

Platforms and Inequality

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Plan for the coming sessions

- Session 9 (gigwork) – Take a stock on your platform plan as whole and see what still requires development and what are the open questions/issues you still need to solve.
- Session 11 (ethics)– Consider ethical issues your platform might have. Continue developing your platform plan as a whole
- Session 12 (taboo) –Create a poster about your platforms. Everyone will have a chance to see what the other groups have developed and give feedback.

Agenda

Introduction to Platforms & Gender Inequality + Case

Tupperware Case - work in groups

Gender Pay Gap & Digital Work

Digital Gender Roles... Mompreneurs and Mommy-Bloggers

Group work

Platforms as Equalisers: The Promise of Equal Access

- Many platforms allow users to become participants with minimal upfront investment (e.g., Uber for drivers, Etsy for creators).
- Platforms give individuals access to international markets and audiences, allowing even small-scale businesses to expand.
- Users can often set their own schedules, prices, and terms of participation.
- Platforms reduce traditional gatekeeping, such as job qualifications or regional limitations.



Introduction to Platforms and Inequality

- Platforms often outsource workers as "independent contractors" to cut labour costs.
- Outsourcing reduces costs by eliminating benefits and transferring training burdens to workers.
- Platform work allows for multiple and parallel commitments like women balancing childcare with work. At the same time these inequalities and stereotypes become reinforced in platform work.
- Digital platforms can perpetuate societal biases (e.g., gendered, racial).



Are platforms gender neutral?

Reflect on the idea
that platforms
enable equal
participation.

What examples
exist to support or
challenge this?

Discuss in pairs

Tupperware®



- Iconic household name, synonymous with food containers since the 1950s.
- Built success through multilevel marketing and "Tupperware parties" in homes.
- Claimed to empower women to work aside their household duties

Challenges Facing Tupperware®

- Consumers seeking sustainable, environmentally friendly alternatives.
- Traditional "homemaker" sales model less relevant as more women join the workforce.
- Competition from cheaper alternatives and product imitations.
- Financial struggles despite recent stock boost in August 2023.



'The party is over' as Tupperware files for bankruptcy after years of troubles



By [Ramishah Maruf](#) and [Olesya Dmitracova](#), CNN

🕒 2 minute read · Updated 6:46 AM EDT, Wed September 18, 2024



Tupperware's Comeback Strategy as a Platform

Can an Old Brand Find New Life?

START QUICK CASE

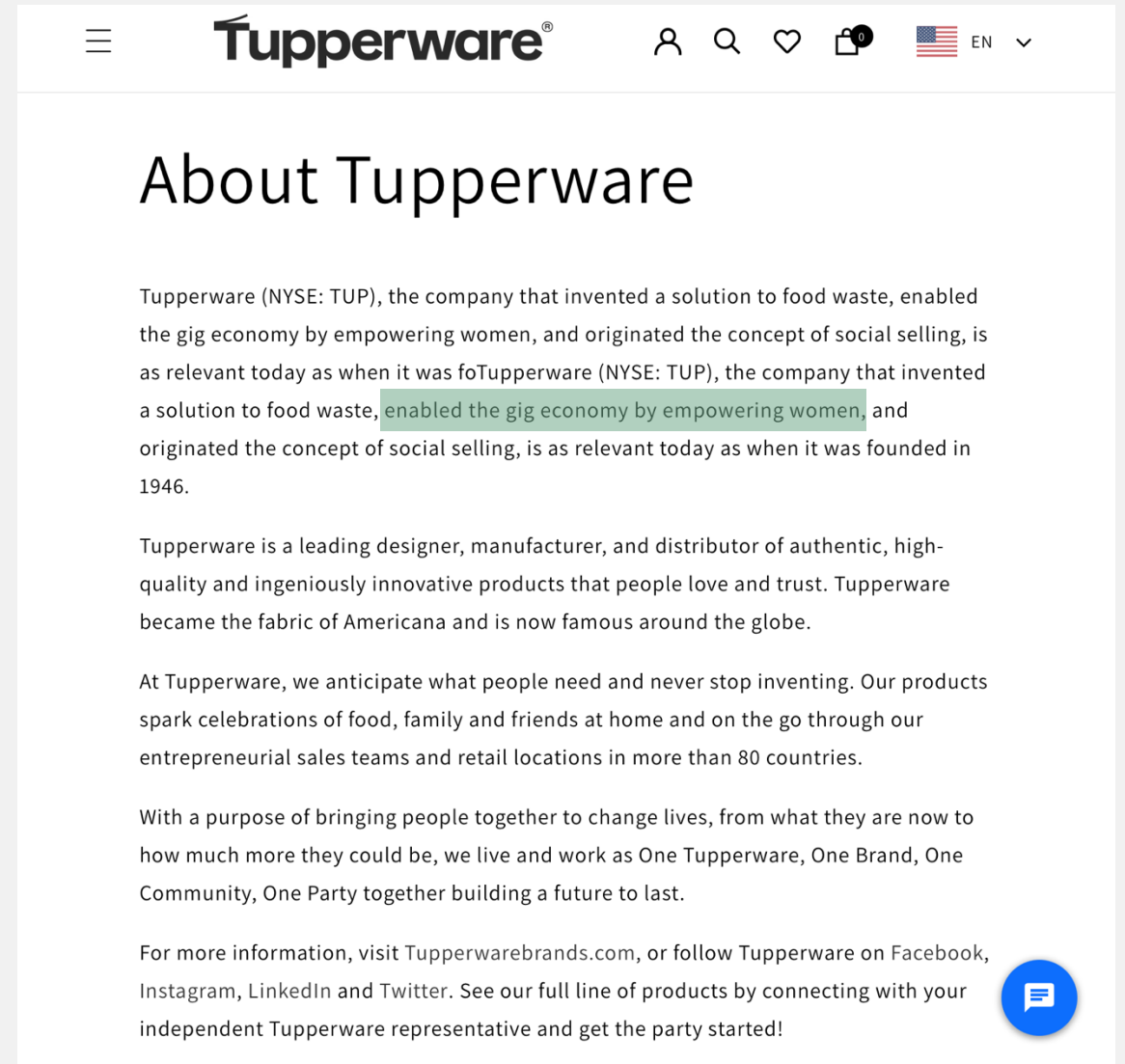
Can Tupperware revive its brand or should it reinvent it?

Analyse the current situation and suggest recommendations for Tupperware. Be creative!

- Key questions to consider:
 - What kind of platform Tupperware would be?
 - What is the core exchange, user groups and value propositions
 - Would gender play a role in its future strategy?

Gig Economy

- Tupperware was an early version of platform-enabled entrepreneurship (direct selling), where women became micro-entrepreneurs through "Tupperware parties."
- Today, we see similar dynamics in digital platforms (Etsy, Instagram).



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Tupperware website, featuring the Tupperware logo, a hamburger menu icon, and icons for user profile, search, heart, and shopping cart. The main heading is "About Tupperware". The text describes Tupperware's role in enabling the gig economy by empowering women and originating social selling. It mentions that Tupperware is a leading designer, manufacturer, and distributor of authentic, high-quality products. The text also states that Tupperware anticipates what people need and never stops inventing, and that its products spark celebrations of food, family, and friends. The text concludes with a call to action to visit Tupperwarebrands.com or follow Tupperware on social media.

Tupperware (NYSE: TUP), the company that invented a solution to food waste, enabled the gig economy by empowering women, and originated the concept of social selling, is as relevant today as when it was founded in 1946.

Tupperware is a leading designer, manufacturer, and distributor of authentic, high-quality and ingeniously innovative products that people love and trust. Tupperware became the fabric of Americana and is now famous around the globe.

At Tupperware, we anticipate what people need and never stop inventing. Our products spark celebrations of food, family and friends at home and on the go through our entrepreneurial sales teams and retail locations in more than 80 countries.

With a purpose of bringing people together to change lives, from what they are now to how much more they could be, we live and work as One Tupperware, One Brand, One Community, One Party together building a future to last.

For more information, visit [Tupperwarebrands.com](https://tupperwarebrands.com), or follow Tupperware on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. See our full line of products by connecting with your independent Tupperware representative and get the party started!

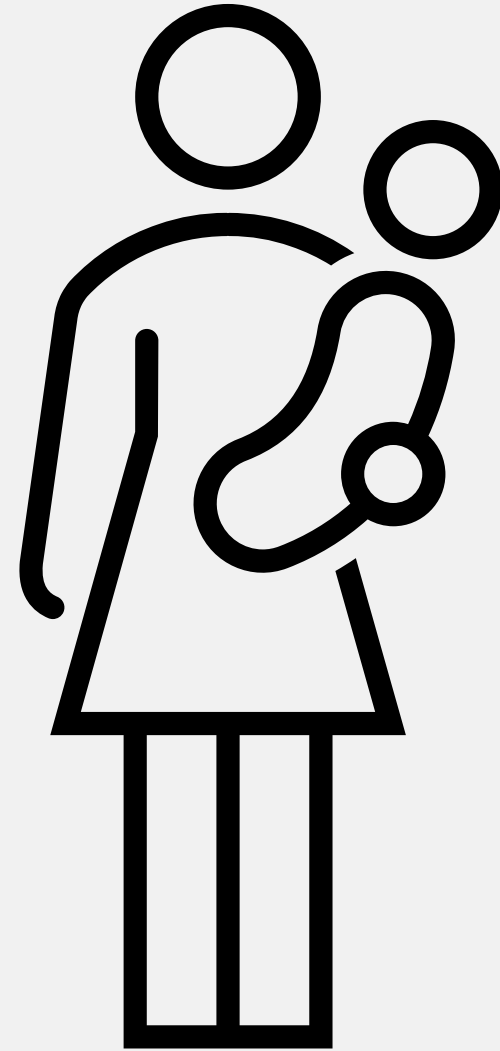
Gender Roles in Tupperware and Platforms Today

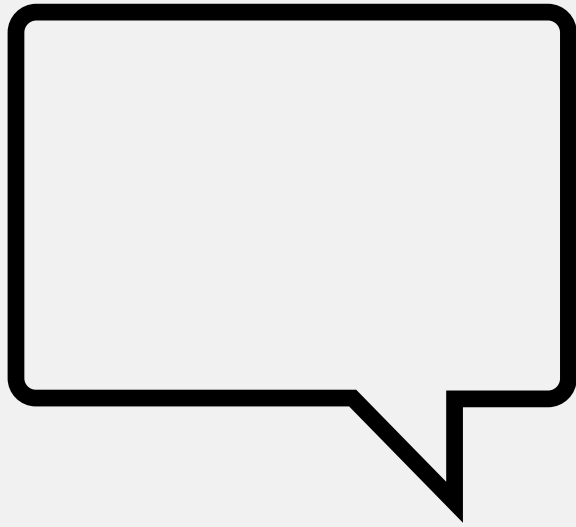
- Tupperware recruited women into economic activity through homemaking and direct selling.
- Reinforced traditional gender roles, positioning women as both consumers and sales agents in domestic spaces.
- Today, platforms like Etsy and Instagram enable "mompreneur" roles, allowing women to balance gig work with household responsibilities.
- These roles offer flexibility but can also reinforce expectations of unpaid domestic labour and caregiving.



Introduction to 'Digital Gender Roles'

- Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer unique spaces for women to build entrepreneurial identities.
- Mompreneurs are often celebrated for balancing domestic roles with business aspirations, but these platforms also reinforce traditional gender roles.





“being a stay-at-home-mama
my goal is to help my hubby
with the bills! Truck payments,
daycare etc... the ‘guilt’ of being
a stay-at-home-mom kills me!
I’m a hustler so let’s get it!!”

Platforms & Scaling Through Digital Gender Roles

- Platforms benefit by scaling through the labour of women, many of whom adopt 'hustle' identities.
- Digital gender roles allow platforms to grow by increasing the number of micro-entrepreneurs (e.g., Seller Stylists on Poshmark).
- Scaling often shifts labour from passion-based curatorial work to automated, repetitive tasks.
- Platforms profit from women's unpaid or low-paid labour, relying on the "hustle culture" to drive continuous engagement and revenue growth.

Capitalising Ideologies

#TradLife #TradWife

- Increasing precarity, loneliness, insecurity and institutional distrust have contributed to longing for regressive gender roles
- The role of the man is one in charge. His job is to protect, command and provide for his family.
- The role of the woman is to submit and take care of the children, her husband, herself and the home.



Researchers say extremist tradwives can provide a "soft face" for the far-right. (Composite image ABC: Teresa Tan with Getty Images)

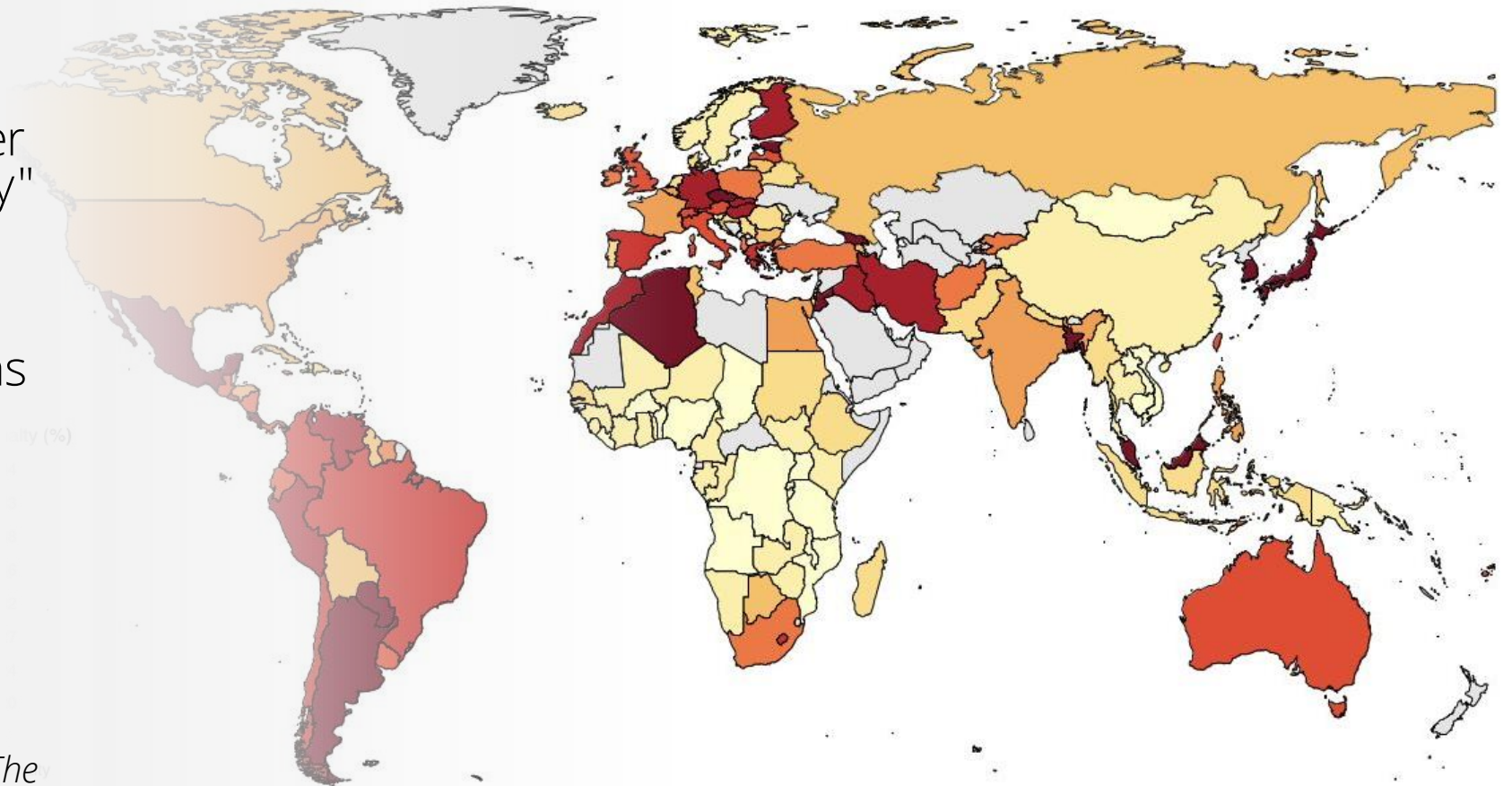
Understanding the Gender Pay Gap

- The gender pay gap is the difference in average earnings between men and women, typically expressed as a percentage of men's earnings.
- Women across the world are paid less than men for the same work, and the gap varies widely between countries and industries.
- Causes:
 - Occupational Segregation: Women are overrepresented in lower-paying jobs.
 - Discrimination: Women may face biased hiring, promotion, and pay practices.
 - Unpaid Labor: Women often perform more unpaid labor (e.g., caregiving), which can impact their earnings.
 - Career Interruptions: Maternity leave and caregiving responsibilities can reduce earning potential over a lifetime.
- On average, women earn about 20% less than men globally (specific figures vary by region).

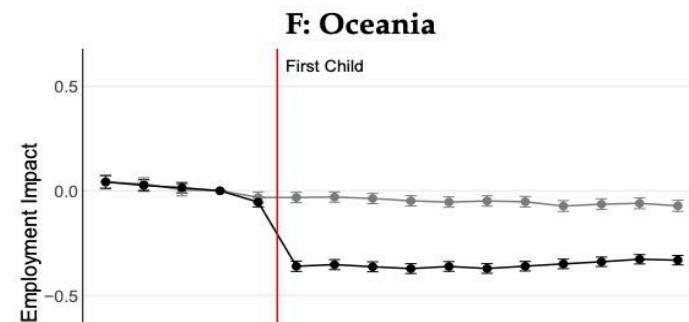
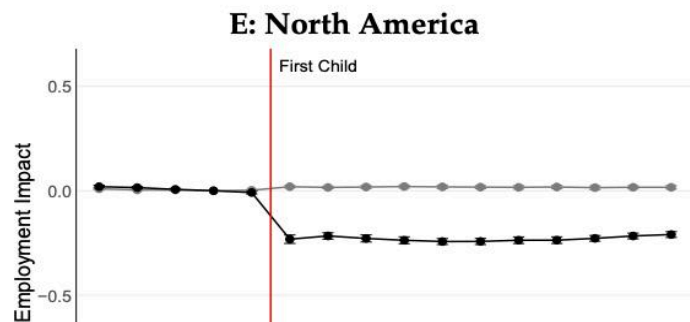
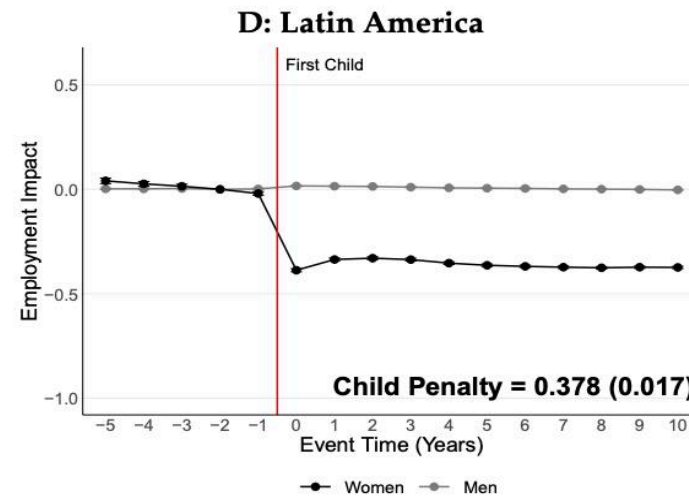
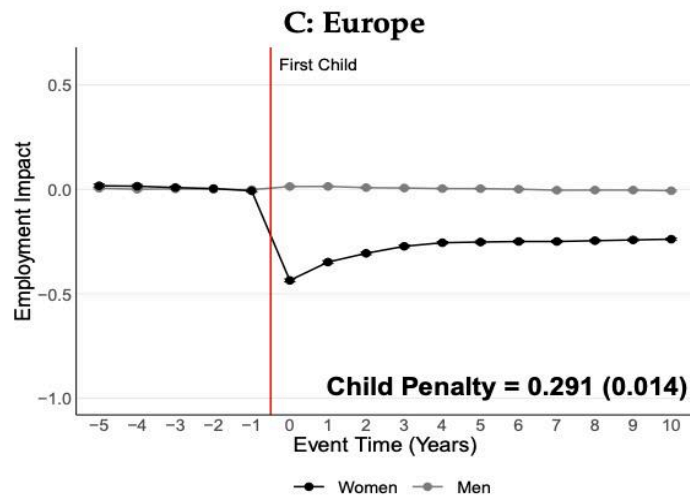
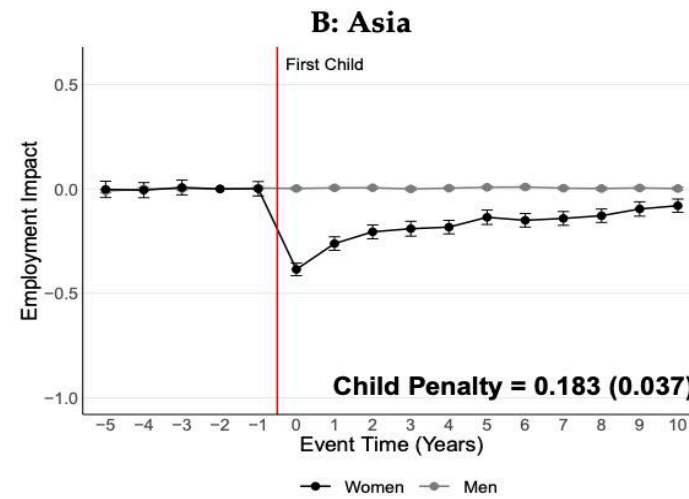
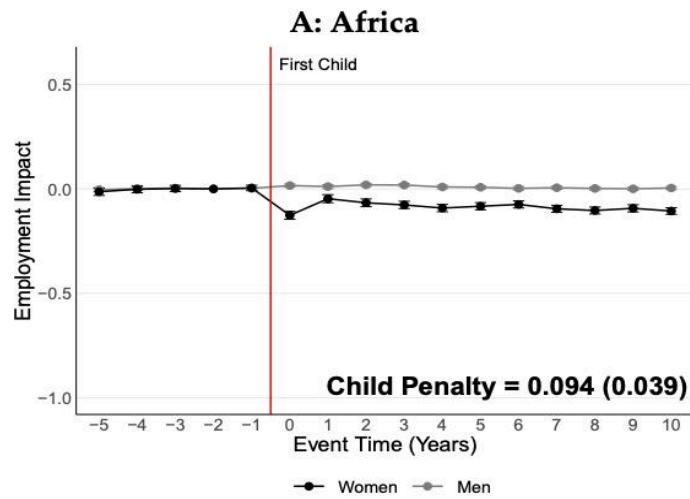
FIGURE 11: HEATMAP OF CHILD PENALTIES

Child penalty

- The "child penalty" refers to the economic and professional disadvantages that mothers, often face after having children. This "penalty" is experienced as income gap, problems in career progression, worsened employment opportunities as well as negative implications to retirement savings."



Henrik Kleven, Camille Landais, Gabriel Leite-Mariante, *The Child Penalty Atlas, The Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 92, Issue 5, October 2025, Pages 3174–3207



Child penalties by continent

- Child penalties become the dominant driver of gender inequality.

Henrik Kleven, Camille Landais, Gabriel Leite-Mariante, The Child Penalty Atlas, *The Review of Economic Studies*, Volume 92, Issue 5, October 2025, Pages 3174–3207

Gender Pay Gap on Platforms

- Platforms are often viewed as providing equal access and opportunity, offering anonymity, flexible work arrangements, and a more level playing field for workers.
- Studies show that even in anonymous online labour markets, like Amazon Mechanical Turk, gender pay gaps persist.
 - Women's earnings were, on average, 10.5% lower than men's for the same tasks.
 - Contributing Factors:
 - Women are more likely to select lower-paying tasks.
 - Flexibility and task choice don't eliminate disparities.
 - Pay inequality arises even in environments free of overt discrimination or traditional labour segregation.
- A study of 22,271 Mechanical Turk workers found that despite controlling for experience, education, and other factors, the gender pay gap persisted—highlighting the complexity of pay inequality on digital platforms (Litman et al., 2020).

Intersectionality in the Gender Pay Gap

- The gender pay gap is not uniform—other identity factors like race, ethnicity, and class intersect with gender to further deepen inequalities.
- Women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities often experience even larger pay gaps.
- Example: In the U.S., Black women earn about 64 cents and Hispanic women earn 57 cents for every dollar earned by a White man.
- These intersectional identities can compound discrimination and bias on platforms, creating additional layers of inequality.

Problems with Meritocracy

- Meritocracy: A society governed by people selected according to merit.
- Platforms claim to offer merit-based opportunities, where effort and skill determine success.
- Despite promises of fairness, gender biases still influence outcomes.
- Women often experience disadvantages in access to high-paying tasks and receive lower reviews.
- Perception and bias affect task allocation, performance evaluation, and even customer interactions.
- Example: In gig work, women are more likely to be rated lower for the same tasks as men, even when performance is comparable. This reinforces the idea that meritocracy, while ideal in theory, is often undermined by deep-rooted societal biases.

Gender and Customer Bias in Platform Reviews

- Customer reviews are a key metric on many platforms, influencing workers' success and opportunities.
- Women often receive biased reviews based on gender stereotypes, even when performance is identical to men.
- Women's reviews tend to be more critical and less generous, which affects future work opportunities and earnings.
- Review systems must be evaluated and reformed to reduce bias.

Summary - Platforms & Gender Inequality

- Platforms often promise equal opportunity but continue to reflect gender disparities. Even in anonymous online labour markets, women earn less than men for similar tasks due to various systemic factors.
- The 'mompreneur' phenomenon offers entrepreneurial opportunities for women but frequently reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, resulting in precarious gig work.
- Platforms, while celebrated for enabling entrepreneurship, often replicate traditional gendered dynamics—similar to earlier models like Tupperware. Women are framed as resilient 'hustlers' yet are subject to hidden structural inequalities.
- Despite their potential, platforms may perpetuate offline inequalities in new forms. Recognising these dynamics is essential for addressing gendered economic participation patterns and promoting equality.



Group work

Gender inequality and data & surveillance

Could your platform unintentionally disadvantage certain gender groups?

How can you design for inclusive participation?

What safeguards against harassment or discrimination do you need?

What data do you need to collect and why??

How will you protect user privacy while creating value?

What are the ethical implications of your data use?

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