001–72,000; \$72,001–120,000; and over \$120,000. During the inductive coding process, I found that people with household incomes of \$48,001 or more shared different reasons for engaging in platform work compared to those with household incomes of \$48,000 or less. Therefore, I treated \$48,000 as the income threshold. In the discussion, I explain why these two groups of platform workers may offer different accounts of their gig work motivations.

Although I cannot generalize to all gig workers, I focus on rideshare and delivery drivers for three primary reasons. First, doing so allows me to examine the gig economy’s largest and most visible segment of platform workers (Anderson et al. 2021; Schor et al. 2020; Schor 2021). Thus, although this analysis permitted an examination of a large segment of workers, the findings do not reflect the experiences of all gig workers, such as Airbnb hosts, care workers, freelancers, and microtask workers. Second, rideshare and delivery drivers complete their work in public and interact with clients, as opposed to platform workers who may work from home (such as microtask workers). Finally, the type of platform workers studied here perform jobs that some view as entry level and a “last resort” (Ravenelle 2019, 161) because they have a low barrier for entry and do not require assets such as residential space for rent (like Airbnb) or a specialized skill set (such as those offered

2. For more information on the American Voices Project, please see the introduction to this issue.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	Total	Percent
Gender of respondent (n = 48)		
Women	27	56
Household income (n = 48)		
\$48,000 or less or missing	>37	>77
Race-ethnicity of respondent (n = 48)		
Non-Hispanic White	14	29
Non-Hispanic Black	17	35
Hispanic or other race-ethnicity	17	35
Age of Respondent (n = 48)		
18–24	13	27
25–34	17	35
35 and above	18	38

Source: Author's calculations.

Note: Figures rounded to the nearest whole percent.

by freelancers and care workers). Once I established the sample, I examined how workers talked about their experiences with platform-based gig work. Throughout the analysis, I focused on any potential variation in experiences by class, gender, and race. Additionally, I used grounded theory techniques to code respondents' comments to allow concepts to emerge from the data (Charmaz 2006). Thus the analysis allowed the grouping of three patterns associated with respondents' socioeconomic class status and gender.

FINDINGS

To promote anonymity, I use pseudonyms and retract the names of platforms worked. Additional background information, such as jobs, marital status, and household context, is also omitted to protect anonymity.

Respondents with annual household incomes of more than \$48,000 were more likely to minimize their financial needs, describing platform work as exciting and a way to occupy their time (Anderson et al. 2021; Dunn 2020; Rosenblat 2016). I label this group the Community Curious. Perhaps less reliant on the income generated from platform work—or at least less willing to discuss their financial motivations—they expressed the fun they had while working as a platform worker. However,

for men and women with household incomes of \$48,000 or less, their gender was salient in their explanations for working as platform workers. Men with household incomes of \$48,000 and lower—the Pit Stop Providers—were more likely than their female counterparts to mention not liking platform work, and much like a pit stop is viewed as a temporary interruption, these men were more likely to discuss platform jobs as a way to make ends meet in the short term. I label women with household incomes of \$48,000 or less as Pathway Providers. They were more likely to describe platform work as a pathway to make money quickly and easily and promote the independence and flexibility of setting their schedule.

The Community Curious

I refer to the respondents who reported a household income of more than \$48,000 as the Community Curious because many described their motivations for working as platform workers by minimizing their financial needs and highlighting work as a way to discover their local community. In his sample of highly educated Airbnb hosts, Isak Ladegaard (2018) finds that hosts were interested in hosting people from foreign cultures and nationalities as a way to experience the wider world. In a similar manner, the respondents in my sample relished the

opportunity to see and learn more about their neighbors and neighborhoods. Diana (White woman), for instance, talked about traveling to new areas: “[I’m doing] [DeliveryApp work] to kind of make a little bit of money, that’s actually kind of fun, it’s weird, but it can be kind of fun. The fun experience about it is being able to see the different restaurants, ’cause there’s a lot here, like being able to travel to areas that you normally wouldn’t have travel to [is] kind of nice.”

Like other respondents in the Community Curious group, Diana found work as a platform provider fun despite some “weird” aspects of the job. Although the possibility of making money is undoubtedly appealing, she found pleasure in discovering neighborhoods and restaurants in her hometown that she would not usually visit.

After acquiring a small debt, Eduardo (Hispanic man) and his wife chose to work a platform job. When asked about side jobs besides their regular income, Eduardo mentioned other strategies to pay off his debt rather than discussing platform work. Like Diana, he viewed platform work as something he and his wife could do to pass the time: “My wife and I, we started doing [Delivery App]. But that’s only sometimes when we don’t have anything to do. Usually, we have something to do during the weekend. But we’ve done it a couple of times, a couple of weekends.”

Schor (2017) notes that higher-income gig workers may usurp lower-income gig workers as they use platform work to augment their incomes. Although those in the Community Curious have higher household incomes than those in the Pit Stop Providers and Pathway Providers, the precarity of the contemporary U.S. economy leaves many workers seeking additional ways to meet their economic needs (Hacker 2019). For instance, many in the Community Curious group mentioned that platform work was helpful in making side money, extra money, or saving for short-term goals.

Notably, Eduardo and Diana mentioned the benefits of additional income while emphasizing motivations beyond money for engaging in platform work. This rhetorical strategy—noting the need or want for supplemental income but discussing platform work as something

done for fun or rarely done—could be a way to downplay the role of platform work in their earnings strategy. According to Sarah Damaske (2013), people often use accounts to rationalize actions they believe may be viewed negatively. Because platform work is considered lower occupational status and resembles entry-level service work, the high-income earners of the Community Curious group may also use accounts to deflect the potential stigma of delivering groceries or taking passengers across town to earn extra money (Ravenelle 2019).

When discussing her platform job, Mary (Black woman) noted the financial benefits of platform work along with the aspects she found entertaining: “It’s a good way to make some extra money, and it gets me out and moving around.” For her, much like Eduardo and Diana, platform work was a way to help her earn additional income while also offering the opportunity to discover more about those around her. Mary was working for a grocery delivery platform during her interview. She was fascinated by the groceries that her neighbors ordered: “It’s also interesting to me to see stuff that people order. Some people will get—to me, it’s weird . . . but they’ll get brand name paper towels . . . and then they’ll get the . . . store brand cereal, and I’m like, ‘Okay what happened?’ And then some of the combinations of stuff, like one order was the big jugs of vegetable oil, they asked for five of those, and I was like, ‘Okay, what are you frying?’ It’s just sort of interesting to see certain things from people.”

Working as a platform provider was more interesting for Mary because she could make light of the quirks of those she shopped and delivered for. Although grocery delivery does not provide the opportunity to interact regularly with customers, driving for a platform company allowed Kathy (Hispanic woman) to meet new people despite her husband’s initial concerns. As a mother, she felt a strong need to get out of the house from time to time. During her interview, she expressed feelings of depression as she shifted from being a person with a regular job to becoming a stay-at-home parent. Describing the need to do something beyond staying at home with her children, she elaborated on the fun she had meeting other people: “So I decided to do [RideShare App] driving. . . .

It helped me to get away from the house, or hear the kids, actually speak to people. . . . It kind of brings me memories because sometimes, on the weekends, if I pick up drunkies . . . I'll be laughing with them. I'll be cracking up. . . . You see a lot of things."

Why were platform workers with household incomes above \$48,000 more likely to discuss platform work as fun and as a way to explore their surroundings? My findings are similar to others that find that the less dependent gig workers are on the platform for basic expenses, the higher their satisfaction with gig work (Schor et al. 2020). Many of the Community Curious held other jobs that rendered them less dependent on platform work. They could therefore discuss motivations other than financial necessity for engaging in platform work. Additionally, their comments may reflect their class position, given that white-collar workers are more likely to discuss passion and other fulfilling parts of work (Blair-Loy 2003; Cech 2021; DePalma 2021; Rao and Tobias Neely 2019). Alternatively, accounts offered by the Community Curious may seek to downplay their reliance on platform work. Although some respondents in this group discussed earning additional income, they were more likely to talk about the joy of meeting others, getting out of the house, and encountering new places instead of a pressing need to work platform jobs to pay expenses.

The Pit Stop Providers

Gender was important in understanding platform participation for those who reported household incomes of \$48,000 and under. The men in this group tended to view platform work as a short-term necessity, much like a pit stop while driving, and were drawn to platform work because they viewed it as an interim solution. I argue this is partly due to platform jobs being precarious and customer-oriented service jobs that men have historically rejected (Choi 2018; MacLeod 1987; Nixon 2009; Willis 1979). Men who feel it is their responsibility to provide for their family may consider platform work to be a temporary and inferior solution because of its precarity (Henson and Rogers 2001). Consequently, the men in this group often reframed their platform work as sometimes

unpleasant or temporary, in addition to another job or as a replacement for a lost position.

To help his family financially, Gary (White man) drove for a platform company part time, though he was looking forward to working as a contractor: "Right now, I'm just doing [RideShare App] and trying to work on improving my skills and getting myself sold as a general contractor." In addition to transitioning to working as a contractor, Gary also had goals of receiving certifications in other lines of work. The money he made through [RideShare App] had decreased over the years; he felt that the drivers' market had saturated.

Like some other men in the Pit Stop Provider group, Alphonse (Black man) mentioned some aspects of the platform work he did not like. However, he found different types of employment difficult. Though Alphonse had a postbaccalaureate degree, he talked at length about his struggles to find a job after graduating. During his interview, he explained, "I don't like [driving for [RideShare App]], but it's a necessity. I have to do it. I don't like dealing with people in general." He would later go on to add, "So, I would say from the experience that it's a short-term job."

Benjamin (Hispanic man) worked for a company but hoped to learn more to eventually start his own business. Though he spent much time with his family after work, he would drive for a platform company when he wasn't working or spending time with his family. Like some of the other Pit Stop Providers, platform work was a way to make money in the short-term as he worked toward more long-term career goals. He also found aspects of platform work unpleasant. In describing his experiences, Benjamin explained, "I do like [RideShare App], sometimes not so much because I fight a lot with the passengers. Sometimes it has happened that they are on the other side of the street, and they don't want to cross over, and there is heavy traffic, so it's hard for me to go around to pick them up, and it's not hard for them to cross. There are times when they are drunk." In this anecdote, Benjamin noted how he refused to show deference to clients, which sometimes led to arguments. Benjamin's annoyance with clients is not unusual for men,

research having shown that men may refuse to show deference at work (Henson and Rogers 2001).

Although men were more likely to talk negatively about their experiences with platform work than women, not all of the men in the sample shared negative views. Four men expressed positive feelings about platform work. Nick (Hispanic man) turned to it when he needed extra income. He saw the positives, noting that platform work was a good option for many people trying to resolve their financial needs. Further, whereas Gary framed driving for a platform company as a job he did while he sought other opportunities and Alphonse as a job done out of necessity, Nick framed it as something that he could do if times became tough, explaining, “You put miles on that car, but it solves your issue.” When discussing his anxiety surrounding work, he asserted that if he had to drive for a platform company to pay his bills again, he would make it happen: “I’ll even do [RideShare App]. If I know that [my regular work will be slow] in two or three weeks . . . and that I won’t make enough money, then I’ll go and make . . . on [RideShare App]. I don’t sit there and get anxious, waiting for something to come my way. If there is, perfect; if not, I’ll go and drive for [RideShare App], you understand?”

Continuing to discuss ways he would be willing to make ends meet, Nick added, “If I have to go and wash a car, I’ll do that. I don’t have a problem with that.” This framing suggests that platform work is not an enjoyable endeavor, but something done to pay bills during periods of financial hardship. Associating platform work with car washing as a short-term resolution to navigate financial struggle suggests a masculine ethos in which a man must do what is needed to pay the bills (Cross and Bagilhole 2002). Despite taking on platform jobs, the men in this group were more likely to discuss the downsides of platform work, bring up problems with showing deference to clients, and create backstories to account for their work. In contrast, most women in this income bracket did not discuss platform work as something to do when push turns to shove but instead, as an opportunity to make money with relative ease.

The Pathway Providers

The Pathway Providers were more likely than the Pit Stop Providers to discuss the positive aspects of platform work. The Pathway Providers comprised women with household incomes of \$48,000 or less. These women were drawn to platform work because it provided a quick and easy pathway to make money. In contrast to the men in the Pit Stop Providers group, who described platform work as temporary, many women in the Pathway Providers group were more likely to describe the work as on the side or in addition to their primary job. Additionally, none of the women in the group discussed platform work as a negative endeavor. Jasmine (Black woman) was one of two women in the group who mentioned changing their jobs for their children. She changed jobs so that her schedule could be more in line with a daycare schedule. When asked about having money for her transportation needs, Jasmine answered by discussing the simplicity of making money as a platform worker, “If I need money right then and there, or if I need money anywhere else, it’s [Delivery App], something I use to make fast cash.” As the interview continued, Jasmine once again brought up platform work, “So, if I need gas, I would just go [Delivery App], [I’ll] just go [Delivery App], make some gas money.” For Jasmine, platform work was a solution to get money quickly and easily.

Other Pathway Providers echoed Jasmine’s sentiments. Nancy (White woman), for instance, acknowledged the financial constraints she and her partner were under while pointing out the benefits of platform work. She admitted, “[it] is not a lot, it helps right now. . . . Money’s tight right now, that’s why we haven’t moved yet. So, we’re just trying to get things together so we can get out of here.” Although she and her partner were receiving income through government assistance programs, she appreciated the ability to make money delivering food orders, “It’s quick money. It’s simple and easy as long as you don’t mind picking people’s food up. I don’t touch it or anything. I don’t look at it. The restaurant hands me the bag, and I take it to them.” Unlike those in the Community Curious group, Nancy and other Pathway Providers were less likely to discuss

the appeal of finding new restaurants and neighborhoods while working.

In addition to appreciating a straightforward way to earn money, some Pathway Providers seemed to sincerely appreciate the income from platform work. As Zora's (Black woman) anecdote highlights, many women appreciated the flexibility associated with platform work (Milkman et al. 2021). As a mother, she felt hindered in her career and mistreated at work due to not having received a college degree. Before working as a full-time platform worker, she worked two jobs alongside her platform job. However, she eventually discovered she could make more money by only working for the platform company instead of splitting her time between three jobs: "Thank God [RideShare Apps] came around. . . . I was doing three jobs for a while, and it just wore me out. One day, I just said . . . 'Let me just see what I'll make for a week with [RideShare App]' . . . I did that. That week alone, two years ago, I'd made twice as much as I would make in one week with the company. So now I make three times as much as I made."

Like Zora, Lynn (White woman) also spoke to the interviewers about the financial benefits of platform work. She received a raise at her primary job, which helped her cover her monthly expenses. However, before the pay increase, working a platform job helped her pay her monthly bills. Indeed, she told the interviewers, "Well, normally, I'm just barely able to pay my bills, like, I'll have to go [Delivery App] just to make a payment."

In addition to appreciating the additional money that came with their platform jobs, many Pathway Providers mentioned the ability to get paid on their schedule. Securing income can add stability for workers with inflexible schedules and precarious work situations (Lambert, Henly, and Kim 2019). Moreover, earning income quickly can help to offset unstable pay in other jobs. According to Steven Vallas and Juliet Schor (2020), many platform workers use their earnings to supplement other sources of income. By doing so, platform jobs can reduce financial instability and compensate for low pay in other positions. Earning income quickly helps with immediate financial needs, especially for those facing economic un-

certainty, and promotes a sense of independence not often found in traditional employment. Many women in the platform provider group compared the freedom they experienced while engaging in platform work with the limitations they felt in the traditional economy. Zora was able to explain the ability to receive wages daily while also detailing her financial strategy: "Well, you can pay yourself every day if you want to. After each transaction, the money is linked with your bank account. So, if you need to cash out for gas or you just need the money right then, you can cash out. I can say I get paid every day. But what I do is I usually just cash out, put the money in my account, and then at the end of the week, I put everything together, and then go from there."

Flexibility was one of the main benefits this group of respondents discussed. This flexibility runs counter to the supervised roles many working-class women have had to endure (Glenn 1992; Rollins 1985; Romero 2002). Marie's interview pointed to many patterns other Pathway Providers underscored when discussing platform work. For starters, some respondents highlighted the flexibility of deciding one's own schedule. During her interview, Marie (Hispanic woman) told the interviewers, "Luckily with [RideShare App], I'm my own manager."

Further clarifying the differences between her three jobs, Marie noted, "With the [RideShare App] job, it's an independent sort of job, like self-employment, so I work the hours I want to." Marie had recently moved, and during her interview, she was able to draw attention to how some Pathway Providers viewed platform work as a quick way to make ends meet, sharing, "I had to do eight hours of [RideShare App] on my two days off just to get back at least \$400 so I can survive for the week." Much like Jasmine and Zora, who made quick money and received their earnings when needed, Marie could take advantage of platform work to make money quickly as she spent much of her money moving to a new apartment.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine how workers describe their motivations for participation in the platform-based gig economy and analyze

how these accounts differ by socioeconomic class, gender, and race. Using a subsample drawn from a nationally representative sample, I found that class and gender significantly shaped how respondents discussed their motivations for engaging in platform work. Those with an annual household income of over \$48,000 glossed over any financial needs and stated that they engaged in platform work to have fun and learn more about their communities. However, for men and women with household incomes of \$48,000 or less, gender affected their explanations for engaging in platform work. Men in this group framed their motivations as jobs done in relation to other jobs—jobs they lost, hoped to pursue, or jobs they were in between. They also mentioned the downsides of platform work more frequently. They appeared drawn to platform work to earn income in the interim. In contrast, women with household incomes of \$48,000 or less highlighted the benefits of platform work, namely the ease of tasks, the ability to earn money quickly, and flexibility. Their comments suggested an attraction to the relative autonomy and the hassle-free opportunity to earn money that platform work provided.

Why did workers from different social groups provide varying explanations? Several reasons may help explain my findings. For the Community Curious, platform workers with household incomes of more than \$48,000 may not heavily depend on platform jobs to meet their basic needs. This may allow them to enjoy other aspects of platform work (Schor et al., 2020). The American Voice Project methodology includes income ranges instead of precise income measurements. Given that, it is difficult to pinpoint the household incomes of respondents. Further, within the AVP data, the income range that begins at \$48,001 ends at \$72,000. This range captures the median household income (\$67,521) (Shrider et al. 2021). It may be that this range begins to capture workers better equipped to meet their basic needs and thus are less likely to rely on platform work as a significant source of income.

Though members of the Community Curious did talk about the ability to earn additional income, they also viewed platform work as an exciting way to occupy their time. In addition

to not having to rely on the extra income, it may be that higher-income workers are more likely to talk about their work in more personal ways. Reflecting their class position, individuals in the Community Curious category may be following a pattern whereby middle-class and white-collar workers discuss the fulfilling aspects of work and the role of passion as a motivator for work while downplaying the financial components of labor (Blair-Loy 2003; Cech 2021; DePalma 2021; Rao and Tobias Neely 2019). Though this group talked about engaging in platform work differently than their lower-income counterparts, unlike middle-class and white-collar workers in the traditional economy, those in the Community Curious grouping are involved in the same type of work as the Pit Stop and Pathway Providers. In other words, in the traditional labor market, middle-class and lower-income workers tend to work different jobs and discuss their work differently; however, among platform workers, higher- and lower-income workers talk about work differently despite performing the same jobs.

Alternatively, it is possible that workers in the Community Curious are motivated by the extra income while trying to avoid the negative association with platform work, given that higher-income workers are performing the same tasks as their lower-income counterparts. Interestingly, rather than learning more about their community by getting involved in local volunteer work or adult recreation groups, they have opted for a second job that mirrors entry-level service work that some may view as a last resort (Ravenelle 2019, 161). Pursuing an additional job may be due to the widespread economic instability affecting the working and middle classes (Hacker 2019). Because of the negative perception of rideshare and delivery jobs—jobs that mirror entry-level service work—and the need for a secondary source of income, it is not surprising that some respondents might attempt to provide an account that is more optimistic than that of financial need.

Notably, most of the sample included in the Community Curious grouping are women and therefore I am unable to investigate gender differences in the group. Research has indicated that women generally exhibit higher levels of

job satisfaction than men (Abbott 1993; Kalleberg 2011). A broader sample may reveal gender differences where women are more likely to view their platform work experiences as positive and men may discuss them negatively regardless of their income. Future research is needed to clarify whether gender differences are salient among those with higher household incomes.

For the men I label Pit Stop Providers, the reality of engaging in service work where deference to customers is a crucial part of the job may lead them to view platform jobs as less than ideal. Platform work is therefore viewed as short-term opportunity while the men pursue—or at least claim to pursue—other prospects that are more aligned with traditional ideas of men’s work (Bishop, Casell, and Hoel 2009; Henson and Rogers 2001). It may also be the precarity of platform work that leads men to avoid framing it as their primary long-term occupation. Given the cultural narratives surrounding men and breadwinning—that men as breadwinners should maintain secure jobs that pay a livable wage—the precarity of platform work may prohibit men from building a breadwinner identity around these jobs and thus frame them as temporary work (Henson and Rogers 2001).

Why do some men express displeasure with driving for platforms but have historically dominated similar industries, such as cab driving? Notably, app-based drivers face different circumstances than cab drivers. Historically, cab drivers have not been held to the same levels of monitoring introduced with technology, nor have they been subjected to customer ratings and encouraged to emphasize the interactional aspect of driving (Anderson 2016; Glöss, McGregor, and Brown 2016). For example, Lyft once encouraged drivers to apply fluffy pink mustaches to their cars to highlight the playful and friendly nature of their service. Rideshare drivers are monitored by their platform and evaluated by their customers, with ratings that can affect their future work—which has become a routine part of platform work. As a result, platform drivers are expected to perform and prioritize customer satisfaction in ways that traditional cab drivers have not been required to do. Thus, although men may under-

take rideshare and delivery driving to earn income, they may still express a dislike for the customer service aspects of these platform jobs.

Working-class women have long worked service jobs with a low entry barrier. However, whereas many women completed these jobs under the supervision of others—women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds or men who held more prestigious positions—platform work provides women with more perceived flexibility and autonomy (Glenn 1992; Milkman et al. 2021; Romero 2002; Wooten and Branch 2012). Given that women’s opportunities for earnings and promotions are limited in comparison to men (Acker 2006; Purcell, MacArthur, and Samblanet 2010), working as a platform provider allows some working-class women to circumvent some barriers that may impede their autonomy and ability to earn, perhaps in ways that are not as labor intensive as other jobs available to them.

Given women’s relationship to care work, future studies should consider the relationship between care workers and the platform-based gig economy. Care work has long been a site of gender, race-ethnicity, and class inequality (Duffy 2011; Glenn 1992; Romero 2002; Wooten and Branch 2012). As care work becomes increasingly mediated by technology platforms and apps such as Care.com, Sittercity, and UrbanSitter, it is crucial to understand who engages in platform-based care work and who does not and under what circumstances. Although women primarily perform care work, many may find that driving for gig economy platforms provides an alternative that is not devalued and underpaid in the same way as care work (England, Budig, and Folbre 2002; Folbre 2012).

I expected to find racial differences in how platform jobs were discussed among the sample of platform workers. However, to my surprise, I found none. Race has played a critical role in the labor market, where workers of color have operated in a subordinate status and have worked jobs that offer little to no control or autonomy (Kalleberg 2011). Participating in platform work could help workers of color counter precarity and discrimination as they can, at least according to platform companies, man-

age their schedules and serve as their own bosses. I suggest two reasons I did not find racial differences within the sample. First, workers of color who engage in platform work may be aware of potential discrimination and may downplay racism as a coping mechanism. Such coping strategies may include avoiding framing entering platform work in racialized terms (Evans and Moore 2015; Jackson 2018; Romero 2002; Wingfield 2010a). Second, it is possible that there are no racial differences in the reasons for entering platform work—the promise of income, independence, and flexibility cut across racial lines; however, racial differences can significantly affect the actual experiences of working such jobs. In other words, though platform workers of different racial backgrounds may not discuss differences in incentives and motivations to engage in platform work, race becomes an important factor when considering client interactions. Indeed, workers of color report more negative experiences while working platform jobs and are discriminated against as providers of platform work (Anderson et al. 2021; Ravenelle 2019; van Doorn 2017). Future studies need to further our understanding of race and accounts of motivations for participating in platform-based gig work.

As with many interviews, one shortcoming of the AVP interviews is that it is difficult for researchers to determine people's true motivations. Issues like deception, recall error, and single-motive bias (the tendency for people to report a single motive behind their choices despite multiple motivations) make it challenging to pinpoint motives from interviews alone (Small and Cook 2023). Thus this study examines how platform workers describe their motivations to participate in platform work and how these accounts differ by social background.

Another shortcoming of the data is also its strength. Because the interviews for this dataset sought to cover a wide range of topics, opportunities for in-depth follow-up questions were few. This shortage is one weakness of the data and may have limited the opportunity to discuss platform work at length. However, the broad scope of the American Voices Project represents a valuable and ambitious tool for un-

derstanding Americans' lived experiences. Additionally, the dataset's large scale enables comparisons of class, gender, and race, and their intersections. Further, the interview data within the AVP shed light on the broader domain of work and labor. For example, during moments of financial hardship, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals may turn to platform-based gig work to help meet their financial needs (Fee, Kaiser, and Wardrip 2024). However, this ability to turn to driving for work during economic hardships may be more difficult in nonmetro or rural areas where the demand may be low. In this way, the AVP can be helpful for policymakers and researchers who seek to understand the gig economy's income-generating potential and limitations.

Understanding how platform workers discuss their motivations and experiences may be useful for researchers and practitioners in a variety of ways. For example, workforce development professionals can help mentor workers on how to “translate their skills and experiences into potential employment opportunities” given that workers may be interested in moving back into the traditional workforce (Berkowitz 2022, 15). This may be especially relevant for the Pit Stop Providers, who view their time as a platform worker as temporary. Additionally, the research presented here highlights the importance of flexibility and workers' ability to affect their schedules. Given the relationship between work schedules, precarity, and job satisfaction, companies may consider scheduling practices that include more employee input to reduce precarity and increase job quality (Lambert, Henly, and Kim 2019). Employee input in scheduling may be especially useful to Pathway Providers, because the women in the sample were more likely to bring up challenges related to time and flexibility. As the gig economy continues to grow, understanding workers' motives for participating and not participating in platform work will only grow in importance.

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