

SOCI2534 Reading Week 5

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Reading 1: Duffy, B.E. (2016) We're Not All Entrepreneurs: Yawning Gaps in the Digital "Platform Economy". Points

This article is a reflection on our generation's enthusiasm towards the prospect of "being one's own boss" and a newfound infatuation with entrepreneurship and what the real effects of that are seeing that "We're Not All Entrepreneurs". The author throws out an astonishing statistic, "According to a 2015 study conducted at Bentley University, roughly two-thirds of those aged eighteen to thirty-four aspire to start their own business.". Showing how enticed the public currently is with being able to set their own schedule, I mean who wouldn't want to live the American dream when it can be accomplished by the touch of a screen. However, these aspirations of making it big with gig work seem to be causing some staggering drops in things like health insurance, retirement plans and pensions.

Reading 2: Knight, W. (2016) Is the Gig Economy Rigged? MIT Technology Review.

The article "Is the Gig Economy Rigged?" focuses on the how the potential for a more efficient and fairer marketplace may possibly be squandered by racial and sexual discrimination and how these aspects may even be implemented in the algorithms of sites

like Fiverr and TaskRabbit. Researchers from Northeastern University found evidence of bias related to race and gender. While Fiverr and TaskRabbit adamantly denied these claims the researchers found a discrepancy in the average rating of black and Asian workers on Fiverr, with similar characteristics being viewed in the data from TaskRabbit.

Reading 3: Lowrey, A. (2017) What the Gig Economy Looks Like Around the World. The Atlantic

Next up is “What the Gig Economy Looks Like Around the World” from The Atlantic, a sneak peek into the state of gig economy around the world. This article gives some insight on the reality of gig economy, displaying some dazing accounts of workers making just 3-4\$ an hour. These are rates similar to what my parents worked for when they were teenagers and factoring in inflation they would be making more. With the oversaturation in the job market currently there are countless people that are willing and able to do the same jobs and with an increasing in supply and demand dwindles leaving qualified workers slaving away for a fraction of minimum wage.

Reading 4: Shade, L R. (2018) Hop to it in the gig economy: The sharing economy and neo-liberal feminism. International Journal of Media...

The following reading highlights how the sharing economy (otherwise known as the gig economy) empowers labour flexibility and entrepreneurship for women. The article also

dives into the “contingent working conditions resident in the sharing economy”, as well as, “legal debates about worker status and platform discrimination.”. The author cites Juliet Schor who has divided the sharing economy into 4 sections: recirculation of goods, the increased utilization of durable assets, the monetization of the exchange of services and the sharing of productive assets via cooperatives. She then goes on to analyze some platforms like Fiverr and TaskRabbit along with a subsection based on the differences between employees and contractors.

Reading 5: Chen, A. (2014). The Laborers Who Keep Dick Picks and Beheadings Out of Your Facebook Feed. Wired. (TW: animal abuse, sexual assault and beheadings)

The last reading is a piece on content moderation and who keeps our social media feeds PG. These types of low-level/repetitive jobs are actually generally done by contractors or even from other countries such as the first example of a content moderator working from “a gritty Filipino town 13 miles southwest of Manila”. The author highlights the astoundingly low rates these moderators are paid for their work, clocking in at 312\$-500\$ in one example, apparently that is the rate to get people to look at beheadings and “a super-close-up photo of a two-pronged dildo wedged in a vagina”. Another point that is made in this article is what kind of psychological effect is it having on these content moderators who have to spend their entire workday staring at disturbing photos and videos. In my opinion the statement “How would you feel watching pornography for

eight hours a day, every day?” Denise says. “**How long can you take that?**” is a good way to sum up this summary.

Some Thoughts:

1. In “Knight, W. (2016) Is the Gig Economy Rigged? MIT Technology Review.” I found the quote “If you’re going to roll out an algorithm that’s going to be used by millions of people, you have some kind of responsibility to the public to examine what you’re deploying, evaluate it, and see if it’s going to have any of these negative side effects.” fairly thought provoking. I’ve always thought of algorithmic bias as a side effect of data; however, this viewpoint makes me consider how these models should be adequately tested before reaching production. Otherwise a company should be accountable for the algorithm they use to control their users.

2. After reading these articles my brain made a comparison to hearing “there will always be someone that’s better” and the rates of the gig economy. With the internet and these platforms having such a reach there’s a high chance that there’s someone out there who is either more efficient or more desperate looking at the same contract work as you. I’ve done a fair bit of contract work in my career so far and my selling point is it’ll be done far before you need it done and this is either due to the fact that I’m efficient or the unhealthy hours I can work. The problem with this model is that currently I have the time and energy to do this type of work for sometimes a fraction of what I make at a regular tech

job, however, if you're a middle aged man with 3 children you most likely don't have the luxury of working 18 hours straight.